This dissertation examines the role of truth-telling in the history of political thought and in contemporary American political culture. It defends an “ethos of candor,” which here names a practice of truthfulness that affirms the power of chance in communicative life, eschews the drama of exposure for a commitment to creative work, and solicits co-operative relationships without presuming mutual understanding.

The first three chapters of the dissertation define the key features of candor (chance, creativity, co-operation) through close readings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Walt Whitman informed by contemporary feminist and queer theory.

Chapter One excavates a non-heroic, chance-attuned truth-telling in Rousseau’s *Dialogues*. After contrasting this notion of truthfulness with ancient Athenian *parrhēsia* (“frank speaking”), the chapter shows how an attention to uncertainty might inform a theory of candor and enrich recent accounts of the “call-out culture” of political activism.

Chapter Two presents Nietzsche’s *Redlichkeit* (“honesty”) as a free-spirited, creative practice. Distinct from modern notions of sincerity, authenticity, and objectivity, Nietzschean Redlichkeit helps to define a candid interpretive practice that remains accountable to a world beyond itself but is not merely a dispassionate evaluation and re-presentation of that world.

Chapter Three tracks a co-operative candor in Whitman’s writing. In Whitman, truth-telling is a form of joint action defined by epistemic humility; these features serve to distinguish candor from the practice of whistle-blowing, the ideal of consensus, and the theory of “impersonal intimacy.”

Together, Chapter Four and a brief coda synthesize the previous three chapters and further develop their argument, examining the relationship between the ethos of candor and the ideal of “openness” now celebrated on both the left and the right. Questioning whether the notion of “threats to privacy” can fully capture the political dangers associated with openness, the dissertation concludes that, alongside attempts to assert rights to control our “private lives” and “personal data,” effort should be directed toward challenging the way state and corporate definitions of openness work to capture, monetize, and instrumentalize communicative life in ways that limit chance, creativity, and co-operation.

Readers: Jane Bennett, Samuel Chambers, Jennifer Culbert, Rochelle Tobias, Christopher Nealon
When relationships are determined... by the need for control, they may possess a dreary, bickering kind of drama, but... the shock of human possibilities has ceased to reverberate through them.

When someone tells me a piece of the truth which has been withheld from me, and which I needed in order to see my life more clearly, it may bring acute pain, but it can also flood me with a cold, sea-sharp wash of relief. Often such truth comes by accident, or from strangers.

It isn’t that to have an honorable relationship with you, I have to understand everything, or tell you everything at once, or that I can know, beforehand, everything I need to tell you.

It means that most of the time I am eager, longing for the possibility of telling you. That these possibilities may seem frightening, but not destructive, to me. That I feel strong enough to hear your tentative and groping words. That we both know we are trying, all the time, to extend the possibilities of truth between us.

The possibility of life between us.

– Adrienne Rich

Candid... is, perhaps, the most beautiful of the words obscurely connected with truth.

– William Empson
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Introduction | Truthfulness and Politics

Trying to tell the truth involves searching for a way to convey the world I sense and the things I feel. While the word “truth” may tend to imply clear facts or an impersonal reasoning process, telling the truth always involves a fallible agent. In fact, truth-telling involves a range of agents, for I always try to tell the truth to someone or to some group of people. Qua truth-teller, I am already a crowd, and some of the most difficult truths to tell may be those I try to formulate to and for myself. Its uncertain collectivity links truth-telling to politics. For politics is not merely the decisions issuing from debates over recognized controversies that take place within preexisting institutions, but includes questioning what can appear as a matter of common concern and collective action, who can voice those questions, and where they can voice them, and telling the

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1 The distinction between factual truth and rational truth is taken from Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 226. Like Arendt, I “look into these matters for political rather than philosophical reasons” and thus, like her, feel that I can “afford to disregard the question of what truth is, and be content to take the word in the sense in which men commonly understand it” (227). Michel Foucault complements this thought when he makes a distinction between epistemological analysis and what he calls a study of alethurgic forms. The latter, Foucault’s focus, involves investigating “the conditions and forms of the type of act by which the subject manifests himself when speaking the truth, by which I mean, thinks of himself and is recognized by others as speaking the truth,” *Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2–3. Even as (in ways elaborated below) I depart from Foucault and Arendt, these distinctions have shaped the questions I am asking here: because my primary concerns are ethical and political, not epistemological, I largely forego questions about the nature of truth or the criteria with which we distinguish true from false. Rather, I am interested in accounts that grapple with the character and disposition of the truth-teller, with the different visions of collective life that might animate truth-telling, with the practices it involves and the styles through which it is expressed. Distinguishing between a political theory of truthfulness and an epistemological account of truth, however, is not the same as denying the possibility or potential importance of an epistemological account of truth. The latter view criticized by Bernard Williams in *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). I do not deny that truth-telling involves some (implicit) theory of the nature of truth, but hope to show that similar political and ethical questions might attach to very different epistemological presuppositions.

2 For me, as the next few pages elaborate, this insight is particularly associated with feminist theory; this particular way of putting the point, however, has also been shaped by Jacques Rancière’s understanding of politics, particularly as developed in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and “Ten Theses on Politics,” *Theory & Event* 5.3 (2001). See also Jane Bennett “Political Ecologies,” in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) and Samuel Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
truth is one of the first and most basic activities by which anyone might make their world and their perspective on it available for collective examination, contestation, transformation, repair, and renewal. Despite the vexed relationship between truth and politics, then, truth-telling is a political act: in fact, it is one important site where we can catch the political in its emergence. Truthfulness broadly names an ethos committed to telling the truth, and is thus a uniquely political virtue.3

This particular account of the political virtues of truthfulness draws inspiration from a short essay by Adrienne Rich (based on a speech first delivered in 1975) exploring what truthfulness might mean for the needs and aspirations of feminist movements.4 Rich addresses her essay to women living in a time and a place organized by what she identifies as structural forms of lying like compulsory heterosexuality and a binary sex/gender system. Under conditions of pervasive lying, many often need to lie – “to bosses, to prison guards, the police,” “landlords, clients, colleagues, [and] family” – in order to survive. However, Rich worries that lying tends to spread to other areas of our lives, in the guise of discretion and through phrases like “my privacy,” becoming less a means of survival and more “an easy way to avoid conflict or complication” (190). Rich argues that, within such a context, forging honest relationships becomes a form of political

3 In contrast to Arendt’s account of the liar as preeminently political (“Truth and Politics,” 245), from this perspective, lying and secrecy would be refusals to share in and with the world – that is, a refusal of politics. Untruthfulness would be the working of this refusal into a habit or a character: an ethos. Such refusals may be necessary – out of exhaustion, out of enmity, out of a need to survive, out of a preference for other pleasures – but they are refusals. I return to the question of untruthfulness in Chapter 2.

action (185, headnote). She acknowledges that honesty might appear far removed from “much of what is narrowly termed ‘politics,’” which “seems to rest on a longing for certainty,” “determined... by the need for control,” and sustained by a fear of losing control (193). However, she insists that “the politics worth having” requires resisting easy satisfactions and insisting on complexities (193). This mode of politics is created and recreated in part through the “tentative and groping words” of honesty (194). Honesty is not “something which springs ablaze of itself,” an easy reassurance to be accomplished once and for all in a single stroke, but rather is a kind of relationship-in-process, “delicate, violent, often terrifying to both persons involved” (193). Honest words are a way of “trying, all the time, to extend.... the possibility of life between us” (194).

Attempting to be honest involves relaxing the will to control in the name of modes of life more fully awake to the possibilities of shared action.

Rich was not alone in assigning such political significance to truthfulness; defined by the practice of consciousness-raising, the feminisms of the 1970s were particularly trenchant in their analyses of the politics of truth-telling, but assertions of the political value of truthfulness and honesty pepper documents and declarations from across the
New Left. Today, these declarations may appear somewhat naïve, for powerful interests, by no means only or primarily of the left, are now aligned behind the idea that more information than ever before is and should be available to more people and entities about more people and entities. For its supporters, this aspiration crystalizes in and through names like publicity, transparency, connectivity, and openness. As Jodi Dean has argued, the accompanying “expansion and intensification of communication and entertainment networks” has not enriched political culture but instead “undermines political opportunity and efficacy for most of the world’s peoples.”

These realities were not lost on Rich. Returning to the topic of honesty in an essay written in 2001, she would continue to reject the assumption “that truth-telling exists in a bubble, sealed off from the desire for justice.” Indeed, extending the logic of her earlier essay, she argues that honesty poses political difficulties and holds political potentialities that “stretch beyond gender to other hoped-for pacts, comradeships, and conversations, including those between the citizen and her government.” Yet, in 2001, Rich would also

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7 “Credo of a Passionate Skeptic,” Monthly Review 64.2 (2012), http://monthlyreview.org/2012/06/01/credo-of-a-passionate-skeptic-remembrance-of-adrienn-rich. The rest of this paragraph continues to quote from this essay.
invoke “Women and Honor” as a reminder of “how one period’s necessary strategies can mutate into the monsters of a later time.” The feminists of the 1970s, Rich now judges, may have not been sufficiently attentive to the ways that systems of self-involvement and self-improvement “devoid of political context or content” were working to eclipse “collective action and even collective realities.” By the late 1990s, practices of sharing “personal anecdote” and “true confessions” were no longer the avant-garde of, but increasingly served as replacements for, political involvement.

Since Rich’s 2001 essay, new media and technologies have helped to intensify many of the politico-economic realities she described. Precisely within this context, her argument that truthfulness points to difficult, precarious, promising forms of political work may be more important than ever. An updated account of truthfulness can help to form a politico-ethical orientation that would critically respond to, and not merely dodge or adopt, contemporary calls for openness. Thus, though this dissertation addresses a different historical conjuncture and employs a different vocabulary than Rich, it seeks to bring some of her sensibility and insights to bear within contemporary debates, and its aims are largely parallel to hers: to develop an account of truth-telling that might help to relax the drive to certainty and control and to enhance capacities for collective life and shared action. Through readings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Walt Whitman informed by feminist and queer theory, I articulate an ethos of candor that provides an alternative vocabulary with which to address the possibilities and dangers that might accompany political life in an era of openness. An ethos of candor attunes itself to the power of chance in communicative life, trades the drama of revelation and
exposure for a commitment to creative work, and solicits cooperative relationships without presuming mutual understanding as either a starting point or goal. My account of candor thus provides an alternative both to those who tie the ideology of openness to the certainties of profit and security and those who oppose such efforts with calls for privacy and individual autonomy.

Many readers may believe (as I do), that collective projects “to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life” are indispensable, and any reader is likely to feel (as I do) that longing for certainty and control may indeed be justified under certain conditions. It’s not that control, certainty, and security are necessarily “bad,” then, but an over-reliance on the desire for security tends to close off important facets and features of political life. In order to guard against these dangers, we should experiment with cultivating alternative moods or dispositions. Candor offers one important site for such political theorization and intervention. My point is not that candor is always best, but I would urge that it not be hastily labeled un- or anti-political. While I hope to offer serious, original readings of classic texts, the ultimate goal of this project is political: my aim is to contribute to thinking about the kinds of practices that might build

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9 This is one of the foundational insights of liberalism, but it hardly exhausts the liberal tradition. Thus, at least on this point, my project is not so much anti- or post-liberal as para-liberal. What I wish to counteract is not any particular approach or ideology so much as an over-reliance on certain moods and dispositions that might attach to any number of political theories or traditions. For more on the tendency of “doctrinal liberalism” to deny surprise and assert mastery, as well as the presence of other tendencies within the liberal tradition, see Chambers, *Introduction to The Lessons of Rancière*. 
and sustain emerging movements less oriented toward certainty and control. The elements of an ethos of candor I outline here then might be what Sheila Rowbotham calls “prefigurative forms,” working “both to consolidate existing practice and release the imagination of what could be,” “making something which might become a means of making something more.”

It is difficult, unwise if not impossible, to specify the goals of this kind of political work in advance; I have here instead tried to think about the values and commitments that might be helpful to those struggling alongside others toward the kind of goal that, in Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James’s formulation, “emerges and is in fact created in struggle.” But to be candid I want a revolutionary socialist society and, through a politics of solidarity that centers the voices and experiences of those the politics of the present marginalizes and exploits, I want more friends and collaborators with whom I can

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10 This focus on a grassroots micropolitics of candor puts my project essentially at odds with the “plebiscitarian politics of candor,” advanced by Jeffrey Green in The Eyes of the People: Democracy in the Age of Spectatorship (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 17. For Green, candor is a criterion according to which spectator-citizens judge the public appearances of their leaders. This approach is plebiscitarian in that “the point is not to cancel political inequality, but to design a political ethics suitable to it. Candor realizes such an ethics because its rational is not to return decision-making power to the People, but to ensure that those who do have massively disproportionate authority and power in a democracy in some sense be compelled to recompense the public for this privilege,” ibid., 26. Despite these differences, Green too understands the politics of candor to work against a politics of certainty and control. For Green, candor, as a principle by which the People might evaluate leaders, involves the People “wresting control from leaders” (albeit to consolidate it in their own hands), ibid., 14.


say “we want a revolutionary socialist society.” Even confining our thinking to questions of how to realize those broad ideals in the present moment – and especially because I hope this project will have readers who will never recognize themselves in this “we” – we face a vast, complex, and heterogeneous terrain where an ethos of candor will not always be recommendable. If one is on the picket line during a difficult labor negotiation, or attempting to build peace after a brutal national conflict, the lessons of this project may be of limited value. But those endeavors, and countless others, will at some point involve people communicating with each other: identifying and naming the problems they face, arguing over potential strategies and responses, persuading potentially interested parties, educating newcomers, sharing images and songs, chanting denunciations of adversaries. What happens and what might happen in these moments? This dissertation ventures one answer by thinking about the practices of truth-telling through which we might try to make more and more of our perspective available to others – a process that is strenuous but need not be agonistic, that need not take the form of deliberation, that is not necessarily aimed at producing conclusions and consensus. Our efforts to tell the truth are valuable, from this perspective, not because they get us closer to the truth but because the get us closer to each other.

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Dean is justifiably concerned about formulations of politics that obscure or displace “the hard work of organizing and struggle.” However, a politics of truth-telling need not be regarded as frictionless, automatic, effortless, or easy. It may be, as Rich suggests, a difficult and even torturous process, and a cause for anxiety and apprehension. I turn to the history of political thought in an attempt to find a mode of truthfulness, sharing, and relationship-building that might avoid the reductive fantasies and displacements that Dean fears. Candor is my name for this largely unrealized past which, distinct from the way Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman have usually been understood to conceive of truth and truthfulness, might be helpfully reactivated and reworked under contemporary conditions.

**Varieties of Veridiction: Truthful Characters, Bad Politics?**

Although Hannah Arendt was not aware of anyone who had “ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues,” she was missing out on quite a bit. To cite just two examples, in addition to the New Left politics of honesty just discussed, the classical Athenians praised political truthfulness under the name *parrhesia* and eighteenth-century members of the British House of Commons praised a form of truthfulness they called candor. As Michel Foucault observes in order to contextualize his lectures on parrhesia,

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14 *Democracy, and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 40.


Western political thought has, since its inception, frequently taken up the links between subjectivity, truth, politics, and ethics. In developing my own account of candor, I join a long line of theorists who have investigated the ways truth-telling might work to develop, reconfigure, and challenge existing connections and boundaries between the personal and the political. In this regard, I depart from Arendt’s judgment that such diverse “truth-tellers” as philosophers, scientists, artists, historians, judges, witnesses, and reporters are all, as truth-tellers, fundamentally “nonpolitical.” Yet different people in different eras have not simply used different names for one and the same unchanging ideal of truthfulness; instead, an attention to history allows one to identify different – indeed, divergent – styles of political truthfulness. Exploring some of these nuances will be a major task of this dissertation. At the outset, however, it will be useful to identify a few crucial axes around which questions have formed and debates have been waged.

Lionel Trilling’s *Sincerity and Authenticity* powerfully illuminates some of these debates and distinctions. He shows ways that, over the last four centuries, practices of truth-telling have not been mere matters “of the personal and private life” but political phenomena serving as both effect and cause of significant changes in collective

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17 Foucault also makes the claim that the three poles of *alētheia* (“conditions and forms of truth-telling”), *politeia* (“structures and rules... of the organization of relations of power”), and *ethopoiesis* (“modalities of formation... in which the individual constitutes himself”) define the field of Western philosophical discourse from Greece to the present. *Courage of Truth*, 66. This broader claim (which Foucault admittedly flags as speculative and tentative) seems to push against his general opposition to Husserlian/Heideggerian claims about an origin and a diffusion of the tradition of philosophy, thus my more moderate paraphrase.

18 “Truth and Politics,” 255. Arendt does allow that the truth-teller may perform “politically relevant functions” (namely, world-building work akin to that of storytellers and poets), but insists that these functions “are performed from outside the political realm,” ibid., 258. However, there are at least two instances in which she recognizes truth telling to be a directly political form of action: in the setting forth of an exemplary truth and in a context of organized lying, ibid., 244, 247. Insofar as the former resonates with Foucault’s analysis of the role of exemplarity in Cynicism and its decedents and the latter with Rich’s analysis of honesty, and insofar as I draw inspiration from both Foucault and Rich, Arendt’s two caveats suggest two paths by which my work might be brought closer to Arendt’s.
existence. Trilling illuminates two crucial questions for the ethical and political evaluation of practices of truth-telling. First, what is the nature of the self (or part of the self) at stake in truth-telling? Second, what is the relation of truth-telling to existing forms of collective life? In short, who tells the truth and why?

These questions are not explicitly framed by Trilling but emerge along the way to the book’s central tasks: charting the emergence and transformation of its two titular concepts. For Trilling, “sincerity is the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one’s own self” (5). The sincerity norm arose amid a crisis of traditional power centers in the late sixteenth century as people strove to demonstrate that, because they had been true to themselves, they deserved to be “admired and trusted” (25). As Trilling’s narrative progresses, sincerity gradually loses much of its dignity and importance, and a “more strenuous moral experience,” authenticity, comes to occupy its place (11). Being authentic here means being true to oneself, period, not as a means to some greater socio-political end. Over time, the growing rejection of “the coercive inauthenticity of society” leads in a fairly straight line to a cultural embrace of isolation (171). As a modality of truth-telling, then, sincerity concerns the public dimensions of a private individual, while authenticity concerns a simple and solid being. Where sincerity aims at demonstrating one’s credentials for fulfilling a social role, authenticity seeks an end to all role-playing.

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20 Authenticity aspires to a “perfect autonomy” (95) achieved through “acts of unprecedented power and mastery” (133). Authenticity is often framed as a masculine overcoming “passive and acquiescent” social qualities, ibid., 96. These more “violent meanings... are explicit in the Greek ancestry of the word 'authentic.' Authenteo: to have full power over: also, to commit a murder. Authentes: ...a master and a doer... a perpetrator,” ibid., 131.
For the sincere person, truth is a social means to social ends; for the authentic person, truth is antagonistic to society and perhaps to all collective ends.\textsuperscript{21}

Despite this tendency of authenticity to lean away from collective life, Elizabeth Markovits has recently demonstrated the political currency still to be gained by those who can convincingly present themselves as authentic, as unbound by convention and so as willing to “tell it like it is.”\textsuperscript{22} Yet, for Markovits, the contemporary high evaluation of straight talk relies on a number of false assumptions: that individuals can understand and express their own intentions clearly, that those intentions are stable and unitary, that we can “fully determine how other people will perceive what we do or say” (35). Moreover, consistent with Trilling’s observations about the historical roots and trajectory of authenticity, Markovits’s straight-shooter evinces strong desire to maintain control and “helps privilege a stereotypically masculine style of talk – self-confidence, certainty, and a seemingly dispassionate tone” (34). This posture is unrealistic, because it “ignores the fact that whenever we speak, we choose words,” and undemocratic, because it seeks to eliminate emotion- and rhetoric-laden modes of communication from processes of public deliberation (34). Disturbed by the assumptions and tendencies of currently dominant practices of truth-telling, Markovits joins Arendt in placing all truth-tellers “outside of politics.” She suggests the best way to avoid the problems posed by existing models of

\textsuperscript{21} For purposes of space, I have simplified Trilling’s nuanced narrative. One should not conclude from my account that he makes sincerity and authenticity out to be absolute opposites. For example, Trilling finds that elements of each of the two ideals combine in Rousseau.

\textsuperscript{22} The Politics of Sincerity: Plato, Frank Speech, and Democratic Judgment (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008). Although Markovits explicitly “collapse[s] the two terms” at stake in Trilling’s distinction and prefers to use the term sincerity, I will highlight the ways the phenomena she discusses more closely resemble what Trilling calls authenticity, ibid., 21n23. Additional citations in this paragraph given in text.
truth-telling is to look beyond truth-telling, toward what she calls an ethos of trustworthiness (191–208).23

Contemporary modes of truth-telling are politically problematic; yet, unlike Arendt and Markovits, I am not convinced that the best response to these difficulties involves drawing a bright line between politics and truth. What I call candor follows up on Rich’s suggestion that there may be forms of truth-telling that challenge rather than shore up the politics of certainty and control that flow from conventional truth-telling practices. While the word candor is sometimes historically associated with sincerity and authenticity,24 I will make a case for it as an alternative to both of these moral frameworks. Rather than digging deep (toward an authentic being) or seeking social harmony (as a sincere individual), candid speakers work through fragile words to explore

23 Between Trilling and Markovits, many have attempted to make truth-telling safe for democracy. However, an account that argues that “the social context is an indispensable condition of authenticity” because authenticity needs a “cultural context” to provide it “raw material” to be “overcome, changed, or assimilated into one’s life” is unlikely to satisfy those who worry about the overemphasis on mastery and control in the authentic life. Jacob Golomb, In Search of Authenticity (New York: Routledge, 1995), 201–202. On the other hand, an account that effectively transforms authenticity into sincerity by insisting that authenticity requires “dialogue” and “openness to horizons of significance” also remains vulnerable to the objections of a skeptic like Markovits. Charles Taylor, Ethics of Authenticity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 66. The classical understanding of parrhēsia or frankness offers a more convincing integration of truth-telling into political life. Indeed, one reason parrhēsia has garnered much attention in recent years may be that it suggests a path beyond the impasse of a socially embedded sincerity and an antisocial authenticity that does not simply exile the truth-teller from the political realm. Yet, Foucault’s account highlights that, at least in its original, institutional form, parrhēsia was itself thought of as a relatively heroic, solitary, and aggressive practice. Courage of Truth, 87. Parrhēsia thus may not be quite the alternative to the problems that plague contemporary “straight talk” it might at first appear to be (this is the organizing claim of Markovits’s book) and recent studies of parrhēsia have highlighted the way fourth century critics demonstrated the undemocratic and otherwise undesirable uses of this practice (Markovits pursues this line of argument as well; also see Sara Monoson, “Citizen as Parrhēsiastēs,” in Plato’s Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 51–63; Saxonhouse, The Politics of Free Speech in Democratic Athens; Foucault, Courage of Truth. I further explore the relationship between parrhēsia and candor in Chapters 1 and 3.

24 Trilling, for example, quotes Conrad describing candor as one of the virtues of the sincere character. In a footnote, Green equates candor with Markovitz’s concept of sincerity (which she had already equated with authenticity), 253n1.
and expand the possibilities of life between them. Candor is, then, something of a middle concept, positioned between the paranoid moralism of sincerity and the isolationist iconoclasm of authenticity.\(^\text{25}\)

This conceptual middle-status is, in a sense, historically appropriate, as the three authors I draw on to help me think through candor (Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman) live and work between the two poles of Trilling’s history: the emergence of the sincerity ideal in the late sixteenth century and the triumph of the culture of authenticity in the mid-twentieth century.\(^\text{26}\) Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman are often read through the framework of sincerity, authenticity, or both; however, I will show themes in their writing that help to disentangle the idea of truthfulness from these frames and associated values, and gather those themes into an ethos of candor. Along the way, I will try to indicate specific reasons why I think the term candor is most appropriate to name a chancy, creative, and co-operative form of truth-telling. Yet in the first place, the term may be appropriate in part because of its relative unfamiliarity. Candor, William Empson notes, is

\(^{25}\) Golomb reads the “candor” of the title character in Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew* as something “more than” conventional honesty or sincerity, but judges him to be “not yet an authentic hero,” *In Search of Authenticity*, 15. I agree with him on this middle-position of candor, although my understanding of candor is quite different from Golomb’s definition of candor as a “courageous exposure of what society does but never speaks about,” ibid., 14. I associate the gesture of courageous exposure with frankness or parrhēsia (an unsurprising connection, given *Rameau’s* explicit and much commented-upon affiliation with classical cynicism), rather than with candor.

\(^{26}\) Though the historical and conceptual middle status I assign to candor might suggest that it is somehow a “dialectical resolution” of sincerity and authenticity, I'm inclined to say otherwise. First, my account is non-binary: I give emphasis to two concepts, but also acknowledge the fact that the existing range of modalities of truth-telling is a well-populated and multipolar field, with overlaps and complex interactions among its constituent elements, not reducible to two or three simple terms. Even sincerity and authenticity themselves are not mutually exclusive, but converge in complicated ways in disparate figures. Second, my account is non-progressive: I don't intend candor to supplant all possible rivals. Sincerity, authenticity, frankness, honesty, etc. are all important and all might do important work. Candor can operate along side them, and need not be seen as their negation. Cf. Amanda Anderson who, in *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), does cast herself as working out a dialectical resolution of sincerity and authenticity.
“a peculiar kind of truthfulness,” and the term implies an “ideal truth-teller” who is “remarkably different” from the figures most often given that designation. Because of its distance from received notions of truthfulness, I thus intend the ethos of candor to highlight a minor tradition of truth-telling circulating in a culture poised between sincerity and authenticity.

Candor names a set of themes in the work of the thinkers I examine in connections they largely did not. Rather than point out where “candor” might already be read in (or into) the work of Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman, I create conditions under which they can speak to issues related to the candid character through the terms of their own distinctive accounts of truth, communication, ethics, and politics. Though my account of candor emerges out of a sustained reading of Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman, each of these three thinkers mutually transforms the others in the course of my reading and all are, of course, filtered through me. My way of doing political theory is significantly historical, but my understanding of history does not involve turning to the

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28 Candor is a common and important, but perhaps not central, word in Whitman. It has strong similarities, but also important differences, with key words in Nietzsche. And it has some allied concepts, but no exact parallel, in Rousseau. It may be objected that reading all three of these thinkers as contributing to an “ethos of candor” is thus not an entirely obvious or honest project. Though I will try to be upfront about the contestable elements of my readings, this objection seems misplaced. At minimum, reading these three as thinkers of candor is no less obvious than the common twentieth and twenty-first century project of reading them as theorist of sincerity and/or authenticity while recognizing that “sincerity” and “authenticity” are to some extent interpretive overlays foreign to the thinker’s own corpus. See Charles Guignon, On Being Authentic (New York: Routledge, 2004), 59: “Though Rousseau never appears to use any word that could be translated as 'authenticity,' it seems obvious that all the core assumptions built into the concept of authenticity are fully worked out in his writings”; Jacob Golomb, In Search of Authenticity, 68: “Nietzsche did not use the term 'authenticity' explicitly, but it is possible to locate it in his recurrent distinctions.” In this context, Golomb’s title takes on a seemingly unintentional double meaning.
past to find readymade “lessons” that need only be “applied” to the present. Like Rich when she returned to Karl Marx after dismissing him in “Women and Honor,” I do not search in the past for a “blueprint for a future utopia;” instead I find there a “skilled diagnosis [and, at times, demonstration] of skewed and disfigured human relationships.” This way of reading the past does not deny the limitations of previous generations of thinkers, nor does it ignore that much of what was once radical has become dulled through appropriation and expropriation, but it is attentive to the fact that “unsilenced questions” from the past “pursue us” yet today. Rather than a monologue issuing from the Present Thinker to all past, present, and future actors, political theory here operates by way of a series of calls and responses.

29 In Ranciérlean terms, I hope to avoid a stultifying position with regard to both the past (I know something about Rousseau that he did not know about himself!) and the present (I, the political theorist, will tell you how and why to talk!).

30 Rich, “Credo of a Passionate Skeptic.” Compare Rowbotham, who, although she does not expect to find “answers’ lying latent in history,” argues that finding a language to express “all those aspects of our experience which are so easily denied because they go against the grain of how we learn to feel and think in capitalism” requires returning to the anarchist and utopian socialist traditions official marxist parties tended to dismiss “as primitive antecedents or as incorrect theories,” “The Women’s Movement and Organizing for Socialism,” 148.

31 Rich, “Credo of a Passionate Skeptic.”

32 For other crisp articulations of the methodological aspirations guiding me here, see Melissa Orlie on political theory as a “mutual transfiguration,” which “aims at beginning powers and selves that are collaborative, not sovereign,” Living Ethically, Acting Politically (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 9, Judith Shklar on the political theorist as a “representative” of past thinkers who foregoes the “aggressive” desire to offer “perfect reproductions of the original, like police reports of his statements,” Ordinary Vices (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1984), 229, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on a historical approach to philosophy less concerned with understanding and explicating systems of thought and more attentive to “a Cartesian, Spinozist, or Leibnizian way of situating oneself” in “relation to being, other men, and the world” (i.e., to what I would call ethos), “Everywhere and Nowhere,” in Signs (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 158.
In trying to think afresh about the politics of truth-telling, I have tried to avoid a number of reductive binaries that always threatened to drag candor back to some more familiar set of terms. Much of that wrestling and disentangling will need to be undergone in the chapters ahead, but to save some effort, I want to mark off a few particularly troublesome dualisms here: ethics/politics, authentic/artificial, and self/world. In each case, the idea is not that I want to pick one option and locate my project at that pole. Nor can the demands of thinking about candor be satisfied by, in any simple sense, combining the two options or even by trying to occupy a middle ground between them. Instead, in each case, candor indicates the need and possibility of finding different ways of moving in fields where, although our practical experience and histories of thought might indicate rich and nuanced terrains, we habitually return to the same two comfortable spots.

Candor, as I present it, is a characterological disposition with political implications. My attention to the political potential of character requires some elaboration, particularly in a context of growing suspicion regarding the so-called “ethical
turn” in political theory. Joan Tronto highlights the way modern political theory tends to mark ethics as external to itself, and thus to argue for either a “morality first” or a “politics first” approach: “Either politics becomes a means to achieve moral ends, or morality becomes a means to achieve political ends.” Unsatisfied with this standoff, I share Tronto’s desire “to escape the dilemmas of seeing morality and politics as separate spheres.” Writing on Aristotle, Jill Frank puts the point nicely: “Although self-ish, virtue unavoidably involves other people” and is fundamentally a matter of practical activity. From Aristotle to Foucault and beyond, practicality and plurality are basic features of much ethical thinking. In other words, the cultivation of an ethos is not so much “preparation... for would-be political actors,” but rather is itself a part of “the worldliness of political engagement”; “arts of the self” are not opposed to but rather only proceed by way of “forces encountered out of doors.” Thus, while critics of ethical language in political theory tend to divide approaches that are “ethical” from those that


37 Honig, “Review,” 428. Honig is making the opposite point about Stephen White’s recent work.
are “truly political,” I find, with Tronto, that “morality and politics are deeply intertwined in Western life.”

I thus avoid granting to critics of the “ethical turn” the premise that we face a binary choice between ethos and collective action, between micro- and macro-politics. Questions of character are intimately and interactively linked to legal and institutional concerns. In my final chapter, I consider ways that an ethos of candor might enrich contemporary vocabularies for engaging and criticizing institutional projects. In earlier chapters, the examples I take up suggest ways questions of ethos secrete from and remain important under both utopian and dystopian institutional conditions. Political actors confront issues of how to maneuver and comport themselves – what ethos to cultivate – whether they face failed institutions, an institutional stalemate, or even hypothesize institutions that do everything they want. No matter how much attention is paid to institutions, questions of ethos cannot be avoided, and an attention to ethos should not become an excuse for neglecting institutional questions.

Authentic/Artificial

Like any ethos, candor involves habituation and skill, forms and conventions: all things that might usually be associated with the artificial or with the untrue. Yet all forms of truth-telling, I think, share some of these ethico-aesthetic features. Arendt recognizes

Moral Boundaries, 7. While some positions within the “ethical turn” may indeed have pre-, un-, or anti-political tendencies, there is another long, strong tradition of genuinely politico-ethical thinking which includes feminists like Tronto and classicists like Frank, as well as liberals like Judith Shklar and Amanda Anderson, Arendtians like Melissa Orlie, socialists like G. A. Cohen, pluralists like William Connolly, and materialists like Jane Bennett. I join this line of thinkers.

Frank’s A Democracy of Distinction offers a sustained discussion of this point.
that even “the teller of factual truth is also a storyteller.”\textsuperscript{40} The very idea of different forms of truthfulness – or of a particular style of truth-telling – already pushes in this direction, troubling a binary division between “truthful” and “artful.” Yet this may be particularly true of candor, since (as I explore most fully in Chapter 2) the candid speaker, unlike the teller of factual truths, deals with truths that only take shape in the telling, and the notion of candor foregrounds the idea that the telling of such truths can often have a transformative or “refreshing” effect on both speakers and audiences. While candor is associated with a lack of pretense, moments of candor are often carefully marked off as such through the use of conventional phrases like “Let me be candid with you” (a phrase I will take up again in more detail in each of the chapters below).\textsuperscript{41}

For Jeffrey Green, who proposes that candor might be used as a criterion for judging the public appearances of democratic leaders, “leaders are candid to the extent their public appearances are neither rehearsed, preplanned, nor managed from above, but rather contain all the risk and uncertainty of spontaneous public events.”\textsuperscript{42} While I affirm the uncertainty of candor, associating the term with spontaneity seems to go too far. While Green does not offer much explanation of why he thinks “candor” is a good name for this ideal, it seems in tension with the way we usually think about candid speech. Like

\textsuperscript{40} “Truth and Politics,” 257.

\textsuperscript{41} These particularly stylized features of candor may be why William Empson, in this dissertation’s second epigraph, associates candor with both beauty and obscurity. Structure of Complex Words, 307. Christopher Reid extends the use of aesthetic vocabulary to describe the peculiarity of candor, noting that for eighteenth-century parliamentarians, “candour... was a beautiful virtue of social cohesion rather than a sublime virtue of command.” Imprison’d Wranglers, 179-180. While the description of candor in terms of “social cohesion” may tilt candor too far toward sincerity – an association Reid explicitly rejects – the contrast with sublimity and authority does help underline the distance between candor and more spectacularly iconoclastic forms of truthfulness like authenticity and parrhēsia.

\textsuperscript{42} The Eyes of the People, 13–14.
the form of truth-telling described by Rich, candor does not spring up on its own.

Admittedly, for Green, candor is an “ocular” rather than a “vocal” standard, a “critical ideal on the basis of which democratic imagery can be assessed, developed, and reformed.” Yet even the use of “candid” to describe a photograph (a usage I will not consider in the chapters ahead) seems in tension with Green’s way of using the term. While the subjects of a candid photograph are typically unaware they are being photographed, capturing such an image can require a great deal of both skill and luck on the part of the candid photographer. So too for the candid speaker or writer: careful framing and a fortuitous moment allow the emergence of something unexpected.

When candor’s status as an ethos and practice is foregrounded, efforts to determine who is or is not really candid become less important. Sincerity and authenticity tend to invite such paranoia. To invoke the inner/outer model of subjectivity most closely associated with the criterion of sincerity is to be drawn into “the calculation of the degree of congruence between the feeling and avowal,” thus into escalating games of proof and doubt (Will my lack of sincerity be discovered? How can I convince others of my own sincerity, or be sure of theirs?) and a spiraling drama of demystification and decipherment (I, at last, will expose the insincerity of x!). A shared concern about this will to certainty leads me to agree with Markovits regarding the difficulties of a political ethic

43 Ibid., 15.

44 Merleau-Ponty’s description of going to sleep offers a powerful example of another kind of action (or, thanks to a rich simile, two activities) that blends skill and spontaneity in a particularly clear way: “Just as the faithful in Dionysian mysteries invoke the god by imitating the scenes of his life, I too call forth the visitations of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper... Sleep ‘arrives’ at a particular moment, it settles upon this imitation of itself that I offered it, and I succeed in becoming what I pretended to be,” Phenomenology of Perception (New York: Routledge: 2012), 166.

45 Sincerity and Authenticity, 7.
that focuses on intentions. Likewise, with Markovits and Trilling, I am worried that an authentic quest to purge life of all conventionality ultimately tends toward a denial of all politics. Even though authenticity involves a rejection of sincerity’s orientation toward a public role, the quest for certainty and control associated with the latter only accelerates, as increasingly severe steps are taken to finally reach a deep, concealed, true self. But if candor can serve to name a chancy and co-operative transformation of the world, judging the new perspectives on the world we gain (or fail to gain) in this process and the transformations thus initiated (or not initiated) might take priority over unmasking, uncovering, and unveiling the really real reality.

Candor is not a matter of objective data, but neither does it concern merely subjective interpretations. The general notion of “perspective” may offer a more helpful place to begin. “Perspective” is strongly associated with Nietzsche; while I will indeed spend time in Chapter 2 developing the point at stake here through a reading of the creativity of truth-telling valued by Nietzsche, all of the authors I focus on in the chapters ahead emphasize that they are trying to convey not just brute facts but a certain perspective on the world to their readers. While “truth” may tend to imply timeless and

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46 Politics of Sincerity, 35. I return to this point in Chapter 2.

47 Elizabeth Wingrove argues that understanding Rousseau requires a “move beyond analytic frames organized by dilemmas of authenticity and fraudulence,” Rousseau’s Republican Romance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 173. This insight helped to inspired not only my reading of Rousseau but the shape of my entire project.

48 Different readers have hotly contested if or when Nietzsche holds a view called “perspectivism” and what such a doctrine would entail, but I don’t think any would quibble with this general statement.
disembodied abstractions, telling the truth requires both a truth-teller and a material medium of expression: sounds vibrating through the air, marks on a page, pixels on a screen, or even just the series of electrical impulses and bodily events we call a thought process. These media, which may be more or less adequate to the task, may often go more or less unnoticed; but at times they might help me in ways I did not anticipate clearly enough to hope for, while the next day they may hinder me in ways I did not even think to fear.

On the other hand, as this discussion of their media indicates, the perspectives at stake in candor are not the same as individual points of view. My ability to be candid about things as they appear to me depends on, to name just a few preconditions and in the most schematic way possible, (1) things having appeared to me at all, (2) my environmentally-constituted and -mediated ability to and interest in providing such an account of things, and (3) an audience who is able and interested in receiving my account. Thus, as I argue in Chapter 3, rather than a focus on the willful acts of solitary truth-tellers – or, for that matter, the resistance to human will demonstrated by bare facts – understanding candor requires thinking in terms of an ecology of truthfulness. Developing an account of candor entails a method of reading that attends to not “just the fact” but to the atmospheres and attunements required for particular perspectives on things to become available to others.

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The tension between a self and its surrounding animating my account of candor is partially reflected in the structure of the dissertation: while the first paragraph of this introduction speaks in the first person singular, the individuality invoked there is increasingly dissolved in the course of the dissertation. That shift emerges as an explicit topic in Chapter 2, it accelerates in Chapter 3, and I experiment with pushing it beyond my own comfort zone in the coda. It’s not that I just did not have time to smooth out editorial tone across these chapters. The journey in part reflects the two-sided nature of truth-telling, and of candor in particular, as it works between self and others, between collectivity and singularity.

An Outline of the Project

In the first chapter, in order to develop an alternative to the resolute stance of the parrheiastēs or frank speaker, I argue that Rousseau’s Dialogues presents truthfulness as a relation to chance. Reading Rousseau as a theorist of chance is not unheard of, but it does swim against the mainstream reception of Rousseau, so before turning to the Dialogues I lay the groundwork for this interpretation through readings of Emile and the “Letter on Providence.” I then argue that, in the Dialogues, Rousseau presents his effort to tell the truth as a non-heroic practice, alert to contingency but marked more by awkwardness and resignation than by trust, courage, or hope. In contemporary contexts where truthfulness is often associated with “straight talk” and “tough conversations,”

50 To invoke a distinction to be clarified along the way, an interest in personality persists throughout the pressure put on individual subjectivity in this process, for (in the Whitmanian conception of personality I elaborate in Chapter 3) personality is defined in relation to the world rather than being set against it.
Rousseau’s sense of truth-telling as a non-heroic practice of attuning oneself to chance can help to reconfigure assumptions about what it takes (and what it means) to tell the truth. Positioning these Rousseauian themes in relation to contemporary activist accounts of “call-out culture,” I suggest that a chance-attuned account of candor brings to the forefront subjects and practices other accounts of political truth-telling obscure.

The second chapter tracks Nietzsche’s use of the term Redlichkeit, conventionally translated as “honesty,” in his writing in the early to mid-1880s. Distancing himself from, on the one hand, an ancient period of Unredlichkeit or “dishonesty,” and, on the other hand, the modern emergence of a harsh, scientific form of Redlichkeit, Nietzsche nevertheless affirms an as-yet future form of Redlichkeit. Nietzsche views this free-spirited Redlichkeit as a creative practice that remains accountable to a world beyond itself but is not merely a dispassionate evaluation and re-presentation of that world. I also return to Rousseau here, this time to the account of truthfulness offered in his *Reveries*, in order to highlight ascetic elements both in that account of truthfulness and (surprisingly) in the readings offered by many of Nietzsche’s interpreters. By clarifying how one practice might be simultaneously creative and truthful, and by specifying the particular sort of creation at stake, Nietzsche’s history illuminates the distance between candor and more familiar forms of truthfulness like objectivity and authenticity.

The next chapter attends to the prominence given to the term “candor” in Whitman’s poetry and prose. In Whitman, candor appears as a co-operative form of truth-telling that both contains and develops new modes of relationality. I first build toward this claim by reading a few significant moments in Whitman’s *Specimen Days* to give a
sense of the overall character of his communicative project, emphasizing his interest in using words in a way that allows for opacity and helps to form relationships and alliances. I then turn to some of Whitman’s specific uses of the word “candor” across a range of his poetry and prose. The “withness with opacity” I trace in Whitman’s theorizations of his writing process echoes in significant features of what Whitman calls candor. Candor here is irreducible to the solitary work of any one speaker, further differentiating this form of truthfulness from that of the parrhēsiastēs; yet Whitman’s candor is also distinct from the putatively utopian ideal of consensus often associated with sincerity. In Whitman’s usage, the term “candor” involves joint action, but does not begin with the presumption that we have perfect knowledge of others or of ourselves, nor even that those are possible or desirable goals. Highlighting moments when the solicitous venturing of candid accounts emerges co-operatively between multiple speakers, sites, and interests, I illuminate the distinctive relational mode involved in Whitman’s candor by comparing and contrasting it with Leo Bersani’s recent work on “impersonal intimacy.”

The fourth chapter of the dissertation weaves the themes developed within the previous three chapters into a sustained reflection on the relation of candor to the contemporary state and corporate rhetoric of “openness.” After first tracking notable instances of the notion of openness across a number of disparate domains, I work to specify the sense currently being invested in that term through a comparative analysis of the related but distinct notions of publicity, inclusivity, and transparency. I then consider the concept of “privacy” as a potential response to the drive to openness. Finding that the
language of “threats to privacy” fails to adequately account for the dangers accompanying corporate-mediated inducements to openness, and that the notion of privacy problematically reiterates the will to stability and control manifest in contemporary practices of openness, I invoke the central features of the ethos of candor (chance, creativity, co-operation) to develop an alternative framework for addressing the possibilities and dangers of currently circulating versions of openness.

The dissertation ends with a brief coda extending Chapter 4’s critical analysis of the present into several possible futures, using science fiction tales of the twenty-fourth century and citations of biblical prophecy from the nineteenth century to explore what a truly open world might mean and what value candor might retain there.
Chapter 1 | Communication Hazards: Rousseau’s Faltering

Long-hidden truths are finally revealed by some chance circumstances. A hundred thousand others may remain forever obscured by lies without our having any means to recognize them and point them out. For as long as they remain hidden, it is as if they are nonexistent for us. Take away the chance that reveals one, it would continue to be hidden, and who knows how many remain for which this circumstance will never come? So let’s not say that time always allows truth to triumph, because that is what is impossible for us to know, and it is far more credible that erasing all its traces step by step, time more often allows lying to triumph, especially when men have an interest in supporting it.

– Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Truth-telling is often hard. It can be hard to tell the truth, in part, because of the strange mix of certainties and uncertainties typically swirling around the act. The truth one attempts to tell can seem sure as the sunrise, or at minimum feel ambiguously right. Yet, in its telling, truth is exposed to uncertainty: will the words that come carry the sense of what one sees or feels? Will anyone receive them? Will anyone understand them in the way one intends?

One classic solution to these difficulties involves preemptively hardening oneself in order to be able to tell hard truths. On this approach, one acknowledges the difficulties and uncertainties truth-telling can entail but tries to muster a courage that can confront

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1 Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990), 230. Henceforth cited parenthetically with the abbreviation D.

2 Here, I set to one side all the many questions associated with how one comes to feel that something is true, if a particular level of certainty is required to properly consider a claim true, whether certainty is even the appropriate criterion to invoke in discussions of truthfulness, and so on. Those problems are better treated by specialists of philosophy, psychology, and related disciplines. I am instead interested in exploring the ethical and political problems that emerge once one begins to share whatever one believes to be true with others; here, specifically, with the problems of navigating uncertainty in that process. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, this move draws on Michel Foucault’s distinction between “epistemology” and an “analysis of alethurgic forms,” in Courage of Truth, 2–3. As Jason Neidleman suggests, and as I explore in the next chapter through a discussion of the Fourth Walk of Rousseau’s Reveries, Rousseau also rejects (or is at least less interested in) epistemological or metaphysical approaches to questions of truth and truthfulness; see Neidleman, “The Sublime Science of Simple Souls: Rousseau’s Philosophy of Truth,” History of European Ideas 39.6 (2013), 815–834.
them, to fashion a will that can sustain them. The classical Greek virtue of parrhēsia, “frankness” or “free-spokenness,” is one example of this approach. A practitioner of parrhēsia, the parrhēsiastēs, “is the courageous teller of a truth by which he puts himself and his relationship to the other at risk.” The parrhēsiastēs resolutely acknowledges that his words may not be received under optimal conditions, that they are exposed to (and expose the speaker to) chances, but he nevertheless takes responsibility for, “personally signs,” those words. In the United States today, at least for those broadly identified as on the Left, the iconic status of whistle-blowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden resembles classical Greek ethical and political thought’s investment in the figure of the parrhēsiastēs. Part of what makes contemporary whistle-blowers so captivating is their display of what a website supporting Manning calls “the valor required to tell the truth.” Like the parrhēsiastēs, the whistle-blower is tough enough to tell tough truths.

However, one need not question the genuine bravery often displayed by such figures to notice that the equation of truth-telling with valor may pay insufficient attention to the many forces that can prevent even the most courageously ventured truths from being heard: failures of medium, a lack of resources, or simple accidents. Such nonhuman forces are, moreover, often supported and coordinated by institutionally entrenched human interests that prevent particular truths from emerging. Under such conditions, having one’s perspective heard and acknowledged may be less a matter of

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3 Courage of Truth, 14. For analysis of the gendered dimensions of parrhēsia and more contemporary understandings of “straight talk,” see Markovits, The Politics of Sincerity.

4 Ibid., 11.

toughening up, more a matter of lucking out.

My epigraph suggests all of this. Although those words are taken from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Dialogues*, Rousseau does not present them as quite his own. The *Dialogues* are an exchange between two characters, “The Frenchman” and “Rousseau” (who is not quite the historical Rousseau), judging the author “Jean-Jacques,” who wrote the books we have in our world under the name Rousseau. The Frenchman speaks the words in my epigraph, and by the time he says them, he has come around to supporting “Jean-Jacques.” For the Frenchman, however, the conjunction of truth and chance suggests that no action can be appropriate, that giving up is the best solution: “surrounded as he is by traps and snares into which every step he takes can’t fail to draw him,” “Jean-Jacques” ought “to remain immobile if he can, not to act at all; to agree to nothing that is proposed to him under any pretext whatsoever, and to resist even his own impulses to the extent he can abstain from following them” (D, 234). This sense that it is safest not to bother is surely another common response among those who confront the uncertainties of truth-telling. But even as he appears to agree with The Frenchman’s analysis of his situation and his probable destiny, this solution is just what the author of the *Dialogues* cannot do. Speaking directly in his own voice in a footnote, Rousseau locates himself in the space opened up by The Frenchman’s conditionals (“if he can,” “to the extent he can”):

> Until the end I *must* do everything within my power if not to open the eyes of this blind generation at least to enlighten one that is more equitable. All the means for doing so have been taken away from me I know. But without any hope of success, all efforts possible even though useless are nonetheless my duty, and I will not stop making them until my final breath is drawn (D, 234n, my

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6 Throughout, I will continue to use “Rousseau” (in quotation marks) to indicate the character within the *Dialogues*, and Rousseau (without quotation marks) to refer to the author of the *Dialogues*. 
Unable to find any resources or supports, not even the internal supports of a strong will or a hopeful outlook, Rousseau feels a duty to venture his words forth on pure chance.\(^7\)

This chapter explores chanciness or contingency in Rousseau’s work in connection with his effort to live his personal motto (\textit{Vitam impendere vero}, “Consecrate life to truth”).\(^8\) Rousseau’s work presents an attention to chance as an alternative to a politically and ethically dangerous drive to mastery, and suggests that the way humans use and are used by words is a crucial site in which that alternative plays out. Rousseau’s final completed monograph, \textit{Rousseau, Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues}, exemplifies this approach and my argument culminates in a sustained engagement with this text. In the \textit{Dialogues}, Rousseau characterizes his earlier \textit{Confessions} as a kind of courageous self-presentation buoyed by a hope that he might succeed in making himself understood to his contemporaries (D, 188). In the \textit{Reveries} he was writing when he died, Rousseau will present himself as having regained that courage, even as he suggests he has concomitantly abandoned the hope of making himself known to others.\(^9\) But in the \textit{Dialogues} themselves, Rousseau presents himself as unable to gather any such courage or

\(^7\) My focus in this chapter is on the relationship between chance and truth in Rousseau; in the next chapter, I will return to Rousseau’s theorization of the role of duty in questions of truthfulness. There, I compare the Nietzschean virtue of \textit{Redlichkeit} and the distinctive perspective on truthfulness Rousseau offers in the Fourth Walk of the \textit{Reveries}. In the course of that discussion, I elaborate my reasons for leaving this crucial text out of the current chapter.

\(^8\) Rousseau first announces that this is the motto he has chosen for himself in his “Letter on the Theatre.” See \textit{Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 132.

to sustain any such hope. The Dialogues thus show Rousseau trying to tell his truth through faltering, though not quite failing, words. Here Rousseau presents his writing as a non-heroic practice, marked more by awkwardness and resignation than by trust, courage, or hope. From this faltering position, Rousseau develops a subtle attunement to the way chance, hazard, and contingency manifest in the circulation of words. Put simply, for the Rousseau of the Dialogues, truthfulness is a relation to chance.

I set up this reading of the Dialogues by exploring, in my first two sections, two earlier works by Rousseau that show his persistent resistance to human efforts to master chance. I then argue that, in the Dialogues, Rousseau develops a responsiveness to the hazards his words face without completely abandoning responsibility for the words he hazards. I conclude by relating Rousseau’s posture in the Dialogues to a present-day site of navigations and theorizations of the difficulties of truth-telling: denunciations of privilege within what has come to be known as “call-out culture.”


On responsiveness and responsibility, see William E. Connolly, Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), Judith Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), and Chad Lavin, The Politics of Responsibility (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008). Informed by but not fully invested in these debates, I invoke their terminology here to suggest that Rousseau is working out something different from, on the one hand, the courageous stance of the parrhēsiastēs (who must “personally sign” the truth he states) and, on the other, the position Rita Goldberg attributes to Rousseau, whereby ideally humans would “revert” to a non-thinking state, a position Goldberg suggests Rousseau adopts in order to shirk responsibility. “Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Lisbon Earthquake,” Eighteenth-Century Life 13 (1989): 1–20. Distinct from these two poles, I find Rousseau neither courageously assuming responsibility nor cowardly avoiding responsibility, perhaps suggesting a different form of responsibility.

As this brief outline suggests, this chapter has both historical and contemporary aims. First, his initial revolutionary reception notwithstanding, in recent decades it has been common for readers to associate Rousseau with the project of seeking control, rather than affirming contingency. Mabel Wong, for example, shows readers a Rousseau who deploys an “assemblage of psychosomatic techniques aimed at organizing and maintaining temporal unity in the face of time’s flux.” This Rousseau, then, acknowledges chance (in the form of “time’s flux”) but ultimately seeks to tame it (imposing “temporal unity” by redirecting future-obsessed social beings to the present). While finding such accounts compelling, I emphasize a different aspect of Rousseau’s work. Wong herself highlights Rousseau’s acknowledgement that his stabilizing procedures are “never complete” and always accompanied by “the inescapable specter of failure.” My own account gives greater emphasis to this line of Rousseauian thinking, emphasizing the persistence of chance and the haunting potential for failure that attends it. Thus, while a paranoid will to control certainly marks many moments in Rousseau’s work, I find that his work is at least as persistently organized by a relaxation or interruption of that same will to control. It is these moments of interruption that I theorize

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13 In addition to the more recent examples I discuss throughout this chapter, see Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) for a key node in the genealogy of readings of Rousseau that emphasize his more chance-averse tendencies.


15 Ibid., 184, 186.
under the rubric of an attention to chance. In order to help balance the image of
Rousseau available in existing histories of political thought, I amplify those moments of
uncertainty where Rousseau presents himself trying to tell his truth through faltering
words.

Second, this rereading of the past aims to open up new possibilities within the
present. In particular, I stretch existing accounts of political truth-telling to make room
for non-heroic views of what it takes to venture words, ideas, perspectives, and
experiences. Rousseau responds to the difficulties of truth-telling not by hardening
himself but by analyzing the multiple ways truthfulness is not simply up to a self.
Truthfulness takes hold in a heterogeneous situation in which individual will, interests,
and intentions are only one small part. Rousseau figures some of the forces assembled
around his effort to consecrate his life to truth as chance, providence, a universal plot
against him, his retiring and reticent taste, and his heedless and awkward temperament –
a potent and mutually reinforcing mix of human feelings, ossified institutions, and cosmic
forces. This heterogeneity neither absolves Rousseau of a stake in the situation, nor
deprives him of a sense of his capacities for action. Rather, Rousseau’s theorizations of
chance can prompt a pluralization of the forms that “capacities for action” might assume.

Focusing on the kinds of beliefs that sustain his project, and the kinds of practices his

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16 In suggesting that the post-Starobinski emphasis on control and stabilization in Rousseau may be an
over-emphasis, and highlighting theorizations of contingency and hazard in his work, I build on other
readings of Rousseau that emphasize the importance of chance to his thinking. These include Louis
Althusser, “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” in Philosophy of the Encounter
Romantic Review 95.3 (2004), 271–292; and Marian Hobson, Diderot and Rousseau: Networks of

17 On heterogeneous assemblages as possible sites of agency, see Bennett, Vibrant Matter.
project is able to sustain, I show why and how he attempts to venture words in a context of dejection and hopelessness. In this way, my turn to Rousseau’s late work is one attempt to answer to Heather Love’s articulation of “the need for an expanded gestural repertoire” informed by “feelings at some distance from…the ‘vehement passions,’ feelings on the model of anger and wonder that indicate ‘an aroused and dynamic spirit.’”\textsuperscript{18} In contemporary contexts where, both in popular consciousness and scholarly work, truthfulness is often associated with “straight talk” and “tough conversations,” Rousseau’s non-heroic stance unsettles assumptions about what it takes (and what it means) to tell the truth. I deploy the term candor – rather than more familiar terms like frankness or authenticity, which suggest more authoritative modes of truthfulness – to capture how this distinctive attention to chance might register in theorizations of political truth-telling, and so aid efforts “to imagine and work toward an alternative form of politics that would make space for various forms of ruined subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Magic Words, Fragile Words}

As I understand it, a drive toward certainty and control is the very opposite of an affirmative orientation toward chance. But why attend to the persistence of chance? Why not try to master the chances humans, together with their words, face? In \textit{Emile}, Rousseau suggests at least two reasons. I will detail each of his concerns, and suggest the ways the position of his educator reflects the alternative stance he hopes to cultivate in


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Feeling Backward, 162.}
Emile. First, an attunement to chance seems to him the most sensible way of approaching the world. For Rousseau, education typically forms people to fit into a position assigned by the vocation of their parents. This attempt to produce unchanging people to fit unchanging molds would suit an unchanging world. Rousseau does not believe that he lives in such a world, however. Attuned to “the mobility of human things” and “the unsettled and restless spirit of this age which upsets everything in each generation,” Rousseau finds traditional methods of education simply “senseless.”

Rousseau argues that in order to raise a child fit for a “mobile” and “unsettled” world, “the only habit that a child should be allowed is to contract none” (E, 41, 63). In direct contrast to his judgment of the function of traditional education, then, for Rousseau, education must avoid imparting in the pupil the illusion that he can circumvent the chancy character of the world.

A second, and parallel, reason Rousseau urges resisting the temptation to master chance is that he fears that there are serious ethical and political consequences connected to the sort of disposition that faces the world with an eye toward overcoming its contingencies. Rousseau regards attempts to master chance as thinly disguised attempts to exercise mastery over other people. Even if such questions of motivation are set aside, Rousseau would argue that the experience of being in control nevertheless provides an irresistible experience with and education in controlling everyone and everything. Conventional education, Rousseau argues, has the effect of instilling just such a controlling character. A central goal of Emile’s education, by contrast, is to prevent him

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from developing a willful and commanding disposition.

Language takes on a particularly important role for the student here, because the words one speaks are, from the start, connected to the character one has. On Rousseau’s account, the infant first acquires an inarticulate “language of the voice” as a helpless being in an overwhelming situation: “The child feels his needs and cannot satisfy them. He implores another’s help by screams” (E, 65). However, while “the first tears of children are prayers,” “if one is not careful, they soon become orders” (E, 67). Through the power of complaint, children might learn to “consider the people who surround them as instruments depending on them to be set in motion” (E, 67). Their teachers must carefully guard against this possibility and, as children grow older, one should above all avoid giving them “vain formulas of politeness.” In an analysis made strangely literal for the many good children today who learn that please is the “magic word,” Rousseau in his time worries that a child might learn the conventions of politeness as “magic words for him to submit to his will everything which surrounds him and to obtain instantly what he pleases.” Once again, Rousseau suggests that the result is a kind of despotic disposition: these formulas for politeness leave the child only “politely imperious,” or indeed “tyrannical” (E, 86, 68). Thus, while Rousseau denies the existence of “a natural spirit of domination,” he finds that “it does not require long experience to sense how pleasant it is to act with the hands of others and to need only to stir one’s tongue to make the universe
move” (E, 68). To imagine oneself as such an all-powerful being is to nourish a fantasy. But Rousseau finds such tyrannical fantasies all too widely shared and vitally important to resist. Rousseau thus figures early childhood education as an important tool for limiting and forestalling the influences that might incline the child toward such a tyrannical disposition.

Providing such an education requires patient and difficult work. This does not mean, however, that Rousseau casts himself as a perfectly controlled and controlling subject. Indeed, Rousseau does not merely prescribe a flexible, chance-attuned disposition to Emile; he also adopts such a position. To be sure, vis-à-vis the student, he occupies a position of essentially unlimited authority. However, for his own part, he is situated in relation to a set of contingencies which challenge his own control. Rousseau describes education as the “art” of responding to “a conjunction of elements” which is “in no one’s control” (E, 38). In education, “all that one can do by dint of care is to come more or less close to the goal, but to reach it requires luck” (E, 38). The position of the educator, then, is marked by an ineliminable element of chance. If Rousseau’s aim is to prevent Emile from developing a chance-denying, certainty-seeking, self-aggrandizing

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21 There is a kind of control here, in the form of self-mastery, but it is important to attend carefully to its particular features. Rousseau argues that the pupil must be “habituated to seeing new objects, ugly, disgusting, peculiar animals” and frightening masks, though little by little, and in social situations that teach him that these are objects for laughter rather than fright. Intervening in this way, one will “prepare from afar the reign of his freedom and the use of his forces… by putting him in the condition always to be master of himself,” 63. While the child’s curious desire to touch and handle everything works in the service of cultivating self-mastery, Rousseau insists it is not “a sign of the desire to dominate” others, 64. Thus, while in the next chapter, I will, in a more critical tone, return to the ascetic elements that sometimes mark Rousseau’s account of truthfulness, for now it is important to note that the self-mastery Rousseau describes is quite a unique one: it is cultivated through playful encounters with difference, and aimed against the desire to impose mastery on others. Note also that in his later writing, as I briefly discuss below, Rousseau will argue that the project of ethical self-mastery is impossible both for himself and (for different reasons) for almost all of his contemporaries.
attitude, he cannot accomplish this goal by adopting that attitude himself. Rousseau’s pedagogue must embrace chance and forgo control.

Accordingly, the pedagogue himself models techniques for forgoing controlling words in order to forestall or prevent the student from developing a controlling character. His first and primary technique is going without words altogether. While he hopes to ensure that Emile will “do everything I want[ ],” Rousseau immediately adds that this must be done “without prescribing anything to him” (E, 124). Issuing direct prescriptions and commands teaches the student that other people exist to be commanded, and this is exactly what must be avoided at all costs. Rousseau thus adopts a peculiar method. Rather than directly impart lessons to the student, he prefers to place Emile in elaborately staged scenes, situations, contexts, and environments in which he might learn things for himself. This means that, even as the pedagogue assumes control in a certain sense, he renounces it in another. He foregoes direct expressions of will over, and direct commands to, the student.

At the same time, however, Emile suggests techniques that, rather than simply forgoing words, adopt a different orientation to the things done with words. Rousseau’s own way of characterizing his words at the beginning of Emile, for example, suggests an alternative to the “magic words” he hopes to prevent his pupil from acquiring, and thus another way in which he models an alternative to a controlling or tyrannical disposition. He asserts that his aim in publishing Emile is more to test his own views than to change those of others, “not to change sentiments but to distrust mine.” Not motivated by a belief “that I alone am wiser than everybody,” not even aiming to “mak[e] an impression on the
reader,” but also unwilling to “provide myself with other eyes or to affect other ideas,”

Rousseau’s first goal is a sort of self-presentation: “speaking to [the reader] as I think,”
“say[ing] exactly what goes on in my mind” (E, 34). He offers this work of self-
presentation and self-examination even though he claims to consider the words he offers
to be “disordered and almost incoherent.”22 Moreover, there is an acknowledgement of
the chancy and contingent fate these words face, as Rousseau “casts his pages out among
the public, without boosters, without a party that defends them, without even knowing
what is thought or said about them” (E, 33). In other words, here there are two
renunciations of the project of control Rousseau finds underlying formulas of politeness.

Rousseau disavows both the project of carefully calculating and controlling his own
words, and the hope of knowing with certainty the effect those words will have on their
readers. These avowedly fragile words thus directly contrast to the magic words of
politeness. While the pedagogic strategies he adopts in the course of Emile cast Rousseau
as something of a master deceiver, in the opening pages of that book, I find an initial
indication of how the project of foregoing control and embracing chance might be linked
to a project of speaking truthfully.

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22 In the Dialogues, “The Frenchman” says of “Jean-Jacques”: “His system may be false, but in developing
it, he portrayed himself truthfully in a manner so characteristic and so sure that it’s impossible for me to
mistake it” (D, 212). Inverting the subtitle of Christopher Kelly’s Rousseau’s Exemplary Life: The
Confessions as Political Philosophy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), I would label this as a claim
for Rousseau’s Political Writings as Confessions. As I will show below through a reading of Rousseau’s
“Letter on Providence,” Rousseau values the self-presentational quality of his claims above their
correspondence-value. To borrow a phrase from Judith Butler, his interest here resides more in the
manifestation of “something we might tentatively call the truth of a person” than truth measured by a
correspondence with things in the world. Giving an Account of Oneself, 64. In the terms from the
Dialogues, the locus of truth here is in “ways of seeing and feeling” rather than the things seen (D, 212).
From the perspective of contemporary critical thought, affirming chanciness as an alternative to control might seem to be a move out of the frying pan and into the fire, for affirming contingency is central to the self-understanding of some of the most violent forces in contemporary life. Consider, for example, the management of “uncertainty” (l’aleatoire) Michel Foucault associates with what he calls the “apparatuses of security” or the concepts of “volatility,” “risk,” and “disruption” at the heart of contemporary forms of capitalism. In this context, chance is often invoked to encourage people to view harms done to them as lumps they must take. The decimation of livelihoods, lives, and ecosystems are, from this perspective, cast as opportunities for “creative destruction,” as “casualties” or “tradeoffs” which are necessary to protect “our national interest,” as eggs which must be broken in the cooking of some (always deferred, always for someone else) future omelet. However, not all forms of contingency are created equal, and not all responses to uncertainty are equally salutatory. On closer inspection, those perspectives that many on the left today rightly and urgently want to resist in fact rigorously disavow the contingency they simultaneously affirm. Nick Werle, in his review essay “The Uncertainty of Risk,” helpfully marks a distinction between, on the one hand, an attention to “the hazards of uncertainty” and, on the other, theories of “a well-behaved normal distribution” with a margin of “manageable risk.” It is the latter, described in terms that mirror those of Foucault, which Werle finds operative under conditions of neoliberal capitalism; Rousseau is a sophisticated theorist of the former.

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While Wong’s reading might serve to bring Rousseau closer to advocates of “risk management,” I find that Rousseau’s work can also serve to attune readers to the potential for chance to register in contemporary life otherwise than according to ideologies of capital and security that acknowledge a limited domain of risk only in order to measure, manage, contain, and control it.  

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**Feeling Providence**

As in the first paragraph of *Emile*, in a prefatory note appended to the *Dialogues*, Rousseau emphasizes and embraces the uncertain destiny of his words:

> If I dared address a prayer to those into whose hands this writing will fall, it would be to read all of it before making use of it and even before talking about it with anyone. But very certain beforehand that this favor will not be granted to me, I keep silent and give over everything to providence. (D, 2)

This note echoes, even as it replaces, an earlier address to the reader on the back of the

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25 Although Foucault himself never quite puts it this way, one might read the chronology of his work as suggesting that he returned to thinking about the Greeks in order to create space for thinking otherwise than, on the one hand, a model of neoliberal subjectivity, making entrepreneurial calculations and consumer choices informed by ideas of manageable risk, and, on the other, “the almost total absence of meaning” of popular slogans that attempt to point to a different idea of individuality. *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 251; see also the contrast he draws in “The Genealogy of Ethics,” in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault: Ethics* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 271, between the Greek “care of self” and “the Californian cult of the self.” My turn to Rousseau might be cast as a complementary effort to highlight papered-over aspects of past accounts of chance to open up new space for thinking contingency in the present. Indeed, while the focus here will be textual, there may also be compelling historical reasons for looking to Rousseau for an alternative to late twenty and early twenty-first century theorizations of uncertainty. Carolina Armenteros persuasively argues that the anti-Rousseauian polemics of the conservative thinker Joseph de Maistre serve as a crucial moment in the genealogy of modern accounts of contingency as deviations from a norm, and thus as a risk to be accounted for and managed. Armenteros, “From Human Nature to Normal Humanity: Joseph de Maistre, Rousseau, and the Origins of Moral Statistics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68.1 (2007), 107–130. She finds “a notion of the generalized, rational, average character of the natural,” within which deviations and abnormalities are nevertheless “quite possible,” “emerges from Maistre’s refutation of Rousseau’s speculations on the birth of society and agriculture,” which the *Second Discourse* attributes to “physical accident,” to a chance occurrence (in Rousseau’s French, *a hazard*). See Armenteros, 113–14. While I will not pursue so strong an argument here, and while Foucault himself invokes Rousseau to highlight the partial continuity of the problematic of sovereignty with the problematics of government, population, and security (*Security, Territory, Population*, 106–108), Armenteros’s argument thus suggests that Rousseau might even be read to offer an anticipatory critique of “risk management.”
Both of these prefatory remarks, in turn, closely mirror language used in the brief Forward to Rousseau’s earlier *Confessions*:

> Whoever you may be whom my destiny or my trust has made the arbiter of the fate of this notebook, I entreat you by my misfortunes, by your innermost emotions, and in the name of the whole human species not to destroy a unique and useful work…

There are a number of minor but arresting differences between these three autobiographical openings. In particular, I highlight the absence of any equivalent to the “trust” of the *Confessions* in the two prefatory comments to the *Dialogues*, along with the shift from a classic example of a performative statement (“I entreat you”), to a slightly deflected performative (“this unfortunate Author implores you”), to a kind of construction that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls a periperformative (not “I pray,” but “If I dared address a prayer”). These transformations reflect developments in Rousseau’s position and outlook. But before turning to those developments in the next section, I want to pause to attend to a notable continuity between the three prefatory remarks: Rousseau’s symmetrical invocations of “providence” and “Heaven” in the notes attached to the *Dialogues*, which in turn recall the earlier appeal to “my destiny” in the *Confessions*.

Rousseau’s appeals to providence are notable here because they might seem to foreclose

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27 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Around the Performative,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 67–92. Note also that Rousseau seems to move in the opposite direction of the infant in *Emile*, who moves from prayers to orders; Rousseau’s first cries of pain are direct entreaties; he ends up offering only peri-prayers.
a robust account of chance by inscribing all events within “God’s plan.” However, Rousseau destabilizes present-day assumptions about what providence means for humanity’s place in the universe and the existence of chance. For Rousseau, the idea of providence reins in humanity’s confidence in its own importance and in its capacities for understanding and mastery, without diminishing the importance of human feeling and action.

Rousseau’s 1756 letter to Voltaire responding to the latter’s “Poem on the Lisbon Disaster” offers one of Rousseau’s first and most extensive discussions of providence (it has come to be known simply as his “Letter on Providence”). I thus turn there in order to clarify the function and importance that Rousseau’s later appeals to providence may hold for him. Despite the metaphysical subject matter of Rousseau’s letter to Voltaire, his interests reside in human-scale issues of politics and ethics. Rousseau, that is, seems more interested in what particular pieces of knowledge do and how particular forms of argument feel than in knowledge pursued and demonstrated for its own sake. Following Rousseau’s interest, then, I will attempt to track the collective effects that certain forms of belief enable and the attunements that certain positions allow. It is these performative and affective dimensions of knowledge, rather than the details of Rousseau’s theological system, that I find relevant for contemporary political theory.

Throughout the letter, Rousseau works critically on the presumption that “the order of the world ought to change according to our whims, that nature ought to be
subjected to our laws.”  Against the “human pride” which seeks to make an “exception” for itself within “the order of things,” he suggests, instead, taking the perspective of “the system of the universe” (P, 115, 116). Rousseau understands this way of looking to “the whole” to be the essence of a belief in providence. A belief in providence attunes the believer to a proto-ecological sense that everything is connected and, from that perspective, finds some way to affirm that “the whole is good.”  Considering the perspective of the universe entails, moreover, a sense that even the smallest events can have world-historical, indeed cosmic, effects, even if these effects are “not always perceived” by humans (P, 113). For Rousseau, then, the doctrine of providence disciplines human perspective away from opportunities for mastery. Would-be masters are quickly made to appear unwisely exceptionalist and unjustifiably confident in their own capacities for foresight.

Yet, for many who subscribe to a doctrine of providence, the apparent check on human hubris it provides generates a new, rebounded confidence in human abilities, namely the ability to indubitably know God’s plan and to assign wins and losses accordingly. William E. Connolly notes that, both historically and in a number of present-day reincarnations, providence is often attended by “the compensatory idea that humans

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28 “Letter from J. J. Rousseau to M. de Voltaire (August 18, 1756),” in Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse), Polemics, and Political Economy (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 110; henceforth cited parenthetically as P.

29 One of the first things we attend to from the point of view of providence is “a circulation of substance among men, animals, and vegetables.” Indeed, Rousseau seems in all seriousness to direct his attention to the needs of “the inhabitants of Saturn” (P, 115). Cf. Neidleman, 821–822.
can master all the forces that impinge upon life.” Contemporary prophets of the “providential” character of markets, who adopt “a punitive attitude toward constituencies and state policies said to obstruct an equation that would otherwise hold,” “impos[ing] sacrifices upon others in the name of their creed,” provide perhaps the most insidious example of this version of providence. However, on the whole, this does not appear to be Rousseau’s providence, which not only predates this deployment of “providence” but has a significantly different historical and conceptual lineage. His “Letter” does not seek to prove that providence is at work in the universe, nor to calculate how various pros and cons might balance into a beneficent totality. Providence is, he insists, not an area in which “knowing” or “direct proof” are relevant, since to him a human knowledge of the whole universe in all its details appears impossible (P, 115). Moreover, distinguishing between the claim that “the whole [le tout] is good” and the claim that “everything [tout] is good,” Rousseau expressly criticizes “the Priests and the Devout” who seek to judge or exonerate individual fates according to the perceived workings of providence (P, 115). Rousseau is thus not interested in proving the existence of providence for reasons of empirical accuracy, nor in deploying providence as a criterion of theological judgment. Rather, the doctrine of providence provides Rousseau with a means of checking human hubris.

In addition to this first critical function of curbing human pride, for Rousseau, the

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31 Capitalism and Christianity, 142.
doctrine of providence also works to oppose what might be called epistemic cruelty, the
often vindictive quest to dispel by means of enlightenment those naïve beliefs which just
happen to be central to the lives of others. Distinguishing forms of knowledge that are
cruel from those that are consoling is a central task of Rousseau’s writing on providence.
This contrast appears early in the “Letter,” in what might be called its thesis statement:
“This optimism that you find so cruel, nevertheless consoles me” (P, 109). By contrast,
Rousseau finds, among his opponents, an “inhumanity in troubling peaceful souls, and in
afflicting men to no purpose, when what one wishes to teach them is neither certain nor
useful” (P, 118). Rousseau’s “providence” is not certain either: it is a perspective, a belief.
This is not a heroic kind of belief, as in the popular use (if not the rigorously
Kierkegaardian sense) of the phrase “leap of faith.” On the contrary, here again Rousseau
displaces a subjective human will, for he claims that “to believe and not to believe are the
things that depend the least on me” (P, 117). For that very reason, he suggests, his belief
in this matter is one “which one can never attack without cruelty” (P, 118).

One of this cruelty’s characteristic forms is argumentative force. Throughout the
“Letter,” Rousseau critically emphasizes the force of his opponents’ arguments, although
for Rousseau this force is not quite the same as logical rigor. On the contrary, he

32 Compare Judith Shklar’s concept of “moral cruelty,” which she defines as “not just hurting someone’s
feelings,” but rather “a deliberate and persistent humiliation, so that the victim can eventually trust neither
himself nor anyone else,” Ordinary Vices, 38. The ruthlessness and persistence that concern Shklar here are
also on Rousseau’s mind, although by labeling Rousseau’s concern a matter of “epistemic” rather than
“moral” cruelty I wish to emphasize that it is forms of knowledge and belief that are the basis of persistent
harassment in the cases of interest to him. Shklar, drawing on Nietzsche and Hawthorne, associates moral
cruelty with those Rousseau terms “the Priests and the Devout,” while what I am calling epistemic cruelty
is more closely associated with their philosophical opponents. That devout religiosity and passionate critics
of religion share assumptions and strategies is, however, one of Rousseau’s fundamental insights. See P
explicitly juxtaposes the two: Voltaire’s argumentative strategies are more backed by “force” and “authority” than by “reasoning” or “proofs” (P, 112). The shape of Voltaire’s arguments, moreover, inflects their content: his theological doctrines seem “to justify [God’s] power at the expense of his goodness” (P, 109). Likewise, Rousseau repeatedly emphasizes the exceptional “force” of Denis Diderot’s arguments about the contingent origin of the universe (P, 118), calling it “what has struck me the most forcefully in my whole life” (P, 117). As in his later critical analysis, in *Emile*, of the tyrannical compulsions behind politeness and commands, discussed above, here Rousseau opposes forms of communication that would close down the space of response

Through a reading of Plato, Hannah Arendt draws out the possibility of “coercion through reason,” which Rousseau’s firm distinction here between “force” and “reason” might seem to undervalue. “What is Authority?,” in *Between Past and Future*, 107. Rousseau would fully agree that a narrow emphasis on logical reasoning can easily become a kind of compulsion. This is the basis of much of his criticism of the Enlightenment; more positively, it is also what enables him to refer to “the force of reasoning” put into the *Social Contract* (Confessions, 340n). He might be read, however, to be holding open an at least analytical separability of “rigor” and “force” or of “reason” and “coercion.” This distinction enables important effects elsewhere in his thinking, most notably his ability to conceive of “an authority of a different order,” one based on “neither force nor reasoning,” “which might be able to rally without violence and to persuade without convincing.” “The Social Contract” and Other Later Political Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71.
available to one’s interlocutors in order to impose one’s own will upon them.34

The Dialogues pick up and amplify these arguments, as “Rousseau” suggests that “this era,” the era of Enlightenment, is one in which “philosophy does nothing but destroy” (D, 53). Indeed, he observes that, as a result of this process, there is “finally no social bond other than strength” (D, 242). He links argumentative force to a cruelty which “pitilessly tears [from “Jean-Jacques”] all his consolations, all his resources, all the hopes that made his ills bearable” (D, 54–55). He reports that “Jean-Jacques” has associated “the brilliant Authors of this century” with “cruel doctrines which, flattering the happy and the rich, crush the unfortunate and the poor by removing all restraint, all fear, all reserve from the former and from the latter all hope, all consolation” (D, 140, 141). What is cruel about the epistemic cruelty opposed by Rousseau and his various personae is thus its relentless pursuit of others, not for beliefs which they have authored or freely chosen, but rather which they contingently find themselves inhabiting, or which they have been

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34 In the “Letter on Theatre,” Rousseau explicitly juxtaposes “force” (and reason) with chance: “Chance, countless accidental causes, countless unforeseen circumstances, do what force and reason could not; or, rather, it is precisely because chance directs them that force can do nothing; like the dice which leave the hand, whatever impulsion is give to them does not bring up the desired point any more easily,” Politics and the Arts, 74. The metaphor of the dice throw is, notably, the same as that invoked by Diderot in his “forceful” argument about the origin of the universe; see Philosphic Thoughts, in Diderot’s Early Philosophical Works (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1916), 39. These discussions of “force” seem to align with the discussion of “force” in the early chapters of The Social Contract: “Force is a physical power, and I fail to see what morality can result from its effects. To yield to force is an act of necessity, not of will; at the most, it is an act of prudence.” Social Contract, 44. In his “Translator’s Note” to this edition of The Social Contract, Victor Gourevitch highlights “Rousseau’s repeated inquiries into possible parallels and contrasts between physical and moral or psychological force” (xlvi). However, as Gourevitch’s discussion makes clear, those inquiries are not uniformly negative, and so the breadth of my claims in this section should not be over-interpreted. Although there are moments, such as the opening of Emile analyzed above, where Rousseau disavows aiming to leave any mark on his reader, more often he seems to reserve a space for certain ways of inducing feeling. The “moving” and “transporting” quality of his writings is central to the judgment of his oeuvre in the Dialogues, and collective mobilizations of feeling are central to his republicanism (or, some would say, his proto-fascism). For his own account of the development of this idea, see Confessions, 339–340. I will return to these questions in my final section on exemplarity and identification.
able to cobble together to sustain themselves through injury and dejection. The *Dialogues* present the persecution of “Jean-Jacques” as a sort of test-case for whether or not this cruelty might be made into an official policy; similarly, Rousseau’s earlier defense of providence might be read as strategically locating a spot to defend against an Enlightenment compulsion to destroy all other forms of knowledge and belief in order to secure a space for its own.

Rather than simply dictate how one ought to feel, or offer his own “obstinacy of belief as a model” (P, 118), Rousseau seeks to pluralize ways of feeling and preserve an ability to respond to events distinctly. While, for Rousseau, it seems that Voltaire understands his project as one of forcefully confronting the reader with certain incontestable if unpleasant facts (a self-understanding perhaps akin to that of the parrhēsiastēs), Rousseau’s own views on knowledge here are more perspectival. Insofar as “there are some events which often strike us more or less according to the perspective under which one considers them” (P, 110), Rousseau does not respond to Voltaire’s poem by appealing to a different set of facts but rather by offering a different perspective, the

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35 In an interesting reconstruction of the debate between Voltaire and Rousseau, Rita Goldberg has suggested that the crux of the dispute was a clash between Voltaire’s project of inducing feeling for those killed in the Lisbon earthquake and Rousseau’s project of using a hypothetical world of “nature” to justify indifference toward those same dead. Goldberg, “Voltaire, Rousseau, and the Lisbon Earthquake.” I believe Goldberg correctly senses what Rousseau objects to in Voltaire’s poem, namely, a certain way of mobilizing feeling. However, it seems to me that Rousseau’s project is not so much to avoid feeling and thus shirk responsibility, as Goldberg would have it, but rather to defend a space for feeling differently. His project is not to eliminate feeling but to make possible alternative geographies of feeling. My use of spacial language here is not an idle metaphor, for in both the Letter and in his *Confessions*, Rousseau criticizes his contemporaries for what he regards as their inability to sympathize with the suffering of those living outside of Europe’s urban centers.

36 For Rousseau, Voltaire has not simply presented the facts but has provided a particular, perhaps distorted perspective on them, insofar as he has “amplified] the picture of our miseries.” “One might say that you fear that I do not see well enough how unfortunate I am; it seems that you expect to placate me a good deal by proving to me that everything is bad” (P, 108, my emphasis).
consoling perspective provided by providence. It may be that “conclusions are consolations,” as Nietzsche would later write, but that need not mean that all consolations are conclusions. For Rousseau, at least, the consolation provided by his belief in providence was not a final resting point. Rather, his ability to draw consolation from the beliefs he found himself inhabiting offered a means of carrying on in a world he perceived as radically inhospitable to him. By checking the human drive to mastery – rather than (as in many other accounts of providence) just displacing it on to God – Rousseau’s use of providence makes space for an attunement to contingency.

Feeling Bad in 1776

The narrative resolution of the Dialogues involves a call for the kind of epistemic modesty Rousseau also performs and prescribes in his letter to Voltaire. By coming to know the real “Jean-Jacques,” “the Frenchman” gains “a great preventative against

37 Recalling that Rousseau advocates taking the perspective of the universe as a whole, it might seem that he has let incontestable facts in through the back door. However, note that while Rousseau argues that nature is precise and regular, for him this precision and regularity are not intelligible in a mathematical sense. Nature’s precision is only in relation to itself, and is absolutely unrelated to any human means of understanding nature. The universe is regular only “in the eyes of nature,” whereas only human abstractions can appear regular to human eyes. This argument, admittedly strange by contemporary lights (which might tend to conflate precision and mathematizability), seems to be at the heart of Rousseau’s insistence that he is not dealing with a realm in which knowledge, proof, or reason are of primary importance. Rousseau’s “providence” relies on propositions that cannot be “demonstrated… by the lights of reason,” and are also not backed by any great show of force, but are instead matters of belief.


39 Although the Dialogues would not be formally published until 1780, 1776 marks the year Rousseau completed the manuscript and attempted to place it on the high altar of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. Invoking this year as a marker of a historically situated form of negative affect, my title for this section draws inspiration from Heather Love’s essay, “Feeling Bad in 1963,” in Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, and Ann Reynolds (eds), Political Emotions (New York: Routledge, 2010), 112–133. As suggested in the introduction to the current chapter, the themes and approach I’ve adopted throughout draw less direct but equally important guidance from Love’s Feeling Backward. On the importance of thinking through various ways of “feeling bad” for contemporary political projects, see also Ann Cvetkovich, Depression: A Public Feeling (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
arrogant confidence in [his] own understanding.” Indeed, “Rousseau” suggests that the first “great lesson” of the story of “Jean-Jacques” is “to have confidence that is less reckless, above all at another’s expense, in the pride of human knowledge” (D, 243). However, the two short pieces written in Rousseau’s own voice that bookend the Dialogues, “On the Subject and Form of this Writing” and “History of the Preceding Writing,” suggest a different outcome in the reality outside of the narrative. There, Rousseau presents the forces of epistemic cruelty triumphant. He feels stripped of almost all the resources he has been able to accrue in his efforts to sustain himself. He presents himself in a state of utter dejection. Although his belief in providence allows him to retain a form of hope, he has lost his anticipation that his lot will improve, his trust in his contemporaries, and his courage to struggle against his situation. Yet, through his dejection, Rousseau still ventures his words forward unprotected. It is this sadness and the communicative project formed within it that I now attempt to unpack.

Through a vast and varied vocabulary, Rousseau describes a form of despondency that seems to extinguish, almost one by one, all of what one might think of as the usual motivations for communication. In the first place, Rousseau’s writing is not oriented by any hope of success or even any sure sense of purpose:

What will become of this writing? What use could I make of it? I do not know, and this uncertainty has added greatly to the discouragement that never left me while I worked on it. Those who dispose of me knew about it as soon as it was begun, and given my situation, I see no possible way to keep it from falling into their hands sooner or later. Thus, following the natural course of events, all the trouble I have taken is a total waste (D, 7; see also D 3, 246).

Rousseau’s position as he faces this bleak and uncertain future also cannot be described as courageous. While writing the Dialogues, Rousseau reports that he “no longer found on [his] own interest that zeal and vigor of courage” (D, 5). In the main body of the
Dialogues, Rousseau and his characters seems to emphasize, as “no longer” suggests, that the lack of such internal supports is a development in his position, a difference between his past and present attempts to give an account of himself. Even in his attempts to circulate the completed manuscript of the Dialogues, sustaining, positive affects are not entirely absent. As plan after plan to secure a happy destiny for his work fails, Rousseau nevertheless reports feeling, at different points, joyful, courageous, hopeful, and trusting (D, 249–251). As late as the penultimate of these failed efforts, he “still didn’t become discouraged” (D, 252). After one more “ill success,” however, he reports a change of outlook: “By teaching me that there was no help for my lot, it taught me not to fight necessity any longer” (D, 252). Subsequently, the unhappy “destiny” awaiting his papers appears “inevitable,” but “no longer alarms” him.

Yielding henceforth to my destiny, no longer persisting in fighting against it, letting my persecutors dispose of their prey as they will, remaining their plaything without offering any resistance during the remainder of my aged and [sad] days; abandoning to them even the honor of my name and my reputation in the future – if it pleases Heaven that they should dispose of it – without any longer being affected by anything regardless of what happens: this is my final resolution (D, 256).

The Dialogues as a whole both narrate this transformation and enact this resolution.

I understand the resigned posture Rousseau learns to adopt as an amplification of the stances adopted in Emile and the “Letter on Providence.” If the earlier writings shows

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40 When he describes the state “Jean-Jacques” was in when he wrote the Confessions, “Rousseau” suggests that courage, as well as hope, friendship, and trust were among the animating forces behind that work, but all of those motivations are located definitively in the past for “Jean-Jacques” (D, 188–190). Likewise, “Rousseau” reports that “Jean-Jacques” has told him that he is now “animated neither by the hope of success like popular authors, not as long ago by that height of courage which uplifts and is inspired only by the love of truth unmixed with any personal interest.” (D, 141, my emphasis) Elsewhere, “Jean-Jacques” is presented as having a “weak” and “timid disposition” in general (D, 14, 165, 184), so one might expect that courage is not among the driving factors of any his works. The distance between the two positions can be resolved, however, by the following characterization: “Jean-Jacques” is not naturally courageous but has in the past sometimes managed to find his way to courage; he is, near the end of his life, no longer able to do so.

41 The way he describes his hope telegraphs his ultimate conclusion, however: he says it “deluded” him.
a quasi-willful *step back* from mastery because of its senseless and ethically dangerous effects, Rousseau is now more decidedly *pushed back* from mastery. His decision “not to fight,” however, still registers as a kind of decision. His movements of “yielding,” “letting,” “remaining,” and even “abandoning” still express a resolve. One way to render this would be to say that Rousseau was able to stay true to his principles even under pressure. I prefer to say that, through his feelings of abjection, Rousseau himself gains a fresh realization of a kind of knowledge he had long attempted to transmit to others: a sense of the boundaries of human capacities for certainty and control. Thus, through the tour he offers readers of his feelings, Rousseau shows a way of dwelling in a situation without attempting to gain certainty about or control over it. In the *Dialogues*, that practice appears painful, but livable.

And not only livable, but actionable. Just as “providence” in Rousseau’s 1756 letter to Voltaire makes space for contingency and human feeling, the “necessity” of the *Dialogues* is cut through with chance, and Rousseau’s “resignation” does not fatalistically smother all effort. As he concludes the *Dialogues*, Rousseau feels “detached from everything pertaining to the earth and the senseless judgments of men,” and thus “resigned to being disfigured among them forever” (D, 252). But Rousseau’s detachment does not (yet) slide over to the “extravagant disinterestedness” displayed and criticized near the end of *Emile* (E, 437). An engagement with the world persists even here. Like the deflected performative of his prefatory note, Rousseau’s project of truth-telling is now bent, indirect, but it remains a project.

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42 On pedagogic reversals (i.e. the teacher becomes the student) and the difference between “knowing” and “realizing,” see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Pedagogy of Buddhism,” in *Touching Feeling*, 153–182.
I am excused henceforth from vain efforts to let them [i.e. “men” in general] know the truth they are determined always to reject, but I am not from leaving them the means by which to return to it insofar as I am able; and this is the final use that remains for me to make of this writing (D, 253).

To be sure, detachment and resignation in the face of perceived necessities are not typically viewed as promising moods for motivating action. Nevertheless, even though he judges that “a proud, disdainful silence is more appropriate” and more to his “taste,” Rousseau finds himself writing and attempting to circulate his writing (D, 6). Although he reports that, “after frequent and futile attempts,” his “despondency” ultimately prevents him from making the revisions he readily sees are possible, he does not disavow or destroy the work, but finds a way to stand by what he has written, even as he judges it “formless” and “drowned in a chaos of disorder and repetitions” (D, 6–7).43

Repetitive and sustainable only in fifteen minute spurts (D, 139), lacking the courage to persevere and always finding itself stopped short (D, 123), Rousseau’s communicative project around the time of the *Dialogues* expresses what I would call a faltering mode of agency. To falter means to stumble and to stagger; to speak unsteadily or incoherently; to flinch or to hesitate in action from lack of resolution; for courage, hope, and resolve themselves to flag.44 A faltering agency is thus awkward, irresolute, and in multiple senses insecure. Faltering agency names a way of moving into the world

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Cf. *Confessions*, 432, where Rousseau reports making the opposite decision and destroying (most of) his projected works *Political Institutions* and *Sensitive Morality*.

44 *OED*. 

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that does not see or necessarily even desire opportunities to affect that world.\textsuperscript{45} For Rousseau, “extinguished hope stifles desire well, but it doesn’t abolish duty,” and he feels “the obligation of trying without hoping that it will succeed” (D, 253, 254). Thus even a faltering agent acts: while Rousseau feels a sorrow without end or exit, he falteringly attempts to communicate from or through his resignation.\textsuperscript{46}

In her work to separate courage from its association with manly fearlessness, Holloway Sparks makes a related point about often overlooked modes of agency and motives for action. Sparks is not interested in a courage defined as “a characteristic of people who are already unafraid;” instead, she understands courage as a kind of “guiding principle for those dealing with fear.”\textsuperscript{47} Sparks listens carefully to what different civil rights activists “described as courage” and powerfully translates those descriptions back

\textsuperscript{45} My formulation of Rousseau’s communicative project as expressing a faltering agency draws inspiration from Alexander Livingston’s work on what he calls the “stuttering conviction” of William James. “Stuttering Conviction: Commitment and Hesitation in William James’ Oration to Robert Gould Shaw,” \textit{Contemporary Political Theory} 12.4 (2013), 255–276. The forms of courage and trust that Livingston finds attending this conviction are carefully and thoughtful specified in his account, and they clearly are not reducible to “martial courage or moral heroism,” but nevertheless seem different from, absent in, the position Rousseau occupies.

\textsuperscript{46} Because Rousseau disavows any present connection between him and courage, and because he makes no effort to exit his situation, it does not seem quite right to say that he writes “despite” his bad feelings. To say that someone writes “despite” their resignation would suggest that the resignation is somehow overcome, temporarily bracketed, or at least that they have some hope of rising above their present situation. None of this is true of Rousseau. On the other hand, it is just as inappropriate to say that Rousseau is able to write “thanks to” to his negative feelings. Although Rousseau recognizes that negative feelings can sometimes be productive, he does not place the feelings that he feels in such a redemptive light: “Anger sometimes stimulates talent, but disgust and heartbreak stifle it. And after reading this, it will be felt that those had to be the constant dispositions in which I found myself during this painful labor” (D, 5). In fact, the task of writing the \textit{Dialogues} itself adds to his dejection. Writing the \textit{Dialogues} is “humiliating,” it requires him to view himself “in the most deplorable and crude position,” “to focus on sad and harrowing ideas, bitter and revolting memories,” to endure a “state of sorrow and distress” each time he sits down to his task. Thus, characterizing Rousseau as attempting to venture words from or through his negative feelings seems the surest way to proceed.

to political theorists (I include myself) who might otherwise too quickly ignore the
nuances of courage.\textsuperscript{48} However, Sparks may go too far when she makes the broader claim
that “courage is necessary for all citizens,” because “engaging in conflict and connection
[for Sparks, the very stuff of politics] are risky activities and will not happen (or will not
happen well) without courageous citizens.”\textsuperscript{49} Alongside projects of rethinking and re-
signifying courage, political theorists also need to listen carefully to accounts of those
(like Rousseau) who do not find courage in themselves, who instead feel weak,
exhausted, and awkward. Listening to Rousseau produces an account of political
motivation that depends less on resources within the self, more on capacities perceived
beyond the self. Rousseau’s work cautions against heroism and prompts its readers to
take dejection seriously. Even without faith in himself, even when he was unable to find
support in the world, Rousseau nevertheless continued to venture words. Thus, for
Rousseau, “communication, connection, and dialogue” do not, as they might for the
activists Sparks tracks, require courage.\textsuperscript{50} Instead, Rousseau is able to persist in his
resolution to “dedicate life to truth” after courage has gone, in part, because he sees the
world as a chancy place.

Rousseau’s resignation presents a non-ideal, but nevertheless potent, way of
orienting oneself to the contingent afterlife of words. One of the final descriptions
“Rousseau” offers of the conspiracy against “Jean-Jacques” is worth quoting at length to
highlight the spaces he makes for chance and accident:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., 98–99.\textsuperscript{48}
\textsuperscript{49}Ibid., 100–101 (my emphasis).
\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., 76.
\end{quote}
In vain they enclose the truth in triple walls of lies and impostures which they continually reinforce; they always tremble for fear it will escape through some crack. The immense edifice of shadows they have built around him does not suffice to reassure them. As long as he lives, an unforeseen accident can unveil their mystery to him and expose them to finding themselves confounded. Even his death, far from calming them, must increase their alarm. Who knows whether he hasn’t found some discreet confidant…? Who knows whether some faithful trustee won’t at some time and place produce such proofs of his innocence that the public – forced to acknowledge them – will feel and deplore its longstanding mistake? Who knows whether among the infinite number of accomplices there isn’t someone… Even if one foresees or arranges all the imaginable combinations, there is always the fear that something remains which has not been foreseen and which will cause the truth to be discovered just when it is least expected. Foresight labors in vain, fear is more active still, and the authors of such a project, without realizing it, have sacrificed the repose of their remaining days to their hatred (D, 225–226).

Each invocation of the thrice repeated “who knows whether” marks a move away from the sense of certainty regarding a future disaster Rousseau sometimes indulges in or succumbs to. The space thus made for unknowing – for chanciness – is, indeed, presented in terms that directly parallel Rousseau’s longstanding critique of foresight, said here to labor “in vain.” Indeed, “Rousseau” suggests that, to fully prepare for his reception and to retain courage in the face of it, “Jean-Jacques” “would have needed foresight that is not in the order of things” (D, 206). Despite the certain terms in which the plot against him is often described, in his own voice Rousseau allows that “it is at least possible” that perceptions of him may, “someday,” “long after my death,” “begin” to change.

51 At times, Rousseau’s resignation can seem so strong as to swing the other way, from an often terrifying sense that anything could happen to a paranoid certainty that the worst is guaranteed to happen. He “knows in advance” how he will be received (D, 254), and he is “very certain” of his inability to ask for a certain kind of reader for the Dialogues (D, 2; see also D, 130, 45). As the paragraph above shows, however, the plot against Rousseau or “Jean-Jacques” seems less airtight elsewhere in the Dialogues. Indeed, for both “Rousseau” and “Jean-Jacques,” this is reason for the pendulum to swing the other way, to speak in the language of “certainty” about a future exoneration (D, 228). But here “Jean-Jacques” and “Rousseau” don’t quite seem to add up to the author of the Dialogues himself, who allows other perspectives to surface. While “the Frenchman” “joins his wishes” to this “prediction,” he is “not as confident about it.” This leads him to offer the analysis quoted as an epigraph to this chapter (D, 230). Although he does not exactly concede, “Rousseau” then seems to slide closer to “the Frenchman’s” perspective, concluding that at present a defense of “Jean-Jacques” is “as perilous as it is useless,” and speaking of the future in more conditional terms (D, 244).

52 For Rousseau’s criticism of foresight, compare especially Emile, 46. See also Mira Morgenstern, Rousseau and the Politics of Ambiguity (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 139–142.
Rousseau thus moves toward his conclusion with resolution, but through a series of conditionals:

I will take advantage, therefore, of occasions to make this writing known, if I find any, without expecting any success from it. If I find a trustee whom I can reasonably ask to take it, I will do so, considering nonetheless my deposit as lost and consoling myself about it in advance. If I don’t find any, as I expect, I will continue to keep what I would have given him, until at my death, if not earlier, my persecutors seize it (D, 256).

Each “if” creates a space in which things might go differently. Although oriented by expectation, none are secured by certainty. Above all, even in its strongest forms, the certainty Rousseau sometimes suggests with regard to his future unhappiness is distinct from the versions of “foresight” he always criticizes in that it is not oriented toward individual interest and opportunities for mastery. Rousseau’s brand of foresight, such as it is, and in direct contrast to the anxiously inadequate foresight required by his persecutors, is not action-oriented. According to “Rousseau,” although “Jean-Jacques” “foresees” future persecution, “he doesn’t see that it is a great inconvenience,” and since it seems “inevitable, it would be folly to torment himself about it and it would be rushing into it prematurely to seek to prevent it” (D, 146). As in his earlier work, an attunement to chance and a relaxation of the drive to certainty and control go hand in hand here. This attention to chance, distinct from the hope and courage of Rousseau’s past work as from the calculations of his present enemies, is one of the supports Rousseau finds for his words after he feels everything else has been taken away.

Neither running from nor rushing toward the future he finds most probable, “Jean-Jacques” “provides for the present as best he can, and leaves the care of the future to providence” (D, 146). This providential vision is a second, complementary way Rousseau supports his late efforts at truth-telling. Rousseau turns to providence “to seek there the
resources I no longer had here below” (D, 247). These “resources” do not rescue Rousseau from his situation or ignite in him the courage to escape it. Rather, they provide him with a new way to navigate it. Importantly, as in the letter to Voltaire, Rousseau’s invocations of providence in the *Dialogues* more often serve as checks on, rather than expressions of, a drive to certainty. He insists that he does not know “when, by what means, or how” providence will manifest (D, 256). He does not even have confidence that it will yield a happy outcome for him. Even when he hopes that providence will work to “transmit it [i.e. his manuscript] exempt from fraud to a better generation,” he still adds “if my work is lost, if it must be given to my enemies and destroyed or disfigured by them, as seems inevitable, I will not count any less on your work, although I am ignorant of its time and its means” (D, 247). In other words, Rousseau does not turn to providence to secure his own power; rather, for Rousseau now as in the letter to Voltaire, “providence” remains a way of looking away from one’s own immediate interests and toward “the whole,” toward relationships and processes of circulation. He persists in his final efforts to promulgate his words “because it is the sole means remaining in my power to collaborate in the work of providence” (D, 254; see also 247). I will return to think more about modes of collaboration in Chapter 3, through the work of Walt Whitman.

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53 Although the *Dialogues* sometimes seem to endorse a view of providence as a ballast for human confidence and a check on the power of chance (D, 7; D, 119), in a kind of auto-critique in the “History of the Preceding Writing” of the *Dialogues*, Rousseau explicitly flags this view of providence as an error to which he is prone. Referring to the second plan he concocts after the failure of his initial plan to deposit the *Dialogues* on the altar of Notre Dame, Rousseau writes that he “did what all unfortunate do who believe they see an explicit directive of fate in everything that happens to them,” and was “deluded my this new hope,” taking “the finger of God” to be at work in a “chance opportunity” (D, 250–251). After this plan fails, he reconsiders it and his earlier efforts “in a different light”: “I had said in my inscription that I was not expecting a miracle, and it was clear nevertheless that one would be necessary for my project to succeed” (D, 248). After this point in the *Dialogues*, Rousseau still invokes providence, but in a more open-ended, less personal way.
now what I want to draw attention to, via Rousseau, is the attitudes or dispositions which sustain and emerge from his particular “collaboration” with providence. In a kind of feedback loop, he turns to providence because he has released himself to whatever fate should befall his words, and his collaboration with providence helps him further relax his drive to determine the fate of his words. A belief in providence allows him to release his words from his own control, to “give everything over” (D, 2, 246), a way of respecting, rather than attempting to securitize, the fragility of words.

Rousseau sometimes figures his choice to keep talking even in the face of impossible odds as no choice at all, as instead a kind of compulsion. “Rousseau” describes “Jean-Jacques” this way:

His heart, transparent as crystal, can hide nothing of what happens within it. Every mood it feels is transmitted to his eyes and face. One sees when and how he gets upset or calms down, when and how he gets angry or is softened, and as soon as what he sees or hears affects him, it is impossible for him to withhold or dissimulate its impression even for a moment. (D, 155)

The sheer inability of “Jean-Jacques” to remain silent or convincingly lie finds its antithesis in the project of carefully choosing and calibrating one’s words. A soul of “Jean-Jacques’s” type will hit on “energetic and vigorous expressions” only with the help of some “lucky chances;” in stark contrast to this type stand those “masters of appearances” who “have words at their command,” who “are never caught short,” who always have some “well organized” patter at their disposal (D, 155–157). The former is “timid and awkward,” “ponderous in his thinking, clumsy in his speech,” and, in his “ineptness,” capable of finding “some felicitous word” only “by chance,” while the latter are capable of “subjugating everything with their scholarly fluency of speech” (D, 108–109). The contrast between chance and mastery Rousseau develops in these passages
resonates deeply with the themes I have been tracking in previous sections, particularly with the critique of politeness I analyzed in *Emile*.

However, these passages also raise new questions: if dissimulation is impossible for Rousseau, if he always gives himself away anyway, what can it mean for him to tell the truth or to make truthfulness his life’s project? Is the concept still meaningful? Perhaps not in the form readers expecting a deliberate, courageous form of truthfulness would anticipate: according to “Rousseau,” “Jean-Jacques” is “more heedless than frank” (D, 107). Here, however, I have focused on Rousseau’s decision to dwell, his choice to neither move on nor shut down, to instead find ways of navigating the situation he is in and finding a language from that place suitable for that position. Chattering on against his own interests and preferences, his choice is not to resent the disposition he has or discipline himself out of it, but to affirm it. Although Rousseau does not present his faltering forth as a free choice (and this is one sense of what it means to be awkward: an inability to behave in a way appropriate to the situation), he nevertheless chooses not to resist it. Rousseau’s heedlessness thus points to an alternative account of truth-telling, one that locates what it means to be truthful less in acts of will and more in situations, orientations, and attunements.54

Should Rousseau’s readers, then, do what Rousseau could not: remake their

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54 Rousseau’s first presentation of his motto in the “Letter on the Theatre” similarly suggests both an act of will and a more complex situation of attunement or response: “Vitam impendere vero: this is the motto I have chosen and of which I feel I am worthy” (*Politics and the Arts*, 132n, my emphasis). That is, while the first italicized phrase highlights Rousseau’s own agency in moving toward the motto, the second emphasizes the motto’s independent existence. This existence might even be characterized as having a kind of agency: although Rousseau feels worthy of dedicating his life to the truth, he may overlooked aspects of dedication, life, or truth that would ultimately make the make the motto a bad fit for him. The Fourth Walk, considered in the next chapter, begins with a serious consideration of this possibility.
characters to fit some ideal type? Is Rousseau – damaged, depressed, and decrepit – a model on which to remodel ourselves? Should we all become a little more heedless and a little less hopeful? I do not think so. Rousseau himself in fact both questions the capacity of most contemporary humans for such acts of sovereign self-making (D, 157–158), and resist any straightforward identification by the reader with him as author. Recall that in the “Letter on Providence” Rousseau explicitly rejects the suggestion that his own character might serve as “a model” for others, and that he opens Emile by saying that his goal is “not to change sentiments.” The Dialogues appear to continue this step back from exemplarity. Initially “Rousseau” presents “Jean-Jacques” as an object of identification for himself and an example for others to follow (D, 52–54, 69), and offers the following advice to “the Frenchman” as a principle for reading his work: “based on the dispositions which this reading inspires in you, judge that of the Author when he was writing them” (D, 30). After “Rousseau” himself meets with “Jean-Jacques,” however, this method of judgment-by-identification comes in for frequently repeated criticism as one of the most insidious mechanisms of amour-propre, the comparative (Nietzsche might say reactive) disposition Rousseau negatively compares to a positive love of self (amour de soi):

After studying man all my life, I believed I knew men. I was mistaken. I never succeeded in knowing a single one… I went about it badly, and always interpreting according to my own heart what I saw others do, I attributed them the motives that would have prompted me to act in their place, and I always deluded myself (D, 95; see also 147, 176).

Indeed, while this critique of identification is presented as a development for the

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55 Eli Friedlander’s claims that “the Reveries constitutes a critique of identification, not just as a moral principle, but also as an interpretative principle.” J. J. Rousseau: An Afterlife of Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 115n5. Despite the differences I have highlighted between the Reveries and the Dialogues, Friedlander’s argument has informed my approach to the Dialogues, in which I find a parallel if less extreme refusal of identification.
characters within the narrative of the \textit{Dialogues}, it is telegraphed by the question that inspires Rousseau to write the \textit{Dialogues} in the first place (D, 3): not “how can I judge others on the basis of myself?” but “how would I judge myself if I were not myself?”\footnote{This is an all-but-explicit inversion of the framing project of Rousseau’s \textit{Confessions}, intended to be “the first piece of comparison for the study of men” (\textit{Confessions}, 3), and so another reason Foucault’s description of the \textit{Dialogues} as “anti-\textit{Confessions}” (“Introduction,” 33) proves apt. Reading Rousseau as a critic of identification puts me at odds with the reading of Rousseau advanced by Cristina Beltrán in \textit{The Trouble with Unity} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) which centers on a “Rousseauian form of politics” grounded in deliberation and driven toward identification. Beltrán does not consider the \textit{Dialogues}, and if the developmental narrative that book presents of Rousseau’s thinking about identification is taken at face value, it may be that her reading holds for the work she considers but not for the \textit{Dialogues} (nor, following Friedlander, for the \textit{Reveries}). Yet I have also tried to highlight some ways the position of those final works develops out of seeds present in Rousseau’s earlier writing, and so my account may also enable a rereading of the works that ground Beltrán’s account. Given the importance of those texts for many other political theorists, I will briefly indicate how that rereading might go despite its secondary importance for my project here. Beltrán acknowledges the “risky” character of communication in Rousseau’s thinking, yet finds that he ultimately aspires to a form of public speech that would rein in that risk. Geneva’s circles, discussed in the \textit{Letter on Theatre}, provides Beltrán with an example of such a communicative mode, where “opinions are exchanged and defended, but deliberative dialogue never transforms one’s view, never changes one’s mind – because in Rousseau’s mind, to be transformed by another’s speech is to be vulnerable to domination” (87). Yet, in the earlier “Letter on Providence” and in the later \textit{Emile}, Rousseau shows that “to be transformed by another’s speech” and “change one’s mind” need not mean “to take another’s opinion as one’s own.” Rousseau views only the latter as a form of “domination.” This argument resonates with what Beltrán calls the \textit{Letter on Theater}’s “critique of performance,” which she characterizes as (I would say reduces to) a critique of dissimulation. However, I would suggest that Rousseau’s argument in that letter might more accurately be characterized as a critique of spectatorship. The problem with the theater for Rousseau is not its theatricality per se, but that, in identifying with virtuous characters on stage, spectators exempt themselves from the sustained attention and hard work required to transform the actual world: “In giving our tears to these fictions, we have satisfied all the rights of humanity without having to give anything more of ourselves.” \textit{Politics and the Arts}, 25. For Beltrán’s Rousseau, the problem with theater is the objects of identification: fictitious villains, not fellow citizens (\textit{Trouble}, 90); for mine, the problem is the passive and exclusive character of theatrical identification. The problem with the theater is that it has too few actors, not that it has too many. Beltrán implicitly acknowledges these aspects of Rousseau’s argument by noting the key role he gives to the festival as an alternative to the theater. It is true that Rousseau praises festivals for promoting something like identification (“each sees and loves himself in the others so that all will be better united”), but if this is all the citizens of Geneva did, they would be vulnerable to the same criticism as the theater-goers of Paris. Even when he praises identification, then, Rousseau does not suggest it should be citizens’ sole or primary activity. More to the point, while Beltrán faults Rousseau’s account of the circles for not theorizing a “discourse between strangers” (87), she may be looking in the wrong place: she overlooks the rich theorizations of public address Rousseau develops in thinking about how his own writing circulates. In those moments, which I have made my focus here, Rousseau has no illusions of “security” and more persistently sticks with what Beltrán calls the “risks” of communication (what I call chanciness). These differences aside, Beltrán’s method of bi-directional reading – using the activist politics of \textit{Latinidad} as a “lens” for “a reconsideration of Rousseauian categories,” in order to then “see movement politics in a new and richer light” – has helped shape my own attempt to place certain Rousseauian themes into contemporary activist conversations, below.}
project: not “that they did not guess the true motives for his conduct,” but their “never having wanted to learn what they are” (D, 147). If other readers can learn from this refusal to learn, it seems that the lesson of Rousseau is not to try to become him, to look to him to “provide myself with other eyes or to affect other ideas” (E, 34), but rather to try to carefully consider the distinctive “ways of seeing and feeling” his work presents (D, 212). To borrow terms developed by Roderick Ferguson in a different context, and to recall Love’s formulation of the need for an “expanded gestural repertoire” cited in the introduction to this chapter, I mean to imbue Rousseau’s writings “with gestural rather than emulative functions.” Rousseau’s position is not a model, but Rousseau nevertheless points to a novel understanding of political truth-telling with unexpected descriptive and interpretive capacities.

**Rousseau’s Gesture**

This chapter has focused on a barely visible exercise of agency in a razor-thin space of decision: the choice to forgo the security often provided by remaining silent, to

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58 *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 143. Above I suggested that Rousseau’s work contains pedagogic possibilities for its readers, but those claims should be read in light of these qualifications, together with Sedgwick’s caution that the expectation of pedagogy-as-mimesis (wherein student models teacher) may be a limited and at times distorting framework. “Pedagogy of Buddhism,” *Touching Feeling*, 154

59 Most readers of this chapter have stumbled over this suggestion that silence and security may go together. Most immediately, I’m motivated to make this connection by Rousseau’s sense that silence would be more comfortable for him and give less ammunition to his critics. Less directly, see Adrienne Rich’s argument, discussed in the Introduction, that justifiable discretion can often transform into “an easy way to avoid conflict or complication.” This theme, and its importance for feminist politics, are more expansively treated in Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” in *Sister Outsider* (New York: Crossings Press, 2007), 40–44. I take up this thread of the argument again in the discussion of privacy in Chapter 4.
risk words even though they seem certain to be regarded as silence, as mere noise, or as intolerable threats. Like the parrhēsiastēs boldly facing down the tyrant with frankness, though by different means, Rousseau’s resigned position near the end of his life – almost absolutely certain that his words would not be received as he intended but awkwardly venturing them anyway – provides an extreme situation that might illuminate more mundane ones.

Consider, for example, recent conversations among social justice activists about “privilege.” In this context, “privilege” refers to unearned, historically entrenched, and power-imbued advantages that activists might (typically unconsciously) rely on and thus perpetuate when attempting to struggle against the very structures which have unjustly advantaged them. While long an important keyword in many activist circles, at least since the publication of Peggy McIntosh’s essay on “White Privilege,” conversations around privilege have reached a new, internet-mediated intensity in the past few years. The resulting formation has come to be called “call-out culture.” Calling someone out for relying on their own privilege can mean provoking their – often contagious – pain, anger, defensiveness, guilt, and shame. The experience of being called out can mean having what had felt like one’s own good intention abruptly turned inside out. The often vicious debates that have emerged within this formation have made graphic that the words one ventures in struggles for a better world are not guaranteed a happy future. They are not guaranteed a fair hearing. They may not even be heard at all.

In a different context (and no doubt enabled by no small measure of privilege), Rousseau felt and thought through a similar condition. Faced with such uncertainty, with such hazards, with such unhappy chances, he did not, perhaps despite his deepest wishes and his better judgment, abandon words. Rather, orienting himself to that same uncertainty, resigned but not acquiescent, he used words to navigate through (if not out of) his condition. Rousseau’s attention to chance helps me think through a kind of persistence that starts from where it finds itself and does not pretend to know where it is headed. He provides a potent set of tools for conceptualizing other efforts at acting from and through negative feelings like shame, fear, and hopelessness rather than wishing them away. These tools can help political theorists to think through the various ways those struggling for social justice within a “call-out culture” have spoken and might speak their truth.

Often, across damaged circuits there can be only damaged communication, and little possibility of connection. For readers unwilling to take Rousseau’s *Dialogues* on its own terms, this can seem to be the obvious and only lesson of that work: somewhere along the line, Rousseau’s difficult personality exhausted his friends’ patience, most of his relationships became impossible, and his final writings are pained and misguided expressions of confusion at and rage against this outcome. This may be a perfectly sensible way of approaching such a contorted and exhausting text. It mirrors the frustration articulated by critics who characterize call-out culture as simplistic,
unreasonable, and unproductive. But sometimes, what first looks to be damaged communication can, from another angle of view, suggest new possibilities for new forms

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of connection and conversation. Rousseau’s inapt and inept manner of expressing himself can often read as tedious and self-indulgent, embarrassing and cringe-worthy. But

62 Two recent arguments guide these formulations. First, I draw inspiration from Leo Bersani’s sense that gay desire expresses “a revolutionary inaptitude…. for sociality as it is known.” Homos (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 76. Bersani’s work is inspired by and has inspired similar arguments from Michael Warner, Eve Sedgwick, Judith Halberstam, Heather Love, Lee Edelman, and others on what has come to be called simply “queer negativity.” The point is not to claim Rousseau for some sort of queer canon (his non-normative and non-reproductive desires not withstanding), only to suggest a parallel form of potentially “revolutionary inaptitude” in his work. Despite these affinities, I avoid calling the lessons of Rousseau’s late work and the lessons I draw from it negative, pessimistic, or even realist for historical and textual reasons. In historical terms, recall that Rousseau was on the side of “optimism” (then an awkward neologism) in his debate with Voltaire. Moreover, his canonical political writings are often characterized as utopian by some of their best critics. See, for instance, Judith Shklar, Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Textually, and more importantly, the Dialogues sometimes cast a glance in the direction of an impossible future in which the lessons of that text have spread out into the world. In particular, consider Rousseau’s way of handling two words of interest to contemporary criticism: “society,” as in Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean’s “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” PMLA 121.3 (2006), 819-828, and “happiness,” as in Sara Ahmed’s The Promise of Happiness (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). In Rousseau, a disposition such as his own is figured as “destructive to the entire social order,” or rather to “that entire pretend social order, which in fact hides the most cruel disorders” (D, 127, 177, my emphasis). “The impossibility of softening his language and hiding the movements of his heart” mean that “the bounds of ordinary societies governed by apparent familiarity and real reserve could not suit him” (D, 118; my emphasis). But just these formulations point to other modes of sociability, to a society for “the truly sociable man” (D, 100), and while “Jean-Jacques” settles for solitude (D, 100, 118), “Rousseau” ends the book calling for the formation of a new kind of “social group” (D, 244). Perhaps thinking of such possibilities, Rousseau even allows for some possibility of an “unhoped for happiness” (D, 254). As in the case of “society,” this “happiness” is presented as a possibility beyond or rupturing the horizon of “happiness” as we presently know it; Rousseau can only imagine it in the shape of a “felicity… of another order” (D, 252). In this way, my reading of Rousseau may resonate less directly with so-called “queer negativity” and more with José Muñoz reshaping of that tradition into one of “queer utopianism,” a “forward-dawning futurity” that begins with a feeling that “this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.” Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 1. Turned away from the world as they are, the Reveries can be productively read as an elaboration of such new forms of happiness and “society,” indeed, while he pushes away from certain “utopian” readings of Rousseau, Friedlander finds in Rousseau’s work (and in particular in the Reveries) a call to “the revolutionary task of reforming society in the dissolution of social bonds.” An Afterlife of Words, 121–122n2. This leads to a second source of contemporary inspiration and a second point of dialogue with contemporary critical theory: Adam Kotsko’s short book on a key trope in recent television, Awkwardness (Hants: Zero Books, 2010). Rousseau occasionally refers to himself as awkward, and there are passages in the Confessions that read as prototypes for what is now called “cringe comedy,” as in the case of the concert at Lausanne, for which Rousseau writes and conducts the music – before he has any knowledge of music – with predictably mortifying results (Confessions, 124–125). Two central points of Kotsko’s book enable these features of Rousseau’s writing to be cast in terms relevant for political theory. First, Kotsko argues that that awkwardness should be located in situations not individuals (which accords with Rousseau’s conclusions: the awkwardness that follows him is not inherent in him but a function of a disjunction between his character and “society” as he knows it). Second, Kotsko defends a kind of “radical awkwardness” (typified by Curb Your Enthusiasm) that shows a “social bond that exists outside the social order,” one that emerges out of shared failures to fit the existing social order (again, a kind of Rousseauian
Rousseau’s work also suggests reasons to dissent from models of evaluating human subjectivity that take “self-indulgent” to be a criticism. Rousseau’s work suggests ways of and reasons for thinking through embarrassment, shame, and other negative emotions. Perhaps what generations of readers have often recoil from in Rousseau is at least in part the shock of previously unfelt possibilities – possibilities unfolding in the very features of “call-out culture” that motivate similar recoil today. Painful as it may have been to write, exasperating as it can be to read, Rousseau’s *Dialogues* do real communicative work. The *Dialogues* thus provide reasons to resist accounts of call-out culture that reject its important conversations because they do not comport with normative models of deliberative civility and productivity.63

One important feature of many normative models of productive conversation is trust. Liberal democratic theory has tended to emphasize the importance of trust and so to denigrate negative emotion. Danielle Allen encapsulates and develops this sort of argument in *Talking to Strangers*, which begins with the claim that “democracy depends on trustful talk.”64 Indeed, glossing Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Allen finds that “75 percent of the work of political conversation is directed toward generating interpersonal trust among citizens.”65 Generating trust means “tackl[ing] negative emotions like anger and

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63 Although I am working with a different theoretical archive and addressing different practical problems, my criticism of criticisms of call-out culture here approaches Lynn Sanders’s influential assessment of deliberative democratic theory, which, she argues, has “often been fraught with connotations of rationality, reserve, cautiousness, quietude, community, selflessness, and universalism... which in fact probably undermine deliberation’s democratic claims.” “Against Deliberation,” *Political Theory* 25.3 (1997), 348.


65 Ibid., 143.
resentment and try[ing] to convert them to goodwill.” In short, people should be “talked out of” their negative emotions in order to make room for trust. Rousseau does not offer an argument “against” trust, and neither do I. Feelings of trust, often vital for anyone, have been particularly important in political discussions among minoritized groups: among women, among queer and trans people, among people of color, among people intersectionally positioned among several of these groups. But an overly-strong prioritization of trust, and a corresponding rush to purge negative emotion, can also inhibit our most urgent political conversations. Thus, in a coarse version of Allen’s subtle mode of theorizing, criticisms of call-out culture decry the “toxic” environment it creates and the fear it generates in many would-be speakers. This sort of criticism echoes earlier moments in feminist history: Audre Lorde reports being told that, by communicating anger in and about her interactions with white feminists, she was “‘creating a mood of hopelessness,’ ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt,’ or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action.’” In the name of allowing for conversation, these theories of trustful communication may tend to close down important topics and styles of conversation.

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66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., 150.

68 See, for example, Michelle Goldberg, “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars,” The Nation, January 29, 2014, http://www.thenation.com/article/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars/. Women of color activists organized an important series of responses to this sort of criticism around the hashtag #thistweetcalledmyback. Because much of the conversation generated there criticized academic non-engagement with the work of these activists, highlighted academic appropriation (or even plagiarism) of that same work, and detailed the harmful sorts of exposure and engagement that has attended many of these existing academic encounters, it seems important to mention this area of inquiry as an important spur for my thinking about these topics and appropriate to avoid a more specific engagement in this forum.

Reading Rousseau has helped me to read for alternate communicative styles that could emerge in and sustain political movements through difficult conversations, and so offers one set of resources for reframing the debates just rehearsed, insofar as he offers a moving demonstration of the sorts of communicative projects that are possible even when the orienting force of trust appears simply inaccessible. Rousseau would have certainly liked to feel that his writing would not be subjected to omnipresent efforts to survey, suppress, and falsify it. However, the hope that motivates the *Dialogues* is not a hope that such a (perceived) conspiracy will suddenly cease, or even that he will find a respite from that conspiracy in a small community of trusted interlocutors. Rousseau’s hope is that we might come to know each other, not despite distortions, or once we have overcome distortions, but from and through all that distorts our efforts to know ourselves and to be known by others.

The dejection and suspicion that mark Rousseau’s final works contain important lessons for conversations that take place in conditions where trust and good faith do not hold and cannot be expected. For example, by deemphasizing trust, the sort of Rousseau-informed activism I am imagining might suggest practices of “calling out” that draw on an older feminist model of coalition politics involving, in Bernice Johnson Reagon’s memorable formulation, “trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill
you... because that’s the only way you can figure you can stay alive.”

Attending to Rousseau’s way of venturing words attuned to the hazards that they face helps make more imaginable modes of communication that are attentive to what can be made of fragile and faltering words even in contexts of distrust. While fraught with its own dangers, this faltering approach might avoid the limitations of, on the one hand, moralistic approaches that simply prescribe to people struggling against injustice that they “ought to” trust those around them, and, on the other hand, communitarian approaches that may merely reiterating and therefore naturalizing the boundaries of existing relationships of trust.

Thus, informed by but not fully identified with Rousseau, this is the first direction in which I bend the term candor: I figure candor as a process of hazarding a few words of one’s own in full awareness of the hazards that those words face. Candor falters. One announces: “Let me be candid with you...” The preliminary phrase declares an intention that one hopes will meet its aim, but in itself does not and cannot suffice to achieve that aim. After speaking it, one thus continues to speak, smoothly or haltingly, in a way that tries to live up to that initial declaration. Just as one may roll the dice, but eventually the dice must leave the hand, there are preparatory steps, postures, and incantations that might increase the likelihood of candor taking hold, but the practice of candor will not get

70 “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” in Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000 [1983]), 344. Few active participants in cultures of “calling out” would say that they intend any eclipse of these aspects of earlier models of feminist politics, and Reagon, in turn, by no means denies the importance of more trusting conversations among those who have shared experiences and backgrounds. However, for Reagon, those conversations exist in a complex relationship – one might call it a dialectical or deconstructive relationship – with coalition politics. In “Sisterhood, Coalition, and the Politics of Experience,” in Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 117, Chandra Talpade Mohanty maps these two aspects of Reagon’s argument in Gramscian terms as “the difference between wars of maneuver... and wars of position,” but even this helpful way of marking difference may underplay the complexity of Reagon’s argument.
underway until one puts the words out there and sees what happens. “What happens” – and whether or not it comes to be recognized as an instance of candor – necessarily depends on a complicated set of factors beyond one’s own control. No amount of hope, courage, or trust could serve to definitely secure this faltering series of steps forward into uncertainty.

While the more familiar modes of truth-telling indexed by concepts like parrhēsia, frankness, authenticity, and “straight talk” tend to deny this chanciness and seek to reassert control, I mean for candor to point to an alternative understanding of truth-telling that would more persistently stick with chance and resist the seductions of mastery. This sense of candor partially resonates with the term’s political history. Christopher Reid reports that for Joseph Addison, co-founder of *The Spectator*, candour was “a gentlemanly mode of reading and exercising judgment, and [he] contrasts it with the malicious, pedantic, fault-finding approach of the verbal critic.”71 From here, Reid makes a more general point about “the distinctively eighteenth-century meanings of candour”:

> Candour softens the strictures of criticism, and by encouraging the reader not to lose sight of the bigger picture makes critical judgment more secure and complex. The candid reader displays superior taste by taking pleasure in the beauties of a work, and superior humanity by overlooking its minutely faulty particulars... To read candidly was “to suppose good meanings,” to allow the writer the benefit of the doubt, and to cleanse criticism of the malignity of faction.72

This sense of candor informs my own, but I also want to push beyond it by inflecting candor through the dialogue just convened between, on the one hand, contemporary intersectional feminist theory and activism and, on the other, Rousseau. Both of these conversation partners are rightly impatient with what passes for gentlemanliness,

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71 Reid, 178.

72 Ibid., 178–79.
humanity, taste, and virtue in the eighteenth century. Developing a contemporary sense of candor through their conversation would involve pushing on the aristocratic and moralized cast given to candor in these contexts, while preserving and expanding the tentative and generous aspects of candor they reveal. Candor would then be not so much a matter of “giving the benefit of the doubt,” for such a benefit might also be called a privilege, and like privilege we will typically have a hard time understanding why those who have never been granted it would be hesitant to grant it to us or critical of the systems that have imparted it to us. Instead, candor would mean, as I think it often does mean when it is invoked in conversations today, dwelling with doubt but speaking anyway, trying not to be malicious, pedantic, or fault-finding but taking the chance that you might be perceived that way regardless.

Again, dwelling with doubt and taking chances are quite different from the risks assumed from the courageous position of the parrhēsiastēs. If parrhēsia is understood as “what finds expression by those uninhibited by shame,”73 then (adopting Holloway Sparks’s point about the relationship between courage and fear) Rousseau’s work shows a way of telling the truth with and through shame (and other negative feelings) rather than providing another name for the virtue of those already uninhibited by shame. The space candor thus makes for imagining truthfulness otherwise can help political theorists to avoid misrecognizing the important work done by emerging political truth-tellers, and it can help activists to keep their novel communicative projects from settling into old patterns.

73 Arlene Saxonhouse, Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens, 5.
Words alone rarely change the world. But radical projects for making visible, disrupting, and dismantling injustice are unlikely to take hold without painful conversations, confessions, and accusations. While calls for heroism and courage are the more familiar route to a progressive politics, and while such heroism and courage undeniably have produced many positive political transformations, in the face of transgenerational, deeply institutionalized forms of domination and exploitation, feelings of weakness, hopelessness, and distrust may be not only justifiable but prudent. The displacements of willfulness and control sketched in the work of Rousseau and his effort to explore rather than disavow his painful feelings might then, paradoxically, provide insight into surer inspirations for sustaining difficult conversations. In the openings created by these displacements, candor makes more legible the uncertain and chancy forms of political truth-telling operating in mundane acts of conversation and negotiation that do not rise to the level of heroic whistle-blowing or dramatic confrontation. A humble, faltering persistence and a watchful (though not always hopeful) attention to chance to me seem essential to having understanding transformed, and such transformations of thought and feeling seem to be one important path to (indeed one

74 This last list draws inspiration from James Baldwin, who writes (in closer kinship to today’s searching discussions around privilege than well-worn cliches about a “national conversation on race”): “The history of white people has led them to a fearful, baffling place where they have begun to lose touch with reality – to lose touch, that is, with themselves – and where they certainly are not truly happy, for they know they are not truly safe. They do not know how this came about; they do not dare examine how this came about. On the one hand, they can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession – a cry for help and healing, which is, really, I think, the basis of all dialogues – and, on the other hand, the black man can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession which, fatally, contains an accusation. And yet, if neither of us cannot do this, each of us will perish in those traps in which we have been struggling for so long.” “The White Man’s Guilt,” in *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 725, my emphasis. My reflections on the ability of words to change the world here also draw on the closing lines of Chambers, *The Lesson of Ranciere*, 168–169.
important mode of transformative action.
Chapter 2 | Creative Engagements: Nietzsche’s Redlichkeit

This community goes on to dream like any other of its successes and failures – and makes plans for a future. It is a future to which I want to refer with this writing. I believe and hope that among the present crises we prepare for it. But when the time comes, won’t we find ourselves on the hither side of that boundary? – with others going on ahead, new pioneers themselves. How will we be present to that absence? Declining to instrumentalize those gone before us, can we hope that those still to come will go further – and raise us up alive?

– Bruce Boone¹

Projects that aim to change the world, like projects that aim to interpret it, often get snagged on the self. In fact, the problems posed by the self in world-interpreting and world-changing projects are connected: because I first apprehend the world from my own location, it can be hard to get a full sense of the world, and so it can be hard to imagine a better future that wouldn’t be first and foremost a better future for me and people like me, even if that wasn’t a better future for the rest of the world. Even the ideal of objectivity – whereby one aspires to act as an “interchangeable and therefore featureless observer” – is not without significant compensations for the observer who seems to be effaced by adopting it; one becomes objective in part because of a belief that “there is a certain nobility in the abandonment of the personal, a sacrifice of the self for the collective.”² At times, thinking and acting otherwise than through “self-perpetuating kinds of thought,”

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finding ways of moving in the world that go beyond “emphatically reconfirming” the way we were before we got moving, can come to feel downright impossible.\(^3\)

Candor may offer a way to think about this set of problems, because candor is a uniquely world-facing kind of world-transforming activity. When Jane Austen suggests that to be candid involves “to take the good of everybody’s character and make it still better,” she indicates that while candor is a kind of making, a kind of creation, it remains a kind of truthfulness; in his analysis of her use of the term, William Empson underlines this implication by noting that, in order “to take the good of everybody’s character and make it still better,” “you still have to 'take the good' which is really there.”\(^4\) To speak with candor is to account for the world and to transform it in the same act. The candid

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\(^3\) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” in The Weather in Proust (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 139; Leo Bersani “Aggression, Gay Shame, and Almodóvar’s Art,” in Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 80. Despite the fact that the lines quoted from Bersani here are part of a criticism of Sedgwick’s work, to me, Sedgwick, Bersani, and the larger tradition of gay-affirmative thinking of which they are a part are exemplary in their handling of these questions. For one rapprochement between Sedgwick and Bersani, see Brian Galvey, “Leo Bersani and the Universe,” Criticism 52.2 (2010), 317–323. Another route to reconciling the two might be through Friedrich Nietzsche, the main subject of this chapter: for both Sedgwick and Bersani, Nietzsche offered a compelling consideration of the questions raised in this paragraph and a disturbing demonstration of their intractability. Sedgwick pursues that idea through the theme of *ressentiment* in “Some Binarisms (II): Wilde, Nietzsche, and the Sentimental Relations of the Male Body,” in Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 178–181; Bersani pursues it through the theme of redemption in The Culture of Redemption (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). One of my key interlocutors in this chapter, Malcolm Bull – whose keywords in Anti-Nietzsche (London: Verso, 2011) include future, failure, anti-social, inhuman, redemption, Nietzsche, and anti-Nietzsche, i.e. words central to queer theory from its beginnings to now – makes no reference to Sedgwick, to Bersani, to other queer theorists, or to queer theory; I place these thinkers at the head of this chapter as a way of indicating that this seems like a missed opportunity. Another inspiration for framing my approach to Nietzsche through questions of interpretation, transformation, and the self is James Martel’s “The Location of Amor Fati: Occupying the Place Where We Already Are,” lecture delivered at Johns Hopkins University, October 17, 2014. The problem motivating Martel’s Nietzsche is that we are so fixated on “a better form of ourselves that we wish to be (whether in the afterlife, in metaphysical terms or some other version of transcendence) that we fail to recognize and be who and what we are.” I offer a different Nietzsche responding to a different problem, but my framing of both was hugely helped by his account. See also C. Heike Schotten’s Nietzsche’s Revolution: Décadence, Politics, and Sexuality (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), which adopts an approach somewhat similar to Martel’s insofar as Schotten’s Nietzsche “proposes a revolutionary program and platform he himself cannot undertake,” Nietzsche’s Revolution, 172.

speaker is thus quite different from the liar who, in Hannah Arendt’s memorable
definition, “says what is not so in order to change the world.” Yet candor, as a kind of
creative truthfulness, is also thereby quite different from the forms of truth-telling most
familiar to Arendt: its process and results are reducible to neither “rational truth,”
“produced by the human mind” in the form of axiomatic statements, nor “factual truth,”
“modest verities” concerning “brutally elementary data.” Austen praises a candor that is
neither a spontaneous production nor a report on pre-given facts, but instead engages
what already exists in order to make something new.5

Friedrich Nietzsche sometimes praises a similar virtue under the name
Redlichkeit, or “genuine honesty.”6 Redlichkeit, in Nietzsche’s most straightforwardly

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5 “Make” here is thus not the “make” of the “truthmaker theory” prominent in recent philosophical debates. In the context of truthmaker theory, make refers to an (unusual) kind of necessitation. A truthmaker is thus “some worldly thing whose mere existence necessitates the [true] proposition’s truth,” *Truthmakers: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Helen Beebee and Julian Dodd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–2. This kind of necessitation is unusual because “making a proposition true” is not like “making Sally angry”: it’s not a contingent causality but a metaphysical entailment, whereby the truthmaker cannot exist in the same universe as the negation of the corresponding truth claim, ibid., 2. Expressed in the form of a principle: “Necessarily, if <p> is true, then there exists at least one entity α such that <<α exists> entails <<p> is true>,” ibid. Because my concerns are political not epistemological, to me this debate seems quite unrelated to those I hope to intervene in. However, Arendt might object that the two senses of “make” are closely connected, thus the importance (for her) of keeping the domains of labor and work separate from the domain of action. See *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 220–230, 322. One task of this chapter and the next is to emphasize different aspects of the process of artistic creation than those Arendt emphasizes (or at least those she is usually taken to emphasize).

6 This way of rendering the sense of Redlichkeit, adopted by Judith Norman in her translation of *Beyond Good and Evil*, is (for my purposes) imperfect, but provides a helpful initial orientation toward the work the term does for Nietzsche: it suggests that Redlichkeit is related to, but somehow “more than,” what we conventionally call “honesty.”
definitional account of the term, is a “play with truth.””7 Because truth is at issue – because one’s Redlichkeit indicates one’s “level of truthfulness” (D 456) – the play that characterizes Redlichkeit is not simply “making things up” or engaging in flights of fancy. As a form of truthfulness, Redlichkeit remains accountable to something beyond itself: accountable in and through its play. But this play is also quite serious, for the play with truth (Wahrspielerei) meets a clear antagonist in the will to truth (Wille zur Wahrheit), the suspicious desire “to see everything naked, to be present everywhere, to understand and know everything” that Nietzsche suggests may indicate “a hidden will to death” (GS P.4, GS 344). Nietzsche bases the association of this sort of truth-seeking and death on evidence at once historical, physiological, and psychological: from the time “truth” first emerged as an ideal, it has “seemed that one was unable to live with it; that our organism was geared for its opposite: all its higher functions, the perceptions of sense and generally every kind of sensation, worked with those basic errors that had been incorporated since time immemorial” (BGE 295). An uncompromising will to truth would mean a drive to destroy all such life-sustaining errors, the errors that sustain the life of the very one seeking truth.

In Redlichkeit, Nietzsche aspires to a different possible truthfulness, one that would not be a matter of unmasking – or any other self-destructive project – and would go beyond simply “not lying” – or any other self-constricting practice – to include creative practices of affirmation. Yet while Redlichkeit seems to name a more light-hearted and less destructive truthfulness, somewhat confusingly, Nietzsche sometimes also calls the ethos that embodies the self-directed cruelty associated with the will to truth Redlichkeit. Redlichkeit, then, is Nietzsche’s name for both a creative practice of truthfulness and the self-constraining versions of truthfulness the former will have to displace. This seeming tension should, perhaps, not surprise: for Nietzsche, a word does not have “one conceptual and perceptual root”; rather, a word is like “a pocket into which now this, now that, now several things at once have been put (HAH, Book II, “The Wanderer and His Shadow,” 33). Accordingly, rather than try to strike at the very roots of Redlichkeit as such, my practice here will be to unpack some of the content Nietzsche himself stuffed into the word, in order to tell one possible story about the conceptual and perceptual work Redlichkeit may have done for him. I read Nietzsche’s disparate uses of the term as a history of the way the specific meaning and value of Redlichkeit have accrued and will continue to accrue over time.

Inside the back cover of the Autumn 1880 notebook containing his early notes toward Daybreak, among what appear to be five potential titles or section headings, Nietzsche jotted the phrase Zur Geschichte der Redlichkeit, “On the History of
Redlichkeit,” and underlined it. Although no explicitly named “history of Redlichkeit” materialized in the final version of Daybreak – nor, ultimately, in any of his authorized work – Nietzsche would return to the term frequently over the next six years. By attending to the travels of the term Redlichkeit in that period, I here offer a reconstruction of Nietzsche’s historical circumscription of a peculiar sense of truthfulness. Truthfulness as we know it now, Nietzsche suggests, is insufficiently honest: a differently truthful future honesty will have to displace it. Attending to this process of displacement as Nietzsche narrates it can help to pluralize our understanding of truth-telling.

Here, then, I turn to Nietzsche as an unlikely hermeneutic partner in the hope of taking what is generative in Austen’s combination of taking and making and making it more generative still. Given its singular place in Nietzsche’s writing on morality, accounting for the history, functions, and effects of Redlichkeit seems like one important project for understanding Nietzsche’s work generally, and, moving through Nietzsche’s work, for understanding “truthfulness” as a contemporary ethical and political problematic more broadly. The current chapter thus draws on Nietzsche to think truth-telling otherwise than according to those forms of truthfulness most closely associated

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8 Two of the other titles on the page also concern Redlichkeit; see http://www.nietzschesource.org/facsimiles/DFGA/N-V-4,146. I will largely refrain from quoting Nietzsche’s notebooks, preferring instead to focus on the work he prepared for publication. Although this exact phrase never appeared in his published writings, this does give at least some reason to believe that, at least as he first began to devote serious attention to the topic, Nietzsche was thinking about Redlichkeit within a historical frame.

9 Mentions of Redlichkeit (however passing, and including variations such as redlich or Unredlichkeit) occur in Nietzsche’s published works in this period in the following places:
- 1886 – Beyond Good and Evil: 5, 26, 31, 32, 227, 230, 244, 295

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with *modernity*, especially the self-effacing ethos of objectivity, just as, in the previous chapter, I read Rousseau’s autobiographical enterprise as an attempt to disentangle the concept of truth-telling from its *classical* valuation as a self-aggrandizing heroic practice. Indeed, as already mentioned and as Nietzsche powerfully illuminates in the texts I take up below, the self-effacing and the self-aggrandizing (and thus the modern and the classical) are not always as far apart as they might seem.

After a brief review, in the next section, of the existing work on Nietzsche’s use of the word Redlichkeit, the following three sections of this chapter elaborate the key moments of Nietzsche’s history of Redlichkeit. I read Nietzsche to be suggesting, roughly, three historical stages: an ancient period primarily characterized by Unredlichkeit or “dishonesty,” the modern emergence of a harsh, scientific form of Redlichkeit, and an as-yet future form of free-spirited, creative Redlichkeit. The fifth section attempts to further specify the kind of creativity implied in Nietzsche’s affiliation of truthfulness with artfulness. I then critically return to the focus of the previous chapter, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in order to highlight the lingering ascetic dimensions in many otherwise outstanding contemporary interpretations of Nietzsche’s work. The concluding section folds the various dimensions of Redlichkeit emphasized by my interpretation of Nietzsche’s writings into my own developing account of candor. By disentangling the ethical and political value of truthfulness from ascetic logics, I will continue to show how the form of truthfulness that is my focus – candor – might be used to counter political visions driven to certainty and control (that is, political visions that get stuck on the self).
Nietzsche’s most famous reflections on truth are likely the questions he poses at the outset of Beyond Good and Evil: “Granted, we will truth: why not untruth instead? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?” (BGE 1) These questions do not admit easy or uncomplicated responses, for either me or (as I read him) Nietzsche. However, I want to resist a response to these questions that would reduce all human interest in and aspiration to truth to a simple error, as if the only way of responding to the question “Why not untruth?” was to shout enthusiastically, “There is no reason why not! Therefore, yes, let us will untruth, uncertainty, and even ignorance instead!” As the introduction to this chapter suggests, there are political reasons for demurring from that particular response to Nietzsche’s questions, but my resistance also has a philosophical motive. As a growing number of Nietzsche’s readers have observed, the author who gave us these famous questions regarding truth seems himself to have been deeply interested in distinguishing between differential forms and levels of truthfulness, and seems to have evaluated some forms of truthfulness quite highly.10 This chapter aims to build on, complement, and in some cases challenge this turn in Nietzsche studies by offering a reconstruction of Nietzsche’s account of a particular form of truthfulness, Redlichkeit.

I am not the first to single out this term in Nietzsche’s oeuvre, and my focus on Redlichkeit is informed by two claims which I take to be persuasively demonstrated by

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the existing literature on Nietzschean Redlichkeit. First, I assume that the word Redlichkeit has the sense and importance I’ll give it here only in the works Nietzsche published between 1880 and 1886. Although truth and truthfulness had been central concerns in his work before *Daybreak*, Redlichkeit appears only a handful of times in *Human, All Too Human* (1878–1879) and the books that precede it. There, the word appears in contexts that suggest it carries something more like the meaning it has in everyday German, “honesty” understood in a broad and capacious sense. Thus, for example, when in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche warns that learning many languages sometimes “stands in the way of the acquisition of thorough knowledge and any ambition

11 See Jean-Luc Nancy, “‘Our Probity!’: On Truth in the Moral Sense in Nietzsche,” in *Looking After Nietzsche*, edited by Laurence A. Rickles, 67–89 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); Alan White, “The Youngest Virtue,” in *Nietzsche’s Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche’s Prelude to Philosophy’s Future*, edited by Richard Schacht, 63–78 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Melissa Lane, “Honesty as the Best Policy: Nietzsche on Redlichkeit and the Contrast between Stoic and Epicurean Strategies of the Self,” in *Histories of Postmodernism*, edited by Mark Bevir, Jill Hargis, and Sara Rushing, 25–51 (New York: Routledge, 2006). I have framed Redlichkeit as a form of truthfulness, but not all of these authors would fully accede to that frame. White marks a fairly strong separation between Redlichkeit and truthfulness (*Wahrhaftigkeit*), going so far as to say that “the trait of truthfulness is... simply inconsistent with Redlichkeit” (65). This seems far too strong, though, as Nietzsche very frequently seems to align the two, as in D 164, which aligns Redlichkeit with truth-seekers (*Wahrheitsuchenden*). In a footnote, White makes a more moderate claim: “Redlichkeit is a matter of a specific sort of ‘truthfulness,’ but... this truthfulness is distinct both from the will to truth and from what is usually understood by telling the truth” (78n10). Here I wholeheartedly agree, in a sense to be elaborated in the main text. Lane makes a more subtle set of claims about the relationship between Redlichkeit and Wahrhaftigkeit, one that finds a distinction between *Daybreak* and *Beyond Good and Evil* (33–35). I agree on the importance of the passages she highlights, but I parse them a bit differently. To me, to observe that philosophers make a racket about Wahrhaftigkeit after noting that they lack Redlichkeit (BGE 5) would be a mere *a non sequitur* unless the problem of Redlichkeit was still understood as touching on the problem of one’s “level of [Wahrhaftigkeit]” (D 456). There can be no question of Lane’s own Redlichkeit – her main argument aside, she acknowledges several places in BGE where the two appear to be connected (as at BGE 295) – and I at any rate agree that Nietzsche does not use the two terms “interchangeably” (26). Thus, while there is room for debate about how consistent Nietzsche’s various invocations of the term are or were intended to be, at the very broadest level, the aim of his discussions of Redlichkeit seems to have involved distinguishing between differential forms and levels of truthfulness.

12 Mentions of Redlichkeit (however passing, and including variations such as redlich or Unredlichkeit) occur in Nietzsche’s published works prior to 1880 in the following places:

- 1874 – *Untimely Meditations*, “Schopenhauer as Educator,” 2
- 1876 – *Untimely Meditations*, “Richard Wagner in Bayreuth,” 3
- 1878 – *Human, All Too Human*, Book I: 81, 225, 267, 447
to deserve the respect of others by honest means,” he seems to be using the word translated as “honest” (*redliche*) in the widest sense of the term, something like “honorableness” or “virtuousness in general,” as one might speak of an “honest merchant” (HAH 267). Although many of these early invocations of Redlichkeit are interesting in themselves, they do not appear to hold any particular importance, and the term does not appear to carry the more precise senses it takes on later in Nietzsche’s work. On the other hand, in the final two years of his writing, just as abruptly as Redlichkeit arrived, the term withdraws into the background. The word makes a few scattered appearances in and after Book V of *The Gay Science* (1887), and it appears there in connections broadly consistent with the interpretation I develop here. In those works, however, Redlichkeit is manifestly less prominent than it was just a few years earlier. Here, I have not attempted to explain this apparent shift of emphasis in the work

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13 See Lane, 28; 48n34.

14 The relevant references here are:

- 1887 – *The Gay Science*, Book V: 357
- 1887 – *Genealogy of Morals*: 3.27
- 1888 – *Twilight of the Idols*: “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” 12
- 1888 – *The Case of Wagner*: 10

Even allowing for the incommensurate amounts of material at stake between the lists in this note and the two above, the disparity is striking: 11 references before 1880, 4 references after 1886, and 44 references in between.
of the final two years of Nietzsche’s writing career. Nor have I explored why Nietzsche’s thought may have gravitated toward Redlichkeit. Rather than genetic, my task is interpretive: what senses did Nietzsche assign to Redlichkeit during the years he most frequently returned to the term?

My formulation of this question is guided by a second assumption: within the period of 1880–1886, Nietzsche uses Redlichkeit to mean something different than when he uses other words that are often also translated into English as “honesty.” For example, Nietzsche appears to consistently use the term Erlichkeit to mean something more like honesty in the sense of conventional morality, the sort adults might have attempted to impart to you as a child by telling you that it was “the best policy.” Nietzsche seems to regard this sort of “honesty” unfavorably. The way Nietzsche writes about Redlichkeit,

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15 So far as I am aware, this dramatic drop-off in the prominence of Redlichkeit in Nietzsche’s work has gone unremarked and unexplored in existing treatments of Nietzsche’s use of the term. My provisional thesis would be that in his later works Nietzsche shifted from describing Redlichkeit to performatively demonstrating or enacting Redlichkeit. Nancy suggests an interpretation consistent with this thesis when he refers to EH as “the book of Redlichkeit par excellence” (74). Nancy does not note the absence of the actual word Redlichkeit from the text, but supports his suggestion by arguing that Nietzsche describes himself as “the first anstandig [decent] man, which must surely imply some degree of Redlichkeit” (ibid). At minimum, it is clear that that Nietzsche’s admiration for some forms of truthfulness is wholly undiminished in the late works. See, for example, AC 50, and discussion by Williams, Truth and Truthfulness, 13–14. Note, however, that the word translated there as “honest” is rechtschaffen. Of 39 occurrences of Rechtschaffenheit or its variants in Nietzsche’s published writings, all but 7 occur in the works of 1887–1888. In other words, during the precise period in which the term Redlichkeit more or less vanishes from Nietzsche texts, Rechtschaffenheit gains a new and unprecedented prominence. Perhaps, then, Rechtschaffenheit in some way supplants or replaces Redlichkeit? If so, is this a mere lexical substitution, or does it suggest a change of theme and argument? These questions need to be followed up by further research.

16 On Ehrlichkeit, see especially Lane, 27-28. Other terms deployed by Nietzsche related to, and sometimes translated into English as, “honest” or “honesty” the most important are Rechtschaffenheit (TI, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” 42; AC 50), Aufrichtigkeit (D 56, D 429), and Freimut[h]igkeit (BGE 295), which might be alternatively translated as uprightness, sincerity, and frankness. Although I have not traced these terms as carefully, an initial survey suggests that their meanings sometime converge with, sometime diverge from, but in any case are less fully elaborated than the sense carried by Redlichkeit. More distantly related terms also sometimes translated as “honest” or some variant include wacker (“brave,” D 480) and brav (“good,” D 167).
however, suggests that it represents a distinct sort of “honesty,” one which for Nietzsche carries a more technical set of meanings and a more positive valuation.

However, while I follow the work of Melissa Lane and others in isolating Redlichkeit within this period of Nietzsche’s work, I depart from the existing literature on Redlichkeit in my sense of the positive content and critical function of the term for Nietzsche. Existing accounts have noted, but have typically given insufficient attention to, an apparent tension within Nietzsche’s account: he seems to associate Redlichkeit with both the dominant morality of his time and his own transvaluative project of identifying the virtues of future free spirits. As indicated in the introduction, I untangle this dilemma by suggesting that these apparent contradictions can be undone if one considers Nietzsche to be offering an account of two different sorts of Redlichkeit associated with two distinct time periods. The grounding assumption of my interpretation is thus that, insofar as he calls it “a virtue in the process of becoming” (D 456), Nietzsche’s Redlichkeit is most appropriately interpreted within a historical frame. An appreciation for Redlichkeit’s historically shifting sense reveals a second, and even more significant, difference: existing accounts of Nietzsche’s use of the term have tended to arrest Redlichkeit along its journey, over-emphasizing its ascetic dimensions and underemphasizing the term’s association with creativity. I return to this difference below, but first I will need to set forth my own interpretation of Nietzsche’s Redlichkeit.

17 See Lane, 35.

18 White’s approach comes closest to prefiguring my own, insofar as he too offers a “Genealogy of Redlichkeit” (66). However, his story diverges from mine in the moments and morals it emphasizes.
The Art of Reading Badly: Unredlichkeit

Redlichkeit, Nietzsche claims, is “the youngest virtue”: by this, he means that there were vast stretches of time in which humans made no great fuss about whether one was behaving honestly or dishonestly (D 456). In the first place, Nietzsche seems to make this claim based on an evident absence: he looks at the list of the four “cardinal virtues” more or less shared by Plato, Cicero, Augustine, and Aquinas (temperance, courage, wisdom, justice), does not find honesty listed there, and so concludes that Redlichkeit “is among neither the Socratic nor the Christian virtues” (D 556, D101). Nietzsche makes a stronger claim, however, when he suggests that Unredlichkeit – “dishonesty” – might be among “the preconditions of morality” (D 101). It is not surprising, then, that Daybreak – Nietzsche’s investigation of what that book’s subtitle calls the “prejudices of morality” – is centrally concerned with Unredlichkeit. To be sure, Daybreak is not a simply or straightforwardly genealogical story about Unredlichkeit (or, for that matter, Redlichkeit). However, existing as it does among the “preconditions of morality,” Unredlichkeit repeatedly reemerges as Nietzsche explores various facets and features of morality.  

In Daybreak (and its reverberations in later works), Unredlichkeit consistently appears as a devalued term. In the broadest sense, Unredlichkeit names attempts to flee or destroy what exists. By contrast, Nietzsche values truthfulness in general insofar as it suggests a potential (merely potential, lacking in almost all who have heretofore

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19 If, as numerous critics have observed, Nietzsche’s works often have a conversational structure, one might say that Unredlichkeit is a frequent theme, though never the exact focus, of Daybreak’s conversation about morality. Most all of the mentions of Unredlichkeit are clustered in Books I-IV, which are primarily negative in character. Book V shifts from critical considerations of moral history to positive investigations of “future virtues” and challenges faced by those who seek them. Accordingly, in this final book, Nietzsche more often mentions Redlichkeit rather then Unredlichkeit.
associated themselves with truth and truthfulness) commitment to engaging with the world, rather than turning away from the world in blithe ignorance or willful self-deception. As a way of organizing Nietzsche’s critical discussions of Unredlichkeit, I suggest that there are two related forms of Unredlichkeit that Nietzsche finds “at the origin of” morality: idealization and unyieldingness. I’ll consider each manifestation of Unredlichkeit in turn.

Nietzsche locates the first form of Unredlichkeit in a process of personal idealization. This process tends to occur, Nietzsche reasons, when some unhappy individual comes to find their present condition intolerable. Those who find themselves in such a state thus flee the modes of thought and forms of life they had so recently called “home.” Homeric agonism might constitute such a “home” for the early Greek philosophers of virtue, as Judaism might for the early exponents of Christian morality. However, for those who live “in the secret dread of having to go back there,” back to the intellectual and spiritual home they have fled, merely attempting to move on may not be enough, may not take, unless one knows where one is headed. So one sets one’s sights elsewhere, on “an ideal which has flesh and blood.” One turns to Socrates to escape the influence of Achilles, for example, or one affirms Christ to escape the authority of Moses. But as one affirms this new ideal, in order to have it function as a new ideal with no trace of the “home” one is coming from and struggling to avoid returning to, one “sets this person at so great a distance from himself that he can no longer see him clearly.” The idealizer thus squints – “half-closes his eyes” – and “reinterprets what he still sees into

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20 This paragraph quotes and glosses D 298.
the ‘beautiful.’” In one’s anxiety to escape one’s current way of life, one willfully
overlooks or even actively obscures potential problems with the new mode of life one is
trying to set forth. One would, quite simply, prefer not to know.21

Although he takes distance from this unredlich unknowingness, Nietzsche takes
care to note that, within the terms of classical and Christian moralities, it was no vice.
Valuing selflessness above truthfulness, the advocates of classical and Christian
moralities advanced their propositions “boldly as the truth in the face of all appearance
and... felt in doing so no religious or moral pang of conscience – for one... transcended
reality in honerem majorem [for the greater glory] of virtue or of God and without any
selfish interest” (D 456). While it poses no problems of internal consistency, Nietzsche
finds this process of closing oneself off from reality in the name of an ideal
“dishonest” [Unredliches] (D 456).22 Nietzsche is thus not simply suggesting that
traditional moralities hypocritically fail to live up to their own standards, but offering his
own evaluation which finds them lacking in truthfulness.

An interpretive practice marked by unyieldingness, a second manifestation of
Unredlichkeit, glorifies itself and persecutes an external opponent (which might be a
person, a doctrine, a text, etc.). Nietzsche’s main example here is the writing of Christian
scholars, which he offers as evidence of “how little Christianity educates the sense of
[Redlichkeit].”23 Christian scholars, on Nietzsche’s account, “present their conjectures as

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21 See also HAH II, WS 37, which makes an implicit contrast between, on the one hand, Redlichkeit, and,
the other, “oversights,” “a neglect of the small facts,” and a “lack of self-observation.”

22 Insofar as Austen praises candor as an ability to be “honestly blind,” there is a potentially interesting
tension (but not a simple contradiction) here. *Pride and Prejudice*, 217.

23 This paragraph quotes and glosses D 84.
boldly as if they were dogma and are rarely in any honest [redlichen] perplexity over the interpretation of a passage of the Bible.” Further clarifying the vice at stake here, Nietzsche suggests that “impudent arbitrariness” is a constitutive feature of Unredlichkeit. Nietzsche does not intend this description as a compliment: he regards this arbitrariness as evidence of an “unheard-of philological farce,” and it prompts him to “laughter and rage.” In a perfect reflection of the way unredlich idealizers falsify by “beautifying” their objects, unredlich self-aggrandizers “pummel and punch” the texts they claim to be interpreting. When preachers model these techniques of interpretation, “the art of reading badly is in all due form imparted to the people.” Indeed, Christian biblical interpreters not only strain the text (suggesting, “however much Jewish scholars protested, [that] the Old Testament... [spoke] of Christ and only of Christ”) but also take to directly “enriching” (that is, falsifying) the text. Christian biblical interpreters interpreted as if they “were conducting a war and paid more heed to their opponents than to the need to stay honest [Redlichkeit].” This bellicose form of Unredlichkeit, like the idealizing form of Unredlichkeit, is thus marked by an unhealthy fixation that gets in the way of one’s ability to relate to the world in an “honest” way.

Nietzsche’s criticism of this way of approaching texts makes clear that, if a “selfless” disregard for appearances in the name of an ideal is unredlich, one should not therefore conclude that, by Redlichkeit, Nietzsche means an honest avowal of selfishness. As I shall detail later, Redlichkeit includes willingness to allow for perplexity, and thus

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24 Nietzsche does use the noun form here, so to make my partial un-translation work grammatically, the translation might be amended to read: they “paid more heed to their opponents than to their Redlichkeit.”

25 See also D 482, which (implicitly) links Redlichkeit with the gentleness and modesty, and (explicitly) contrasts it with the “inclination for fame.”
serves as a ballast to a self-serving certainty. Redlichkeit means allowing oneself to be unsure, without claiming for oneself the privileges that can accrue to a pure unknowing. Thus, far from suggesting that Redlichkeit is a process of pure self-assertion, Nietzsche associates both obsequious idealization and unyielding selfishness with Unredlichkeit. Contra Malcolm Bull, reading on Nietzschean terms cannot mean “reading for victory” – Nietzsche is a thoughtful critic of the practice of reading with “ruthlessness and ambition,” not an exemplary of that approach.

Paul, whom Nietzsche calls “the first Christian,” seems to have passed through both of these forms of Unredlichkeit. In his early life, Paul was a “fanatical defender and chaperone of” the Jewish God and law. When Paul subsequently found himself unable to live up to the very law he had heretofore idealized, however, “he sought about for a means of destroying it.” On Nietzsche’s account, then, Paul does not remain in the position of “the extremest fanaticism in revering and defending the law,” which seems to parallel the first form of Unredlichkeit detailed above. However, Paul does not overcome, and in fact exemplifies, the “intractable lust for power” and corresponding will to destruction that characterizes the second form of Unredlichkeit. If idealizing and

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27 Anti-Nietzsche, 35. Bull acknowledges that Nietzsche praises a different style of reading in Human, All Too Human, but suggests that “in his later writings, this possibility is dismissed,” ibid., 34. At minimum, then, I am extending the timeline on Bull’s argument, so that this more gentle style of reading persists at least into the book Nietzsche wrote directly after Human, All Too Human, i.e. Daybreak. Bull mostly relies on Nietzsche’s late notes collected in The Will to Power to support his reading, but one specific piece of support he offers from Nietzsche’s published writing is AC, “Forward,” where Nietzsche suggests that his only “rightful readers” are those who are “honest in intellectual matters to the point of harshness.” The word translated here as honest is rechtschaffen, which I suggested in a note above seems to replace redlichen in Nietzsche’s last writings.

28 This paragraph quotes and glosses D 68
unyielding interpretations are two manifestations of Unredlichkeit, and Paul is in fact “the first Christian,” we might understand why Nietzsche insists that Redlichkeit is not among the Christian virtues, why indeed he finds Unredlichkeit at the core of Christianity.  

In the passages of *Daybreak* I have arranged here into a genealogy of Unredlichkeit, Nietzsche seems to invite his readers to learn from Paul’s case. If Paul, the first Christian, exemplifies Unredlichkeit as reading badly by idealizing and/or destroying, he might, by means of contrast, also provide an introductory lesson in the art of reading well, of reading with Redlichkeit. By reflecting on the dishonest position of the unknowing and the unyielding, Nietzsche leads his readers to ask: what if we were to read scripture “not as the revelations of the ‘Holy Spirit’” and also “without thinking all the time of our own personal needs,” without seeking “a signpost of consolation in one’s own personal distress” or “read[ing] oneself into and out of it” (D 68)? What would it mean, that is, to interpret texts in a way that neither disavowed our interpretive activity nor disregarded the independent status, force, and interest of the object being interpreted? What if, moving from the text of scripture to the materials of the world, we were to more broadly practice strategies of reading, interpretation, and engagement that leave behind both “credulous emulation and blind and bitter animosity” (D 167, my emphasis)?

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29 “The First Christian” is the title of this section of *Daybreak*. For Nietzsche, Christianity proper (as opposed to “a few Jewish sectarians”) only emerges in a moment of “sudden enlightenment” when Paul realizes he cannot fulfill the Jewish law and concludes that he must therefore destroy it.

30 Nietzsche uses the phrase “the art of reading well” in AC 52, again in the context of a critical contrast with Christian theology.

one were to do those things, then, at least in comparison to classical ethics and early Christianity, one really would be trying “something novel” (D 167). For Nietzsche, to learn to read well and thus to approach the world with “conditional consent [not self-effacing idealization] and benevolent opposition [not unyielding self-aggrandizement]” would be “to grow more honest [Redlichkeit] toward oneself” (D 167, my emphasis).³² To read this way would mean engaging in “a free and honest [redlichen] exercise of one’s own spirit” (D 68).

Growing Pains: Modern Redlichkeit

In the texts just quoted, Nietzsche seems to figure Redlichkeit as a mere possibility, a figure on the horizon. At times, however, Nietzsche appears to suggest that his contemporaries had already achieved something called Redlichkeit. To be sure, Nietzsche’s account of Redlichkeit is no mere happy history of progress where secular reason overcomes premodern forms of fanaticism and dogmatism. The classical forms of Unredlichkeit survive even at the heart of the nineteenth century. Unredlichkeit also seems to take updated forms, and some of Nietzsche’s descriptions of his contemporaries suggest that the “prejudices of philosophers” grow out of and extend the “prejudices of

³² Again, to make my partial un-translation work grammatically, the syntax would need to become slightly more awkward: “to grow in Redlichkeit toward oneself.”
Nevertheless, uneven and multitextured as this account of historical transformation is, it seems that Nietzsche largely understands modernity as a shift away from Unredlichkeit. If the Greeks could advance their moral doctrines “boldly in the face of all appearance” (D 456) and early Christians could gleefully falsify Hebrew scripture with a good conscience, Nietzsche’s contemporaries were not so free: “Whoever is unyielding these days will often have pangs of conscience because of his [Redlichkeit]; for unyieldingness and [Redlichkeit] are virtues which belong to different ages” (GS 159). There is a “type of [Redlichkeit]” which at least some of Nietzsche’s contemporaries possess which is “alien to all religion-founders” (GS 319). Whereas unredlich religious folks have no qualms about falsifying reality, whether in order to glorify it or subdue it, Redlichkeit leads others to ask: “What did I really experience? What was going on inside and around me?” They, the religious, have “a thirst for things that are contrary to reason,” while “we, we others, we reason-thirsty ones, want to face our experiences as sternly as we would a scientific experiment” (GS 319). There is, then, a sense in which Redlichkeit – a type of Redlichkeit – is the virtue of the modern age.

In this section, I will work to unpack this modern, stern, scientific form of Redlichkeit. My argument will be that the defining feature of modern Redlichkeit, sternly

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33 I draw these phrases from the title of Book One of *Beyond Good and Evil* and the subtitle of *Daybreak*, respectively. Nietzsche notes the difficulty his contemporaries have with the unredlich tendency to idealize flesh and blood (D 167, D 298), but does not suggest his contemporaries have given up on idealization altogether. As evidence of philosophers’ lack of Redlichkeit, Nietzsche notes that “they all act as if they had discovered and arrived at their genuine convictions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely insouciant dialectic,” a tendency he finds exemplified in Spinoza’s “mathematical form” (BGE 5). An idealization of methods and systems thus seems to take the place of the idealization of people, but Nietzsche still finds it useful to characterize this process (negatively) in relation to Redlichkeit.

34 Again, Nietzsche’s history is uneven and multitextured, not a simple story of progress: Redlichkeit remains alien to “our dear religious ones” today (ibid).
facing reality, represents a necessary step in overcoming the Unredlichkeit of antiquity, but does not in itself constitute the Redlichkeit Nietzsche praises as “our virtue,” the virtue of free spirits and philosophers of the future. Following Sarah Kofman’s masterful example, my method here involves paying particularly close attention to the metaphors Nietzsche deploys in conjunction with Redlichkeit. In particular, I will attend to the way Nietzsche employs metaphors of youth and maturity when discussing Redlichkeit and its opposite in order to clarify the distinction between Redlichkeit and Unredlichkeit and to begin to detail what Nietzsche might find problematic about the modern form of Redlichkeit.

An extended parable in Beyond Good and Evil provides one of the most elaborate instances of the youth/maturity contrast in connection with Redlichkeit. In the parable’s first moment, Nietzsche begins by suggesting that young people – and, I am suggesting, we should also read this (with reservations and complexities to be elaborated further on)

35 Cf. Nancy and Lane, who more directly align the Redlichkeit Nietzsche praises with science.


37 BGE 31. Except where otherwise noted, this paragraph and the next two will continue to quote from this section. Evidence that this section is intended at least in part as parable includes the following section, which is explicitly about three stages of – not life history but – “human history,” although, admittedly, the three stages of each section do not perfectly align with each other (BGE 32). Nietzsche has certainly not been the only one to employ metaphors of youth and maturity to describe historical transitions. Often, the traditional deployment of these metaphors has been joined with the assumption that particular people in the present are somehow more directly tied to the past, thus “backward,” “primitive,” or “underdeveloped.” For exemplary analyses of this use of the tropes of youth and maturity to describe historical transitions, see Amy Kaplan’s criticism of nineteenth century US feminism’s use of metaphors of youth and maturity as shoring up logics of intervention, “Manifest Domesticity,” American Literature 70.3 (1998), 581–606, and Donna Jones’s criticism of twentieth century French anthropology’s use of the language of the primitive and the civilized as a mere metaphorical pawn in monological intra-European national disputes, Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). The traditional use of these metaphors gives reason to be cautious. However, as detailed in the main text, Nietzsche resists being read as telling a straightforward story about a transition from youth to maturity, antiquity to modernity, supposed savagery to supposed civilization. He reconfigures and revalues these terms in a way that certainly doesn’t immunize him from all potential criticism about the dangerous histories of such contrasts, but which at least would require highly specialized modes of critique.
as “young Europe” – are “intrinsically falsifying and deceitful.” The “falsifying” posture of youth described here seems synonymous with Unredlichkeit. Although in this passage Nietzsche does not explicitly write “Unredlichkeit,” or indeed use any form of the word, the details of the description here match a number of the features of Unredlichkeit set forth in the previous section. When he notes that young people have “the worst possible taste, the taste for the unconditional,” Nietzsche might be read to be recalling the association of Unredlichkeit with “unyieldingness” in Daybreak. Moreover, Nietzsche suggests the need to falsify first emerges in young people because of their desire to “vent themselves” on people and things, an aim parallel to that of the bellicose philology of early Christian scholars. And insofar as Nietzsche here says that young people not only “despise” but also to “admire,” insofar as he identifies them not only by their “wrath” but also by their “reverence,” there is also a fainter reflection of the idealizing position here, too. This first moment of the story, then, suggests we are on familiar ground.

A second moment in Nietzsche’s story comes as the youthful person recognizes new cognitive virtues. Here, the association with Redlichkeit is explicit, for the emergence of these new virtues comes about as the result of “the subtler development of honesty.” Elsewhere, in a less allegorical history, Nietzsche casts light on what this development might entail: in addition to valuing “faith and conviction,” which might be read to correspond, respectively, with the idealizing and unyielding forms of Unredlichkeit, thinkers developing a sense of Redlichkeit come to recognize the power of “scrutiny, denial, suspicion, and contradiction” (GS 110). These features seem to be essential to the kind of Redlichkeit described here, with suspicion playing a particularly
important role. Armed with a newfound commitment to Redlichkeit, “we punish ourselves by distrusting our feelings, we torture our enthusiasm with doubts.” The once-young soul “ends up turning suspiciously on itself, still raging and wild, even in the force of its suspicion and the pangs of its conscience,” it is “furious... with itself,” it “impatiently... tears itself apart,” it exacts “revenge... for having blinded itself for so long.” Moreover, there are feedback loops at work here, since all of this wrath arises in part out of a concern to guard against “the depletion of a more subtle, genuine honesty.”

The “partisan[ship]... against ‘youth’” Nietzsche details at this second moment in the story seems to describe the attitude of the enlightened toward prephilosophical naïveté. This is the “type of Redlichkeit” achieved within modernity, and it is no small achievement. For many, this has seemed to be a defining characteristic of the era, exemplified indeed by Nietzsche himself, who Paul Ricoeur famously placed alongside Marx and Freud as one of the modern “masters of suspicion.”

However, here Nietzsche, the putative master of suspicion, seems more interested in distancing himself from suspicion than in practicing it. His admiration for the achievement represented by the emergence of Redlichkeit in its modern form should not obscure the striking parallels between modern Redlichkeit and its disavowed antagonist,

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38 Compare my comments here to what I traced as Rousseau’s skepticism toward epistemic cruelty.


40 The friction between Ricoeur’s suggestion that Nietzsche helps to found a “school of suspicion” and the treatment of suspicion in Nietzsche’s own texts is also suggested by Elisabeth Strowick, “Comparative Epistemology of Suspicion: Psychoanalysis, Literature, and the Human Sciences,” Science in Context 18.4 (2005), 659–660. See also Z “The Leech,” in which Zarathustra encounters a man for whom Redlichkeit means “venomous, rigorous, vigorous, cruel, and inexorable.”
Unredlichkeit, nor the criticism thus implied. In its jealous protection of its own hard-
earned Redlichkeit and its “partisanship” against youth, the modern position resembles
nothing so much as the ancient attitude that lives in fear of returning to its own past form
of life and the unyielding will to protect one’s own current position. Nietzsche himself
suggests as much in the conclusion to the parable: “A decade later, we realize that all this
– was youthfulness too!” Apparent maturity turns out to have been a mere “transitional
state.” Insofar as the central features Nietzsche associates with Unredlichkeit are
unknowingness and unyieldingness, the skepticism and severity that define modern
Redlichkeit will often merely extend, or indeed compound, rather than resolve, the
problems posed by those positions.

The transitional, “still very immature” (D 456) nature of modern Redlichkeit can
be corroborated by a look at what Nietzsche later describes as modern Redlichkeit’s
exemplary representative, the “honest atheism” [redliche Atheismus] of Arthur
Schopenhauer (GS 357). For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer’s atheism represents the very
embodiment of the up-to-date, the very “air... we breathe” (GM 3.27). However,
Schopenhauer’s redliche atheism is not so much a radical break with Christian moralism
as its triumph:

One can see what it was that actually triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself,
the concept of truthfulness that was taken ever more rigorously; the father confessor’s refinement
of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual
cleanliness at any price (GS 357).

It is this scientific “severity” that Nietzsche finds shared among many of his
contemporaries. This attitude, however, is anything but the radical break from pre-
modern Unredlichkeit it takes itself to be. Nietzsche all but cites Beyond Good and Evil’s
parable here: Schopenhauer’s severe and scientific answer to the problem he posed for himself (the problem of the value of existence) “was – forgive me – something hasty, youthful, a mere compromise, a way of remaining and staying stuck in precisely those Christian and ascetic moral perspectives in which one had renounced faith along with the faith in God” (GS 357). The modern form of Redlichkeit – that characterized by a scientific sternness and austerity – seems radical and uncompromising but merely extends the oldest (ultimately unredlich) impulses of Christianity. When writing about his own time, Nietzsche describes Redlichkeit as something that makes people “swell with pride,” but this is merely the haughty pride of precocious youths in their false maturity (BGE 230).

Tracking his use of the metaphors of youth and maturity offers an indication of Nietzsche’s dissatisfaction with modern Redlichkeit. Perhaps surprisingly, however, Nietzsche’s many criticisms of modern Redlichkeit – as immature, as (self-)deceptive, as Christian, as ascetic, as moralistic – never culminate in a rejection of Redlichkeit as such. For Nietzsche, this does not even register as a choice: he says that Redlichkeit “is our

41 Although the texts I am focusing here come after the heyday of Redlichkeit in Nietzsche’s work, they revive themes presented as early as Daybreak. When Nietzsche says there that the “pages of the Jewish Pascal [i.e. Paul] expose the origin of Christianity as thoroughly as the pages of the French Pascal expose its destiny and that by which it will perish” (D 68), the former origin ought to be read as Unredlichkeit and the latter destiny as Redlichkeit. The reasons why “the origin of Christianity” might be glossed as Underlichkeit are elaborated in the previous section of this chapter. To complete the story, by suggesting that Christianity’s destiny is Redlichkeit, we need only note that, elsewhere, Nietzsche associates Pascal – that is, “the French Pascal” – with Redlichkeit (D 192).

42 BGE 230 is loaded with temporal markers that have guided my interpretation. Two diametrically opposed reading of Nietzsche’s views on truth and truthfulness emerge from readings which ignore (or, in fact, delete) the temporal markers in the passage: as Lane presents it, the section seems to first praise, then condemn Redlichkeit, then shift to another topic (hardness) which apparently is the same as Redlichkeit (“Honesty as the Best Policy,” 37). For Kofman, the text is evidence that Nietzsche advocates “risking the truth... that there is no truth” (Nietzsche and Metaphor, 93). As I read it, however, the section suggests that Redlichkeit might “one day” serve as a positive term, but, “In the meantime,” “so far,” and since “long ago,” it has served as something that Nietzsche evaluates in negative terms. A body puffed up with pride also appears as a foil or danger for Redlichkeit in Z “The Magician” 2.
virtue and we cannot get rid of it, we free spirits,” then adds “– well then, we will want to work on it with all the love and malice at our disposal, and not get tired of ‘perfecting’ ourselves in our virtue, the only one we have left” (BGE 227). If the development of a scientific skepticism, distrust, and suspicion constitutes a crucial moment in the story Nietzsche is telling about Redlichkeit, it is not yet the endpoint of that story.

Free-spirited Redlichkeit

For Nietzsche, the will to truth is a kind of “youthful madness.” The free spirits of the future, the audience he hopes to inspire, will be quite different from those “youths who... want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into bright lights whatever is kept concealed.” As we have just seen, this drive to uncover is an important moment in the history of Redlichkeit, but one which may have reached its limits. As I read Nietzsche, this is not a reason to turn against truthfulness per se but suggests a need to rethink the interest in truth in terms of new ideals. Recovered from “the illness of severe suspicion,” the free spirit becomes “more childlike, and at the same time a hundred times subtler” (GS P.4). Nietzsche thus not only twists the meaning of the metaphors “youth” and “maturity” but also complicates the relationships between the two terms. Neither term is valued in itself, to the exclusion of the other, and the passages between the two

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43 This way of working on what you are stuck with should be compared with what, in the last chapter, I described as Rousseau’s decision to make a project out of accepting and orienting himself alongside what he nevertheless felt was his unalterable disposition.

44 Nietzsche here is working out from thinking about his own convalesce, but the point is clearly intended to be a broader one. Note also that in GS 110, discussed above in connection with BGE 31’s parable of youthfulness, the moment prior to the recognition of “scrutiny, denial, suspicion, and contradiction” as important cognitive traits is one in which “an intellectual play impulse” predominates. So the suspicion/play contrast is an important one.
are neither straight nor singular. Nietzsche treats the features of modern Redlichkeit as points of difference and differentiation in order to help his readers draw from the virtues that the free spirits of the future, the audience he hopes to inspire, will have overcome.

Nietzsche, in short, councils attending to and learning from what is distant from oneself. Insofar as he praises maturity, Nietzsche suggests that maturity means rethinking the very distinction between the serious and the frivolous, between youth and adulthood. As Nietzsche suggests elsewhere, “human maturity... means regaining that sense of seriousness we had towards play as children” (BGE 94). A truly mature Redlichkeit, then, would be one that had learned better how to play, would be a Wahrspielerei, “playing with truth” (D 418), and not a will to truth (Wille zur Wahrheit).

Consistent with a long tradition of German aesthetic theory, for Nietzsche, “play” indicates a kind of creative practice. Yet, because of the non-binary nature of Nietzsche’s history (and, perhaps, because of what Brian Massumi has recently termed

45 Among a voluminous literature on play – including work by Kant, Hegel, Simmel, Gadamer, and countless more recent theorists – a contrast with Friedrich Schiller here might be most instructive: Schiller was a marked influence on Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy, and the references to him sprinkled throughout Nietzsche’s writing suggest a more direct engagement than, say, his references to Hegel. A similar set of dualisms seems to be at work in both thinkers – art/science, youth/maturity – and in each case the idea seems to be reworking the dualism. Thus, without arguing for turning back the clocks to the classical period, Schiller praises the ancient Greek ability to combine “all the delights of art and all the dignity of wisdom,” “the first youth of imagination with the manhood of reason.” On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters, trans. by Elizabeth Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 41. This praise notwithstanding, though, for Schiller, the progress from youth to maturity seems more linear: he “distinguish[es] three different moments or stages of development through which both the individual and the species as a whole must pass, inevitably and in a definite order” (171). Although Schiller is clear to indicate that his types should not be read to indicate “any particular people” or “any particular age,” the “definite order” he assigns to the developmental process, alongside his uncritical importation of a Montesquieuian distinction between savage, barbarian, and civilized, makes his a much more standard modernization tale than Nietzsche’s. His notion of play likewise appears in juxtapositions similar to but slightly less complexly textured than those found in Nietzsche. For Schiller, the play-drive associated with the aesthetic is contrasted with the earnest [ernst, the same word translated as “serious” in Nietzsche] demands of sense-drive and form-drive: as the mutually canceling reciprocal action of both of the latter drives, play causes the seriousness [Ernst] associated with both to disappear from the scene (105). Schiller may anticipate Nietzsche (and other thinkers) who deconstruct the opposition between play and seriousness, though, when he remarks that play itself must be regarded with “earnestness,” or seriousness, indeed with “the twofold earnestness of duty and destiny” (107).
the logic of “mutual inclusion” characteristic of play itself, the Redlichkeit of free spirits “compels” them to become scientific, to become “physicists.” From modern Redlichkeit, the free spirit learns “how to observe,” in full awareness that “there neither are nor can be actions that are all the same” (GS 335). At the same time, free spirits treat the insights they gain from modern physics as transitional states, not ends in themselves. They approach the physicists’ tasks – description, observation, attention to the present – in a different way than the physicists themselves have. Free spirits “become physicists in order to become creators” (GS 335).

This contrast between physicists and creators can be clarified by revisiting the association of modern Redlichkeit with asceticism, introduced above in connection with Schopenhauer, whose severe scientific attitude Nietzsche diagnosed as “a way of remaining and staying stuck in... ascetic moral perspectives.” Nietzsche telegraphs an initial reason for this association between modern Redlichkeit and asceticism in Beyond Good and Evil’s parable on youthfulness, where he emphasizes that the turn against youth is in the first place a pleasurable turn against oneself (BGE 31). Nietzsche regards the “dangerous thrill of self-directed cruelty” that he associates with asceticism as dangerous because “youth” is not alone in being falsifying and deceitful: it shares these qualities with “everything that lives, grows, and propagates” (BGE 229, 230). Redlichkeit’s suspicious turn against the youthful will to ignorance is thus not only a turn against

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47 This observant attention to change is not only an instance of the non-antagonistic attitude toward difference and toward the past just described, but also an important way of cultivating that stance. In Nietzsche’s terms, the lessons of physics help the free spirit avoid the “bad taste” of “those who have nothing to do but drag the past a few steps further though time and who never live in the present” (GS 335).
oneself, but a turn against life in general. Life itself “meets resistance from... a type of cruelty on the part of intellectual conscience,” the “intellectual conscience” Nietzsche elsewhere associates with Redlichkeit (BGE 230). Indeed, finding “a drop of cruelty in every wanting-to-know,” Nietzsche tentatively suggests that this cruelty might simply be named “Redlichkeit” (BGE 229, 230). Modern Redlichkeit, then, does not move from science to creation; on the contrary, it involves a commitment to scientific severity even at the expense of the creativity of life itself.

Art provides a necessary counterforce to keep modern Redlichkeit from being merely moralizing and, indeed, to keep a severe and life-denying Redlichkeit from killing those who attempt to practice it. The arts are practices, techniques, and traditions humans have developed to generate and sustain the simplifications we need in order to live. Nietzsche thus understands his present as constituted by a precarious balance between life and art, on the one hand, and science and Redlichkeit, on the other:

Had we not approved of the arts and invented this type of cult of the untrue, the insight into general untruth and mendacity that is now [jetzt] given to us by science – the insight into delusion and error as a condition of cognitive and sensate existence – would be utterly unbearable. [Redlichkeit] would lead to nausea and suicide. But now [nun] our [Redlichkeit] has a counterforce that helps us avoid such consequences: art, as the good will to appearance. We do not always keep our eyes from rounding off, from finishing off the poem [i.e. we do not always practice the sort of self-restraint modern Redlichkeit would seem to require]; and then [when we artistically simplify reality] it is no longer eternal imperfection that we carry across the river of becoming – then we feel we are carrying a goddess, and are proud and childish in performing this service (GS 107, my emphasis; see also GS 114).

The basic idea here is that, if humans complied completely with the requirements of Redlichkeit as the modern period understands it, if we did not allow ourselves some creative license in our approach to the world, we would be unable to live. Art gives us away of understanding that “license” not as a mere imperfection to be overcome but as something praiseworthy. Notice, in particular, how the metaphor of youth and maturity...
resurfaces in this text. Here again, we have a contrast between austere, self-constraining Redlichkeit and “proud and childish” falsification. But, as I have suggested, Nietzsche seems more interested in exploring this contrast than in endorsing it. His way of locating the terms of the passage firmly in the present, with what translates as a repeated use of “now,” offers readers a hint not to accept the contrast as absolute.

Rather than suggesting that we must choose between honesty and life, between maturity and ignorance, I take Nietzsche to be suggesting a way of undoing this choice. In the work I am considering, Nietzsche refuses to rest with a simple binary that would cast the “life-preserving errors” of art in opposition to the life-denying force of Redlichkeit. Already, “the drive to truth has proven itself to be a life preserving power, too.” A broadly “scientific” skepticism toward traditional ideas and attitudes has profoundly (if unevenly) increased the life chances of many people. But how much further can humans go in combining truth and life? “To what extent can truth stand to be incorporated?” – incorporated into life as errors previously were – “that is the question; that is the experiment” (GS 107). Nietzsche’s experiment is to see whether Redlichkeit might be recast, not as a life-denying power, but as something that might be incorporated into life.

If life is in essence something artful, incorporating Redlichkeit into life might require a form of Redlichkeit defined, not against art, but as something artistic in itself.

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48 Cf. the final paragraph of his early essay “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” in The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings (Cambridge University Press, 1999). There, Nietzsche presents a sort of standoff between “the man of reason” and “the man of intuition,” each with their own peculiar forms of dissimulation and deception. While The Birth of Tragedy 14, ibid., raises the question of an “artistic Socrates,” that section ends by phrasing the point in terms of art as a “correlative and supplement” to science, rather than (as the early phrase might suggest, and as I am arguing the later works do suggest) a kind of “artistic science.”
At the moment, it is anything but: Nietzsche associates modern Redlichkeit with a body that inelegantly “sighs and stretches its limbs” (BGE 227). To be sure, many moderns have recognized the value of Redlichkeit, and in fact always find themselves desiring “for once to be honest [redlich] with others” (GS 329). However, modern material conditions – “one thinks with a watch in hand, as one eats lunch with an eye on the financial pages” – make it so that moderns mistake the demand for “crude obviousness” with a concern for Redlichkeit (GS 329).

For life in a hunt for profit constantly forces people to expend their spirit to the point of exhaustion in continual pretense or outsmarting or forestalling others: the true virtue today is doing something in less time than someone else. And thus hours in which honesty is allowed are rare; during them, however, one is tired and wants not only to ‘let oneself go’ but also to lay oneself down and stretch oneself out unceremoniously to one’s full length and breadth (GS 329, my emphasis).

For Nietzsche, the modern way of writing letters offers the chief example of this undignified process of self-stretching – those letters through which, in Jürgen Habermas’s famous analysis, “the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity.” In Nietzsche’s estimation, such forms of self-display are “unceremonious”; as a result of the ever-increasing “haste of the workers,” “one no longer has time and energy for ceremony, for civility with detours” (GS 329). Thus the modern concern with honesty comes too late. Now that we desire Redlichkeit, we no longer have the artistic sense – “the feeling for

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50 Passages like this might be read to exemplify what Habermas dismissively refers to Nietzsche’s “aristocratic pretensions.” Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, 13. Certainly, Nietzsche here seems to, by means of a myopic and misguided metonymy, direct his criticism at workers themselves instead of capitalism as a historical force. To read Nietzsche as expressing a longing for the return to feudal nobility misses the mark, though. Note, for example, what Nietzsche says to those “experts” of modern Redlichkeit, the Germans: in this, “they can ’still go far’” (BGE 244). These are not the words of someone satisfied with Redlichkeit in the forms it can assume under current conditions, but neither are they reactionary cries for a return to the past. On the contrary, Unredlichkeit produces “physical disgust” in the free spirit (D 56).
form itself, the ear and eye for the melody of movements” – that a more vital practice of Redlichkeit would require.

I believe it is such a form of creative Redlichkeit – a Redlichkeit of the future, distinct from the stern Redlichkeit of modern scientists and the fumbling and inelegant Redlichkeit of the modern bourgeoisie – which Nietzsche sees worthy of affirmation and advancement. In short, if modern Redlichkeit and art now face one another as force and counterforce, it seems that the Redlichkeit of the future will have to come closer to the practice of artists. To return once again to the terms of *Beyond Good and Evil*’s parable of youthfulness, for Nietzsche, people have advanced beyond the “transitional state” and achieved real maturity when they “learn to put some art into their feelings,” when they gain “that art of nuance which is life’s greatest reward.” It is in this sense that the Redlichkeit of free spirits compels them to become creators. Through the notion of a free-spirited Redlichkeit, Nietzsche seems to be trying to work out what a creative, non-ascetic practice of truth-telling would look like.

**Winning like a Loser: Rousseau and Other Ascetics**

To appreciate the novelty of Nietzsche’s view of truth-telling as a creative practice, suggested through his use of Redlichkeit, it will help to examine an account of truth-telling that I consider quite close, but importantly different, from Nietzsche’s own. The focus of the previous chapter, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, provides such a proximate view. Although Nietzsche might be loathe to acknowledge it, “the moral tarantula” (D P. 4) Rousseau had already rejected a number of forms of truthfulness that Nietzsche would...
also reject. In other words, in what he opposes, Rousseau often seems to anticipate Nietzsche. Nevertheless, Rousseau’s own positive accounts of truthfulness are not quite Nietzschean. Rousseau values a truthfulness that is sacrificial rather than creative. His fixation on others leads to a fantastical self-revision quite distinct from the practice Nietzsche names Redlichkeit. Thus, although he successfully battles many of what Nietzsche will consider avatars of the ascetic ideal, Rousseau’s own concept of truthfulness remains (or becomes) thoroughly ascetic. Rather than directly revisit the arguments of the previous chapter, here I’ll examine a new text, Rousseau’s last and most sustained consideration of truth and truthfulness, the Fourth Walk from his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker.*

In the Fourth Walk, through a complicated series of reflections, Rousseau arrives at two questions: “when and how we owe the truth to another” and “whether there are cases in which we may innocently deceive” (45). After thoroughly searching his potential reasons for valuing truthfulness, he concludes that his commitment to “the truth” has little to do with some disembodied notion of “the reality of things” or “abstract notions of the true and the false” (57). More interested in truth as a “virtue” than as a mere “metaphysical entity” (58), Rousseau seems to anticipate Nietzsche in recognizing the problem of truth as a problem of values and evaluations which no simple appeals to the “objective world” could resolve. Moreover, on the way to this conclusion, and again


52 For Rousseau, at the end of his life, these seem to be real questions, real problems. He notes at the very outset that “the ‘know thyself’ of the temple at Delphi was not as easy a maxim to follow as I had believed in my *Confessions*” (43). As the previous chapter showed, the *Dialogues* are a moving demonstration of this kind of post-Confessional project. In the *Reveries*, Rousseau tries a fresh approach.
anticipating Nietzsche, Rousseau suggests that the evaluation of the value of telling the truth cannot be reduced to either a calculation of probable consequences (as for the utilitarians) or an absolute criterion (as for many Kantians). True to the structure of a “walk,” Rousseau takes up or ventriloquizes first the utilitarian, then the absolutist, prohibition on lying, working each to its own exhaustion.

Accordingly, taking an initial stab at the question of “when and how we owe the truth to another,” Rousseau suggests that “particular and individual truth is not always a good; it is sometimes an evil, very often an indifferent thing” (45). The reasoning here is dictated by the logic of ownership implicit in the question he has given himself: if truth is something “owed,” it must be something like property, “and since property is founded only on usefulness, where there is no possible usefulness, there can be no property” (46). Telling the truth will be good, according to this perspective, when the truth in question can be classed among “the things important for a man to know and of which he must be aware to achieve happiness” (45). These truths are owed absolutely; indeed, to withhold them can only be a grievous form of theft (45). Conversely, “an idle fact,” a “truth stripped of every kind of possible usefulness, cannot... be a thing owed, and consequently he who suppresses it or disguises it does not lie at all” (46). Without yet stepping out of this property-bound, utilitarian perspective, Rousseau puts an initial question to it in his very next sentence: “But are there any of these truths so perfectly sterile as to be in every way useless for everything?” (46)53

53 Compare Arendt’s account of Hobbes, who she says “consoled himself with the existence of indifferent truths,” “Truth and Politics,” 226.
For the moment, Rousseau allows this question to hang in suspense, and turns to the question of “whether there are cases in which we may innocently deceive.” He first approaches this new question by applying the results of his investigation of the first question, i.e. with a reflection on bare or “idle” facts. According to this line of thought, whereby at least some portion of the truth that might be told concerns neutral and amoral facts, “he who deceives by saying the opposite of the truth is no more unjust than he who deceives by not declaring it; for with useless truths, error is no worse than ignorance” (46). At this point, though, the previously postponed perplexities quickly multiply. In rapid succession, Rousseau asks:

- “If the obligation to tell the truth is found only on its usefulness, how will I make myself the judge of this usefulness?”
- Whose “use” matters, when, and how much?
- What about the conflicts between various personal interests, or between public and private interest, or between present and absent persons?
- “Am I confident of understanding all the relationships of the matter well enough so as to apply the insights I possess only according to the rules of equity?”
- Is the question exhausted by calculating relationships between different persons? What about the relationship of self to self? “In examining what we owe others have I sufficiently examined what we owe ourselves and what we owe the truth for its own sake?” (47)

These questions seem unanswerable from the a perspective that attempts to assess the value of truthfulness according to its “consequences,” or at least from the minimal elaboration Rousseau gives that perspective here.

Rousseau is thus tempted to glance in a proto-Kantian direction: “How many embarrassing discussions we could easily extricate ourselves from by saying: let us
always be truthful, whatever comes of it” (47). He takes up the voice of this perspective for all of a paragraph before abruptly cutting it off: “But that is to settle the question without answering it” (47). If the question is when and how truthfulness is to be valued, one cannot answer it by simply asserting that truthfulness is valuable.

Rousseau thus returns to, and offers a final rebuke of, an evaluation of truthfulness based on the calculation of its effects. Evaluating speech by its consequences is ineffective, Rousseau argues, because, “apart from the fact that these consequences are not always perceptible or easy to recognize, they vary infinitely, as do the circumstances surrounding these speeches” (48). Consequences are thoroughly and incalculably beset by hazards. In response to these difficulties, Rousseau’s positive (if tentative) approach to the problem of truthfulness continues to be motivated by a concern about how to evaluate or assess language, but redefines the locus of that evaluation: he turns his attention from the external effects of speech to the inner intentions that motivate speech. He distinguishes the type of truthful man who “faithfully cite[s] places, times, and persons” in a way that “costs him nothing” from a type he calls the truthful man, who “never serves [truth] so faithfully as when it is necessary to sacrifice himself for it” (51). It is this ideal of living not merely truthfully but truthfully that Rousseau finally uses to assess how well or poorly he had lived up to his motto Vitam impendere vero.

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54 When I call this view proto-Kantian, I have in mind Kant’s (citation of Benjamin Constant’s) famous example of the murderer at the door to whom you would be obligated to impart the whereabouts of your friend. Allen Wood makes a compelling case that Kant himself does not have quite the “rigoristic craziness” about truthfulness he is often assumed to have, but even Wood’s Kant nevertheless remains on the side of “the strictness of important moral rules.” Kantian Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 251. For this reason, and for the reason that, even if not Kant’s own position, it is a position widely regarded as Kantian, I call this absolutist moment in Rousseau proto-Kantian.
The terms of this final critique are consistent with what in the previous chapter I called Rousseau’s attention to chance, but the proposed alternative, a turn to intentions as the primary locus of evaluations of truthfulness, represents a departure from the modes of attuning to hazard I traced in Rousseau’s earlier work. While the “Letter on Providence,” the “Letter on the Theatre,” Emile, and the Dialogues all urge readers to turn their attentions away from intentions toward effects, even as those effects are judged to be hazard-beset and ultimately uncertain, the Fourth Walk uses the uncertainty of effects as a reason to return to the perceived certainty of intentions. Indeed, in its conclusion, the Fourth Walk seems to depart from Rousseau’s earlier writing on several points. Rather than dwelling in his bad feelings, Rousseau now wishes he could purge himself of them. Rather than tracing a line between his weakness and his truthfulness, Rousseau now connects his weakness with his lies, and wishes for “the courage and the strength to be truthful always” (58). Rather than a strained and broken reach toward others, truthfulness now becomes a matter of “what I owed myself.” Rather than truthfulness being presented as a kind of imprudent compulsion, the problem is now on the contrary that in lying we “degrade ourselves” (58).

Rousseau’s embrace of a logic of self-sacrifice, regarding truthfulness favorably only when it is linked to pain and risk, illustrates the gap between Rousseau and

Nietzsche on the question of truth-telling. At the heart of Nietzsche’s problematization of the will to truth is an association between truth and what he calls “ascetic ideals.” For Nietzsche, utilitarians and Kantians are both eminently ascetic, and so he could only applaud the way Rousseau skillfully and presciently disposes of those positions. However, despite this distance traveled, Rousseau’s surprising conclusion seems to be to reaffirm, more explicitly and emphatically than ever before, an ascetic version of truthfulness. Rousseau makes every effort to disentangle himself from the problems of a calculus of utility, of absolutism, and of metaphysics – and makes several positive steps toward thinking truth as a problem of value – but his exclusive defense of truthfulness-as-self-sacrifice ultimately seems to validate Nietzsche’s suggestion that will to truth and will to death so far go hand-in-hand. Indeed, the very distance Rousseau travels from traditional versions of asceticism before affirming truth for ascetic reasons perhaps confirms Nietzsche’s otherwise puzzling suggestion that the will to truth is not a remnant of the ascetic ideal but the kernel of that ideal (GM III.27).

Certainly, Nietzsche himself sometimes speaks favorably of sacrifice, and Nietzsche also recognizes the existence of painful truths. What distinguishes Rousseau and Nietzsche here? Nietzsche describes Rousseau as “sick with unbridled vanity and

56 While Nietzsche’s frequent references to Rousseau are extremely valuable for illuminating Nietzsche’s own positions, they are often too polemical to reveal much about Rousseau. I’ve thus reconstructed, on the basis of a more carefully detailed reading of Rousseau, potential Nietzschean reservations about Rousseau. The terms of my criticisms here are consistent with many, but significantly different from other, of Nietzsche’s own criticisms of Rousseau. For accounts of Nietzsche’s own critical treatment of Rousseau, see especially Alex McIntyre, “Nietzsche Contra Rousseau,” The Sovereignty of Joy: Nietzsche’s Vision of Grand Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 100–126, which emphasizes Nietzsche’s use of Rousseau as “a type,” a symbol of the wrong way of attempting to overcome Christianity (and Goethe as the self-overcoming of the Rousseauian type); and Penelope Deutscher, “‘Is it not remarkable that Nietzsche... should have hated Rousseau?’ Woman, Femininity: Distancing Nietzsche from Rousseau,” Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory (London: Routledge, 1993), 162–188, which carefully compares a number of superficially similar passages in Rousseau and Nietzsche on women.
unbridled self-contempt” (TI, “The Improvers of Mankind,” 48). We might not expect that these two traits would exist side by side in the same person, but the dynamic is basic to Nietzsche’s physiology and psychology of asceticism. The ascetic disposition “becomes more self-assured and triumphant to the same degree as its own condition, the physiological capacity to live, decreases” (GM III.10). The “despite oneself” of asceticism is a kind of “trick” to provide resources for a weak self (GM III.13).

Nietzsche’s way of dividing the weak and the strong, the sick and the healthy, is probably politically irredeemable, the suppleness, subtlety, and slipperiness of his use of that language notwithstanding. But, as much as possible, I would like to bracket that language and attend to the movement Nietzsche points to through that language. Nietzsche’s critique of asceticism shows that telling the truth “despite oneself” doesn’t quite work when one remains, as Rousseau does in the *Reveries*, fully committed to the mission of vindicating oneself, of proving one’s own innocence.

The Rousseau of the *Dialogues* is unable to escape, but is committed to navigating, his feelings of weakness and failure. The Rousseau of the *Reveries*, by contrast, tends to displace his failures on to others and more fully deny his own limitations. Nietzsche might say this redirection of a feeling of one’s own failings to a blaming of others then back around to oneself is a classic example of the mechanisms of

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58 A similar dynamic is at work in the Unredlich idealizer (who “squints,” like the “man of ressentiment” at GM I.8). Although the idealizer “patiently submits himself and his kind to mistreatment” and “takes sides against himself” in the name of the ideal, since he is both “the one mishandled” and the “interpreter” of the ideal empowered to do the mishandling, this idealist “feels... something like a martyrdom – thus he mounts to the peak of his arrogance” (D 298). Thus, this selfless denial of appearances is only apparently selfless.
ressentiment under the influence of ascetic ideals (GM III.15–16); the earlier Rousseau might himself recognize in this reactive movement the workings of amour-propre.\textsuperscript{59}

While in the previous chapter I tried to think through the positive lessons contained in the faltering project of the Dialogues, I find that the project of the Reveries gets unproductively snagged on this point, that is, snagged on Rousseau himself.

In his attempt to move against and beyond Nietzsche, Malcolm Bull has recently called for a practice of “reading like a loser.” Although its name promises something like the Rousseau of the Dialogues that I admire, in its details this method more closely resembles the Rousseau of the Reveries I am here criticizing. For Bull, when we read like losers, we neither accept the arguments of a text as affirmations of our form of life nor do we reject a text as bad and mistaken (and affirm some alternative as better and more correct); instead of “reading for victory with Nietzsche, or even reading for victory against Nietzsche... we read for victory against ourselves.”\textsuperscript{60} When we read like losers, the power of the text will be its power over us, the arguments it makes against us. For Bull, this “of course” means a “far less pleasurable” mode of reading. But Nietzsche would seriously question this “of course,” and the reading of Rousseau shows why: in the strange logic of asceticism, self-contempt is a form of vanity rather than an escape from

\textsuperscript{59} Rousseau describes the circuitous, calamitous route of amour-propre this way: “as soon as one adopts the habit of measuring oneself against others and moving outside oneself in order to assign oneself the first and best place, it is impossible not to develop an aversion for everything that surpasses us, everything that lowers our standing, everything that diminishes us, everything that by being something prevents us from being everything,” Dialogues 112. In an arresting formulation, Rousseau writes that those animated by amour-propre “don’t even know how to love themselves; they only know how to hate what is not themselves,” ibid., 157.

\textsuperscript{60} Anti-Nietzsche, 36
it. Indeed, when Bull’s losers read Nietzsche, “we will think primarily of ourselves.”

The loser’s motto is “that sounds like me.” That sounds like a problem to me. The self-declared losers think primarily of themselves, not the subhuman wastes they are supposedly identifying with, and so the so-called loser starts to sound an awful lot like a winner. For Bull’s losers, the objects of identification change, but the relentless unidirectionality of identification does not. Rather than suggesting that contemporary readers must become anti-Nietzschean to read otherwise than “for victory,” I find that Nietzsche’s Redlichkeit offers one of the most promising alternative styles of reading.

Surprisingly, however, a number of other commentators have interpreted the Redlichkeit that Nietzsche endorses in ways that seem to preserve its connections to ascetic ideals. For Jean-Luc Nancy, Nietzschean Redlichkeit appears as “the irredeemable loss of the self” in a pure act which displays “inner certitude and discipline,” “conformity to the laws of physics,” a “metaphysico-moral” criterion “of a Stoical type, perhaps.” In Redlichkeit, Nancy finds something strongly resembling “the essence of the categorical

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61 Ibid., 36.
62 Ibid., 39.
63 Later on, Bull himself raises the question of whether “there [is] a way to read like a loser that is not a form of disguised self-interest,” ibid., 143. In reply, he offers a model where “the other is a loser through whom reading passes, so that one loses oneself,” ibid. I think this reply continues to undervalue the Nietzschean insight that this instrumentalization of others, who I’d call real losers, comes with great pleasures and benefits for the self. Read as a critic of a self-serving practice of reading-by-identification, Nietzsche draws closer to the Rousseau of the dialogues, who, as we saw in Chapter 1, is a strong critic of this interpretive method. Chapter 3 will draw on Whitman to offer a more partial, less self-serving model of identification.
64 See especially D 370 and Z “On War and Warriors” – I return to these passages in the next section.
imperative,” namely “constraint.” Building on exactly these suggestions from Nancy, Melissa Lane characterizes Redlichkeit as “combining frank speaking with an unblinking acknowledgement of the reality which one perceives.” Redlichkeit, in contrast to the “desire for a[... easier existence,” and “insofar as it remains strong, is hostile to such self-indulgent and so self-deceiving emotional, hence cognitive, flaccidity.” Maudemarie Clark does not make Redlichkeit central to her exploration of Nietzsche’s views regarding truth the way Nancy and Lane do, but she too notes the persistence of “truthfulness or honesty” as positive evaluations in Nietzsche’s work. Clark implicitly departs from Nancy’s and Lane’s conclusions insofar as she repeatedly emphasizes the incompatibility of Nietzsche’s criticisms of asceticism and any doctrine defined by “limiting our capacity for knowledge,” starting with and above all including the constraints imposed by the Kantian “thing-in-itself” as it was interpreted in the nineteenth century. However, even as she (I think rightly) notes that other interpretations of Nietzsche are “too ascetic,” she concludes that Nietzsche’s ideal type “needs much of what the ascetic ideal trains one for: hardness against oneself, willingness

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66 Ibid., 83.
67 Lane, “Honesty as the Best Policy?,” 27.
68 Lane is explicit that she means this in the classical sense discussed by Foucault (27, 29), from which I take distance in the previous chapter.
69 Ibid., 32.
70 Ibid., 35. BGE 227 is pivotal to Lane’s interpretation (35–36), but she seems to elide a crucial distinction: on my reading, BGE 227 is more about hardness toward Redlichkeit rather than (as Lane suggests) Redlichkeit as hardness. Nancy makes a similar slip when he – ignoring key aspects of the text – takes the “cruelty” Nietzsche associates with Redlichkeit in Z “The Leech” to be a positive value (I construe this passage the same way Lane does, as a criticism of this interpretation of Redlichkeit). Lane cites Martha Nussbaum on the GS’s “extreme... critical attitude toward Stoic hardness,” but does not elaborate on how this position intersects with her own thesis (40).
71 Clark, Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy, 179.
to sacrifice desirability, comfort, and comfortableness for the truth.” While I have learned much from each of these positions, each seems to undervalue the transition Nietzsche calls for from science to creation, and thus to miss the distinctive notion of a creative truthfulness Nietzsche values in Redlichkeit.

The interpretation advanced here, which attends to the subtle distinctions and temporal markers in Nietzsche’s account of Redlichkeit, offers contemporary readers better access to the lessons of Nietzsche’s robust critique of asceticism and his creative reinterpretation of the value of truthfulness. As the case of Rousseau’s Reveries shows, without both dimensions, one risks sliding, despite oneself, back into oneself, adopting a moralistic and resentful stance. Revalued in terms of aesthetic ideals, truth appears not when I deny myself, but, on the contrary, by starting from myself. Understanding truth as self-sacrifice gets it backward, because truthfulness (at least the truthfulness Nietzsche thinks his readers need and have within reach) necessarily involves an expression and expansion of the self in response to the world. Nietzsche points us to another, non-ascetic way of acting “despite oneself,” i.e. Redlichkeit as a way of moving “beyond oneself.”

What is Creative?: Five Thoughts

The forms of creativity and creation Nietzsche associates with Redlichkeit should be distinguished from several others:

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72 Ibid., 21, 201.
1. The creativity of Redlichkeit is this-worldly, unlike the modes of creation or "poetizing" that characterized the ancient, idealizing forms of Unredlichkeit. My somewhat schematic presentation in the previous sections should not be taken to suggest that Nietzsche denies the creative aspects of ancient philosophy and theology. He readily acknowledges that even they contain “something artistic” (D 298). However, this form of creation is a way of attempting to escape from “home” – the idealizer creates in order to “look away from himself.” These forms of creation have sought to escape from the world by positing “another world” through idealization. Because of this motivation to turn away from the self and the world, Nietzsche acknowledges that those who are “addicted to God” often creatively “poetize,” but nevertheless finds them “sickly” (Z, “On the Hinterworldly”). Far from bringing them closer to Redlichkeit, this kind of creation is an expression of a degree to which they “hate the knowing ones and that youngest of virtues which is called [Redlichkeit]” (Z, “On the Hinterworldly”). By contrast, as the free spirit “learns to speak ever more honestly,” it “finds words and honors for the body and the earth,” rather than seeking to replace either (Z, “On the Hinterworldly”).

2. The creativity of Redlichkeit starts with itself, but it does not remain there. If modern Redlichkeit involves a suspicious hunt for secrets – a drive to dissect the lives of others – the Redlichkeit of free spirits impels them to become creators “who create themselves” (GS 335). Yet the creative Redlichkeit that characterizes

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73 Cf. Peter Hallward characterization of Gilles Deleuze’s “philosophy of creation” as one that takes us “out of this world.” Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation (London: Verso, 2006).
free spirits remains distinct from the bellicose form of self-assertion that characterizes early Christian Unredlichkeit. Even as they affirm and honor themselves, “all men who are honest [Redlichen] and seek the truth” must recognize “that every morality that affirms itself alone destroys too much valuable strength,” and must instead work to further “numerous novel experiments... in ways of life and modes of society” (D 164, my emphasis). Unlike “all those great self-opinionated believers who even now still want to impose their belief on the whole world and torment them to the quick,” free spirits must “act humanely with our ‘sense of [Redlichkeit]’” (D 536). Indeed, Nietzsche argues that to “never keep back or bury in silence that which can be thought against your thoughts,” but rather to “give it praise,” “is among the foremost requirements of [Redlichkeit] of thought” (D 370). This form of Redlichkeit might risk swinging back toward the self-lacerating stance common to the idealizer and the youthful scientist, but Nietzsche still urges his readers to avoid that position: even as he tells free spirits that, in their concern for truth, “a victory and a conquered fortress are no longer your concern,” he is quick to add “– but your defeat is no longer your concern either!” (D 370). Redlichkeit is thus praiseworthy when it moves

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74 Compare GM I.10: “Slave morality says ‘no’ on principle to everything that is ‘outside’, ‘other’, ‘non-self’: and this ‘no’ is its creative deed.”

75 See also Z “On War and Warriors”: “when your thought is defeated, then your [Redlichkeit] should cry out in triumph even for that!”
those who affirm it to expose themselves without self-sabotage and to engage
others without antagonism.  

3. *The creativity of Redlichkeit concerns production, not reproduction.* Redlichkeit is not simply the revelation or re-presentation of a preexisting subject or object. “All honest people” [allen Redlichen] aim “not merely to reproduce, but instead to *sur*produce,” that is, to “overproduce” (Z “Of Old and New Tablets” 24).

Reproduction simply replicates what already exists through oneself as one already is. As a form of truthfulness, we might recognize this sense of reproduction at work in the ideal of objectivity, or, as Nietzsche specifies, “modern ‘objectivity,’” the desire to deny my own involvement and simply act as a mirror, to stay silent and let objects do the talking (TI, “What the Germans Lack,” 6). The other modes of “truthfulness” most frequently associated with modernity and most frequently debated in connection with politics – “sincerity” (understood as the

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76 In outlining the kind of Redlichkeit that would characterize the free spirit, then, Nietzsche is drawing an incredibly fine set of lines. Insofar as it involves creatively going beyond oneself, Redlichkeit must remain oriented toward things and the earth, but “one grain of gratitude and piety too much: – and one suffers from it as a vice and, for all one’s [Redlichkeit] and independence, falls prey to a bad conscience” (D 293). In light of Nietzsche’s fine-grained distinctions, the conjunction of “Redlichkeit and independence” here should also be carefully circumscribed. In D 167, Nietzsche mentions two potential critical postures: one in which the critic positions him- or herself “above things” (as a modern scientific stance would seem to require), the other in which the critic “on his knees before things” (an unproductive slide in the other direction, “a danger of becoming a panegyrist of things” that Redlichkeit sometimes runs, according to D 550). Schopenhauer’s unique position is to be “against things,” “to range oneself alongside things and yet to do so as an enemy.” Nietzsche rejects this “unpleasant” approach. However, Nietzsche is not advocating reoccupying a space above things by claiming an unalloyed “independence,” nor that we revert to an idealizing posture but stop worshiping people and start worshiping things. Rather, he seems to want to draw on but recast the Schopenhauerian position, pointing toward a different way of being “alongside things.” For Nietzsche, becoming more honest seems to involve turning away from one way of relating to people (the unredlich tendency toward “unconditional homage”), and turning in a new way toward things. This turn is expressed by his citation of a maxim of Lazare Carnot: “Ce qui importe, ce no sont point les personnes: mais les choses.” The editors of the Cambridge edition of *Daybreak* render the sense of this maxim as: “What matters is not people but things.” Free-spirited Redlichkeit turns from people to things, not to lord over them, or to project one’s own powers onto them, but attend to them (perhaps even cooperate with them) with a delicate mix of creativity and respect. In GS 107, Nietzsche speaks of “that freedom over things that our ideal demands of us,” but it seems that this the first person plural refers to “we moderns,” not “we future free spirits.” The temporal markers that place the passage in the present, discussed above, support this interpretation.
correspondence between the pre-existing intentions of an intimate self and the public actions and roles that self takes up) and “authenticity” (understood as the tough and demanding assertion of a pre-social self without consideration of social role or location) – are equally determined by the frame of re-production. Modern Redlichkeit exemplifies what might be called subproduction, insofar as it merely mucks about in the depths, suspiciously seeking to undermine the productions of others rather than offering its own. Understood against these foils, the surproduction that characterizes free-spirited Redlichkeit attempts “to create over and beyond” oneself (Z “On Immaculate Perception”). As a form of surproduction, free-spirited Redlichkeit moves away from “modern objectivity,” modern sincerity, modern authenticity, and modern Redlichkeit toward what Nietzsche’s later work refers to as a “future ‘objectivity,’” a perspectival knowing that acknowledges itself as such and seeks to enrich (rather than eliminate) its own perspective (GM III.12).

4. While Redlichkeit is creative, it is not a creation ex nihilo. Although free-spirited Relichkeit is not simply the revelation of a pre-existing subject, it would be wrong to say that nothing preexists this process. The elemental imagery Nietzsche often employs to describe the free spirit is instructive here. A flash of lightning or a gust of fresh air is surprising, and could not be if it did not occur and matter in

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77 In drawing up this quick and highly schematic set of definitions and positions, I’ve drawn on Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity and Markovits, The Politics of Sincerity.  

78 This is my coinage rather than Nietzsche’s.  

79 Thanks go to Chad Shomura and Willy Blomme for helpful pressing on this theme at an early stage.
the world. However, the mattering of lightning and fresh air is not the province of
a well-organized and in command subject, and their surprises are thus not well
addressed by a traditional moral language of freedom and responsibility.

Nietzsche suggests as much when he compares the thoughts of the philosophers of
the future, in contrast to the dogmatic philosophers of the present, to “fruits born
on the tree – all related and referring to one another and a testimonial to one will,
one health, one earth, one sun” (GM P.2). 80 What “I” am, then, is not a bare
atomic unit (an “individual”) but a singular conjunction of multiple elements and
forces. It is this conjuncture that we try to name and honor – this is the “oneself”
we create out of and beyond – when we speak with Redlichkeit.

5. The models for the creativity of Redlichkeit are derived from material artistic
practices, not theatrical ones. If free spirits are tree-like – sending forth what they
produce with a joyful lack of concern for their “reception” (“Do you like the taste
of our fruit? – But what concern is that to the trees?”) – they will have an attitude

80 See also BGE 43. It is important to note that if the taste of the eater is not the tree’s concern, even trees
are not completely without concern, and their production is emphatically not “without interest” (see Z “On
Immaculate Perception,” as well as the discussion of objectivity in my previous paragraph).
quite different from the “audience-oriented subjectivity” of the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{81} Although it seems likely, as suggested above, he also intends a contrast with “will to truth,” Nietzsche most immediately coins the term \textit{Wahrspielerei}, “playing with truth,” as a definition of Redlichkeit to distinguish this virtue from the talent of the \textit{Schauspieler}, “play-actor” (D 418).\textsuperscript{82} The playful and creative Redlichkeit of the free spirit answers Nietzsche’s call for “another kind of art,” one distinct from art of the “theatrical” kind (GS P.4).\textsuperscript{83} The art of the Schauspieler involves taking on roles and putting on a show, directing us away from the world. Wahrspielerei, by contrast, persistently returns us to the world, but – it is important to add – in order to make something of it, not merely to mirror it, to contemplate it without interest, or to pierce its inner depths. Redlichkeit’s way of making something thus might more productively be compared, not to a performance before an audience,

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\textsuperscript{81} GM P.2; \textit{Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere}, 49. Here, it is helpful to contrast my understanding of free-spirited Redlichkeit as a practice of “becoming what you are” with the sense given to that phrase by one of its most thoughtful exegetes, Alexander Nehamas. For Nehamas, “becoming what you are” involves constructing “unity of character,” a project that for him is “essentially public.” This public may be very small, or even “an audience that does not yet exist.” Nevertheless, “it takes spectators for unity to be made manifest and therefore for it to be there. To an extent, one is at the mercy of one’s audience,” \textit{Nietzsche: Life as Literature}, 186. Although he does not mention Habermas by name here, Nehamas thus seems to bring Nietzsche’s free spirit and Habermas’s bourgeoisie quite close together. I prefer, by contrast, to take Nietzsche and Habermas at their word when they suggest that these are two very different figures. Nehamas himself notes some of the textual difficulties posed by his interpretation, ibid., 252n16. If, as Nehamas would have it, “becoming what you are” involves constructing a “unity of character,” that unity will be highly precarious: “the future is, therefore, always a danger to it: any new event may prove impossible to unify,” \textit{Nietzsche: Life as Literature}, 186. The free spirit’s character, for Nehamas, would always face threats from the future, which is to say that the free spirit would always face the future as a threat, its own character as something to be protected and secured against such threats. Taking Nietzsche as a critic of such a paranoid stance, I am suggesting the opposite.
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\textsuperscript{82} The contrast between Redlichkeit and acting occurs with some frequency; see especially Z “The Magician,” and Z “On the Higher Man” 8.
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\textsuperscript{83} Here “theatrical” is a style, not a form: Nietzsche applies it to “art, books, and music,” rather than using it exclusively to refer to staged plays. In GS 367, Nietzsche argues that “the first distinction to be drawn regarding artworks,” prior to all distinctions among media, is a distinction between “monologue art” and “art before witnesses,” or, to use the terms above, art before an audience. See also the distinction, in GS 356, between actors and architects. Nietzsche articulates his fullest criticism of theatrical style later, in \textit{The Case of Wagner}, in \textit{The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings}.
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but to deliberately layering paint upon a canvas, carefully arranging words and sounds into a poem, or patiently constructing a sculpture.\textsuperscript{84}

To summarize the work done throughout this section: the Redlichkeit of the free spirit does not deny its “personal” or “subjective” features, does not flee from the world, and does not suspiciously seek to get beneath or behind the world. As I read Nietzsche, the creative practice of free-spirited Redlichkeit involves a step back from the suspicious drive to certainty and the fearful quest for security without a corresponding step back from the world. Nietzsche provides us other ways of knowing and engaging the world and the people and things in it. A certain receptivity characterizes Redlichkeit – it is at stake in both “the art of reading” and “the art of hearing” (D 84; D 255) – but Redlichkeit cannot be mere receptivity. Redlichkeit is a creative act, but it creates in a manner analogous to those artists who know how “to stop bravely at the surface,” who are...

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\textsuperscript{84} Sianne Ngai refers to Nietzsche’s accounts of performance in \textit{The Gay Science} as “ambivalent” or “clashing,” \textit{Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2012). 205, 227. However, the move that enables her to find ambivalence while citing overwhelmingly critical passages seems to be a conflation of “experiment” (a term Nietzsche largely favors in \textit{The Gay Science}) and “performance” (a term Nietzsche largely criticizes in \textit{The Gay Science}). To support this move in her argument Ngai cites not Nietzsche’s \textit{Gay Science} but Jon McKenzie’s \textit{Perform or Else}. McKenzie relies GS 356: there, Nietzsche offers a (critical) discussion of role experimentation, but it seems like quite a leap, from the notion of experimenting with a role, to the conclude that all experiments are performances or that all performances are experiments. Ngai’s case for Nietzsche’s ambivalence is strongest in GS 361 and her reading thereof. There, Nietzsche does link actor to artist and does express ambivalence with regard to this figure. The “uncertainty here about whether ‘performance’ is truly ‘artistic’” (232) may resolve in a genealogical frame, though: acting is a talent appropriate for warding off the dangers of modernity but is not suitable for those working toward future in which those dangers have been overcome. Although he draws on Nehamas and is sounding a skeptical note regarding Nietzsche, Dana Villa helpfully contrasts Nietzsche’s “poetic, ultimately antitheatrical framework” with Hannah Arendt’s more positive exploration of the concepts of performance and representation in “Arendt, Nietzsche, and the ‘Aestheticization’ of Political Action,” \textit{Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 80-110. Jane Bennett suggests that, insofar as they attune us to “the mark or force of prior embodiments, intentions, or accidents” and require “an attention to things as sensuous ensembles,” “the plastic arts” may provide a more promising language for ethics and politics than “the visual-voyeuristic model typically invoked by political critics of the aesthetic,” “‘How is it, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians?’: Foucault, Schiller, and the Aestheticization of Ethics,” \textit{Political Theory} 24.4 (1996), 667.
“worshippers of shapes, tones, [and] words” (GS P.4). To shift metaphors: free spirits characterized by Redlichkeit are land surveyors and mapmakers, neither advocates of the Flat Earth thesis nor professional spelunkers. They do not deny that there are depths, but neither do they define their existence around the need to uncover and expose depths. They do not adopt the arrogant stance that assumes it has nothing to learn, that everything is already available and present at hand to itself, but neither are they motivated by the drive to find out about absolutely everything not currently known to them. Redlichkeit works alongside and beyond – not above, before, beneath, or against.

Free-spirited Redlichkeit is an engagement with the world that aims to enrich that world. For Nietzsche, retaining the language of “truthfulness” and “honesty” seems to be an important way of characterizing creative practices of interpretation that, unlike the nihilistic creation of “another world” he associates with “dishonesty,” remain a part of “this world.” And, as I suggested at the end of the section on Unredlichkeit, retaining the surface.

85 I certainly do not mean to imply that the surface is a simply, obviously, or consistently positive term in Nietzsche’s work. This term, too, has undergone revaluation. For a clear account of Nietzsche’s twisting and turning of spatial language, see Sarah Kofman, “Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism,” Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), ed. Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall, 21–49.

86 My attention to Nietzsche’s attention to surface draws energy from work in literary theory on the ethics and practice of “surface reading.” See, for example, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” Representations 108.1 (2009), 1–21, and Heather Love, “Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn,” New Literary History 41 (2010): 371–391. However, because it has primarily been motivated by a need to take distance from “suspicion” per se, not suspicion as part and expression of an ascetic disposition, an ascetic vocabulary sometimes reemerges here. Love, for example, cites with approval Bruno Latour’s praise for a “disciplined,” indeed “enslaved,” scholarly practice; “Close not Deep,” 377, citing Reassembling the Social (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 126. Another important inspiration for thinking about surface as the locus of creative truthfulness in Nietzsche has been work in political theory on demystification (see Jodi Dean, Publicity’s Secret, Jane Bennett, Vibrant Matter, and Samuel Chambers, The Lessons of Rancière). Like the work in literary theory just cited, much of the work in political theory on this theme builds on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” in Touching Feeling. Certain moments in the work of Michel Foucault might represent a less frequently appreciated moment in this genealogy – “decipherment” is a persistently devalued term in his work almost from beginning to end, and his method refuses to treat discourse “as an element that ought to be transparent, but whose unfortunate opacity must often be pierced if one is to reach at last the depth of the essential,” Archeology of Knowledge, 138. Hannah Arendt offers an even earlier critical account of the scholarly drive to expose and unmask in On Revolution, 88–89.
moral language of “honesty” (now recast in an extra-moral role) may also be a way to emphasize that it is not exclusively the reading of texts at issue here, but a whole complex of activities of engaging with the worlds within which we find ourselves. The self remains an important site of creative work here. Particular selves engage with particular worlds in particular ways, and Redlichkeit names a kind of fidelity to that singularity. This singularity is not the result of a humanist assessment of the uniqueness, dignity, or authenticity of a self, but emerges from the peculiar ensemble of elements and forces that form any self. Redlichkeit involves a recognition of multiple sites of creative transformation both within and around the self. Its creativity – its surproduction – involves finding ways to name, honor, coordinate, and enrich these other modes of creative work already underway.

Translating Redlichkeit

Does English provide us with words for the creative practice of truth-telling Nietzsche calls Redlichkeit? The most common translation of Redlichkeit, “honesty,” seems not to cut it. Honesty is typically understood to involve a mere restraint from lying, without much room for anything “creative.” It is good we have a word for that, and if a boss or romantic partner suggests being “creatively honest” with you, that ought to be a cause for concern. Nevertheless, as I hope my discussion of Redlichkeit has demonstrated, we would also benefit from having words to express other experiences of

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87 My point here is close to that of Timothy Bewes, “Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism,” differences 21.3 (2010), 1–33. For Bewes, “‘reading with the grain’… is a reading that… resolves to read, henceforth, alongside the novel,” attentive to the reading and theorizing the novel (or other object of interpretation) itself is or does, ibid., 4.
and aspirations to truthfulness. Without presuming to retranslate Nietzsche, I would suggest that the English word *candor* comes closest to indicating concerns and functions similar to those I have traced in the Redlichkeit of Nietzsche’s free spirits. 88

For those long inculcated to think of “honesty” or “truthfulness” as a self-restraining realism, as an “objective” evaluation and re-presentation of what is, linking truthfulness and creativity can seem strange. Yet the history of the term candor in English suggests the conjunction is not as peculiar as it might at first seem. As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the word has been used to indicate just this conjunction. In everyday language, one rarely employs a disclaimer such as “Let me be candid with you” if what follows will be merely “unfalse” and unobjectionable information. Rather, we tend to reserve this phrase for introducing words carefully chosen and tentatively ventured – but ventured all the same. Moreover, candor, like free-spirited Redlichkeit, is distinctive as a mode of truthfulness in that it faces reality without suspicion: as Christopher Reid notes, quoting Samuel Johnson, a person who “interprets every word in the worst sense” and “appears always suspicious” may be perfectly sincere but is utterly “without candour.” 89 As described by Joseph Priestly:

> We show our candour when we appear to be in doubt, and discuss our own doubts; when we freely allow as much weight as possible to the objections of our adversaries; and particularly when we frankly retract what we acknowledge we had too hastily advanced; also when, seeming to forget our own particular situation, as advocates for one side of a question, we consult with our hearers.

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88 In the Cambridge University Press editions of Nietzsche’s work I’ve used while writing this chapter, “candor” is used once to translate Redlichkeit, which is otherwise translated as honesty or genuine honesty.

our judge, our adversaries, as if persons on all sides were equally impartial, and intent upon finding out the truth.\textsuperscript{90}

Like the speaker characterized by Redlichkeit, the speaker characterized by candor praises what can be “thought against their thoughts” without actively seeking self-defeat. Candor, like Redlichkeit, plays and creates within uncertainty.

While helpfully emphasizing the creative dimensions of candor, these historical definitions are perhaps too oriented toward audience and performance to get at all of the meaning Nietzsche invests in Redlichkeit; the way we use the term candor today may get at these other important aspects of the term. In everyday situations marked by candor, one often finds oneself surprised at what one is saying. Later, one might reflect on this situation in terms like these: “I wasn’t quite sure I felt that way until I started saying it.” Candor’s frequent surprises are, however, often not unwelcome. This may be one reason why, as the Oxford English Dictionary notes, the word refreshingly often modifies candid, as in “a refreshingly candid exchange.” Thus, rather than simply being something that a self does with or reveals about itself before others, candor contributes to the reformation – “refreshment” – of a self. Candor, we might say, is a way of “becoming what we are.” Or, at least, this is an emphasis I would like to give to the term candor, guided by the light of (without assuming direct correspondence or agreement with) what Nietzsche calls Redlichkeit.

Charles Taylor uses the very same example I have just appealed to – a situation in which “we did not really know what we felt or wanted until we acted” – to describe the

\textsuperscript{90} A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism, ed. Vincent M. Bevilacqua and Richard Murphy (Carbondale, Ill., 1965), 123–124, quoted in Reid, 180-181. Priestly concludes: “This is paying a compliment to our audience, and to our adversaries, which is generally returned with advantage.” As I note in the next paragraph, I think the contemporary use of candor can join Nietzsche’s Redlichkeit in pushing away from that audience-oriented model.
concept of “expressivism” he associates with the modern ideal of authenticity. Taylor is right to sense that Nietzsche performs a kind of twisting of the expressivist tradition, but I read Nietzsche’s innovations within that tradition as something other than the simple degradation or misunderstanding of expressivism, and so as something irreducible to authenticity. The metaphors which guide Taylor’s analysis of expressivism are instructive on this difference: expression “makes what was hidden manifest,” “a human life is seen as manifesting a potential which is also being shaped by this manifestation” (375). This idea of a doing that takes shape in the doing itself is indeed a close cousin to the sort of creativity I have traced in Nietzsche’s Redlichkeit; however, the language of a “hidden” potential which becomes “manifest” is, on my reading, exactly what Nietzsche sets Redlichkeit against. To employ Nietzsche’s spatial metaphorics, Redlichkeit moves along surfaces without denying the existence of depths. By locating creativity in this attention to and respect for surfaces, by counterposing this creativity to a suspicious drive to unveil and uncover, Nietzsche suggests a distinctive way of incorporating art into a life of truthfulness. Redefined away from “the

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92 For negative evaluations of Nietzsche and Nietzschean thought (Taylor does mark a distinction between the two) in relation to expressionism, see Sources of the Self (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 343, 488. Henceforth cited in-text.
inexhaustible domain... within,” from “inner depths” (390), Nietzsche’s truthfulness becomes more fully creative, more fully “expressive.”

As I interpret it, what Nietzsche calls Redlichkeit suggests that there may be forms of truthfulness that challenge rather than shore up the epistemologically and politically problematic drives toward certainty and control associated with authenticity and other conventional truth-telling practices. As a creative practice, Redlichkeit goes further than mere repetition or re-presentation of what already exists, while still affirming a certain commitment to truth. Candor is the name under which I explore those possibilities beyond Nietzsche’s texts. Candid speakers, like Nietzsche’s free spirits, realize the possibilities for truth to work otherwise than in the service of a drive toward suspicion and control. Avoiding both the paranoid moralism of sincerity and the isolationist iconoclasm of authenticity, candor, like Redlichkeit, might serve to name a seriously playful, creative, and generous mode of engagement with the world.

In Nietzschean Redlichkeit, we see a practice of interpreting the world and changing the world that honors the world as an independent set of forces, irreducible to the transformative interpretations we develop of it. Yet the things and people that compose our world can also act back on us, acting not just as honored objects of our transformative interpretations but as bonafide interpreters and transformers in their own

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93 Taylor is clear that “to talk of ‘making manifest’ doesn’t imply that what is so revealed was already fully formed beforehand” (374). This is an important caveat, but it does not quite anticipate the Nietzschean objection I am making, which is more about the impulse to seek revelation, not the status of what is revealed. Taylor thinks that one can disarticulate the “strands” of eighteenth century thought that lead to “a mere cynical unmasking” from those that lead to “a more direct and open, hence fuller, release of the stultified powers of nature and desire” within the self (343). As I read him, Nietzsche is more likely to regard those two strands as, rather, two sides of the same coin. Despite the apparent starkness with which Nietzsche famously poses the opposition between truth and untruth, uncertainty, and ignorance, in Redlichkeit he affirms a kind of commitment to truthfulness that is not driven by the need to purge all uncertainty, ignorance, or even untruth. In this way, the term again parallels the historic use of candor.
Candor can also be a helpful frame for thinking these kinds of multi-centered, mutually entangling activities. While I think we have seen elements we would need for such a theory of candor – a theory of what I will call candor’s co-operative aspects – already beginning to emerge in Nietzsche’s account of creativity, a turn to another thinker will help make these features of my account even clearer.
Chapter 3 | Unknowing Collaborations: Whitman’s Candor

As noted in the first chapter, the most iconic political truth-tellers in the United States in recent years, at least for those broadly identified as on the Left, have perhaps been the whistleblowers Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. The broad investment in these iconoclasts may be worth another critical look: while I previously sought to complicate the value given to courage in discussions of whistleblowing, here I am interested in the related but distinct issue of the solitariness of the whistleblower. In particular, I am interested in the apparent diminution of the capacity of contemporary political theorists and activists to think of truth-telling less as a matter of individual virtue and more as a matter of politics, as collective effort and agonistic contention. Consider again how different the solitary figure of the whistleblower is from the New Left versions of a politics of honesty discussed in the Introduction, exemplified by Adrienne Rich’s essay “Women and Honor.” There, honesty appears as something that does not “spring ablaze of itself,” but requires “trying, all the time, to extend…. the possibility of life between us.”¹ What has happened to this understanding of political truth-telling? What possible histories might be constructed to support it in the present? Animated by these questions, in the current chapter I consider the work of Walt Whitman to elaborate how candor might both contain and develop new modes of collectivity and relationality.

Do you dream of a larger and richer possible “life between us”? Perhaps not: Jodi Dean has recently charged that contemporary Left politics is plagued by “we-skepticism.” Disappointed by past failures and sensitive to ongoing problems of false universalism,

many within the academy (the “typing left,” in Dean’s terms) recoil from the first-person plural. This skepticism, Dean argues, “displaces the performative component” of we-saying, “treats collectivity with suspicion,” and “privileges a fantasy of individual singularity and autonomy.” I share Dean’s concerns along with her interest in developing new modes of collectivity and relationality. However, my turn to Whitman’s distinctive understanding of candor in pursuit of this interest may seem triply unlikely, insofar as (1) candor names a sort of communicative ethos, a framing that Dean says tends to capture rather than express political energy; (2) candor is a practice of truth-telling, and the common view holds that truthfulness is a matter of exemplary individuality rather than collective practice; and (3) Whitman is often read as offering the very “fantasy of individual singularity and autonomy” that Dean decries.

I have already engaged with Dean’s important criticisms of “communicative capitalism” and of the so-called “ethical turn” in contemporary political theory in the Introduction, and return to those arguments in the next chapter; I invoke her work here not to engage with her broad theses but to alight on a small but important stylistic issue that helps inspire my project in this chapter. Herself a member of the typing left, Dean’s first move in her efforts to counter we-skepticism occurs at the level of her writing practice: “I write 'we' hoping to enhance a partisan sense of collectivity. My break with

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2 By an editorial oversight, Dean refers to this as the second-person plural. The second-person plural is not “we” but “y’all,” a word Dean and I are also aligned in favoring.

3 Communist Horizon (New York: Verso, 2012), 12. Dean’s recent work should be read alongside her first book, Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism After Identity Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), which takes a very different path from some shared premises.

4 On ethics, see “Ethics: Left Responsiveness and Retreat,” in Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies; on communication, see Publicity’s Secret and Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies.
conventions of writing that reinforce individualism by admonishing attempts to think and speak as part of a larger collective subject is deliberate.” Dean highlights the performative component of we-saying displaced by its critics; she thus invites a consideration of the way that individual writing projects might help to work on and expand readers’ sense of the possibilities for political relationality. But how, exactly? This question motivates my turn to Whitman, who experiments with and expands possible modes of voice and address, in the hope that those experiments might resonate beyond the page to inspire a variety of (written and unwritten) projects with radical political and ethical potential.

In particular, Whitman’s writing suggests – as an alternative to the equation of truthfulness with the certainty and directness of individual iconoclasts – a communicative style in which an ambition to speak truthfully and a keen sense of the limits of language and thought go hand in hand. He reconciles an aspiration to express with a sense of the limits of expression by refiguring what it means to be truthful: rather than an exceptional bravado adhering in some individuals, Whitman shows truthfulness as a co-operative practice. My way of describing this co-operative form of truth-telling is through the word...

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5 Critical as she is (in the paragraph that follows the lines just quoted) of an unspecified group of “some activists and theorists” concerned with “micropolitical activities,” Dean might be surprised to find a writing practice similar to her own in the work of William E. Connolly, who in *The Fragility of Things* writes of a “we” which is “here as elsewhere, invitational” (181).

6 On the political possibilities of poetic experiments with voice and address in texts that pre- and post-date Whitman, see especially Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” in *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 23–50, alongside Barbara Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 184–200, an explicit inspiration for Berlant’s chapter. Among the many places where Whitman himself suggests the kind of movement between rhetoric and politics Johnson and Berlant perform, see his claim that, just as “to ordinary scansion” “the earth itself... is full of vulgar contradictions and offense,” “The People are ungrammatical, untidy.” *Democratic Vistas*, in *Collect and Other Prose*, vol. 2 of *Prose Works 1892* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 376. *Collect and Other Prose* hereafter cited as PWII.
“candor” – which also turns out to be a significant word for Whitman. In both the 1855 “Preface” to *Leaves of Grass* announcing Whitman’s project and the 1888 “A Backward Glance o’er Traveled Roads” recollecting its development, he emphasizes the “candid” nature of his writing. Like Whitman’s writing itself (according to his own accounts of it), Whitman’s “candor” forms relationships characterized by what I’ll call a “withness with opacity.” Candor thus names a communicative mode that helps to disentangle truthfulness from the model of exemplary individuality, and it helps to construct an alternative account of truth-telling that would emerge from and help to encourage the crafting of collective identities.  

My first task will be to read a few significant moments in Whitman’s *Specimen Days* to give a sense of the overall character of his communicative project. I resist readings of Whitman as an imperious individualist and attend to his interest in using words in a way that allows for opacity even as they help to form a sense of a common “we.” I next examine several of his specific uses of the word candor, while also folding lessons from Whitman’s broader corpus into my own understanding of candor. Finally, I conclude by considering a specific practice – writing letters for soldiers during the American Civil War – as an instance of Whitman’s co-operative candor that illuminates its distinctive forms of relationality and collectivity.

In writing about her decision to forego the censure of we-skepticism, Dean underlines the deliberate nature of her writing experiments, and surely many other writers

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7 The metaphor of “disentangling,” on which I’ve relied throughout, is in part a Whitmanian one: “How much is still to be disentangled,” he rhetorically asks in *Democratic Vistas*, explaining his project there. PWII 389.
are similarly deliberate; accordingly, I will draw extensively on Whitman’s explicit
descriptions of his writing process and techniques. However, I will also try to attend to
what happens in Whitman’s writing. While this is perhaps just good critical practice for
anyone writing about literature in the wake of the New Critics, Roland Barthes, and
Michel Foucault (to name a few), it particularly suits my effort to write about relationality
in Whitman, since, I hope to show, this sort of cooperative relation between author and
reader was extensively theorized by Whitman himself. At the conclusion of Democratic
Vistas, using a number of terms (especially “hints”) that will be seen to be typical in his
poetry and his descriptions of his poetics, Whitman claims that

a new theory of literary composition for imaginative works of the very first class, and especially for
highest poems, is the sole course open to these States. Books are to be call’d for, and supplied, on
the assumption that the process of reading is not a half sleep, but, in highest sense, an exercise, a
gymnast’s struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must
himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay – the text
furnishing the hints, the clue, the start or frame-work.⁸

⁸ PWII 424–25. In her introduction to the edited volume Writing Design: Words and Objects (New York:
Berg, 2012), Grace Lees-Maffei calls this passage an “anticipation” of Roland Barthes idea of the
Which is to say: in places where my readings seem to stretch the text, to skim its surface, or to focus so microscopically as to miss the point, these acts of infidelity to Whitman’s intentions are to some extent a way of being faithful to – by working with – Whitman.9

**Specimens of Specimen Days**

Whitman’s corpus is holographic in structure, in that so many of its parts refer to and aim to sum up the whole. To understand how Whitman understands his communicative project and practice, one might thus begin almost anywhere. I will begin with *Specimen Days*, a particularly useful place to begin, because it consists of material gathered from throughout Whitman’s career and because its various sections explicitly claim to be illustrative of something larger – that is, they are “specimens.” The guiding principle of my explication of two sections of *Specimen Days* is that, *qua* specimens, the central features of these section say something about the character of *Specimen Days* as a whole and about Whitman’s project across his work.

9 A further note on method: In Section 44 of “Song of Myself,” Whitman emphasizes the “immense,” cosmic, transgenerational “preparations” that have enabled his existence and his poetic practice: “Long I was hugg’d close—long and long.” Imagery of holding – of hugging, helping, and being transported inside of; of enclosing arms, cradles, embryos, and mouths – recurs throughout this section. Picking up this image, and on Whitman’s use of other enclosing figures for his writing (like “framework” and “atmosphere”), another way I’ve read as Whitman’s writing is as a kind of “holding environment,” in Donald Winnicott’s sense. In Winnicott, the concept of the “holding environment” reimagines psychoanalysis on analogy with maternal care. As Adam Phillips explains, rather than trying to ferret out the secrets of the unconscious and then provide the analysand with the “authoritative translation – having his unconscious fed back to him, as it were,” the Winnicottian analyst attempts to build an environment that will enable the patient “to reveal himself to himself.” Phillips, Winnicott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 11. Read as an analogous sort of holding environment, Whitman’s writing serves as a sort of experimental space, not so much for the reader to gain improved self understanding as to try out different relational possibilities. This resonates with another description of analysis Phillips offers, as “a new way of being present to another person.” Phillips, introduction to *Wild Analysis*, by Sigmund Freud (New York: Penguin, 2002), xiii. Through the various relations to human, quasi-human, and non-human bodies Whitman’s writing narrates, in the modes of addressing those bodies he imaginatively performs through apostrophe, and in the relations and addresses to the reader he directly enacts, Whitman gives the reader a playful lesson in and opportunity to experiment with new relational modes. Like the Winnicottian analyst, Whitman also holds his texts out as objects to be resisted, struggled with, even destroyed by the reader.
I will focus on Whitman’s development of modes of communication that acknowledge and allow for opacity and partiality. These days, admittedly, the theme of “linguistic opacity” is somewhat well-trodden critical ground, and the precept “we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face” is well engrained in the minds of most all graduates of “theory kindergarten.” I emphasize this theme for three reasons. First, I find “transparency” has been overemphasized as a keyword in the Whitman literature; giving selective emphasis to the contrasting theme of “opacity” serves to introduce a different Whitman and prepare the ground for my subsequent interpretive moves. Second, the conjunction of opacity with relationality reconfigures the theoretical import of opacity. Whitman casts opacity primarily in a productive register, as an enabling component of a form of relationality, rather than as a sign of lack or a marker of human finitude. Finally, the inverse is also true: the conjunction of opacity with relationality also refashions relationality. Whitman’s emphasis on opacity even within robust interactions allows for a reconceptualization of collectivity in non-communitarian terms. With opacity and partiality emphasized, relationality need not appear as the subsumption of difference within a stultifying “common” medium.

“The Real War Will Never Get In The Books”

Near the end of the section of Specimen Days on the American Civil War, Whitman reflects on the difficulty of transmitting a sense of the event to future
generations, or indeed of recalling the War’s details even in the comparatively recent present of his writing:

Future years will never know the seething hell and the black infernal background of countless minor scenes and interiors... of the Secession war; and it is best they should not – the real war will never get in the books. In the mushy influences of current times, too, the fervid atmosphere and typical events of those years are in danger of being totally forgotten... Its interior history will not only never be written – its practicality, minutiae of deeds and passions, will never be even suggested. The actual soldier of 1862-'65, North and South, with all his ways, his incredible dauntlessness, habits, practices, tastes, language, his fierce friendship, his appetite, rankness, his superb strength and animality, lawless gait, and a hundred unnamed lights and shades of camp, I say, will never be written – perhaps must not and should not be. The preceding notes may furnish a few stray glimpses into that life, and into those lurid interiors, never to be fully convey'd to the future.... Of that many-threaded drama, with its sudden and strange surprises, its confounding of prophecies, its moments of despair... those forming the untold and unwritten history of the war – infinitely greater (like life’s) than the few scraps and distortions that are ever told or written. Think how much, and of importance, will be – how much, civic and military, has already been – buried in the grave, in eternal darkness.  

This rich passage says and does many things. Here are four of them: it makes a strong claim about the limits of knowledge and communication; it suggests that what’s beyond the limits of knowledge and communication is nevertheless meaningful and significant; it resists the idea that a superiorly positioned viewer or speaker could overcome these limits of knowledge and communication; it characterizes its perspective as a distorted glimpse, not a clear panorama. I will unpack each of these features of this passage in turn.

First, Whitman makes a strong claim about the limits of knowledge and communication (and the undesirability of imagining that he or anyone might go beyond those limits). No less than six times in “The Real War,” Whitman writes that the actual war will “never” be told or written. This suggests, in the first place, that he does not think his own writing about the war presents the actual war. It also means that he does not think that any future efforts could possibly be up to the task. To say that “it is best they should

not,” that a full account of the war “perhaps must not and should not” be transmitted to
the future, is to go even further, suggesting the dubiousness of the project of trying to use
language in this way, at least for this event. What’s more, this passage’s claims about
representative failure do not (or do not only) make a claim about the particular character
of the Civil War in the United States, or about war in general, or about “the event” qua
event. When he claims that “the untold and unwritten history of the war” is “infinitely
greater (like life’s)” than what can be told or written, Whitman’s parenthetical “(like
life’s)” dramatically expands the scope of the claim being made, from the evental to the
everyday.12

The emphasis Whitman gives to these points suggests an initial reason for
skepticism toward readings of Whitman as a kind of all-devouring imperialist. D. H.
Lawrence provides an early and powerful example of such a reading: “Whitman becomes
in his person the whole world, the whole universe, the whole eternity of time. Nothing is

12 In part as a consequence of this generalization of the claim, I’d argue that Whitman’s rumination on
“unwrit heroes, [and] unknown heroisms” (“Unnamed Remains of Bravest Soldier,” PWI 48-49; see also
“The Million Dead, Too, Summ'd Up,” PWI 114) are not reducible to, though they may participate in, the
more recognizable political (or depoliticizing) functions of the figure “Unknown Soldier” analyzed by
Hannah Arendt and Benedict Anderson. See, respectively, The Human Condition, 181, and Imagined
Communities (New York: Verso, 2006), 9–10. It is in his writing about known deaths, more than about
unknown deaths, where Whitman looks most like a stock example of the type “Nineteenth Century
Nationalist;” see “Death of President Lincoln”: “He was assassinated – but the Union is not assassinated –
ça ira! One falls, and another falls. The soldier drops, sinks like a wave – but the ranks of the ocean
eternally press on. Death does its work, obliterates a hundred, a thousand – President, general, captain,
private – but the Nation is immortal.” PWI 99.
rejected. Because nothing opposes him. All adds up to one in him.”

However, at least in this section of *Specimen Days*, without necessarily rejecting or opposing anything, Whitman finds that there is much that does not “add up”: much that history cannot tell us, much that Whitman cannot access, much he has not seen or known, much he cannot write or say.

Admittedly, Lawrence’s reading focuses not on Whitman’s prose but on his poetry. However, it would be easy to find resonant passages throughout *Leaves of Grass* itself. To indicate just a few, here are some things Whitman emphasizes that he does not or cannot know at particular moments in *Leaves of Grass*:

- What grass is

- Who the young fellow who drives the express-wagon is (even though he is beloved)

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13 “Whitman,” in Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writing* (New York: Norton, 2002), ed. Michael Moon, 826. This is the 1921 version of Lawrence’s engagement with Whitman; in 1923, he considerably nuances his argument and exponentially amps up his rhetoric. In the 1923 essay, Lawrence keeps the first sentence quoted here, but adds to it “as far as his rather sketchy knowledge of history will carry him, that is. Because to be a thing he had to know it.” *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1995), 178. The last sentence here is a rather direct gloss on a short poem from *Leaves of Grass* – “I am he that aches with amorous love;/Does the earth gravitate? does not all matter, aching, attract all matter?/So the body of me to all I meet or know.” “I Am He That Aches With Love,” in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writing*; henceforth cited as LG. Lawrence had quoted but not analyzed these lines in his earlier essay (here he analyzes it but does not quote it). For the line to work as a criticism, it seems that Lawrence must think Whitman does not realize how much he does not know. Lawrence’s examples of things Whitman does not know are Charlie Chaplin and “Eskimos.” But in the passages I am reading here, we see Whitman dramatically acknowledging the limits of his knowledge, and so (if in nothing else) dramatically limiting his ability to “become.” For other readings that emphasize the “imperial” side of Whitman, see Allan Grossman, “The Poetics of Union in Whitman and Lincoln: An Inquiry toward the Relationship of Art and Policy,” in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed. Walter Benn Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 183–208, and Kathryn V. Lindberg, “Whitman’s ‘Convertible Terms’: America, Self, Ideology,” in *Theorizing American Literature*, ed. Bainard Cowan and Joseph G. Kronick (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 233–268


15 Ibid., “Song of Myself,” Section 15.
• What the future holds

• What the failed European revolter or revoltress is for

• What he is for

• What anything is for

• Why a sudden memory-flash comes back

• Whether he is asleep or awake

• His own work past or present

These cognitive and sensory limits are, of course, not all equivalent, and many are matched for Whitman by particular and corresponding cognitive and sensory compensations. Individually and collectively, however, they form an important contrast to the “transparency” often noted by Whitman’s readers. All together, these examples complicate the reading of Whitman’s project as simply and seamlessly appropriative.

These limits on what Whitman can know in *Leaves of Grass* are accompanied, throughout the text, by limits on what he can present to the reader: in addition to being “unknown,” the subjects (and speakers) of those poems are frequently “untransmissible,”

16 Ibid., “Song of Myself,” Section 43; “Song of the Open Road,” Section 14; “Good-Bye My Fancy!”

17 Ibid., “To a Foiled Revolter or Revoltress.”

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., “The Pilot in the Mist.”

21 Ibid., “Song at Sunset.”

22 Ibid., “Prayer of Columbus.”

“untellable,” and “untranslatable.”24 Encountering words like these would be surprising from the point of view of a reading that expects to find in Whitman a poet of transparency, but they are confirming of the reading of Specimen Days I am developing here.

Whitman’s sense of limitation in “The Real War” includes a sense of the limits of his own capacity as a writer, and his sense of loss reaches down into the minutia of individual lives; however, loss and limitation here are not merely subjective but rather linked to a kind of philosophy of history. For Whitman, important aspects of the past are wholly lost to the present.25 This finds fullest expression in Democratic Vistas:

Without doubt, some of the richest and most powerful and populous communities of the antique world, and some of the grandest personalities and events, have, to after and present times, left themselves entirely unbequeath’d. Doubtless, greater than any that have come down to us, were among those lands, heroisms, persons, that have not come down to us at all, even by name, date, or location.26

What reaches the present “safely convey’d” from the past arrives, on this account, only “by incredible chances.”27 Again, similar thoughts are scattered throughout Leaves of

24 From throughout the book: “They [the ‘truths of the earth’] are calm, subtle, untransmissible by print,” (LG, “A Song of the Rolling Earth”); “Your [you ‘little shells’] tidings old, yet ever new and untranslatable,” (ibid., “As Consequence”); “I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,” (ibid., “Song of Myself,” Section 52); “Then [‘When he whom I love travels with me or sits a long while holding me by the hand,’] I am charged with untold and untellable wisdom, I am silent, I require nothing further,” (ibid., “Of the Terrible Doubt”); “Light [of God] rare untellable, lighting the very light,” (ibid., “Prayer of Columbus”).

25 In the brief essay “Memorial Rags,” Michael Moon finds in Whitman’s Civil War poetry that “loss is not lost,” by which he means is not accepted or worked through but rather preserved as a loss. In Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature, ed. George E. Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995), 239. Which is true: but the chilling suggestion of the late sections of the Civil War portion of Specimen Days (CPI, “The Real War,” but also “Unknown Remains” and “The Millions Dead”) is that some losses are not worked through, are not accepted, are not even retained as loss. Some losses are simply lost.

26 PWII 405.

27 Ibid., 408. While this attention to chance resonates with themes I traced earlier in Rousseau’s work, compared to Rousseau, Whitman is perhaps less attentive to the possibility that the past might actively be destroyed or distorted by those working in the present, a possibility the former’s paranoia may have uniquely attuned him to. Cf. Chapter 1.
Grass. Whitman affirms that “the numberless unknown heroes [are] equal to the greatest heroes known;” he “see[s] the nameless masonries, venerable messages of the unknown events, heroes, records of the earth;” he sings both “the grandeur and good of ancient nations whose fragments we inherit” and “the good of the dozens of ancient nations unknown to us by name, date, location.”

A second key feature of “The Real War” is that it does not take the scenes, persons, things, characteristics, and details it marks as unknown and incommunicable to be mere blank spots. Whitman is aware of a great deal of particularity here – distinctive “habits, practices, tastes, language,” and more – but insists on the difficulty (perhaps even undesirability) of his or anyone’s attempt to simply and directly re-present these particularities. Whitman recognizes his inability to capture or transmit singularities, while also insisting that they are “of importance.” This combination of engaged curiosity with epistemic humility – a merger that serves to distinguish the “unknown” in Whitman from the “unknowingness” criticized in the previous chapter – recurs throughout Whitman’s writing. For example, in another section of Specimen Days, “Spiritual Characters among the Soldiers,” this combination of unknownness or unknowability with singularity is applied to living soldiers, and then, through another powerful parenthetical, to potentially everyone:

Every now and then, in hospital or camp, there are beings I meet... young men, obeying the events and occasions about them, marching, soldiering, fighting, foraging, cooking, working on farms or at some trade before the war – unaware of their own nature, (as to that, who is aware of his own nature?) their companions only understanding that they are different from the rest, more silent, “something odd about them.”

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28 LG “Song of Myself,” Section 19; ibid., “Salut au Monde,” Section 7; ibid., “Song of Prudence."

29 PWI, 68.
Here, Whitman acknowledges a particular mode of being as particular, but does not presume to fill in just what is “strange” or “odd,” nor force it to reveal itself using what *Leaves of Grass* figures as “the obstetric forceps of the surgeon.”

Third, Whitman is not making a claim about the priority of presence over absence, speech over writing, direct witness over reliance upon a second-hand report. Emphasizing this point pushes on the reading of *Specimen Days* advanced by Mary McAleer Balkun. For Balkun, “Whitman’s arrangement of the materials he has collected brings order to the bedlam of war and allows for the construction of... meaning and value as determined by Whitman,” and thus, “Whitman reserves the right to determine what constitutes reality.”

By this light, Whitman’s statements about “the limitations of prose” in “The Real War” would be a way of insisting that “one must have firsthand experience in order for one’s

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30 LG, “Song of Myself,” Section 30. The “unworldiness, disinterestedness, and animal purity” ascribed to these soldiers, the inexplicable something that is “veil’d and abstracted” in the manner, may tempt some contemporary readers to specify their oddity as *queerness* in the present-day sense. But it is just this sort of leap to specify I am saying Whitman avoids, while also avoiding the opposite pincer which would disavow such a possible content. Peter Coviello makes a related point through a careful study of the varieties of “inexplicitness, occlusion, [and] encryptment” Whitman employs in his “Calamus” poems. *Intimacy in America*, 150. In *Leaves of Grass*, the characteristic form of this gesture of open-ended curiosity may be the phrase “you whoever you are.” While Allan Grossman reads one of the most prominent instances of this phrase, the poem “Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand,” as a meditation on and dramatization of the thought that representation “requires a judgment as to what could occupy the finite space of appearance,” I find that a broader survey the 27 other instances of this phrase across *Leaves of Grass* suggests Whitman instead trying to hold open that space of appearance, to forestall that judgment. Grossman, “Whitman’s ‘Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand’: Remarks on the Endlessly Repeated Rediscovery of the Incommensurability of the Person,” in *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*, ed. Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 112–122. Moving too far in the other direction, some other critics characterize these moments in Whitman as instances of “anonymity,” but this seems to ignore that Whitman’s “yous,” whoever they are, often come with a great deal of particularity. See, for example, Jason Frank, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” in *A Political Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. John Seery (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2011), 155–184. My formulation in the text, “engaged curiosity with epistemic respect,” is designed to resist the errors and excesses of each pole.

account to be considered authentic.” But on my reading, “The Real War” says something nearly opposite: here Whitman points to a need to go beyond a view of language and communication that takes as their sole tasks “the construction of meaning,” the capture of “reality,” or the transmission of “authentic” or “firsthand experience.” For Balkun, Whitman’s acknowledgment of the limits of prose carries with it a necessary arrogation of the authority of sight. By denigrating the trustworthiness of writing, Whitman would thus be staking a claim for his own status as a genuine witness, a reliable voice amid a growing scene of confusion. I read Whitman instead as actively resisting this model of language and the modes of authority that might flow from it. Whitman’s claim to be unable to tell the complete story of the war despite having witnessed much of it, his repeated invocation of limits to what can be written or told, and his prediction of an “eternal darkness” surrounding much of the war all point away from the restoration of a sunny order of meaning that Balkun’s account attributes to his personal presence. Despite their aspiration to accuracy or fidelity, Whitman’s words are not meant to lead us to the authentic, unmediated reality. Such a seamless “conveyance” of the meaning of the past

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33 Whitman will have a critique of the “second-hand,” but (and consistent with Whitman’s broader theory of reading) this seems to hinge on the passivity of one who merely takes things second hand, rather than an argument against mediation; see LG, “Song of Myself,” Section 2.
forward to the future or of the attention of the present back to the past is, Whitman judges, neither possible nor desirable.\(^{34}\)

The fourth and final aspect of “The Real War” I wish to highlight is this: rather than a direct or unmediated presentation, here Whitman characterizes his writing as a collection of “scraps” and “distortions.” He offers a “stray glimpse,” and not an full account. Or, more precisely, an indirect and incomplete hint of the war is the most Whitman says he can offer here. Often, he will be able to offer much less: much of the war will “never be even suggested.” As Whitman notes in the conclusion to a later piece, “A Thought on Shakspere,” an untellable object (which may include, for Whitman, all objects) requires an indirect approach: “The best poetic utterance... can merely hint, or remind, often very indirectly, or at distant removes. Aught of real perfection, or the solution of any deep problem, or any completed statement of the moral, the true, the

\(^{34}\) There are moments of over-exuberant confidence in Whitman, but it is most often the case that Whitman’s unique knowledge is, Socrates-style, a knowledge of his own lack of knowledge. For example, he makes something more closely resembling an argument for the authority of his personal presence in Democratic Vistas: “Probably no future age can know, but I well know, how the gist of this fiercest and most resolute of the world’s war-like contentions reside exclusively in the unnamed, unknown rank and file,” CPII 377. Here, his physical presence for the sights of the Civil War does give him a claim to knowledge or authority which no future generations can have. However, the “knowledge” future generations must thus rely on Whitman for concerns the power of the unnamed and unknown, which in turn is, in the larger context of this passage, evidence of the “measureless” capacity of the people. Unknown, unnamed, measureless: Whitman’s objects thrice deny him representative traction. Whitman, moreover, has no great confidence in his capacity to transmit this privileged knowledge to the reader: regarding his motive for trying to communicate these experiences, he remarks “I know not whether I shall be understood,” PWII 378. Balkun may have a stronger case when she turns to the section of Specimen Days entitled “Final Confessions – Literary Tests.” Here, Whitman writes that, while his book may contain some errors, “in the deepest veracity of all—in reflections of objects, scenes, Nature’s outpourings, to my senses and receptivity, as they seem’d to me—in the work of giving those who care for it, some authentic glints, specimen-days of my life—and in the bona fide spirit and relations, from author to reader, on all the subjects design’d, and as far as they go, I feel to make unmitigated claims,” PWI 293. Balkun puts great weight on the appearance of the word “authentic” here: for her, the section thus suggests that Whitman “believes he has captured some of the actuality of his experience for the reader,” American Counterfeit, 35. She does not consider the way “glints” (together with “as they seem’d to me,” “as far as they go”) – and the necessity of work on the reader’s part – might counterbalance or complicate the obviousness of the word “authentic” in this passage. It is these sorts of terms and relations I consider in the fourth point here and throughout the next subsection.
beautiful, eludes the greatest, deftest poet – flies away like an always uncaught bird.”35 In other words, this fragmentary, indirect, or suggestive mode of writing follows from the writer’s fragmentary, suggested, or indirect sense of his or her objects. Given his sense of history as a fragmented realm of relative darkness, it is not surprising that, as I'll detail in the next sub-section, “suggest,” “hint,” and “indirect” are keywords for Whitman’s understanding of his own method.

“To the Spring and Brook”

As Whitman is walking, he hears a stream whose sound he calls “musical as soft clinking glasses.” Indeed, Whitman experiences the gurgling of the stream as “meaning, saying something, of course (if one could only translate it).” Undeterred by this uncertainty, the section ends with the address its title promises:

Babble on, O brook, with that utterance of thine. I too will express what I have gather'd in my days and progress, native, subterranean, past – and now thee. Spin and wind thy way – I with thee, a little while, at any rate. As I haunt thee so often, season by season, thou knowest rekest not me, (yet why be so certain? who can tell?) – but I will learn from thee, and dwell on thee – receive, copy, print from thee.36

Here, Whitman figures, in miniature, a distinctive relational mode that I take to be crucial to much of his writing: a withness-with-opacity. More economically, I will call it cooperation. To be sure, it would take no great effort to write “To the Spring” off as a naïve instance of anthropomorphism or the pathetic fallacy. But that dismissal would miss the figural and syntactical complexity of Whitman’s description: to call the sound of a stream

35 PWI 558. Elsewhere, Whitman makes a similar point in connect to Plutarch, from whose “indirect traits and asides... we get far profounder clues to the antique world than all its more formal history,” PWI 116.

36 PWI 121: A similar account of Whitman’s experiences with Nature appears in PWI, “A Sun-Bath – Nakedness” and “The Oaks and I”
“musical as soft clinking glasses” is to deploy an analogy that instantly pulls away from itself, shuttling between human and inhuman. Whitman describes the (conventionally regarded as non-musical) sound of the stream as musical: musical in the way of the (conventionally regarded as non-musical) music of soft clinking glasses. Jane Bennett has suggested this push and pull (or “echo and bounce”) is implicit in many anthropomorphisms. I will say a bit more about Whitman’s movement between the human and the non-human later on; for now (and, as J. L. Austin quipped, “until the dawn of hydro-semantics”), readers troubled by the idea of a conversation with a stream are advised to bracket the occupant of the position of addressee in Whitman’s account and consider only the two roles here: Whitman and his interlocutor. Focusing on these two roles in this passage will help to clarify the positive features of Whitman’s communicative project.

In “To the Spring,” Whitman’s parenthetical, optative invocation of the limits of translation – “if one could only translate it” – resonates with the sense of the limits of knowing, telling, and writing noted in the previous sub-section. As the past may be unmoved by my interest in conveying it to the present, my interlocutor’s language may not respond to my attempts to translate it into my own. Whitman’s sense of what has passed but cannot be known, told, or said does not involve a denial of the sensuous particularities of the past; his sense that he cannot fully grasp the language of his interlocutor likewise does not involve a denial that it is a language or a corresponding

37 Vibrant Matter, 99; see also Leo Bersani’s work, over the last decade or so, on “aesthetic relationality” and “impersonal narcissism,” as in “Gay Betrayals,” in Is The Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays, 43–44, to which I will return in the last section of this chapter.

38 “Truth,” Philosophical Papers, 126.
assertion that it is mere noise. “Babble” is not quite “barbar”: he is sure that something meaningful is said despite his limited access to it. Whitman concludes “To the Spring” by promising that he will “receive, copy, and print from” the brook, but, he might have added, “the real brook will never get in the books.”

But “To the Spring” also enriches the lessons drawn from “The Real War” by clarifying the mutuality (if not reciprocity) of the relationships at issue. His interlocutor speaks, and Whitman speaks. Whitman directly addresses his interlocutor, but does not exactly expect a response in kind; rather, Whitman’s imperatives tell the interlocutor to develop its own “utterance,” to go its own “way,” only to do it in his company, for a little while. The encounter does not take the form of a symmetrical exchange of information, but there is communication – even a scene of pedagogy. The content of Whitman’s speech, and perhaps also the form of his voice, is shaped by the encounter. Something of the encounter is gathered by Whitman, but his interlocutor does not lose its particularity, is not simply absorbed into Whitman. Perhaps for this reason, Whitman’s certainty about the limits of his own knowledge does not entail a parallel certainty about his

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39 The policing gesture that regards an utterance as mere noise has been importantly explored by a Rancièrèan wing of contemporary political theory: see Rancière, Disagreement; Chambers, The Lessons of Rancière; Honig, Antigone, Interrupted. Again obliquely inspired by Bennett, here I am exploring the possibility for this tradition to extend somewhat beyond the boundaries of human speech; see Vibrant Matter, 106. Though working within a framework of “the object’s resistance,” which Bennett productively deemphasizes, Fred Moten’s In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) has been another important source for my thinking about the relation between sound, speech, and objects.

40 Cf. early lines of Wordsworth’s The Prelude (New York: Penguin, 1996), where the sounds of the Derwent river in Cumbria are blended with human song and indeed actively compose human thoughts. A more recent point of comparison may be Jody Gladding’s Translations from Bark Beetle, which attempts to “translate” the “poems” left in trees by bark beetles. For Gladding’s description of this work and her thoughts on what remains “untranslatable,” see Jen Bervin, “Three Dimensions,” http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/248330.
interlocutor’s knowledge or lack of knowledge. Though he does not quite know his interlocutor, his interlocutor may know or reckon him to some degree (or may not). At any rate, neither speaker’s limited knowledge of the other is figured as an obstacle to be overcome, and those limits, whatever they may be, do not inhibit their capacity to relate to one another: the two are with each other, for “a little while, at any rate.” Their relationship is partial and temporary, but affective and effective.

The distinctive relational mode elaborated in “To the Spring” echoes in the way Whitman conceptualizes his relationship with his readers. In a late-career “Backward Glance,” Whitman says that the key word for describing *Leaves of Grass*

is the word Suggestiveness. I round and finish little, if anything; and could not, consistently with my scheme. The reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had in mine. I seek less to state or display any theme or thought, and more to bring you, reader, into the atmosphere of the theme or thought – there to pursue your own flight.

Whitman expresses a similar thought in “Poetry To-Day,” where he favorably quotes an 1868 piece by Sainte-Beuve on Racine:

> For us the greatest poet is he who in his work most stimulates the reader’s imagination and reflection, who excites him the most to poetize. The greatest poet is not he who has done the best; it is he who suggests the most; he, not all of whose meaning is at first obvious, and who leaves you much to desire, to explain, to study, much to complete in your turn.

Just as his account of the war offers a stray glimpse and not a straight shot, Whitman’s poems do not aim to capture reality in round, well-finished words then place those words

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41 Cf. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s analyses, developed across her work, of the projective force often implicit in both claims of knowledge (the paranoid “I know you know I know”) and of ignorance (the self-exonerating “Who could have known?”): “Privilege of Unknowing,” *Tendencies; Epistemology of the Closet*; “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” *Touching Feeling*.

42 “Backward Glance,” PWII 725. This mirrors a description of Whitman’s poetic practice near the end of *Specimen Days*: “I only seek to put you in rapport. Your own brain, heart, evolution, must not only understand the matter, but largely supply it” (“After Trying a Certain Book,” PWI 292; many of the points elaborated above – an indirect method, a distinction between a limitation on knowledge and a celebration of ignorance – are neatly summed up in the earlier paragraphs of this section of *Specimen Days*).

43 PWII 482.
before the ear and mind of the auditor. Rather, Whitman’s words are uncertain and indirect. As he suggests in Democratic Vistas, he intends for his work to initiate a collaborative construction project or a “gymnast’s struggle” with the materials provided by the text. The poems solicit the reader to take up his words, though not necessarily to comprehend them fully, and certainly not to understand or embody them in a way that parallels Whitman’s own understanding. Rather, Whitman tells the reader to “pursue your own flight” (not unlike the imperative for the brook to “wind thy way”), from out of the atmosphere his words helped to create.

The aim and consequence of Whitman’s indirect method of writing is to involve or enlist the reader in a relationship – a partial and temporary “rapport” – with the author and to pursue further trajectories from there. Rather than figuring the reader as recipient of a sovereign author’s decision to present or withhold some determinate meaning, or even to decipher the intention hidden behind the “suggestion,” “hint,” or “glint,” Whitman views words as a way of building relationships. Whitman’s encounter with the brook gives a model, or a motto, for his co-operative communicative project: speaking together and writing together, without necessarily knowing together. Knowing is not an essential assumption or aspiration to co-operative communication. On the contrary, scenes of co-operation often emerge in and through moments of uncertainty, opacity, non-knowledge. In your uncertainty, you offer a clew, indirection, hint to others in the hope that they might be able to make something more of it – but this process does not necessarily entail returning it back to you in the form of improved understanding. This co-operative mode of relationality involves collaboration or joint action, but does not
necessarily aim at any harmonization of ends or the adoption of any particular substantive conclusion.]

Sliding between collaboration, co-operation, and joint action in my descriptions of this relational mode, I also inflect the distinction between labor, work, and action elaborated by Hannah Arendt. For Arendt, the work of the poet is to record and remember the fundamentally plural and unpredictable action of others. For Arendt, “being in the thick of it… is no good place for a poet to be.”

She makes this claim as part of her condemnation of the late poetry of Bertolt Brecht, but to me the charge seems ill-fitting in its original context, since in his poem “I Need No Gravestone,” Brecht suggests an epitaph for himself that places his work beside, not in the thick of, where the action is:

He made suggestions. We Carried them out.

Given the importance of suggestiveness and collectivity in Whitman – constitutive elements of what I am calling co-operation – this might also be a fit description of his aspirations for his own earlier work (more than, say, W. H. Auden’s more Arendtian sense that “poetry makes nothing happen”). Whitman most directly anticipates this Brechtian epitaph, and this proximity/distance from Arendt’s distinctions, in his short poem “No Labor-Saving Machine”:

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44 For Bernard Williams, who also explores the relationship between truthfulness and co-operation, “a necessary condition of co-operative activity is trust, where this involves the willingness of one party to rely on another to act in certain ways,” Truth and Truthfulness, 88. Building on the work done with the notion of trust in Chapter 1, the model of co-operation I offer here would not necessarily share this “necessary condition.”


No labor-saving machine,
Nor discovery have I made;
Nor will I be able to leave behind me any wealthy bequest to found a hospital or library,
Nor reminiscence of any deed of courage, for America,
Nor literary success, nor intellect—nor book for the book-shelf;
Only a few carols, vibrating through the air, I leave,
For comrades and lovers.

Whitman here distinguishes his poetic enterprise from the mechanical and materialistic
domain of labor, the remembered deeds of action, and the conventional understanding of
creative work as enduring “literary success.” Instead, he figures his distinctive
contribution more as a fragile form of collective inspiration or vibration. That is,
Whitman (like Brecht) does not exactly upend so much as complicate an Arendtian
distinction between work and action. I am calling this distinctive mode of activity co-
operation.

Some axioms for a co-operative model of communication might include the
following: Much is not known to us. Even much of what we feel we know cannot be fully
put into language. “Untellable” and “unknown” do not necessarily mean that there is
simply “nothing to say” or “nothing to see”; but neither does an imperative to discover, to
make known or knowable, necessarily follow from a sense of the unknown. An ignorance
may stand as an ignorance without extinguishing curiosity or concern. And many degrees
of and relations to ignorance may exist, such that in some cases the glimpses, scraps, and
distortions of a life or a reality I am able to offer to you in speech or in writing may
become freshly alive and differently enabling in your hands.

48 Arendt herself does allow that to “persuade by inspiration” is a kind of action, but she seems to have in
mind only the kind of persuasion that an exemplary deed or life (rather than, say, a really good poem) could
The everyday practice of candor carries with it something of this understanding of ways of using words. Candor is often explicitly flagged as addressed to others – “let me be candid with you.” As the previous chapter suggested, speakers say “let me be candid with you” not to simply present facts, but to initiate a creative practice. Here, I am emphasizing the point that that creative work is not that of one speaker alone. Candid words are offered in the hope that the interlocutor will be able to make something of them, something the initial speaker could not make on their own. As invocations of candor frequently involve an (implicit or explicit) solicitation for others to respond in kind (though in their own way), it may be more appropriate to speak of scenes of candor, to refer (as everyday language often does) to candid moments or candid exchanges, rather than to focus on words per se.

In the earlier chapters of this dissertation, I used Rousseau’s and Nietzsche’s distance from received accounts of truth-telling to develop what I’ve termed an ethos of candor; while I employ Whitman’s work in a parallel way, Whitman himself (unlike Rousseau and Nietzsche) frequently employs the term “candor.” Whitman’s communicative project cannot be reduced to its candid aspects or to my sense of the term candor, but he often uses it in a consonant way. In this section, then, I turn from a broad consideration of Whitman’s communicative project to his specific uses of the term candor.
In the 1855 “Preface,” Whitman associates candor with an “absence of tricks,” an absence of “deceit or subterfuge or prevarication.” But, given Whitman’s “indirect” or “suggestive” method, this does not per se require that truth-telling be associated with direct or unmediated expression of a single speaker. The same “Preface” that emphasize the candor of the Poet tells us that “the expression of the American poet is to be... indirect and not direct or descriptive,” that “the indirect is always as great and real as the direct.” Likewise, in the midst of the various invocations of candor in “Backward Glance,” Whitman insists that “first-class literature does not shine by any luminosity of its own; nor do its poems... The actual living light is always curiously from elsewhere – follows unaccountable sources, and is lunar and relative at best,” which is to say, exists only in relation. Within situations of opacity, being in some sense indirect is often the most truthful one can or might wish to be. Exchanges of words that aspire to “candor,” on this understanding, thus might be those that help to form relationships without seeking to fully dissipate the various forms of opacity that exist between parties to the relation. Such, at least, will be my argument in this section: Whitman uses “candor” in ways that are not only textually proximate to but conceptually complementary with the broader co-operative perspective I have distilled from his writing.

In his “Backward Glance,” for example, Whitman depicts his ambition to give a “candid” account of his personality (which would eventually produce Leaves) as “a desire that had been flitting through my previous life, or hovering on the flanks, mostly

49 Leaves of Grass and Other Writings, 630.
50 Ibid., 619, 631.
51 PWII 717.
indefinite hither to, had steadily advanced to the front, defined itself, and finally dominated everything else." Candor here animates a flitting impetus described in shifting terminology: a desire, a conviction, a feeling, and an ambition. But while these terms may tend to suggest a private intention or subjective motivation, Whitman locates the desire to be candid at least partially outside of himself. The desire to be candid here is figured as diffuse and circulating, yet capable of crystallizing and of coming to feel imperative. It is not something best described as an act of deliberate, intentional, or free will. Rather than possessing candor as his own specific virtue, the desire to be candid is something that Whitman finds himself “remaining possess'd” by throughout his early life as it (not yet definitely named or defined) moves through or exists alongside that life. Possession and domination are not egalitarian relations; at best, they suggest highly diminished or one-sided modes of relationality. But here they are relational modes, and Whitman does his part by struggling to honor the forces of and desires for candor that (laterally) possess him.

In “Backward Glance,” candor moves within and beyond an individual subject; these turns are anticipated and enlarged in a poem of the “Calamus” sequence of *Leaves of Grass*, “Trickle Drops”:

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Trickle drops! my blue veins leaving!
O drops of me! trickle, slow drops,
Candid from me falling, drip, bleeding drops,
From wounds made to free you whence you were prison'd,
From my face, from my forehead and lips,
From my breast, from within where I was conceal'd, press forth red drops, confession drops,
Stain every page, stain every song I sing, every word I say, bloody drops,
Let them know your scarlet heat, let them glisten,
Saturate them with yourself all ashamed and wet,
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52 PWII 714.
The poem’s images – of wounds, bloodstains, and scenes of shame – invoke a sense of embodied vulnerability, but the body invoked here is not quite the body of conventional personhood. Candor cannot, for Whitman, be localized as just a speech act, just a function of perception, or just a psychological state. Neither solely matter of lips, eyes, brains, or guts, in “Trickle Drops,” candor’s sites spread and bleed across the person: “From my face, from my forehead and lips,/ from my breast, ...” Indeed, even in this explicitly confessional poem, candor resists figuration as the property or performance of a single human subject. The “confession drops” Whitman addresses, not Whitman himself, are the site of “candor” here. These candid drops of blood have a complex relationship to Whitman’s own agency and activity. Who has made the wounds that enable these candid confessions? A healer with a renewed interest in the curative properties of bloodletting? An enemy who unexpectedly enables? Whitman himself, perhaps as part of a religious ritual of mortification? Simultaneously disorganizing and liberating, the locus of candor’s agency and action is ambiguously distributed between

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53 Though the word appears only once in the poem, its etymology is recalled in the final lines: heat, glisten, glow, and light all recall *candor* shared roots with *candle*. Even if unintentional, this etymological echo enhances the meaning and structural integrity of the poem: while blood may often be hot and glistening, the final two lines describing the glow and light of drops of blood may sound rather strange without the candor-candle connection to mediate them.
subject and object, tallied in the movement from “my blue veins” to “[you] red drops,” and from “whence you were prison'd” to “where I was conceal'd.”

In both “Backward Glance” and “Trickle Drops,” while candor’s mode is ambivalent or excessive in relation to subjective intention, the content of candor is unambiguously yet complexly personal. Candor here is not the exclusive work of a self, but candor does involve a telling about a self. In “Trickle Drops,” candor is associated with confession, with the revelation of an “I” otherwise “conceal'd.” In “Backward Glance,” candor attaches to Whitman’s desire to “express” and “exploit” “my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and æsthetic Personality.” These representations of candor’s content may seem thinner than my account, in previous chapters, of truth-telling’s irreducibly yet non-exhaustively personal side in the work of Rousseau and Nietzsche. Yet Whitman’s personal or confessional sense of candor is subtler than it first appears. For immediately after invoking a candor linked to the expression of “physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and æsthetic Personality,” Whitman specifies that his candor concerns a Personality “in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America.”

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54 The temporality of candor here is similarly complex. While above I highlighted the passing nature of Whitman’s encounters with a variety of interlocutors, we also saw that those encounters, while temporally delimited, also left a mark: Whitman and the brook are only together for “a little while,” and he begins “Song of Myself” asking the reader only to “stop this day and night with me,” yet these encounters have a lasting impact on Whitman (and aim to have a lasting impact on his interlocutor or auditor). Here, candor comes in drips and “slow drops,” urged to trickle rather than pour out. That is to say, candor here occurs in a scene that is fragile, passing, but not exactly brief. Though candor’s effects tend to endure (to stain and saturate), they endure in modes that suggest change, dynamism, transformation (“glisten,” “glow,” and “blush”).

55 PWII 714.

56 Ibid.
out that a candid account of Personality is part and parcel of an account of a larger spirit or milieu.

The move linking of individual personality and historical position is typical of Whitman’s descriptions of his project. In the next paragraph, Whitman refers to the subject of his poem in the following terms:

_Given_ the Nineteenth Century, _with_ the United States, _and_ what they furnish as area and points of view, ‘Leaves of Grass’ is, or seeks to be, simply a faithful and doubtless self-will’d record. _In the midst of all,_ it gives one man’s—the author’s—identity, ardors, observations, faiths, and thoughts, _color'd hardly_ at all [i.e. not “not at all”] with any decided coloring from other faiths or other identities.  

Each of the italicized words enlarges the reader’s understanding of Whitman’s sense of what “one man’s identity” might encompass. Whitman renders Personality political and historical, and suggests that the best way of capturing the political and historical is through the personal. In Whitman, candor thus touches on the personal, while also reorganizing and redistributing the field of “the person.”

Whitman’s unwillingness to reduce candor to a localizable, personal property in these texts does not necessarily entail presenting candor as a property distributed across multiple bodies or as co-operative practice; however, candor is explicitly marked by this sort of plurality in one of the “Inscription Poems,” “On Journeys through the States.” When the poem first appeared as Number 17 of the “Chants Democratic” in the 1860

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57 Ibid., my emphasis.

58 Note the similar push and pull in this 1887 Preface to the London edition of SD, collected in “Notes to Late English Books,” where Whitman describes that book as follows: “You have had, and have, plenty of public events and facts and general statistics of America; – in the following book is a common individual New World _private life_, its birth and grown, its struggles for a living, its goings and comings and observations (or representative portions of them) amid the United States of America the last thirty or forty years, with their varied war and peace, their local coloring, the unavoidable egotism, and the lights and shades and sights and joys and pains and sympathies common to humanity,” PWII 598. In other words, what starts out as an indication of the contents of a “private life” is gradually enlarged by what follows the “amid,” until it ends up in what is “common to humanity.”
edition of *Leaves of Grass*, its speaker alternated between first-person singular and first-person plural in the first two stanzas. In the “Blue Book,” Whitman’s own copy of this edition of *Leaves of Grass*, however, he scrupulously deleted each occurrence of “I,” and these revisions were adopted in the 1872 edition of *Leaves of Grass* and retained in all future editions. The “we” that speaks this poem seems to be those who have been inspired by *Leaves of Grass*. “Urged by these songs,” taking up the poems hints and indirections, they hope to inspire others to do the same, in their own ways. These “willing learners of all, teachers of all, and lovers of all” have, in particular, learned from and impart lessons inspired by the seasons:

> We have watch'd the seasons dispensing themselves and passing on,  
> And have said, Why should not a man or woman do as much as the seasons, and effuse as much?  
>

This dispensing and passing informs the practice of the speakers of the poem. The next two lines begin, respectively, “We dwell” and “We pass.” And this lesson, adopted through imitation and practice, is echoed in a verbal formulation, a kind of motto that they say to themselves in the hope that others will overhear (and, perhaps, join them):

> We make trial of ourselves and invite men and women to hear,  
> We say to ourselves, Remember, fear not, be candid, promulge the body and the soul,

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60 The fluid movement “through the States” envisioned by this poem may be an important instance of what Mark Rifkin identifies as “settler common sense.” Rifkin traces how the “forms of opposition” in sexually and politically radical literature of the nineteenth century United States “depend on taking for granted the conceptions of place, politics, and peoplehood normalized in the settler-state’s engagement with Indigenous peoples.” *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), xviii. His figures are Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Melville, though Whitman would easily fit alongside this group. Indeed, “On Journeys through the States” may be read (with, I would think, no small measure of reductiveness, though not exactly inaccuracy) as a poem about colonial expansion. However, the poem also resists this reduction: if the poem’s “all” is taken at its word, we might begin to imagine readers of Whitman who — passing on from Whitman himself — might more genuinely learn from, love, and thus fight alongside decolonization activists, moving through the states in order to de-center them, candidly promulgating Indigenous sovereignty. On the connection between truth-telling (albeit a model of truth-telling that, from my perspective, may place too much faith in exposure) and the move from colonization to co-existence, see Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2008).
Dwell a while and pass on, be copious, temperate, chaste, magnetic,
And what you effuse may then return as the seasons return,
And may be just as much as the seasons.

The “we” here, in William E. Connolly’s terms, is invitational (and in Dean’s terms, performative). Collective candor is a difficult practice, and so it is necessary to constantly recall the group to the task of its formation.

The 1855 “Preface” to *Leaves of Grass* proleptically enriches this account of candor’s fragile collectivity by describing a scene that performatively invokes candor’s circulation and distribution, its way of moving between and temporarily binding (not indefinitely blurring) together distinct sites. Whitman’s uses of the term candor in the 1855 “Preface” can be read almost as a system, a series of complementarities, that mitigates against candor’s reduction to any one type of person or its sedimentation at any one level of analysis: candor describes an aspect of physiognomy and of heart, an attribute of the people and the great poets. Rather than merging the parties to candor, the “perfect personal candor” of “the greatest poets” *inspires* “folks” to “echo a new cheap joy and a divine voice leaping from their brains: How beautiful is candor! All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor.” At the very moment a “perfect personal” candor is described, it is also presented as “leaping” or escaping from its localization. The encounter with the Poet stirs an echo within the people, who do not merely parrot the words of the Poet, but find a third voice leaping out of them. Candor appears here, then, as contagious; but rather than reproducing itself symmetrically across

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61 *The Fragility of Things*, 181; *Communist Horizon*, 12.

62 *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, 617, 627, 628, 630.

63 *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, 617, 627, 628, 630.
each of its sites, candor works more like an infection that mutates with each new host it inhabits.

Whitman’s own figure, the echo, highlights aspects of candor’s transits and transports that this paraphrase might obscure: an echo, while having a definite source, not only changes as it travels but can retroactively reshape a sense of that source. In later editions of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman will rely upon the “echo” as a privileged figure for his descriptions of his poetic enterprise, where it suggests a way of honoring and carrying forward the inspiration he has drawn from other (human and nonhuman) voices and bodies. As Whitman describes them, echoes do not originate from a single will: Whitman does not *decide* to echo the songs of birds and stars, but insists they “have started to life” or been “arous'd” *in him from* elsewhere. Echoes do not merely re-produce but repeat with a difference. Echoes have specificity, locality, originality, yet also undo these very concepts (thus perhaps the pleasurably disturbing feeling of sublimity many find in shouting into a canyon, hearing their own voices suddenly dispersed, emerging from beyond themselves).

In the scene between the Poet and the People the 1855 “Preface” presents, candor is neither a product of human will nor purely accidental, but “divine”: it has an energy

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64 Elaborating on the uses of the figure of the echo for understanding feminist history, Joan Scott helpfully elaborates some of that figure’s particularities: “Echoes... are incomplete reproductions, usually giving back only the final fragments of a phrase. An echo spans large gaps of space (sound reverberates between distant points) and time (echoes aren't instantaneous), but it also creates gaps of meaning and intelligibility. The melodic toll of bells can become cacophonous when echoes mingle with the original sound; when the sounds are words, the return of partial phrases alters the original sense and comments on it as well... repetition constitutes alteration. It is thus that echo undermines the notion of enduring sameness that often attaches to identity.” “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 27.2 (2001), 291.

65 LG “Out of the Cradle,” “Lilacs.”
and an impetus its adherents court rather than contain or control. Yet this is a divinity potentially available to all, and thus accompanied by a “cheap joy.” The double aspect of the candor echoed here – both “cheap” and “divine” – expresses something of the everyday sense of candor. Candor often seems to require postures, gestures, rituals, and incantations to induce and sustain its presence (beginning with though hardly reducible to the phrase I've been guided by throughout, “Let me be candid with you,” and represented in the 1855 “Preface” by the work of the Poet), but the gestures and techniques that aim to lift oneself and others to a state of candor may not always have their intended effect. Candor, as “Trickle Drops” reminds us, may often illuminate from unexpected sources.

66 Rousseau’s attempts to “collaborate” with providence in order to motivate and sustain his own autobiographical project (discussed in the first chapter) might describe a similar feeling. Though working with a radically different image of divinity, Rousseau suggests that he persists in his final efforts to promulgate his words “because it is the sole means remaining in my power to collaborate in the work of providence” (D, 254; see also 247).

67 Whitman seems to use “cheap” here in the third sense listed in the OED: “fig. Costing little labour, trouble, effort, etc.; easily obtained.” This sense is corroborated by Whitman’s mature poetic references to the cheap: “What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,” or “It is not what you anticipated, it is cheaper, easier, nearer,” or “THE commonplace I sing; / How cheap is health! how cheap nobility!”
and in surprising ways, and this presence of multiple and surprising sources of activity within candor helps inspire my decision to call candor co-operative.  

Sharing Voices

As a co-operative form of truth-telling, candor can be situated schematically among other forms of truthfulness. One key node of this schema is, as we've seen, the parrhēsiastēs, the solitary truth-teller. The effect of this form of political speech is that a whistle is blown, something is exposed. Another key node in a schema of varieties of veridiction is the virtue of sincerity, obliquely referenced throughout this chapter and previous ones, often held to be key to deliberative exchange. The effect of this mode of political speech is that a consensus is reached, the parties come to better know and understand each other. As I describe it, candor pulls against both of these nodes: it is more collective than the former, less homogenizing than the latter. Its effect is that a

68 The unexpected or surprising nature of co-operative candor also resonates with Whitman’s suggestion, in “In Cabin'd Ships at Sea,” that *Leaves of Grass* might enable relations despite or through its misunderstanding of itself. The first stanza appears to be in the voice of *Leaves of Grass* itself. The book takes itself to be “a reminiscence of the land,” and imagines itself being “haply” read, in a variety of seafaring scenes and settings, “By sailors young and old.” The book imagines that it will be “In full rapport at last.” Yet this imagined rapport does not quite arrive. Immediately following this line, another voice breaks in, set off in a fresh stanza and by italics, an imagined possible voice of those sailors as they read the poem. They receive the poem exactly the opposite way of how the poem imagines itself being received. “Here not the land, firm land, alone appears” — rather, they conclude, “this is ocean’s poem.” Finally, in a third stanza, a third voice enters, apparently now Whitman’s own voice. Whereas the first two stanzas are spoken in soliloquy, in this stanza, Whitman addresses the first two speakers. He seems to mediate between their two interpretations. Whitman echoes and so apparently agree with the second voice, addressing the book as “You not a reminiscence of the land alone,” but he does not exactly adopt the sailor’s formulation that these are “voyagers’ thoughts” or “ocean’s poem.” Whitman’s mediations between the two speakers does not exactly resolve the first two interpretations into a third, but rather proliferates possible relations: ones of simile (“You too as a lone bark cleaving the ether”), metaphoric identification (“spread your white sails my little bark”), (sexual) companionship (“Consort to every ship”), mediated love (“Bear forth to them folded my love”), and direct dedication (“This song for mariners”). These relations are, again, neither grounded in nor aspire to knowledge. The book originally misunderstands itself and thus its potential relationship to other bodies, and Whitman’s ability to imagine and construct various relational possibilities in the wake of that misunderstanding does not have a clear goal in mind (it is “purpos’d I know not whither”).

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novel sort of collective subject emerges, characterized by a novel sort of collective action: co-operation. The “co” in co-operation in this case does not primarily refer to reciprocity. Though co-operation may at times be characterized by reciprocity, the emphasis on partiality and opacity I have associated with co-operation means that here reciprocity serves as neither an epistemological presupposition nor a normative telos. At the same time, it is not often easy to hierarchize or prioritize the parties to a co-operative relation, identifying some as leaders and others as followers, some as secondary and others as primary, some as originals and others as imitations.

One reason why such a ranking is difficult in Whitman is because, as we have seen, he figures the self itself as a site of plurality, of unintentional echoes and surprising inspirations. Consistent with his claim, in his various prose prefaces to and retrospective accounts of *Leaves*, that accounting for his Personality also required telling the story of his time and place, Whitman’s poetry shows an enlarged self alongside a persistent attachment to singularity. Throughout “Song of Myself,” Whitman suggests a double movement of recognizing the imprint of the world on oneself and the likeness of oneself in the world. This theme emerges clearly in Section 24 and 52, and a quick look at these
two sections will clarify how Whitman’s poetry refigures the self in order to enable new ways of relating to others.69

Regardless of the narrative structure a particular critic proposes, Section 24 is often read as a turning point in “Song of Myself” because of its dramatic first line: “Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son.” This line retains but relationally reconfigures a distinct personality, so that the poet can possess a particular name and a biographically specific origin while also identifying with (in fact, as) the cosmos – a favorite son and a rising star. The series of dramatic identifications that follows this one in the early lines of Section 24 may seem to run aground in the middle of this section, where Whitman proclaims “If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body, or any part of it.” However, a few lines later it appears that the “parts” of the poet’s “own” body include whatever has contributed to his cultivation, such as the “Sun so generous,” “Vapors lighting and shading my face,” “You sweaty brooks and dews,” “Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me.” So, when the editors of the Norton edition of Leaves of Grass find in this section a transition from “the procreative impulse...
of the individual” to “cosmic energies,” this seems doubly mistaken. It undervalues the identifications just run through (the individual is already, as the first line of this section suggests, “cosmified” when Whitman finds that the sun and wind are parts of his body because they have nourished his body) and it undervalues the productive anthropomorphism running through the same lines (the “procreative impulse” is already moved beyond the individual in the suggestion that brooks are sweaty and the wind has genitals).\textsuperscript{70}

The bidirectional movement between self and world in Section 24 seems to anticipate the poem’s eventual conclusion in Section 52. A cloud projects Whitman’s likeness, and Whitman responds by becoming more cloud-like, coaxed “to the vapor and the dusk.” Whitman thus “depart[s] as air,” and poem culminates in a dramatic scene of self-dissolution: “I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.” This self-dissolution, moreover, is in the service of a relation (in particular a relation to the reader) that does not require, is not oriented around, knowledge:

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

\textsuperscript{70} The double movement at work in Section 24 may also help to enable the remarkable opening lines of the next section: “Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me, / If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me.” Crucially, while similarity here may be linked to bodily health, it is not linked to knowledge. In other words, this sense of a “cosmified” body in no way involves the domestication of those forces traditionally conceived as external to and other than the human body, since Whitman continues to have a sense of epistemological and/or communicative incapacity before those forces, and, therefore, toward his own physiology and psychology. In Section 24, we read: “I cannot tell how my ankles bend, nor whence the cause of my faintest wish, / Nor the cause of the friendship I emit, nor the cause of the friendship I take again.” In Section 24, then, Whitman develops a sense of withness-with-opacity consonant with that developed in the sections of \textit{Specimen Days} examined above. Likewise, in Section 52, these limits to knowledge are also represented by limits of communicability: “I too am untranslatable.” This limit is established around Whitman, as “too” suggests, by yet another identification with the non-human world beyond him (in this case, a spotted hawk, perhaps recalling an earlier exchange with a bird in Section 14). That is to say, despite the difficulties of translation encountered here, communication (specifically, an “accusation” and a reply) and relationality are still sustained.
In a moment, I will consider the particular shift of frame – from “knowing” to “healing” – Whitman institutes here. For now, I want to emphasize that “Song of Myself” ends by invoking a relationality akin to the one I described as operative in key scenes from *Specimen Days*, a co-operative relationality which allows for (or is even constitutively structured by) opacity between the parties to the relationship.

In a scene of co-operative activity, the impetus may seem to come from one person, but find surprising forms of support in a structure, may seem to spread to others in unanticipated ways, or may turn out to have drawn a hard to articulate inspiration from others who thus turn out to be not quite so other. As another marker of the proximity/distance between Whitman’s poetics and Arendt’s distinction between work and action, then, we might say that Whitman points to a form of work in the plural. Although Whitman’s most famous poem is called “Song of Myself,” that same poem also complicates its own authorship, avowing “It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the tongue of you, / Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen’d.” As co-operative

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71 In a late note on “Slang in America,” Whitman offers an account of the origins of language that resonates with and complicates the reading emphasizing co-operation that I am developing here. “Language,” Whitman writes, “is not an abstract construction of the learn’d, or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its base broad and low, close to the ground. Its final decisions are made by the masses, people nearest the concrete, having most to do with actual land and sea,” PWII 573. He suggests (by placing in proximity), that this claim is related to, or perhaps even a gloss of, a claim from John Addington Symonds: “Those mighty works of art... which we call languages, in the construction of which whole peoples unconsciously co-operated, the forms of which were determin'd not by individual genius, but by the instincts of successive generations, acting to one end, inherent in the nature of the race,” PWII 574. Writing again in his own voice, Whitman draws a conclusion from this account: “The propensity to approach a meaning not directly and squarely, but by circuitous styles of expression, seems indeed a born quality of the common people everywhere,” PWII 574. In invoking an “unconscious co-operation,” Symonds seems to point to an alternative to viewing language strictly as a representational medium, and an alternative to viewing communication within the horizons of mutual understanding. “Unconscious cooperation,” or what I’ve called “unknowing collaborations,” suggests a way to decouple truthfulness from directness, and the indirect from the esoteric or deceitful. Even as he adopts these aspects of Symonds’s work, and while Symonds’s emphasis on the “unconscious” resonates with the “unknowns” Whitman so often insists on, it is unclear to what extent Whitman endorses Symonds imputation of a “whole people” and “one end.” Whitman’s account seems to introduces division (the masses, not the learned) and plurality (“needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes”) where Symonds sees wholeness and unity.
practice, candor works similarly. To say that candor is co-operative means that candor emerges between speakers rather than from within one speaker. Candor takes hold among people, rather than being the special property of certain persons. Candor is broadly distributed, and thus within the comprehensive grasp of no party.\textsuperscript{72}

The co-operative relationality marking Whitman’s use of candor approaches (but does not coincide with) what Leo Bersani has theorized, through other texts, as an “impersonal intimacy.” Moved by, yet working to move beyond, a psychoanalytic framework linking otherness to aggression, Bersani theorizes a range of practices of impersonal intimacy, from Christian cults of “pure love” to “the dangerous sexual practice of barebacking,” in which “the subject allows himself to be penetrated, even replaced, by an unknowable otherness.” Bersani is not interested in “the humanizing aspects of intimacy,” where “the personhood of each partner is presumed to be expanded and enriched by knowledge of the other.”\textsuperscript{73} Rather, in relations of impersonal intimacy,

\textsuperscript{72} A conventional view of truth-telling, according to which words that are indirect or uncertain would necessarily seem to reflect a diminution of the capacity of words to produce effects for their speakers or auditors, has informed how critics have read Whitman. In Peter Coviello’s formulation, for example, “Whitman’s once so exuberant faith in the limitless civic and national capacities of writing, of his writing, dies with the thousands of soldiers whose graves are marked, he keeps reminding us, ‘UNKNOWN.’” “Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America” (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 49. Certainly, Whitman’s thought and practice developed in crucial ways after 1855, with the war as a significant pivot in his development. On this, see especially Moon, *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). Coviello’s account, however, misses the efficacy Whitman assigns to the unknown and the indirect in *Specimen Days* (as well as the resonance between that text and earlier work). On my reading, Whitman’s interest in the capacities of language and his confrontation with the Unknown fit together: rather than the former foundering on or being checked by the latter, the two complement one another. For Whitman, words work best when they work indirectly and co-operatively through the unknown.

\textsuperscript{73} *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 53. This traditional vision of intimacy might lead, via Habermas’s historical work in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* on the importance of the “intimate sphere” in the development of early bourgeois conceptions of “the public,” to contemporary theories of deliberative democracy. For a reading of Whitman that bends toward (even as it enriches and contests) this model, see Kerry Larson, *Whitman’s Drama of Consensus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
the subject is “absorbed into the nameless and faceless crowd,” “overwhelmed by the massive anonymous presence to which they have surrendered themselves.”

This is a promising model for conceptualizing the way words work relationally in Whitman because, in *Intimacies*, Bersani is particularly interested in the way this impersonal intimacy might be developed in particular modes of talk, typified for him in psychoanalysis and Socratic dialogue. Indeed, working parallel to Bersani, D. A. Miller has also described an “impersonal intimacy” attending Jane Austen’s narrators, coming even closer to the co-operative reader-relations that interest me in Whitman. Moreover, while these particular paradigms are not (yet) widely invoked in the critical literature on Whitman, many critics speak of Whitman’s interest in the anonymous, impersonal, and/or the intimate, both to describe what the poems narrate (what are conventionally described as scenes of “cruising”) and the way they act on their auditors, who are habitually address in *Leaves of Grass* by the anonymity-respecting “you, whoever you are.” One might also note that “absorption” and “facelessness” (powerfully refigured as virtuous possibilities in Bersani’s work) have often been keywords for critics of Whitman’s allegedly imperious attitude toward otherness.

While Bersani’s work has helped to give new life to queer theory’s pursuit of “new relational modes,” I do not find “intimacy,” impersonal or otherwise, to be the most helpful label for the relational possibilities I have been focusing on in Whitman’s work.

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74 *Intimacies*, 53, 54.


76 For example, although accepting a link between intimacy and personality (contested by Bersani), Jason Frank nevertheless comes close to a description of Whitman in terms resonant with Bersani’s analysis when he refers to an “eroticized impersonality” in Whitman’s poems, “Promiscuous Citizenship,” 175.
“Song of Myself,” for example, often addresses the reader directly, but this address is not quite an intimate one: it is interrupted and diffused by Whitman’s reflections on himself, and by his address to all sorts of others, including his soul (in Section 5), the earth (Section 21), the sea (Section 22), the sun (Section 40). There are also outbursts of shifting address, as in Section 24, where sixteen consecutive lines address some twenty five distinct “yous,” all of which are in some way parts of Whitman himself. Each time he seems to focus in a personal and exclusive way on one interlocutor, Whitman quickly turns to another. If this was a model of intimacy, it would have to be a promiscuous or impersonal kind of intimacy.

Yet I do not think this way of relating could be aptly described as “impersonal.” While Whitman does depart from a conventional theory of personality, unlike the figures and practices considered by Bersani, he does not seek to dissolve into impersonality nor does he hold that out as an “ideal limit.” Whitman’s affinity with Emerson would have made a rich theory of impersonality available to him, but Whitman remained an avowed “Chanter of Personality,” even as (as we have seen) he considerably complicates and pluralizes the sense of “Personality.” He wants to build up his personality to have it flow out again. As he puts it in Section 14 of “Song of Myself,” Whitman is exploring a practice of “Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,” or what Section 19 refers to as “the merge of myself and the outlet again.” He wants to have

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77 For a poem that makes this shifting address its exclusive focus, see “Apostroph,” the introduction to the “Chants Democratic” of the 1860 edition and included among Moon’s collection of “Poems Excluded from Leaves of Grass,” LG 524–525.

something to give back to the world that enriches him, and suggests that you need to have a self to give a self, even as he decouples the personal from the proprietary.

If Bersani alerts his readers to the ways a theory of relationality is connected to a theory of the agent engaged in relations, the mode of relationality Whitman develops exists somewhere to the side of the two poles set out by Bersani. Deemphasizing knowledge, Whitman cannot be associated with a traditional model of intimacy whereby “the personhood of each partner is presumed to be expanded and enriched by knowledge of the other.” At the same time, retaining a notion of personality, Whitman also avoids an impersonal intimacy where the subject is “absorbed into the nameless and faceless crowd.” Rather than a new form of intimacy, Whitman offers a co-operative relationality.

In thinking candor under the banner of “co-operation,” I imagine surprising modes of ethical and political activity that work in two directions. On the one hand, as an expansive and expanding form of relationality, co-operation works against a conservative desire to maintain safe and comfortable distances. On the other, in the space it makes for difference and opacity, co-operation remains distinct from putatively utopian ideals of consensus or unmediated, transparent, and reciprocal understanding. Whitman’s own candid way of using words proves a helpful guide for beginning to think and feel our way toward this alternative relational mode.79 Read as theorizing and poetically performing a co-operative candor, then, Whitman in his own way helps to show that there are things to

79 Whitman often figures these relationships in the explicitly political terms of comradeship and solidarity. After seeing President Hayes speak while he is traveling west, for example, Whitman indicates “some revised ideas of oratory—of a new, opportune theory and practice of that art.” Here, speech is valued not because of its depth or dignity, but because of its ability “to compact and fraternize the States... and tie all and each with resistless double ties not only of intertrade barter, but human comradeship,” “President Hayes’s Speeches,” PWI 227; see also “Elias Hicks,” PWII 643.
be done with words, politically, beyond “the liberal aim of exchanging and testing ideas.”

I conclude with an example: Whitman’s curious practice of inhabiting the voice of others without quite claiming that voice as his own. “To the Spring” provides an initial orientation here. Whitman copies the voice of the brook without full certainty of what the brook says, knows, or is, without being able to fluently translate its fluvial utterance into his own tongue. But as I have suggested, this relationship models Whitman’s human relationships, too. We can see this in the section directly preceding “To the Spring,” entitled “New Themes Entered Upon,” which announces the end of the lengthy section of Specimen Days narrating Whitman’s Civil War experiences. Yet the very section that announces this shift from the war years to his post-war notes on “concrete outdoor Nature” works to link Whitman’s human and non-human relations.

Who knows, (I have it in my fancy, my ambition,) but the pages now ensuing may carry ray of sun, or smell of grass or corn, or call of bird, or gleam of stars by night, or snow-flakes falling fresh and mystic, to denizen of heated city house, or tired workman or workwoman? – or may-be in sickroom or prison – to serve as cooling breeze, or Nature’s aroma, to some fever’d mouth or latent pulse.

He suspects that his writing will be regarded less as “literature” and more as healing “draughts of water to drink.” He cannot be sure his words will affect the reader this way (he thus says “Who knows”? and “may-be”), though such was, at least, the effect the experiences Whitman is about to recount had on him: “Dear, soothing, healthy, restoration-hours – after three confining years of paralysis – after the long strain of the war.” Once again, a limitation on knowledge serves to orient, rather than derail, Whitman’s writing. Again, words play a role in constituting a relationship.

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80 Bersani, Intimacies, 87.
81 PWI 120.
Here, Whitman specifies that relationship as one not of knowledge-transmission but of care. It is this specific relationship that ties “New Themes” to what has come before, for care-giving, nursing, and writing were at the heart of Whitman’s wartime experience. “Down at the Front” announces Whitman’s hospital work abruptly in its ungrammatical first sentence: “Begin my visits among the camp hospitals in the army of the Potomac.”

Writing letters for injured soldiers is, from the start, his most important activity. On this first visit, he “had nothing to give, but wrote a few letters to folks home, mothers, &c.” But the work of writing letters continues even after Whitman is more experienced and has more to offer, and in “Hospital Scenes and Persons” he emphasizes that he wrote “all sorts of letters for them, (including love letters, very tender ones).”

Coviello expresses Whitman’s wartime work well when he writes “writing anchors Whitman’s sense of what care giving means,” but for him this “sits rather oddly alongside” Whitman’s textually proximate claims about the limits of writing with regard to the unknown. Given Coviello’s sense of Whitman’s sense of writing, the prominence of letter-writing in Whitman’s account of his wartime experience is “curious.” From my slightly different perspective, this is not so odd, for Whitman thinks the very purpose of his writing is forming relationships that allow for a potentially generative unknownness.

82 PWI 32.
83 Ibid., 33.
84 Ibid., 38.
85 Tomorrow’s Parties, 51.
86 Ibid.
87 The poetic formula for this relation might have been given, prophetically, among the final lines of “Song of Myself,” considered more fully above: “You will hardly know who I am, or what I mean, / But I shall be good health to you nevertheless, / And filter and fibre your blood.”
In Whitman’s care-work, this blending of opacity with a relational effort at communication involves no bold metaphysical or epistemological claim but a simple and practical one. Whitman showed up, had nothing to give, and so he helped men who he barely knew to write “very tender” letters. These letters are not quite conventional expressions of personality, though, for they are told not just to but through another (i.e. Whitman). Letter-writing is a form of care where the person cared for is not simply a dependent but a collaborator. Whitman writes letters for but also with the soldiers he visits. Letter-writing thus might be seen as an example of Whitman working collaboratively with the voices of others. “New Themes” suggests he hopes that his post-war writing can have a similarly healing effect on similarly unknown (less immediately present, but perhaps no more “impersonal”) interlocutors. Thus, Coviello’s apt claim that writing anchored Whitman’s sense of caregiving needs to be complemented with its inverse: caregiving often anchors Whitman’s sense of writing (and reading).

Through his “suggestive” method of writing, through his explicit use of the term candor, and through his complex refiguring of “Personality,” Whitman helps his readers glimpse and experiment with co-operative modes of candid speaking, listening, and acting. To linger with and in another voice can be uncomfortable. But Whitman does not disavow the voices that are entangled with his own yet remain unfamiliar. I call this difficult work a practice of candor where, inspired by Whitman’s use of the term, candor names a relational mode of communication that acknowledges or even affirms its own limitations and partialities. In situations where candor takes hold, without quite losing

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88 Consider, in this regard, the social media disclaimer omnipresent in the early 2010s: “retweets are not endorsements.”
yourself or seamlessly absorbing someone else, you may, like the folks in the “1855 Preface,” find another voice leaping out of you.89

What would it mean to make more space in contemporary political theorizing – particularly in ways of theorizing truth-telling – for these relational modes and the forms of collectivity that might attend them? In the first place, it might involve a heightened attention to the way, precisely as exemplary figures, the figure of the heroic whistleblower can be read in a more relational, perhaps even co-operative light. Human rights attorney Jesselyn Radack put the point simply but effectively in the context of a discussion of Snowden: “courage is contagious.”90 But it might also require going further, thinking of Snowden or Manning less as singular heroes inspiring others, of their acts less as momentary (if resonant) events, and instead thinking of both more as complexly structured nodes in a dense relational ecology of truthfulness. Indeed, in the present ecology of truthfulness, the high visibility of the figure of the whistle-blower may be symptomatic of some important constraints on contemporary political imagination, for dissidents today are as likely to confront “violence that [is] from the beginning exemplary and spectacular, pointedly addressed, meant to serve as a public warning or terror to

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89 Revising one’s own words, the central activity of Whitman’s adult life, also, could be seen as a kind of co-laborative kind of word-work. A more troubling example might be Whitman’s work, after the war, as a copyist at the Indian Bureau – work which he was, unlike Bartleby, all to happy to do, even if he was ultimately fired for the other work he was up to at the time (revising LG). I do not know if Whitman shared my opprobrium toward this means of employment, but his letters suggest he did not; see Edward W. Huffstetler, “Indian Affairs, Bureau of,” in Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia (New York: Routledge, 1998), ed. J. R. LeMaster, Donald D. Kummings, 308. However, I also know, from LG’s “A Slave at Auction,” that he was willing to experiment with inhabiting and co-operating with the voices of those he found repugnant. Michael Moon and Eve Sedgwick make a related point, and suggest another figure of this kind of co-operation, when they note that “Whitman points to his mother’s ‘great mimetic power’ and facility at ‘impersonation’ as among her dearest gifts to him – among the things he acquired, that is, in imitation of this beloved and resisted model,” “Confusion of Tongues,” Breaking Bounds, 27.

members of a particular community” as they are to face “hidden violence that requires exposure.” A more co-operative conception of truthfulness thus might also require relaxing the whistleblower’s exclusive hold on our imagination (without ignoring their legitimate claims to our support) in order to tune our attention to other models of activity and activism that might make candor’s political dimensions better felt. In the next and final chapter, I will begin this work.

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91 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” in Touching Feeling, 140.
Chapter 4 | Candor and Control in an Era of Openness

Open will win. It will win on the internet and then it will cascade across many walks of life: The future of government is transparency.

– Jonathan Rosenberg¹

No one today should accept a model of political life that would work just as well as a motto for Microsoft or AT&T.

– Jodi Dean²

This chapter attends to prophecies of and prescriptions for an “open” world, like those of Google’s Jonathan Rosenberg, while guided by Jodi Dean’s insistence that these corporate buzzwords cannot serve as sufficient bases for organizing political life and action. “Openness” does indeed have vocal proponents among powerful economic and technical actors. But openness, as a way of framing and engaging worlds, has a life that exceeds the intentions of its current advocates and holds possibilities beyond the technologies through which they have insisted it will materialize. Candor, as I've been developing the term, indicates some of these possibilities: the possibility of communication that is chancy rather than certain, creative rather than aggregative, co-operative rather than privately controlled.

“Openness” and “candor,” then, are the two keywords that organize this chapter, and I understand each in a distinct way. Perhaps the clearest example of a widespread rhetoric of openness can today be found in a letter written by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg on the occasion of the company’s initial public offering. It begins by proclaiming that “Facebook was not originally created to be a company. It was built to


²Publicity’s Secret, 14.
accomplish a social mission — to make the world more open and connected.”

I take this “social mission” as a serious challenge for contemporary political thought: the powerful rhetoric of openness contributes to the creation of a time and a space within which new modes of engagement become possible and some older forms of political activity may become less effective. I position candor in this opening created by the rhetoric of openness. Candor, as I have developed it, is a way of marking the distance between “what we think we know” about truthfulness and its more unruly and unwieldy operations within and between persons, places, words, and things. More specifically, I have argued that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Walt Whitman link truthfulness to chance, creativity, and co-operation in ways that do not so much exemplify as complicate and deform dominant understandings of truth-telling (indexed by terms like frankness, sincerity, and authenticity). In this final chapter, I explore how the fresh perspective I've offered on these thinkers through the frame of candor might illuminate a present in which we are urged to be ever more open, ever more connected, ever more ready and willing to share our contributions. I argue that candor offers a way to critically embody the call to openness: embody because it shares some features with the call to openness, but critically embody because it does not simply accept that call’s terms.

The theorists I've used to elaborate candor – Whitman, Nietzsche, and Rousseau – were themselves products and theorists of the then-emerging media landscape now called print culture. This landscape shaped their sometimes anxious, sometimes exuberant reflections on the problems and possibilities of expressing oneself and one’s perspective

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truthfully. From within the terms of the established story of modern print culture and its attendant modes of truth-telling, Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman will appear to be of little help in thinking about how the contemporary language of openness might be critically engaged and resisted, because (the story goes) today’s inducements to openness are themselves products or at least symptoms of the appropriation of the aspirations of print culture often associated with these thinkers: sincerity, authenticity, sharing, connecting. This is one way of recasting the story of Jurgen Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Indeed, there are good reasons to believe this incorporation of intersubjective communication into relations of exploitation and domination has only intensified since the 1962 publication of that key text. Sianne Ngai summarizes these developments this way: within “the new capitalist work paradigm, which often explicitly draws on artistic analogies,” “human competences once viewed as outside capital – affect, subjectivity, and sociability – are systematically put to work for the extraction of surplus value.” From this perspective, to invoke a thinker like Rousseau or a value like truthfulness now could only yield a reiteration and re-entrenchment of neoliberal capitalism and the violent modes of life that it organizes, not a resource for inspiring and organizing transformative political opposition to those modes of life.

While there is much to this developmental account of neoliberal capitalism, the story of the role of truth-telling in modern political thought that I have narrated

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4 The exemplary model of the standard history, with attention to its historical-material features, is Lionel Trilling’s *Sincerity and Authenticity*, although my comments here are less directed at Trilling than the many accounts that followed in the wake of his.
complicates the picture. In connecting these two new media moments – the development of print culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the emergence of social media in the early twenty-first century – my aim is both analogical and genealogical. On the one hand, the hopes and anxieties of the past resemble those expressed in the present in non-superficial ways: understanding how people grappled with theretofore unanticipated levels of personal and political disclosure heralded by the age of mass print may therefore help to imagine similar tactics and strategies around social media. On the other hand, the present media moment also grows out of the earlier moment in important ways. A fresh understanding of these aspects of the past may thus cast a surprising light on the present, for the values of chance, creativity, and co-operation represent possibilities so far less fully (or at least less familiarly) captured by unjust forms of contemporary state and corporate power. In its travels along these two circuits, analogical and genealogical, the minor version of truthfulness that I designate with the term candor enables new opportunities for theoretical and practical engagement with the contemporary media-political landscape. I thus focus on ways that the key features of candor might be used to articulate what is unsatisfying and unjust about openness as it is currently promoted by the likes of Facebook and Google. Alongside attempts to assert rights to control our “private lives” and “personal data,” we might also focus some effort on challenging the way state and corporate versions of “openness” themselves aim to

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6 As Ngai and other theorists of neoliberalism rightly emphasize, “chance” and “creativity” are well-publicized watchwords for contemporary capitalism. However, in my chapters on those themes, I have shown that when the thinkers I am focusing on elaborate “chance” and “creativity” in relation to truth-telling, they conceptualize those terms in a way quite distinct from their status as entrepreneurial buzzwords: Rousseau’s chance is not a manageable margin of risk, Nietzsche’s creativity is not virtuosic performance.
capture, cull, monetize, and instrumentalize communicative life in ways that limit

*chance, creativity,* and *co-operation.*

By thinking through the resonances and dissonances of the history of recent decades with the history of recent centuries, and by attending to imbrications of political economies, communication technologies, legal principles, and ethico-political commitments, this final chapter returns with a difference to the concerns outlined in the Introduction. There, I considered the distance between Adrienne Rich’s 1977 account of a feminist politics of “honesty” and her return to that essay in 2001 in light of thirty years of experience with neoliberalism’s ability to incorporate second-wave feminism’s most radical demands. Here, I again follow Rich’s trail, this time guided by more recent feminist and queer theoretical considerations of the concepts of “the public” and “the private.”

From a feminist and queer perspective familiar with the ambivalences and limits of the dichotomy between the public and the private, it is regrettable that so much of the energy motivating contemporary thinking about “openness” has been captured by a simplistic clash between laments of a loss of privacy and celebrations of the internet as a new public sphere. This dichotomy elides a long line of feminist and queer thinking about how the public/private divide could be avoided, undone, redistributed, or reimagined in ways irreducible to an uncritically romantic “longing for unity.” This chapter contributes to efforts to redress this failure of imagination by deploying the

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queerly feminist value of candor to provide an alternative vocabulary for addressing the possibilities and dangers that accompany an “era of openness.” Treating candor as a counter-hegemonic enactment of contemporary openness, I aim to explore how the familiar feminist mantra “the personal is political” might retain or regain a radical charge in the context of a pervasively personalized politics of lifestyles, identities, and consumer choices.

I begin by mapping the specificity of contemporary inducements to openness, first on their own and then by comparing the language of “openness” with the related but distinguishable concepts “publicness,” “inclusiveness,” and “transparency.” Finding that the risks of the present moment are not fully captured by a language of “threats to privacy,” I then invoke the central features of the ethos of candor (chance, creativity, and co-operation) to develop an alternative framework for addressing the harms and violations associated with contemporary openness.

**An Archeology of Openness**

What I call the *language* or *rhetoric* of openness is not reducible to the word openness, but includes the set of images, associations, aspirations, effects, and affects that accompany the word in its recent journeys. An open letter attributed to Mark Zuckerberg included in Facebook’s S-1 Registration Statement with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, indicating the company’s decision to file for an initial public offering, marks a key moment in that journey. The letter begins by situating Facebook among a set of technologies that have, in our time, a revolutionary potential equivalent to that of the
printing press and the television. Today, “the majority of people in the world have access
to the internet or mobile phones — the raw tools necessary to start sharing what they’re
thinking, feeling and doing with whomever they want.” Facebook hopes to “build the
services that give people the power to share and help them once again transform many of
our core institutions and industries.” They will, in short, “make the world more open.”
This “big” mission “starts small — with the relationship between two people.” By
“extending people’s capacity to build and maintain relationships,” by getting people to
share more “— even if just with their close friends or families — ” Facebook “creates a
more open culture and leads to a better understanding of the lives and perspectives of
others.” They “hope to rewire the way people spread and consume information.” In fact,
the letter argues, Facebook has already helped to initiate such a transformation and now
aims “to help this rewiring accelerate.”

Though the letter promises to clarify what Facebook’s mission of “openness”
means, it does not get very far beyond providing a list of activities that go with – or
perhaps are intended as synonyms for – openness. Openness is operationalized as
“sharing,” “forming connections,” “building and maintaining relationships,” and
accessing “as much information as possible.” It requires “dialogue” and “engagement.”

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9 Facebook, S-1 Registration Statement, 67. The other quotes in this paragraph and the one that follows are
drawn from this page and the next. On the relative novelty of including such manifesto-like statements in
an S-1 Registration Statement, see Yuval Dror, “We Are Not Here for the Money: Founders’ Manifestos,”
New Media and Society 17.4 (2015), 1–16.

10 This is, apparently, not only a corporate but also a personal mission. As of today, if you go to
Zuckerberg’s own public Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/zuck), under “About Mark,” you will
find this sentence (and only this sentence): “I’m trying to make the world a more open place.” Zuckerberg
has frequently repeated – and occasionally elaborated – this mission in interviews. See, for example, Ryan
Singel, “Mark Zuckerberg: I Donated to Open Source, Facebook Competitor,” Wired (May 28, 2010),
http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2010/05/zuckerberg-interview.
Qualities associated with a more open world include “honesty,” “transparency,” “directness,” and “authenticity.” Even though it only makes it this far, and thus does not fully live up to what it promises, this is a rather remarkable document. It is not my suggestion that we take this letter at face value, as a sincerely held statement of ideals that Facebook is executing or as a political blueprint for the rest of us to adopt wholesale. But I would also urge that we not dismiss this document as “merely” corporate boilerplate. I would hope that, just as we would not unthinkingly accept this vision, we would not unthinkingly reject it. I start with the Facebook IPO letter, and will frequently return to its terms below, not because I think its claims are accurate or noble, but because it provides a clear instance of a language of openness that circulates widely today. I am interested, that is, in the contexts that make a distinctive sense of openness available to Zuckerberg and intelligible to others, even if those contexts are not fully present in our minds and that distinctiveness does not immediately strike our ears. With a better map of the field where inducements to openness are taking shape and spreading, critics of contemporary inducements to openness will be better positioned to respond to openness.

The use of similar rhetoric by other high-tech companies provides the most obvious context for Zuckerberg’s use of the language of openness. “Openness” has long been in the air around Silicon Valley, as in the prophecy of openness cited as an epigraph to this chapter from Jonathan Rosenberg, then serving as a Senior Vice President at

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11 A more open world means “a more honest and transparent dialogue around government” and “will also encourage businesses to engage with their customers directly and authentically.”

12 By calling this case “clear,” I mean that the language of openness appears here in an almost entirely unadulterated form, whereas the next four examples cited mix the vocabulary of openness with other vocabularies (transparency, publicity, etc.) that I argue are distinguishable.
Google. Rosenberg’s manifesto-like statement of “the meaning of open” also leaves the concept conspicuously under-defined. Yet Rosenberg suggests definitional work is urgent because, he warns, “many companies” may falsely claim the mantle of openness “since they know that declaring themselves to be open is both good for their brand and completely without risk.” Of course, this charge could be turned right back at Google – which is exactly the response Rosenberg’s letter received in many quarters of the internet. Rosenberg, however, likely intended it as a jab at his high-tech competitors: Apple’s products are explicitly named, but Facebook may be another of Rosenberg’s targets, as Google is increasingly regarded as a direct competitor with – even rival to – Facebook.

Despite their author’s competitive interest in distinctiveness, though, Rosenberg’s 2009 letter and Zuckerberg’s 2012 letter are strikingly similar in their accounts of openness. As in Zuckerberg’s letter, accessing and sharing – in particular, “sharing valuable information” – appear to be definitive activities indicating “the spirit of openness” for Rosenberg. Although Rosenberg’s letter suggests that debate “should be in the open,” contestation does not appear to be central to his notion of openness. But that’s not to say Rosenberg understands openness as powerless or apolitical: as in Zuckerberg’s letter, Rosenberg argues that when openness spreads, it “transforms lives globally;” as a result, “the world will be a better place.” While Rosenberg is perhaps


more direct than Zuckerberg in emphasizing the instrumental role openness can play in producing new products and new sources of value, he also does not shy away from speaking in terms of broad ideals. Openness “deliver[s] the world’s information to the palms of every person” and “give[s] everyone the freedom of expression.” Openness promotes “understanding,” allows systems that “harness the intellect of the general population,” and “build[s] trust.” In the next section, I'll further specify the travel and development of the concept of openness within tech-culture in a way that may explain the precise similarities (and differences) between these two instances of the language of openness. For now, my aim is simply to make its omnipresence visible and its broad (and broadly shared) contours palpable. If two companies on opposite sides of an industry that affects more and more lives are deploying the same language, perhaps that alone is a reason to attend to that language.

Both Zuckerberg and Rosenberg directly link the technical sense of openness to a politics of openness, and this linkage appears to have resonance, for the language of openness circulates well beyond Silicon Valley. Consider Wikileaks. The gap between Facebook and Wikileaks is significantly greater than that between Facebook and Google, as pointed out by an image circulating after *Time* named Zuckerberg “Person of the Year” in 2010.\(^\text{16}\) On one side, the image contains a photo of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and a speech bubble saying “I give private information on corporations to you for free, and I'm the villain.” On the other side, a photo of Zuckerberg, and a speech bubble that reads “I give your private information to corporations for money. And I'm Man of the

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Year.” While such a comparison is apt, it overlooks (or, through the language of privacy, papers over) some of the significant ideological proximities shared by Zuckerberg and Assange, proximities indicated by their shared fluency in the language of openness. The “About” section of wikileaks.org formulates its mission in these familiar-sounding terms: “Open government answers injustice rather than causing it. Open government exposes and undoes corruption. Open governance is the most effective method of promoting good governance. Today... the need for openness and transparency is greater than ever. WikiLeaks interest is the revelation of the truth.”17 It seems, then, that when Wikileaks tries to describe its ambitions, the first or best language available to it is the same language of openness, couched in the same chain of equivalences and associations, and given the same lofty telos, as its ostensible antipodes, Facebook and Google.

As one final example illustrates, a language of openness also circulates inside the more formal structures of electoral politics. Both President Barack Obama’s Whitehouse and the Tea Party Patriots prominently declared their commitment to “openness.” And both groups have been criticized – using precisely the same language of openness – for falling short of these commitments.18

What is going on here? As we have already seen – and will take up again later – transformations in the needs and organization of capital are important (likely definitive) parts of the story. But a crude demystification, exposing a single form and force of

17 https://wikileaks.org/About.html
capitalism as the base on which the superstructural language of openness rests, cannot tell
the whole story. A careful analysis of changing economic conditions might illuminate
why so many people, on different sides of so many issues and industries, are currently
describing their actions and ideals in terms of “openness” and a commitment to “make
the world a more open place.” But that analysis wouldn't quite be able to offer an account
of what it ultimately means to be “open” here nor of how this language is functioning.

I borrow my method for addressing these questions – and so for analyzing the
language of openness – from Michel Foucault. Openness, like the notion of desire that
Foucault identifies as the spark for his *History of Sexuality*, can be found “at the very
center” of a number of currently hegemonic political and economic projects *and* in “the
conceptions that [seek] to detach themselves from” those projects. One reason for this
may be that openness has, like desire, become for us a problem, one of the ways “being is
historically constituted... as something that can and must be thought” (6–7). Its unstable
outlines make openness a slippery problem, yet the language of openness persists – even
insists – in and through its instability. Rather than try to explain away that slipperyness, I
will make it an object of investigation.

Openness, like the concepts Foucault studied, “allows diverse phenomena to be
grouped together, despite the apparently loose connections between them, as if they were
of the same nature, derived from the same origin, or brought the same type of causal

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parenthetically in the text. Below, when I turn from an analysis of openness to a critique of openness, I'll
turn from Foucault to Butler. But Foucault is, of course, a profound influence on Butler, and the two tasks
of analysis and critique are closely connected in Foucault. Showing the ways one cultural anxiety might
call forth a range of responses and become theorized and embodied in diverse ways is, indeed, the central
project of *The Use of Pleasure*. 

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mechanisms into play” (35). Foucault’s approach does not attempt to disaggregate or simplify such heterogeneous ensembles, but rather to “examine the forms themselves,” in their complex and apparently contradictory character (12). This approach involves bracketing the question of what the respective “authors” are actually doing or would like to do in using a language of openness and instead focuses on the specific operation of statements and discourses themselves.20 This is a strategic decision, for the intentions of the speakers are one (but only one) of the many forces at work in producing effects. But foregrounding function while allowing questions of motive to rest in the background helps me avoid merely parroting or dismissing a corporate line or political rhetoric about “openness.” Instead, using “openness” as it currently circulates as an archeological site for investigation, I ask: what is the specificity of the discourse of openness? What work does it do? Can we be sure that openness has any stable function at all, given the wide range of actors and interests who have positioned themselves as advocates of it?

While “openness” is indeed doing distinct work when pronounced by high-tech companies like Facebook and Google, by activist organizations like Wikileaks, or in both self-descriptions and critiques of institutional political actors ranging from the Obama administration to the Tea Party Patriots, together these various usages of the language of openness form an interesting constellation.21 Attending to the decentered operation of

20 Archeology does not treat discourse “as an element that ought to be transparent, but whose unfortunate opacity must often be pierced if one is to reach at last the depth of the essential,” Archeology of Knowledge, 138. In its attention to the productivity of surfaces rather than the sincerity of intentions, the method of this section also builds on the substantive conclusions of Chapter 2 and 3.

21 I slide between describing openness as an ensemble, constellation, and assemblage. Though at times it may be important to distinguish these notions and their (Foucaultian, Critical Theoretical, or Deleuzian) genealogies, here I mean each to indicate more or less the same thing: a loose arrangement of heterogeneous elements where both the items related and the modes of relating are diverse and shifting.
openness across these domains, rather than the cross-context differences, underscores the internal heterogeneity that marks each invocation. Schematically, these might be termed heterogeneities of content, genre, and scale. I'll elaborate the sense of each of these three in turn.

First, the rhetoric of openness is characterized by a strikingly diverse set of contents. Foucault noted that the concept of “sexuality” peculiarly lumps together disparate “behaviors, but also sensations, images, desires, instincts, and passions” (35). In an analogous way, openness groups together potentially distinguishable activities like sharing, communicating, and accessing, alongside even more heterogenous elements like relationships, information, feelings, media, and technologies. In its blend of the technical and the emotional, the term’s range is positively cyborgian. The “elements” of each “ensemble” are certainly distinct, and are often treated as such, but are also “closely bound to one another” (42).

The diverse range of genres within which the rhetoric of openness is simultaneously articulated represent a second heterogeneity. In many of the instances cited above, the language of openness seems at once to take the form of prophecy and prescription. Whatever openness is, it is apparently something many people feel we should be doing and will, in any event, be doing more in the future. The future will be open. The future should be open. The strange blend of description, prescription, and prophecy suggests that our experience of openness has emerged, or is in the process of
emerging, as a moral experience. “Blend” is an important word in the last sentence, because while not all prescriptions or all descriptions or even all instances of the word “should” indicate the presence of a moral problem, when “is,” “will,” and “ought” all appear together it may be a sign of a particularly moralized form of anxiety. In a manner (if not an intensity) analogous to sexuality for European moderns, flesh for early Christians, or aphrodisia for the citizens of classical Athens, “openness” today suggests a “prescriptive ensemble,” a “set of values and rules of action,” as well as various ways for taking up those rules within particular relationships (12). Combining a discourse of moral choice with a rhetoric of inevitability, the prophets of openness enjoin their audiences to take part in what they are told is their fate. We are warned to be on guard against false representations of openness by those like Rosenberg who also ascribe to openness an almost world-historical inevitability.

Finally, openness spans a heterogeneous set of scales. Openness is associated with such (apparently) everyday phenomena as sharing, connecting, and relating, yet is also ascribed a fundamentally transformative role in such “big” matters as institutional politics and economics. In other words, personal truthfulness and factual truth, the micro and the macro, the routine and the revolutionary, are all paired and mixed within the rhetoric of openness.

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22 For Foucault, experience does not primarily refer to what happens to a person, nor to the impressions left by what happens. Instead, he uses the term experience to indicate “the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture,” Use of Pleasure, 4. To call openness a moral experience is to put particular emphasis on the latter two dimensions. In a different but closely related register, one might say that in speaking in the genres of description, prescription, and prophecy, the language of openness stands ready to offer itself as an answer to each of the three famous questions Kant poses near the end of the first Critique: “What can I know?” “What ought I to do?” “What may I hope?” Critique of Pure Reason (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 735.
Each of these heterogeneities serves to indicate the peculiar place of openness in contemporary state and corporate rhetoric. They indicate the ambition and scope of that rhetoric. They also indicate the slipperiness of openness and the difficulties of forming a commensurate response. To further clarify each of these problems, it will help to compare the heterogeneities that characterize this sort of openness with some closely related concepts and partially overlapping senses of openness.

Publicity, Inclusivity, Transparency

In this section, I will trace some of the debates I want to pivot from – even as I remain inspired by and indebted to the same – in order to bring out the specific sense of openness I think is most relevant here. Although openness is often empirically intermingled with the cognate languages of publicness, inclusiveness, and transparentness, these discourses are analytically separable. Each works differently. While there are often good reasons for the proximities, approximations, and slippages I'll highlight, my goal is to disentangle elements at risk of becoming too closely bound. I will seek, in other words, to introduce some friction into vocabularies that may otherwise become a bit too slick.

Those who would welcome Mark Zuckerberg’s call to openness for its possibilities for greater inclusivity, or reject it for expressing a naïve faith in publicity, have misheard and misconstrued the call. These are not the terms in which openness speaks, and prove to be of limited value in evaluating calls to openness. Rather than quickly assume that these formulations are, say, democratic-theory-gone-sloppy (because
they have confused vertical forms of transparency between citizen and state with the
horizontal interactions between citizens) or “mere rhetoric” that fails to match realities
(because of the digital divide, a perceived decline in face-to-face communication, or the
carefully polished self-presentation of contemporary politicians), I instead attend to the
unique possibilities and dangers of this specific discursive assemblage. Never merely
rhetorical, the contemporary language of openness has its own peculiar material
functioning and action-potential. A sense of the similarities and differences between
publicness, inclusiveness, transparency, and openness is essential for understanding what
“openness” means in contemporary politico-technical debates and for identifying the
critical possibilities each affords.

In political science and political theory, the language of openness is often
interarticulated with, and often treated as a synonym for, the language of publicity or
publicness. 23 It is thus a striking feature of Zuckerberg’s statement about Facebook’s
mission of openness that the language of the public, publicity, and publishing do not
appear in it (with the, perhaps significant, exception of three references to Facebook
becoming a “public company”). This may help to explain the fact that Zuckerberg
initially responded to criticism of Facebook as violating privacy with a mixture of

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23 “Some of the primarily normative elements linked together through publicity include ideals of openness,
inclusivity, visibility, equality, accessibility, and rationality,” Dean, Publicity’s Secret, 2; “The relation of
public to private can take any of the following forms at least: 1) Public, open to everyone; Private,
restricted to some,” Warner, Publics and Counterpublics, 29. Perhaps symptomatic here is the difficult case
of translating the title of a work that serves as a touchstone for both Dean and Warner, Jürgen Habermas’s
first major book, which the existing English translation renders Structural Transformation of the Public
Sphere. While Habermas does use the German cognates for “sphere” and “public” in the book’s main text,
it seems that a totally literal translation of the key word in Habermas’s title – Öffentlichkeit – would be
“openliness,” or, less awkwardly, “openness.” Warner himself draws attention to this translation difficulty,
Publics and Counterpublics, 47.
confusion, consternation, and indifference. While he certainly has a commercial interest in resisting privacy claims, it may also be that he considers the objection of “privacy!” inappropriate because he has not said, and has not intended to say, “publicity!” but rather openness.

Publicity implies a specific audience: the public. The notion of “the public” carries a particular history with it, indicating a specific response to a definite set of concerns, distinct from those associated with notions of people, mass, multitude, culture, community, society, nation, etc. “A public,” in Warner’s terms, “is a relation among strangers.” It may be a feature of modern publicness that this audience is only ever a “virtual object,” a fantastic ideal, or a projected center, but publicness nevertheless continues to aim at a public. Openness, however, does not seem to have any particularly privileged audience, object, end, center, or aim. Per Zuckerberg and other contemporary advocates of openness, a government can be open with its people – but I could also be open with my own grandmother. Neither of these is exactly the same as addressing a public. Although we might imagine other times when openness might be addressed to a

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24 For an overview of this initial response and Zuckerberg’s eventual shift in tone and tactic, see Will Oremus, “Facebook’s Privacy Pivot,” http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2014/07/facebook_s_privacy_pivot_mark_zuckerberg_s_plan_to_win_back_trust.html.

25 The statements on openness offered by Rosenberg, the Tea Party Patriots, the Obama Whitehouse, and Wikileaks do alternate more freely between the vocabulary of “openness” and that of “the public,” publicity, and publishing (to a greater or lesser degree). This is one reason why, as I noted at the outset, I consider Zuckerberg’s to be a particularly clear statement of the value of “openness.”

26 Publics and Counterpublics, 56; Publicity’s Secret, 9; Habermas, Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 359.

27 The distinction I draw here between openness and publicity is related to Daniel Naurin’s distinction between transparency and publicity, and his work offers a helpful indication of why and how such a distinction might matter in other modes of political inquiry. See Naurin, “Transparency, Publicity, and Accountability: The Missing Links,” Swiss Political Science Review 12.3 (2006), 90–98, but compare my discussion of transparency below.
public, it is not reducible to public address. Indeed, in the formulations of the language of openness that I’ve taken as my point of departure, it is crucially important to the functioning of openness that it not primarily involve public address. In Zuckerberg’s formulation, the transformative power of openness – which we might call its macro-political effects, and which might include its public effects – necessarily “starts small,” with acts of sharing with friends and family that do not share the orientation toward strangers characteristic of public address.

This currently emerging sense of “openness” is also not simply synonymous with inclusiveness, although the two are often seen together and at times conflated. What I mean by “inclusiveness” is well-captured in an essay by Jamie King. King traces the “considerable celebrity” of what he calls “the idea of openness” (understood, I'm arguing, as a kind of potential inclusiveness) to the work done by Richard Stallman and Eric Raymond in the mid-1990’s articulating and institutionally grounding the principles of the open source software movement, whose “key elements” are “communal management and open access to the informational resources for production, openness to contributions from a diverse range of users/producers, flat hierarchies, and a fluid organizational structure.”28 As phrases like “open access” and “diverse range of users” indicate, the controlling sense of open here is “open to all comers.” This sense of openness as potential inclusiveness involves not only “allowing new people to participate,” but also a bias toward decentralized and consensus-oriented methods of decision-making.29


29 Ibid., 46–47.
through the ideal of inclusiveness, “open” appears to refer to inclusive processes of contestation (i.e. “open-minded,” “open to debate,” or “open to all”).

To be sure, this sense of inclusiveness is far from flat: it gestures toward a rather heterogeneous set of elements, including argument, questioning, freedom, inclusion, tolerance, possibility, critique, and flexibility. My point is two-fold. On the one hand, this diverse ensemble and the historical problematic that has brought its elements together seems distinct from the language of openness tracked in my initial survey of that rhetoric. Those instances of openness suggest a different assemblage of affects, ideas, and practices: sharing, communicating, connections, relationships, media, technologies, information, and feelings. Yet on the other hand, the two domains are clearly connected: Rosenberg and Zuckerberg both locate the “openness” they explicate in the history of open source software development. To explain and explore both of these dimensions (both the distance and the proximity between openness in the sense of potential inclusiveness and openness in the sense of sharing and connecting), I want to extend that timeline forward and refine its texture: the statements of Rosenberg and Zuckerberg

30 The distinction between “openness” and inclusiveness is significantly related to that between “openness” and “publicness,” insofar as openness as potential inclusivity is what people often seem to have in mind when they associate or conflate publicness and openness. In these contexts, openness (i.e. openness understood as potential inclusion in a process of contestation) is linked to publicness, which is thus taken to be essentially a matter of discussion, debate, and deliberation, themselves typically understood as essentially matters of thinking, reasoning, or other human cognitive processes. There are notable exceptions to this understanding of “the public.” For example, in The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), Charles Hirschkind emphasizes the emotional, passionate, sensory, prereflexive, and visceral elements of public formation. William Connolly has also drawn attention to these features of political life (and, in so doing, as served as inspiration and interlocutor for Hirschkind). In general, however, Connolly has been somewhat less insistent that these be thought of as elements of something called “the public use of reason in the public sphere,” for reasons he explains in Why I Am Not a Secularist (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 29–36. For his part, Warner questions the degree to which the “discourse culture” studied by Hirschkind can still (usefully) be called “a public,” Publics and Counterpublics, 305n56.

31 Rosenberg even extends the timeline further back, linking the open source movement to an early twentieth century history of “patent pooling.”
indicate that, as “openness” has traveled within and beyond tech-culture, its meaning has shifted. The once-controlling sense of potentially inclusive contestation has become increasingly faint, or even absent, in more recent invocations of the rhetoric of openness.

The key difference between the sort of openness I am tracking and the notion of inclusivity from which it seems to have emerged is that the former pluralizes, supplements, and deemphasizes the bias toward epistemological concerns that defines most formulations of inclusiveness and many formulations of publicness. This manifests in at least three ways. First, in the contemporary language of openness, the concern is not so much with who gets what information. The concern is simply with sharing and circulation as such. Second, at least in Zuckerberg’s formulation, openness is less about information, more about feelings and perspectives. Finally, its goals are associational (building connections, strengthening relationships) rather than aversive (arguing, debating).

32 John Palfrey, in his article on the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, does some of the work of showing how this sense of openness as potential inclusiveness is itself a complex phenomenon. “The End of the Experiment: The Failure of Democracy in ICANN,” in *Reformatting Politics*, 161–180. Palfrey highlights three different understandings of openness: first (a meaning he associates with “activists”) “openness in the sense of an ability to participate in the decision-making process,” second (a meaning he associates with Richard Stallman) an “outcome oriented” openness focused on “positive freedom to do whatever users want with the output of the process,” and finally (drawing on Eric Raymond), a “production model” of openness emphasizing openness “as a process by which a good end is achieved,” *Reformatting Politics*, 170. The first is about an ability to “affect the decision-making process,” the second about “nonproprietary outcomes,” and the third about “a nonproprietary process,” *Reformatting Politics*, 170–171. My claim is that Zuckerberg’s letter, for example, emerges from but reflects a shift in this contested context.

33 Like her *Publicity’s Secret*, Jodi Dean’s *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* centers on an indictment of “communicative capitalism,” but whereas the former takes the ideal of the public as its source of critical leverage, the latter focuses more tightly on the ideals of access, opportunity, participation, and responsiveness (decoupled from the public as their necessary subject or object), *Democracy*, 23. In other words, I read the first as a critique of publicity, and the second as a critique of what I call “openness as inclusiveness.” Both are persuasive. But, by elaborating another sense or dimension of openness, I aim to show that these trenchant and formidable analyses do not exhaust the contemporary conjuncture.

34 Though she often analyzes it under a rubric of publicity, this is a central feature of what Dean calls communicative capitalism. See especially her discussion of the shift from “messages” to “contributions,” *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 21–28.
A closer cousin to “openness” is “transparency.” Like openness, transparency is an increasingly popular “organizing principle and administrative goal,” and indeed “seems to span the political divide.” Like openness, transparency currently circulates as, in a broad sense, “a moral discourse.” More precisely, the rhetoric of transparency can, like that of openness, be figured as “an assemblage of normativity that mobilizes actors to respond in certain ways.” Indeed, even in the seemingly impersonal world of corporate managerial discourse, transparency “takes on a personal dimension, as something to which each individual must relate and respond.” In the words of a presenter at a panel on corporate transparency at a 2002 conference of Business for Social Responsibility, “Transparency is a personal thing.” Pulled into the morally charged field of transparency rhetoric, “each actor has to demonstrate his or her responsibility for making things transparent.” As with openness, this hazy moralization of transparency can also open opportunities for politicization: “The matter of what constitutes transparency is a subject of negotiation: between individuals, within organizations, between organizations and the state, organizations and the public.” Accordingly, “What exactly counts as good, ethical behavior and responsible action is up for grabs, and subject to… contestation.”


37 Ibid., 88.

38 Ibid., 89.


The scholarship I’m relying on in these descriptions of transparency – by Claire Birchall and in the co-authored work of Christina Garsten and Monica Lindh De Montoya – often slides between openness and transparency. They often use the two terms interchangeably and their definitions of each frequently include the other. While they are largely critical of the valorization of transparency, in this shifting use of slippery terms these scholars mirror advocates of both openness and transparency: Wikileaks, Rosenberg, and even Zuckerberg all invoke transparency in the elaborations of openness cited in the previous section. In part because of this significant conceptual and empirical entanglement, I do not dissociate transparency and openness as strongly as I dissociate openness from inclusiveness and publicity. Moreover, while scholars of publicity and inclusivity sometimes force emerging problems into these old frames, I think the transparency literature is much more attentive to the nuance, richness, and novelty of contemporary formulations of disclosure. But while I draw on the literature on transparency, I continue to foreground the term openness.

I find two chief distinctions between these two overlapping rhetorical domains. First, while Birchall notes the appeal that transparency holds for many activists and Garsten and Montoya track a certain personalization of transparency, transparency rhetoric seems almost invariably pulled toward the macro, toward the level of the state or the firm. While they go on to track the way transparency rhetoric hails individuals, in the first instance Garsten and Montoya name “states, markets and corporations” as the addressees of calls for transparency.41 While transparency rhetoric invests individuals

with responsibility for the transparency of these larger entities, the objects and content of transparency less consistently reach down to the level of personality. The language of openness, by contrast, promiscuously moves between different scales and domains of life.

Second, transparency is closely tied to a “just the facts” concept of objectivity, while openness makes room for considerations of entities with variable degrees of agency, affectivity, and creativity. Transparency “suggests that... what is visible can also be represented, objectified, measured, and compared.” Transparency is a “neutral, automated, systematic, efficient, lawful, and regulatory mode of disclosure,” and its advocates claim that it “disseminate[s] pre-interpretive or noninterpretive information and data in an efficient fashion.” Openness, on the other hand, is less visibly married to (but often affiliates with) the impersonal, liberal, and proceduralist associations of “transparency.” Openness requires real work. And part of the work (not to mention the labor) of being open involves not so much a commitment to expose facts as a willingness to share thoughts, feelings, and perspectives about and alongside said facts.

I find the conceptual promiscuity of openness promising because my interest is in thinking together (in a palpably fraught rather than frictionless way) personal projects of disclosure, the investment of political movements in honesty, corporate inducements to

42 Ibid.
43 “Radical Transparency,” 78.
44 I briefly discussed the Arendtian distinction between labor and work in the previous chapter in order to indicate the complex status of Whitman’s poetic practice. I resurrect the distinction here to get at a slightly different set of problems: the massive and unshared value currently being generated by corporations like Facebook from the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and perspectives.
openness, and state promises of transparency. Yet highlighting the more personal nature of openness as compared to transparency – both in terms of its scale and its content – is also troubling: it indicates another way the state and capital increasingly deploy the language of subjectivity and affectivity, which previously seemed to offer some respite from or resistance to their terms, for their own ends. Thus, my point is not that openness is “better than” transparency, only that it calls forth a slightly different set of research tasks and a different set of political questions. While Birchall’s focus on transparency leads her to ask why the left has come to adopt this liberal language, my focus on openness leads me to ask: as neoliberal capitalism has moved into the domain of the personal, are there aspects of this domain that have been less fully incorporated or subsumed within hegemonic terms? How might they be practiced, developed, and used as a basis for critique? In what follows, I explore several different possible responses the aspiration to openness might call forth. I believe the notion of “candor” indicates a response with a critical edge: a partially submerged past within the present indicating a future that might be different from, rather than merely reproduce, the current moment.

Embodying Openness

In an era where billion-dollar companies are organized around a mission of “sharing” and where politicians vie to demonstrate their commitment to “transparency,”

45 While the introduction and the first three chapters focused on developing the linkages between the first two domains, now I am trying to re-situate those investigations in the context of the last two.

the risks of depoliticization and co-optation that Adrienne Rich came to see facing a politics of honesty have only increased. While I acknowledge that there are good reasons to resist inducements to openness by seeking to protect and cultivate experiences of “closure” and control, with Rich, I am interested in thinking in a different direction. Rather than resisting calls to openness or uncritically embracing them, I propose critically affirming, enacting, and embodying openness by cultivating an ethos of candor.

Just as the earlier part of this chapter took cues from the structures of Foucault’s analysis of sexuality, this move draws inspiration from Judith Butler’s approach to gender. Butler not only analyzes the current sex/gender system, but also explores the critical modes of life it affords, the ways we might do gender differently. Eschewing the fantasy of a total escape from the discourses into which one is born, this mode of critique suggests alternative ways that the calls and modes of recognition offered by dominant discourses might be taken up. Thus, in a paradigmatic example, Butler argues that gay and lesbian articulations of butch and femme resignify hegemonic understandings of masculinity and femininity, without simply repeating their terms. Likewise, recognizing the current force of calls to openness, I ask how openness might be reimagined and reinhabited. If contemporary inducements to openness of the sort I’ve attempted to clarify here have a moral or ethical quality, what subject positions can we take up, what possible ethos can we cultivate, in response to those inducements? What sorts of affective

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47 Undoing Gender, 3–4


49 Amanda Anderson calls these questions of “characterological enactment,” The Way We Argue Now, 3.
comportment are appropriate to openness? In short, if we live in an era of openness, how can we make openness livable?

We might imagine the many possible responses to the call for openness as arranged on a continuum, from those that decisively react against openness to those that fully embrace it. At the first pole are responses that seek to develop strong versions of individuality, autonomy, and self-control, to protect and cultivate experiences of closure, which might take the form of intimacy, ownership, secrecy, domesticity, introversion, evasion, dissimulation, or privacy. I am more interested in the other side of this continuum, where we might find concepts like sincerity, frankness, authenticity, acting in concert, honesty, – or candor. I now take candor as a unique style or way of embodying openness. If honesty and authenticity seem to be the preferred embodiments of openness in Zuckerberg’s IPO letter, a turn to candor may represent a way of taking up the call to openness in an aberrant or unexpected way.

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50 Although I don’t think this move in my argument stands or falls with its grounding in the history of the English language, it does seem that “candor” and “openness” are often already associated in this way. In George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, for example, Dorothea Casaubon (née Brooke) is repeatedly described as both open and candid, and in a more negative description of the banker Mr. Bulstrode, Eliot seems to imply that candor is a specific way of embodying the general trait of openness: “Loud men called his subdued tone an undertone, and sometimes implied that it was inconsistent with openness; though there seems to be no reason why a loud man should not be given to concealment of anything except his own voice, unless it can be shown that Holy Writ has placed the seat of candor in the lungs.” *Middlemarch* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 123, my emphasis.

51 He writes, in lines already quoted above, that Facebook “believe[s] building tools to help people share can bring a more honest and transparent dialogue around government” and that “a more open world will also encourage businesses to engage with their customers directly and authentically.”
To show how the features of an ethos of candor might work together as a unique response to the contemporary condition of and inducement to openness, I will juxtapose the critical possibilities afforded by candor with the critical potential mobilized by the language of privacy. Critics of the newly prominent rhetoric of openness – and the broader set of technologies and practices that rhetoric is summoned to justify – commonly invoke “rights to privacy” to express limits of this rhetoric, reasons for suspecting its proponents, and methods for the regulation or rejection of the attendant technologies and practices. There are strong reasons to be skeptical of the rhetoric of openness and the new technologies and practices that attend it. Likewise, it would be foolish to completely banish the word privacy from all theoretical vocabularies and permanently retire the concept from all legal toolboxes. However, the concept of privacy has become overextended. In the space created by its partial retraction, I offer candor and its attendant values of chance, creativity, and co-operation as a different way of imagining what might be troubling about contemporary appeals to openness in order to suggest new ways of critically responding to those appeals.

While appeals to privacy as a basic and inviolable right now circulate widely, the concept of a “right to privacy” is of fairly recent vintage: nearly all scholars of the topic trace the phrase’s meteoric rise to Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis’s 1890 Harvard
Law Review article “The Right to Privacy.” Warren and Brandeis themselves emphasize the novelty of their titular concept: recognition of a “right ‘to be let alone’” is “the next step which must be taken for the protection of the person” in light of “recent inventions and business methods,” namely photography and (what might today be called) tabloid journalism. The rapid expansion of the domain covered by this relatively new right may be partly due to the nature of the “right to privacy” itself. As Warren and Brandeis’s method of argumentation suggests, and as their influential commentator William Prosser makes explicit, one of the key functions of the right to privacy is to “fill in the gaps” left between neighboring areas of common and constitutional law. The concept has thus “expanded by slow degrees to invade, overlap, and encroach upon a number of other fields.” One such field, by no means strictly legal, is the rhetoric of openness.

To elaborate the terms of privacy and their limits, I will focus on Jean Cohen’s “Rethinking Privacy,” which responds to a wide range of criticism of liberal theories of privacy (in the context of a discussion of abortion rights) with a robust defense of the

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52 “The Right to Privacy,” *Harvard Law Review* 4.5 (1890), 193–220. The article is not merely of scholarly importance, but has had a direct impact on legal and institutional development: the first footnote to Justice Black’s dissenting opinion in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) – the majority opinion of which constituted the first official, explicit recognition of a constitutional right to privacy at the federal level in the United States – concurs on the topic of the article’s influence. For accounts that pluralize this origin story, see Jessica Lake, “Privacy, Property or Propriety,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 10.1 (2014), 111–129. To again sound the genealogical note struck in the introduction to this chapter, note that, writing in 1890 puts Warren and Brandeis immediately after the works by Nietzsche and Whitman that I have focused on in the two previous chapters. I do not think there is any influence between the two; on the contrary, I mean again to invoke different responses to a set of common anxieties and so perhaps a “road not taken.”

53 “The Right to Privacy,” 195. Indeed, for Warren and Brandeis, privacy is doubly modern. In their argument, not only do new threats to privacy now make its protection uniquely important, the domain of privacy itself is somewhat newly emergent: “advancing civilization” and the “refining influence of culture” have made people “more sensitive to publicity” and so more in need of “solitude” or “some retreat from the world,” Ibid., 196.


55 Ibid., 422.
Cohen’s rearticulation of privacy usefully isolates a problematic reliance on control at the center of many disparate accounts of privacy rights. An ethos of candor as developed here offers an alternative to the valorizations of control that persistently accompany appeals to privacy.

Cohen begins her essay by isolating two dimensions of the contemporary legal notion of a right to privacy, which she calls “informational privacy” and “decisional privacy.” Aligning the former with Warren and Brandeis’s “right to be let alone,” Cohen identifies its key elements as “freedom from unwarranted intrusion or surveillance” and “control over the acquisition, possession, and spread of information about oneself, along with control over access or attention by others.” By contrast, decisional privacy is said to involve “freedom from undue regulation or control.” Although Cohen herself does not foreground this aspect of her argument, “control” thus seems to unite the two faces of privacy: informational privacy appears as a guarantee of control over one’s own personal information, while decisional privacy appears as a check on control by others. Because a focus on control animates both dimensions of privacy Cohen discusses, she can, later in the essay, parenthetically specify that “a right to personal privacy” effectively means “securing control over access and decision making to the individual.” Although Cohen’s task is “redescribing the good that privacy rights are meant to protect,” for her this

57 Ibid., 139–140.
58 Ibid., 153.
59 Ibid., 138.
means deemphasizing the value of being “let alone” and giving new emphasis to
“inviolable personality,” while leaving unquestioned the will to control said to make
privacy valuable and personality inviolable in the first place. While Cohen’s point is to
pivot from the “widely accepted” right to informational privacy to the apparently more
controversial right to decisional privacy, I want to problematize the appeal to control
underlying both (and so, Cohen persuasively suggests, central to or perhaps even
synonymous with privacy itself). 60

Cohen’s focus on control is broadly mirrored in diverse theories of privacy,
including those that otherwise depart from her approach and aims. Jessica Lake, for
example, seeks to complicate a narrow focus on Warren and Brandeis’s article in the
development of privacy law. Yet this broader genealogy apparently points to similar
conclusions (albeit with a consequentially shifted range of agents): “the history of privacy
law in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is one filled with female voices
asserting the right to control the publicity and circulation of their faces and bodies.” 61
George Kateb similarly grounds his articulation of privacy rights in the thesis that “I am
not supposed to be mobilizable, either knowingly or unknowingly, for goals that I have

60 Ibid., 140. Cohen suggests that “personal privacy” is the only force that “protects the variety of identities
of individuals and groups living in modern civil society from leveling in the name of some vague idea of
community values or the majority’s conception of the common good,” ibid., 153. Cohen’s addition of “and
group” seems like cheap defense against the communitarian critics she’s engaging, and is not elaborated as
a piece of her argument. To draw out the logic of Cohen’s own sentence and risk stating the obvious: isn’t
“a right to personal privacy” a rather dubious way of going about protecting group identity? Moreover,
while I’ll focus above on the limits of Cohen’s imagination of remedies, note the limits on the way she
conceptualizes threats, too: if Mill could confidently locate tyranny of the few in the past – or at least
elsewhere, among “barbarians” – and announce the “tyranny of the majority” as “the vital question of the
future,” it is hardly clear that we live in that future or amid such civilization. On Liberty (New York:
Penguin, 2006), 7, 16. For many, the dangers posed by special interests, persistent or reconsolidated state
sovereignties, and corporate oligarchs are the vital questions developing in the political theory and action of
the present and urgent for their futures.

61 “Privacy, Property or Propriety,” 122.
no power to help to initiate or control.” Even Julie Cohen, who begins by rejecting theories of privacy that exclusively ground the term in a sense of control, nevertheless arrives at a similar valorization of a rather narrowly conceived individual agency: a “lack of privacy means reduced scope for self-making,” while “privacy’s goal... is to ensure that the development of subjectivity and the development of communal values do not proceed in lockstep.”

If, as Jean Cohen argues and these citations suggest, today people widely accept the value of “control over the acquisition, possession, and spread of information about oneself, along with control over access or attention by others, be they private individuals, organizations, or public officials,” I hope the readings I have developed in the previous three chapters can help to make those values less widely accepted. As those chapters have shown, Rousseau (through his resistance to conventions of politeness and embrace of a minor version of a providential vision), Nietzsche (through his rejection of self-assertive protocols of reading and engaging with the world), and Whitman (through his attention to the opaque and unspeakable even in robustly relational settings) are strong critics of a narrowly conceived account of individual sovereignty, and each proposes a number of ways of relating to “information about oneself” otherwise than through attempts at control. Inspired by these readings, I contest Cohen’s thesis that what’s wrong with “unwarranted intrusion or surveillance” is that it violates an individual subject’s sense of control or that subject’s otherwise limitless capacity for self-making. To be clear, in

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saying this, I am not coming out in favor of unwarranted intrusion or surveillance.

However, in focusing on control, Cohen et al unnecessarily narrow the available paths for conceiving of possible remedies for these maladies. Here, I'll briefly mark a problem internal to Cohen’s essay before recasting my argument in terms of the critique of the in-control subject I have already developed through Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman.

Cohen would likely object that my invocation of an “in-control subject” suggests an ontological dimension alien to her theory and unnecessary to politics. Indeed, the central thrust of her response to communitarian critics of privacy discourse like Michael Sandel and Mary Ann Glendon is that they erroneously conflate the abstraction of legal personhood with “an ontological description of the self or a particular concept of agency.”64 For Cohen, one can defend privacy without committing oneself to any particular ontology of the subject.65

Yet I find that Cohen’s argument does rely on a substantive conception of the person: the aforementioned controlled and controlling subject.66 In a quite ontologizing register, Cohen suggests that

a sense of control over one’s own body is crucial for maintaining an intact sense of self and to the ability to interact with others. Self-confidence is predicated upon a sense that one can dispose freely over one’s own body: that one can coordinate its functions autonomously and regulate access to it.67

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64 “Rethinking Privacy,” 148.
65 “Rethinking Privacy,” 149. Cohen hedges: if the right to privacy has been interpreted as being grounded in a particular ideological version of the self, “then it is time to change the interpretation, not to jettison the principle of individual privacy rights,” ibid., 148. Since I am convinced by Cohen’s demonstration of the deep “conceptual connection” between privacy and control, I am not so convinced that any such reinterpretation is possible.
66 In making this claim, I build on William Connolly’s insight that the liberal self is not as presuppositionless as many of its supporters suppose, an argument perhaps most fully elaborated in Why I Am Not a Secularist.
67 “Rethinking Privacy,” 159.
Relying on this argument, Cohen thus concludes that it is “obvious that to force a woman to endure an unwanted pregnancy is to force an identity upon her.”⁶⁸ I agree that it is, and that this is a strong defense of abortion rights. But, by the lights of Cohen’s broad conception of “a sense of control over one’s own body,” it would seem that not only restrictions on abortion, but pregnancy itself, not to mention any kind of ailment or impairment, would be a “violation of privacy rights.”⁶⁹ That is, if privacy rights depend on a confident ability to coordinate bodily functions, it seems that whole ranges of bodies would be permanently disqualified, and all bodies occasionally blocked, from enjoying such rights. I, at least, rather frequently experience my bodily functions as something resistant to my will in ways that shape my identity before myself and others – as when,

⁶⁸ Ibid., 160. Cohen’s views are, to some extent, reflected in a minor strain of Supreme Court jurisprudence. Writing for the four dissenting justices in Gonzales v. Carhart (2007), Ruth Bader Ginsburg has argued that “legal challenges to undue restrictions on abortion procedures… center on a woman’s autonomy to determine her life’s course, and thus to enjoy equal citizenship stature.” Note however that Ginsburg (in a clause I ellipsis over in the previous quotation) offers this conception of autonomy as part of a contrast with privacy, not a redefinition of privacy: “a woman’s autonomy” is here defined in distinction to “some generalized notion of privacy.” Ginsburg has made this argument for decades; indeed, in a much-discussed lecture delivered in 1985, well before her appointment to the Court, Ginsburg took even more (in this case proleptic) distance from Cohen’s language. Ginsburg, “Some Thoughts on Autonomy and Equality in Relation to Roe v. Wade,” North Carolina Law Review 63.2 (1985), 375–386. As Pamela Karlan summarizes, Ginsburg there criticized the Roe Court’s decision to locate “a woman’s right to terminate her pregnancy solely in ‘a concept of personal autonomy derived from the due process guarantee’ of the Fourteenth Amendment, rather than also in the then-emerging sex-equality jurisprudence of the Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause.” “Some Thoughts on Autonomy and Equality in Relation to Ruth Bader Ginsburg,” Ohio State Law Journal 70.4 (2009), 1085. To cast Ginsburg’s distinctions in terms developed in Chambers’s Lessons of Rancière: Ginsburg valorizes democratic equality over liberal autonomy (and Cohen, the opposite?). This discussion of the relationship between privacy and the undue burden standard in particular, and my thinking about privacy and abortion rights in general, benefitted from conversations with Amy Krauss. For some of her thoughts on the issues raised here, see “‘Undue Burden’ and the Discursive Limits of Reproductive Rights,” http://openhumanitiespress.org/feedback/sexualities/undue-burden/.

⁶⁹ That natural pregnancy might indeed be unjust under current conditions was seriously proposed by second wave feminists, most notably by Shulamith Firestone in The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); though this is often a point of embarrassment or ridicule for observers of the second wave, I find Firestone’s development of this argument worthy of serious consideration. Thus, in invoking the potential immorality or illegality of reproduction itself as a reductio ad absurdum of Cohen’s premises, I don’t mean to belittle this discussion, only to suggest that this does not seem to be argument Cohen intends to make. Firestone, it should be noted, makes her argument from wholly different starting points (horrifyingly ableist in their own ways but, again, for me not to be rejected out of hand).
for example, a burp slips out, a ball is fumbled, a feeling of embarrassment rises, I catch the flu, or I get too drunk – despite my inability to become pregnant and my relatively normative body. Indeed, as if Freudianly slipping out what sort of selves this conception of the self might have particular trouble thinking about, Cohen goes on to write that when an individual lacks this sense that they can autonomously coordinate their bodily functions, “the individual’s self-image is crippled.”70 Cohen’s redescription of privacy thus seems to assume an able-bodied subject, and this implicit valorization of able-bodiedness is one aspect of the in-control subject valued in most privacy talk.

Although I think developing a less-ableist theory of liberal subjectivity would be a worthwhile project, in raising this objection, I do not wish to offer my own truly presuppositionless account of subjectivity but to highlight the presuppositions of Cohen’s account (and many other accounts) of privacy as presuppositions and to defend an alternate set of presuppositions with greater political potential. Instead of rethinking privacy, I would suggest that a more promising approach to Cohen’s stated mission of “redescribing the good that privacy rights are meant to protect” may entail leaving (at least temporarily) the privacy concept behind. The values of chance, creativity, and cooperation offer a wider range of remedies and a more capacious sense of the sites at stake in the contemporary rhetoric of openness than the narrow focus on individual control characteristic of approaches that focus on privacy. Thus, as I demonstrate in the next

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70 “Rethinking Privacy,” 160. Cohen goes on to suggest the separability of bodily coordination and the ground of identity: “an unwanted pregnancy imposes not only a very powerful form of embodiment on the woman, in which she very much fears losing control over her bodily functions and her sense of self; it also imposes a new and undesired identity… on the woman,” ibid. But later still, one again seems to directly follow from or be equated with the other: “when women claim the ‘right to control our own bodies’ they are claiming the right to define themselves,” ibid., 161.
section, a promising line of theoretical elaboration and political contention involves relaxing the drive to autonomous control of our “personal lives” and “private data,” instead redescribing the goods threatened by currently circulating versions of openness as chance, creativity, and cooperation.\(^{71}\)

### Candor and the Harm of Openness

A closer look at the projects currently associated with the rhetoric of openness can clarify how openness can harm us when the “us” in question is not the set of self-assured and in-control subjects anxiously attended to by the right to privacy, but a collective of candid speakers moved by and organizing around the values of creativity, cooperation, and chance.

Visions of “openness” are often joined with background efforts to objectify or quantify all that is in the open. Thus, while Zuckerberg calls for more voices and perspectives, these are often treated by Facebook as mere data: as indications of what is trending and as opportunities for targeted advertising. Privacy advocates have highlighted many of the dangers here. Perceptively criticizing the methods at work even before the technologies and practices had been perfected, Kateb objects that “accumulated details about people have the effect of defining them and locking them into that definition,” such

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\(^{71}\) Since my argument in favor of turning to chance, creativity, and cooperation draws on the literature about abortion decisions and their legal regulation, it may be fair to ask what these values would offer to that literature. I don't expect that they would offer much. To me this follow from (rather than qualifies) my argument that privacy covers too wide a domain. If privacy was used more narrowly, we ought not to expect the same goods to be at stake in every case where we would have previously reached for the language of privacy. If the language of privacy were to recede, access to (or ability to refuse) reproductive interventions might be justified through appeals to equality or justice while other values became more relevant in other areas.
that “I can no longer say... that I own myself.” Writing in a similar spirit, Julie Cohen argues more recently that “the techniques of Big Data subject individuals to predictive judgments about their preferences, and the process of modulation also shapes and produces those preferences.” These practices, Cohen adds, “can be expected to move subjectivity in predictably path-dependent directions.” Here, as noted above, the concern is to protect a subject’s autonomy and control; drawing the curtains around the subject by asserting its right to privacy quite reasonably suggests itself as a remedy. But I want to develop the attention to making – authoring, shaping, and producing – incipient in Kateb’s and Cohen’s objections while departing from what I take to be their unwise tethering of making to an aspiration (even if an avowedly unrealizable one) for an unalloyed self-making. With the emphasis thus shifted, the harm done by the reduction of what is shared within the open to an accumulation of data about subjects might be articulated in terms of its tendency toward constraining or denying a broad range of creative expression (without suggesting that that creativity is, can, or should be in the exclusive control of any person or party).

In Chapter 2, I explored such a broader conception of creativity through Nietzsche’s writing on Redlichkeit. A central target of Nietzsche’s critical work was the desire “to see everything naked, to be present everywhere, to understand and know everything,” to become “expert at scrutinizing the inner lives of others.” Privacy-minded critics have rightly pointed out a similar desire (not necessarily the explicitly formulated

72 “Watched and Known,” 279, 278.
73 “What Privacy is For,” 1925.
74 Ibid.
desire of any one person or group of people) animating many contemporary practices of surveillance and data mining. But while the diagnoses are similar, the responses are quite different. Nietzsche’s primary response to this degraded form of the will to truth is not to reactively suggest strategies of concealment or deception. Instead, as I read him, Nietzsche casts the suspicious search for stability as a necessary – but necessarily insufficient – stage in a developmental process. As a more complete response to the will to truth, Nietzsche thus proposes a creative practice I characterized as working from oneself beyond oneself. Taking a hint from Jane Austen’s suggestion that candor also involved a kind of making, and the parallel senses of candor in eighteenth century parliamentary debates and present day ordinary speech, I argued that the creative sort of truthfulness Nietzsche associates with Redlichkeit might also be an important feature of an ethos of candor. Identifying the value of this creative mode of truthfulness suggests an alternate line of criticism and an alternate set of remedies when engaging with the contemporary rhetoric of openness.

Such a line might run as follows: The way that powerful entities like states, corporations, or even just more privileged individuals treat our voices and views can harm us in ways that have nothing to do with the assumptions about the value of a unique, authentic, and self-determining human subjectivity that tends to ground theories of a “right to privacy” or a “right of personality.” In trying to fix a description of the world based on the words and deeds people share with the world – whether that fixing is done in the service of naming a trend, characterizing an advertising demographic, or tracking a perceived national security threat – many openness advocates arrest and
exploit a creative practice. Those who find this sort of creativity a vital part of their lives and a resonant description of their worlds might thus respond not by insisting that their words and deeds be protected from all outside influence or observation, but by demanding that the process of creativity be mutually enriched and enriching rather than frozen or one-sided.75

A closely related form of injury associated with existing forms of openness is their tendency to deny cooperative elements of communication. Frequently, a complex ecology of truthfulness and a densely relational, situational mode of communication is reduced to a trans-contextual truth about one particular subject. It is tempting to welcome this reduction when it comes in the form of praise, as in the mundane retweet or “like” that the casually venture thought or amusing link might meet or the more spectacular forms of endorsement that the heroic truth-teller can attract. However, these “positive” forms of individualizing what is shared within the open are necessarily linked to – and no less false than – falsely individualized blame, contempt, or denunciation. Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* is one important source for thinking beyond this rhetoric of individualization or individualization of rhetoric. Bennett notes the pleasure that can be associated with particularized denunciations, but finds them “empirically false” and thus

75 Relatedly, an affirmation of creativity against a reductive vision of market value is not necessarily a denial of the goods that technology and mediation might bring. Indeed, the opposite may be true: it may be that those who focus only on market value fail to appreciate the power and potential of technology and mediation. For example, in another new media moment that resonates with and in the present, cyberneticist Norbert Weiner writes against what he considers an American tendency to evaluate “questions of information… according to a standard American criterion: a thing is valuable… for what it will bring on the open market… The fate of information in the typically American world is to become something which can be bought or sold.” This attitude, Weiner argues, “leads to the misunderstanding and mistreatment of information and its associated concepts.” See “Communication, Secrecy, and Social Policy,” in *The Human Use of Human Beings* (New York: Avon Books, 1967 [1950]).
difficult to “honestly affirm.” To supplement (if not entirely supplant) an individualizing politics of “moral condemnation,” Bennett argues for an attention to an “interfolding network” or “heterogenous series of actants with partial, overlapping, and conflicting degrees of power.” The dimensions of “co-operation” I elaborated around Whitman’s use of candor can help develop our sense of what it would mean to highlight such heterogeneity when engaging the rhetoric and practice of openness.

As I read them, Whitman’s scenes of co-operative candor neither rank order nor presumptively flatten differences between differently situated communicants and listeners. In Whitman, utterances overlap with and give shape to one another, but these interactions are not fully captured by the reminder that communication always takes place in what Bennett calls “an enabling background or context.” The words of one may create an “atmosphere” for another, but that relation is anything but passive. On the contrary, it can be so pervasive as to make it difficult to identify one discrete speaker as a source of influence and another as influenced. Neither a symmetrical exchange of information nor what Whitman calls a relationship of “derived power,” he figures this co-operative action variously as a setting-to-flight, the development of a rapport, the initiation of a wrestling match, and so on. As we saw, “candor” is one key term he uses

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76 *Vibrant Matter*, 37. In “Ontologized Agency and Political Critique,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 14.1 (2015), Bonnie Washick and Elizabeth Wingrove are critical of the way that this reflection on responsibility precipitates a moment of individualized ethical reflection, and find this symptomatic of Bennett’s politics. While I find this argument misses a good deal of the action of *Vibrant Matter*, I’ve nevertheless tried to be attentive to this criticism in emphasizing that I’m thinking of co-operation here less as an individual commitment and more as a value around which collective projects and demands might organize (as well as by reemphasizing Bennett’s point that a focus on the various form of co-operation within which we are entangled may require an enlargement and a revision of the concept of “the self” itself).

77 *Vibrant Matter*, 38, 31, 33.

78 Ibid., 29.
for this co-operative speech act; I again augmented and extended that usage through an analysis of the histories and present-day uses of the word candor in order to enrich my account of an ethos of candor. Again, this ethos can take on a critical edge in relation to contemporary inducements to openness.

Inspired by the way Whitman renders even the most “private” modes of confessional discourse as sites of overlapping and ambiguous agencies, I emphasize that we often speak and write, not merely to express our unique thoughts and feelings, but to indicate the limits of our own expressive abilities. On this understanding, even our most personal words and deeds ventured within the open do not always or only say “come this far and no further” – as privacy-minded critics might have it – but something closer to “from where I started and with what I've had around me, this is as far as I've made it so far.” While this sharing of experience may be the kind of thing many openness advocates call for, both those advocates and their critics may be surprised when they listen closer to find that these modes of engaging in openness do not lay down fixed points nor call for stable borders to be drawn; they often act as précis of work in progress, cries for help, calls for papers. And much of what is ventured within the open will have no such personal content but will instead be offered by and about a fragile collectivity, an invitational or performative “we.”

As in Bennett’s work on the networks of agencies involved in energy politics, then, my aim in highlighting the co-operative elements of contemporary modes of communication is not so much to deny the value of responsibility but to argue for a pluralization of responsibility beyond the individual. To rephrase, reproduce, republish,
or recirculate words indiscriminately apart from their original context can undoubtably be damaging to both the words and their speakers, and we must remain mindful of these effects in our own conduct and demand a similar mindfulness from institutions, corporations, and the individuals they empower. However, it can be just as destructive to these communicative efforts to summon a privacy to “protect” them, for their form and force often depends on the fact that, on the one hand, they occurred in a particular context and were shaped by a particular collectivity, and, on the other hand, that that context and collectivity cannot be neatly defined or finally fixed. When this co-operative character is denied, these efforts at communication become not merely different from but less than what they have been. When the rhetoric of openness is used to justify individualizing projects of surveillance, candid speakers energized by the value of co-operation might thus object, not that their privacy and personality have been violated, but that their co-operation has been misrecognized, distorted, exploited, or destroyed. When the value of privacy is invoked to suggest that the practices currently associated with openness are insufficiently attentive to our individuality and our personality, this problem is compounded rather than remedied, for it is precisely this ideology of individualism that misrepresents the promise of candor in an era of openness.

Chance, the last value associated with candor, may operate most clearly here as a formal principle or meta-level presumption rather than as a specific substantive source for
articulating harms and remedies. By this, I mean to answer a potential objection which would hold that control is valuable at a higher level or an earlier moment than the values I've been posing as alternatives. In asserting the value of creativity and co-operation in communicative life, this objection might run, I am assuming (or implicitly arguing) that speakers ought to have control over the creative and co-operative dimensions of their communication. But I mean, instead, to elaborate a different vision of creativity and co-operation where these values cannot really exist under anyone’s control. As we agitate around the values of creativity and co-operation, then, we must remember that these are always riven with contingency, uncertainty, and hazard.

As I argue in the first chapter, Rousseau’s Dialogues are motivated by a sense that projects that seek mastery over words are closely connected to (and too often transform into) projects that seek mastery over people. Rousseau often seems to find such a will to mastery both ethically dangerous and ontologically dubious: it’s a harmful way of treating people based on a falsely static picture of the universe. Believing himself instead to live in a mobile, unsettled, and restless world, Rousseau emphasizes the limits of human capacities for certainty and control. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, Rousseau also finds something ameliorative and enabling in this chancy picture of the universe and of

79 There is also a substantive (rather than strictly formal) line of criticism here too, though: Existing forms of openness downplay chance by emphasizing volition and by carefully calculating their intended effects and targets, and the practice of candor as I've developed it may also illuminate the way the denial of chance can also be felt as an injury. Julie Cohen makes a similar point in criticizing the view that privacy protections irrationally restricts innovation. She invokes a privacy “that prizes serendipity as well as predictability” to respond to the “valorization of predictive rationality and risk management” assumed in this view. I criticized just this valorization in my first chapter, and so Cohen and I are quite closely aligned, but again I would want to develop these shared assumptions of our respective arguments in a different direction than the one she pursues. I agree that “there is reason to worry… when the pathways of serendipity are disrupted and rearranged to serve more linear, commercial imperatives” and that “environments designed to promote consumptive and profit-maximizing choices will systematically disfavor innovations designed to promote other values,” but I am less convinced that privacy or “critical independence of mind” are sufficient responses to these threats. See “What Privacy is For,” 1926.
the place of human conduct within it. Near the end of his life, he did not believe his words could find a receptive audience, but rather than vainly attempting to secure such conditions and reassert his control, he instead sticks with chance. Rousseau finds a kind of release – and thus a motive for writing – through viewing his writing and its reception as not fully up to him, as a process constitutively beset by many hazards.

From a similarly chance-attuned perspective, if I object to a practice that surveils my conduct or monetizes my voice, it is not (contra Kateb or Jean Cohen) primarily because in such a practice I am used by forces I do not see and cannot control. Being used in this way is fundamental to being at all, or at least to being in a life awake to the value of creativity and co-operation. The salient objection to openness, then, will be to particular forms of use and particular localizations of power. Rousseau was most exercised by the coldly incurious forces of a forward-marching, distinction-seeking Enlightenment; today, in the realm of communicative life, the most dangerous ways we are used by the most damaging localizations of power may be through those state and corporate practices justified by and through the language of openness. These are techniques of scrutiny and surveillance that, clothed in a rhetoric of openness, privilege the generation of profit and security over flows of transformative creativity. These are methods of quantification and analysis that, enabled by appeals to openness, reduce thickly co-operative milieus to a set of easily transposable data-points. To assert the value of candor in an era of openness is, finally, a plea that nothing be so finely or finally controlled. Candor then functions to reintroduce an ever more equitable and enlivening
distribution of chance into a world where both the rising forces of openness and their most influential critics increasingly pursue only a vain and deadening agenda of control.

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In her analyses of communicative capitalism, Jodi Dean acknowledges the power of neoliberal values but urges her readers not to let corporate slogans determine the course of political activism. As I hope the analysis of the rhetoric of openness above indicates, I agree on both counts. We diverge, in part, on two separate points: our methods for analyzing corporate rhetoric and our understandings of how to respond to and move forward from that rhetoric.

Dean’s method is a sophisticated version of ideology critique: rather than expose the truth underlying appearances, she attends to the forms of belief, fantasy, and desire that inform action (or inaction). I have offered an archeological reading with an ear for analogy and an eye on genealogy. Rather than focus on naming root causes or trajectories of desire – in part because Dean has already named them in an effective and persuasive fashion – I have studied the form of openness itself, highlighted its distinctiveness among other current discursive objects, and drawn out possible lessons to be gleaned from

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80 See, for example, Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies, 3–4: “The left has assumed and enjoyed the values of neoliberalism, firing its own salvos at the state and celebrating the imaginary freedoms of creativity and transformation offered by communicative capitalism. The unique singularity of each would replace the constraints of thinking in terms of, much less trying to build, something collective.”

81 Publicity’s Secret, 8–9.
(distantly but directly related) past strategies for navigating emergent media and new levels of disclosure.

In response to the weaknesses she identifies in the fantasies that attend communicative capitalism, Dean insists on the need to articulate new visions and new values with our eyes fixed resolutely on “the communist horizon.” I share these goals, but in this chapter I have lingered longer with her insight that “globally networked communications remain the very tools and terrains of struggle.” Accordingly, I've tried to articulate ways we might directly respond to calls to openness without uncritically internalizing them. My method in this chapter has thus represented something of a departure from the desire that guided earlier chapters, especially Chapter 1, namely a desire to aid a prefigurative kind of political theorizing. The fundamental insight of prefigurative politics is that our political movements in the present should resemble the world we want in the future. My practice in this chapter has been almost the reverse, what might be called a disfiguring kind of political theory. This politics of disfiguration uses the perspective offered by the ethos of candor to articulate dissatisfactions with the present in and through the very terms the present offers to us, hoping to resist and rework those terms.

Although strategically motivated, this kind of politics and political theory is not quite as crudely reformist or brutally pragmatic as it might at first appear. Rather, it aims

82 Communist Horizon, 21.
83 Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies, 48.
84 As the analogy earlier in this chapter might suggest, another name for this politics of disfiguration would be a politics of performativity in Judith Butler’s sense.
to split the difference between reformism and utopianism. In the first place, demands that the practices of openness make space for chance, creativity, and co-operation might be ways to ameliorate the damage currently being done in the name of openness. Yet in the future, or indeed parallel to the work of amelioration, the same demands might be the basis for an alternative vision of openness and new practices, new technologies, and new institutions that could embody, support, and promote that vision. Laying the groundwork for the first, more reformist task has been the primary objective of this chapter and the culmination (but not the sole purpose) of this dissertation. The second, more utopian task would likely take a second dissertation, but I make a start in the brief coda that follows. My goal there is not to set out a blueprint for a differently open world nor to posit a newly defined ideal of openness, but to outline a set of tools and questions that might help that kind of creative visioning to take place in and through struggle.

85 The potential demands on the advocates of openness I articulate here thus also share an affinity with the “utopian demands” outlined by Kathi Weeks in The Problem with Work, 218–224.
Theo-Technological Coda

This dissertation has sought to dislocate commonsense about the politics of truth-telling through patient readings of submerged possibilities of the past. These readings aim to set the present in productively awkward angles to history so as to allow the emergence of a political ethic of candor. But I have some unfinished business, for the rhetoric of openness I engaged in the final chapter also addresses itself to the future, to a more open world to come. In Jonathan Rosenberg’s formulation, Google’s “goal is to make open the default. People will gravitate towards it, then they will expect and demand it and be furious when they don’t get it. When open is intuitive, then we have succeeded.” While I do not know if the predicted triumph of openness will or should come to pass, I am convinced we should take time now to think carefully about what a more open world might mean and the different ways it might be possible to live within that world. The work of the previous chapter – illuminating and criticizing the present – thus requires a supplement. Here, I will consider two genres that might be called upon to theorize both a new perspective on the present and a new vision of the future: speculative fiction and religious prophecy. I have two goals: to re-emphasize the importance of a response to openness that is distinct from an appeal to privacy, and to reframe the relationship between truth-telling and the acts of individual subjects.

My first resource for developing a response to Google’s drive to “make open the default” comes from somewhere in the twenty-fourth century, as depicted in the television series Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987–1994), and specifically through its most iconic villains, the ominous Borg. An extremely advanced alien collective of
cybernetic organisms sharing a single consciousness, the Borg can be read as a sinister
reflection of the Starship Enterprise’s mission “to seek out new life and new civilization.”
The Borg share this mission, although their goal is not peaceful co-existence but seamless
integration into one and the same collective consciousness, a mission encapsulated in
their oft-repeated mantra “Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated.” The crew of the
Enterprise, oriented as it is by an adherence to the (robustly liberal if not actively de-
colonial) Prime Directive of non-intervention, usually regard the Borg’s assimilative
mission with horror; yet there are also moments when Star Trek: The Next Generation
views the Borg mantra in a more complicated light, attending to what the original script
for the episode “I, Borg” calls “the pleasures of Borg life.”

In this episode, a member of the Borg collective initially known as Third of Five
(and eventually as Hugh) comes aboard the Enterprise and provides a view of the Borg
from the inside. “On a Borg ship,” Hugh says, “we live with the thoughts of others in our
minds. Thousands of voices... with us always.” By comparison, life aboard the
Enterprise seems thin: it leaves Hugh in a state the Enterprise’s regular humanoid crew
calls loneliness. Apart from the sheer unstoppability of the Borg, then, perhaps what is so
chilling about the Borg is that they represent a kind of reductio ad absurdum of a
connectedness many people find desirable – without which their lives would feel less full.

A fan theory of the Borg’s origins emphasizes these aspects of Borg life and their
resonance not only with the mission of the United Federation of Planets and its flagship


2 Ibid.
Enterprise, but, more disturbingly, with pleasures recognizable for many in contemporary life:

The shared media programs and social networks of the past morph into tighter and tighter connections... [As these and other technologies develop over decades and then centuries,] Everyone 'belongs' for the first time in a truly significant, emotionally overwhelming way. Your friends and loved ones all know exactly how you feel and you can spend your entire existence living in a paradise of real people... Identities begin to flow back and forth and change or condense... The Borg of my dreams are a possible result, in the end, not of a conquest-driven or animalistic technology but instead something more insidious: cooperation, inter-species understanding, and the underlying drive... to be fully understood by those they care about... [– a drive] to not be alone.  

Here, the pleasures of not being alone decisively win out over a right to be let alone. For Hugh and other Borg, open is intuitive, the default, and they feel, if not quite furious, at least empty when they don't get it.  

One way to resist these developments is to insist on the value of a distinctive individuality. In “I, Borg,” the ideal of individuality is heralded as the defining difference between the Federation and the Borg, indeed as a potential weapon of the former against the latter. The Enterprise’s Captain Jean-Luc Picard hopes that Hugh, once reintegrated into the collective, might undo the Borg from within as a result of his exposure to “the knowledge of self,” “the most pernicious program of all.” This weaponized difference

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4 What this theory describes as the origins of the Borg can sound a bit like what Lauren Berlant calls an intimate public, which offers “the feeling of rich continuity with a vaguely defined set of others,” The Female Complaint (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 7. Yet, to again invoke the distinctions developed in Chapter 4, I associate the Borg trajectory with openness rather than publicity because what Hugh and Chairboy describe are not “vaguely defined” others at all, but highly particular ones: real people, not an imagined public. The total connection with thousands of minds Hugh describes is less like an intimate relation to an anonymous public and more like an openness miraculously extended beyond the boundaries through which we currently know it, perhaps analogous to how, in Arendt’s summary of Dostoevsky, the clearest sign of Jesus’s divinity is “his ability to have compassion with all men in their singularity, that is, without lumping them together into some such entity as one suffering mankind,” On Revolution, 85. As we will see, the dangerous tendency of the Borg is to deny singularities and to thus move closer to a kind of lump-entity; the dangerous tendency of a liberal response to the Borg is to only recognize singularity and difference in the shape of individualized interiority.

5 Echevarria and Taylor, “I, Borg.”
can allow viewers to forget the disturbing proximities between the Federation and the Borg. And it obscures other important differences. Note what is and is not picked out as an arrestingly significant difference in this scene as a skeptical Captain Picard tests what Hugh has learned while aboard the Enterprise:

PICARD: This culture will be assimilated.
BORG [i.e. Hugh]: They do not wish it.
PICARD: Irrelevant.
BORG: They will resist us.
PICARD: Resistance is futile.
BORG: Resistance is not futile. Some have escaped.
PICARD: They will be found. It is inevitable. All will be assimilated.
BORG: Must [Chief Engineer] Geordi [LaForge] be assimilated?
PICARD: Yes.
BORG: He does not wish it. He would rather die than be assimilated.
PICARD: Then he will die.
BORG: No. Geordi must not die. Geordi is a friend.
PICARD: You will assist us to assimilate this vessel. You are Borg. You will assist us.
BORG: I will not.
PICARD: What did you say?
BORG: I will not assist you.
PICARD: I...?6

Picard becomes convinced of Hugh’s difference from the Borg through the word “I” — but earlier events in the episode suggest that the concept of a “friend” would be just as alien to other Borg (to say nothing of the concepts of the desires or resistances of cultures, not of individuals, also apparently unpersuasive to Picard). These differences go unexplored in *The Next Generation*.

To be clear, I align with the writers of *The Next Generation* in regarding the rise of the Borg as a disturbing possibility, not a utopian prediction; but what disturbs me about the Borg is not, say, that assimilation represents a triumph of Soviet-style collectivism over American-style liberalism (as a common reading of the Borg through

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6 Echevarria and Taylor, “I, Borg.”
Cold War politics would have it). Instead, for me, the Borg represent a collapse of the possibilities of collectivity. To give an Arendtian twist to the phrase from Adrienne Rich frequently invoked in this dissertation, a “life between us” requires space between us. Communication among the Borg is not well-described as candid, or even as communicative, for an undifferentiated blob is not an us. By insisting on the futility of resistance, the Borg move close to such an undifferentiated mass, diminishing the allure of Borg life and its attendant pleasures. Yet by insisting on the value of individuality, the crew of the Enterprise forgets that interiority is not the only axis, method, or scale of differentiation within collectivity. Less-individualizing modes of differentiation from and resistance to a blob-like social ontology might come from the alternate values of chance, creativity, and co-operation, developed through their association with candor. As argued in the last chapter, these values offer both more theoretically interesting and politically promising ways of resisting aggressive forms of openness than the more familiar values of autonomy, privacy, and individual control.

But what if, working in an alternate direction, we pushed the thought of openness as far as it could go and assumed that the value of privacy was not merely politically dubious or legally limited, but ontologically incoherent? While finding it disturbing, I continue to find my thinking pulled toward this question and thus toward the pleasures of

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7 On the popular anti-communist (and racist) uses of the figure of the Borg as “the communists of future’s outer space,” see Eric Hayot, “Chineseness: A Prehistory of Its Future,” in Sinographies: Writing China, ed. Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3–34. For more on this reception, and the way it misreads the politics of the show, see Aris Mousoutzanis, “‘Death is Irrelevant’: Gothic Science Fiction and the Biopolitics of Empire,” in Gothic Science Fiction 1980-2010, ed. Sara Wasson and Emily Alder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 57–72. For Mousoutzanis, reading the Borg against the backdrop of the Cold War overlooks how Star Trek “persistently blurs the boundaries between the Federation and the Borg,” highlighting an “uncanny echo between totalitarianism and Western imperial rhetoric,” ibid., 66, 67.
Borg life. This is a strong lure in part because I believe that we are so much more – and so much less – than conventional accounts of individuality and subjectivity can capture.\(^8\) The organisms in the crook of the elbow, the determinations of physical forces acting on a body, the friendship that is more than the sum of its parts, the ecstasy of a political assembly, and the pull toward zoning out after a long day might all be read as diverse signs of this “more and less.” The gradual depopulation of a space of interiority through an ever-expanding candor might be another. Perhaps at its best what openness calls us to are the small pleasures and revolutionary potentialities of not being an individual, of not having an exclusive inner life.\(^9\) Openness in the mode of candor provides another way of creating, engaging, and mapping this space beneath and beyond privatized subjectivity, where “our” actions are on display and “our” thoughts progressively estranged from us, out there, in the open.

As the twenty-fourth century example of the Borg might attest, and a clear-eyed glance at life in the early twenty-first century can confirm, this sense of limitless openness comes with unlimited (though differently distributed) opportunities for exploitation, colonization, and violence. The lives and work of Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman might also testify to the breathtaking heights and terrifying depths to which a life in the open might be exposed (or to which it might travel). Precisely because the

\(^8\) As I develop in Chapter 3, this space beneath and beyond conventional theories of subjectivity need not entail a theory of impersonality.

\(^9\) Lauren Berlant had recently explored the small pleasures moments of non-personhood provide through her explorations of “lateral agency,” while Jodi Dean has explored their revolutionary potential through her reflections on the “party form”; *Cruel Optimism*, 23–50; *Communist Horizon*, 207–250. The distance between these two examples suggests that we should not expect pleasure and potential to always be found in the same place. At the same time, I don't think we can say in advance that mundane pleasures and radical movements won't ever intersect: the fact that neoliberal capitalism can accommodate a space for pleasure does not mean that all pleasures accept its terms.
consequences of traveling in that direction are so real for all of us, and so dramatic for those already worst off, it seems essential to develop standards by which to judge which aspects of this process are valuable and which are perversions of those values. By identifying ways it can feel right to be open, and experimenting practically and theoretically within those moments, we might further develop our skills at naming and identifying how it can feel wrong, and how that wrongness can be attended to, cared for, and repaired. In the concluding chapter, I focused on the latter task, deploying the values associated with an ethos of candor as critical tools for challenging certain state and corporate visions of openness. But it is an aspiration of the dissertation as a whole to contribute to the former task, i.e. to develop an alternative vision of openness. It is here that it might be useful to turn to another genre adept at moving between temporal registers: religious prophecy.

Before a crowd of thousands, Luke’s Jesus says that “there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.” This bit of Christian wisdom is cited in two disparate contexts at the end of the nineteenth century. The first is in Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis’s landmark 1890 Harvard Law Review article “The Right to Privacy,” discussed in the last chapter. Commenting on the technological novelty that they assert

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10 Luke 12:3, NIV. The Gospel of Matthew attributes a similarly provocative saying to Jesus, albeit with a rather different meaning and in an altogether different context. While giving his twelve disciples their apostolic mission, Matthew’s Jesus offers them a great deal of instruction and advice, including “there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.” Matthew 10:27, NIV. Here, Jesus offers not a warning that one’s seemingly secret deeds are not so secret, but a mandate to make his secret teachings known to the world.
has brought about the need to recognize a new “right to be let alone,” they lament the fact
that “numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that ‘what is
whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops.’” The second reference
to Luke comes seven years later, in Oscar Wilde’s letter from prison De Profundis, which
glosses the verse in question in these terms: “I forgot that every little action of the
common day makes or unmake character, and that therefore what one has done in the
secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the housetop.”

Brandeis and Wilde offer two different responses to the radical vision of openness
contained in Luke’s prophecy: one takes this prediction as a reason to move away from
the world through the protections of privacy, the other leans toward an ethos of candor by
defining character as something only made in common. Understood this way, the
exchange I have opened between Wilde and Brandeis also troubles the liberal
commomnesense about who stands most in need of the protections of privacy. When
apologetics for state and corporate practices of surveillance trot out the cliché that those
who haven't done anything wrong don't have anything to hide, liberals often respond that
indeed we have all done much wrong and do have much to hide, and thus we must insist
on robust privacy protections to control our availability before the watchful eyes of
others. Perhaps surprisingly, then, in the two adaptations of Luke’s prophecy, it is the
prisoner and not the jurist who accepts that all action may potentially be seen by any or


all people. Wilde, whose “sodomy” could have benefited from the kind of hiding place a robust right to privacy could provide, suggests that hiding is not an option in the society in which he lives. Despite the fact that in 1890 Warren and Brandeis are well-heeled Boston lawyers while in 1897 Wilde is in prison happy to be eating white bread, the latter accepts as ethico-ontological truth what the former dread as techno-apocalyptic prophecy. I want to conclude by briefly tarrying between these two registers, mapping the place of candor between ethico-ontological acceptance and techno-apocalyptic trembling.

One initial spark for this dissertation was a question: what if Jonathan Rosenberg’s prophecy of openness, cited as an epigraph to the last chapter and elaborated above, comes true in the most extreme version imaginable? What would it really mean for open to “win,” for numerous mechanical devices to help openness cascade across our lives? In some ways, this remains the farthest edge of my thinking: what if we allow ourselves to think Wilde’s thought? While Wilde argues that he now “must be far more of an individualist than ever” and praises Christ as “supreme individualist,” this is an individualism whose first principle is that “there [is] no difference at all between the lives of others and one’s own life.” In what ways might our picture of the world and our conduct shift if we assumed he was right? How would we act and speak if there were no

13 The two glosses of Luke are also surprising, from a political theoretical perspective, because neither party seems especially interested in Luke’s particular message, a warning against hypocrisy. This interpretation prefaces the lines from Luke just quoted: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” On the way this Christian message has been translated into politics, see Hannah Arendt, “The Location of Human Activities,” in The Human Condition and “The Social Question,” in On Revolution, as well as Judith Shklar, “Let Us Not Be Hypocritical,” in Ordinary Vices.

14 De Profundis, 176, 187–88, 177.
set boundaries separating “me” from “you,” if everything we did or said was potentially available to others?

From Rousseau’s belief in a universal conspiracy against him that prevents his truth from reaching the future except by incredible chance to Whitman’s descriptions of a shadowy work of history that block those in the present from accessing the past in any direct way, this dissertation has explored alternatives to the unmediated disclosure invoked in Luke’s gospel message and its nineteenth-century diffractions. Candor, I have emphasized, requires hard work, imaginative creation, and no small measure of luck. On this picture, it is hard to see how its disclosures could ever be theologically preordained, ontologically given, or technically perfected. Yet thinking about candor through the autobiographical (and quasi- and para-autobiographical) work of Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Whitman, I've had something like Wildean questions in mind even if I've raised them only obliquely and answered them only tentatively: by what paradoxical paths might talking about our selves more often make us think of ourselves as individuals less often, or at least less familiarly? What would follow from such a gradual erasure of the borders of conventional individuality? In what large and small ways can we relax our need for secrecy and our drive to certainty? What would a human world unmoored by either look like? How far from our own experience is such a world? With candor – between pleasure and danger, between acceptance and trembling – we might find many possible futures for openness, many possible ways of taking up these questions in a life between us.


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Candor and Control: The Politics of Truthfulness in an Era of Openness
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Does political transformation require truth-tellers, or does a focus on personal truthfulness serve to displace politics? My dissertation reframes this debate by defending a peculiar form of truthfulness: candor. Neither a neutral means for achieving political ends, nor a distraction from politics, candor names a difficult and precarious form of political work. Through readings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Walt Whitman emphasizing the chancy, creative, and co-operative aspects of truth-telling, I distinguish candor from more familiar forms of truthfulness like sincerity and authenticity. I mobilize this account of candor to responding to increasingly prominent inducements to personal and political openness and to intervene in key debates within contemporary American feminist and queer theory and politics.

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