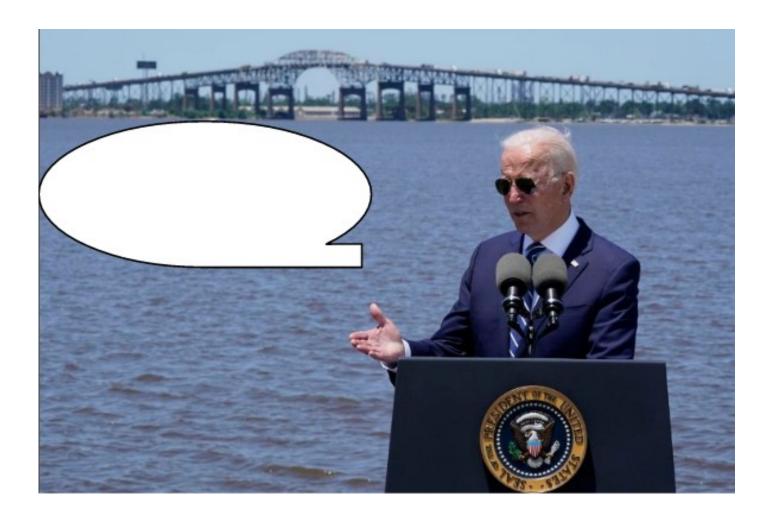*Sycamore Lite Reading and Make Total Distro presents*

THE TYRANNY OF INTIMACY

      AND THE INTIMATE SOCIETY

excerpts from *The Fall of Public Man* (1979) by Richard Sennett

editors note

The Fall of Public Man is a history of the disappearance of public social culture from European and American cities and from the western imagination.

Sennett importantly attributes this disappearance to cultural shifts in addition to obvious material transformations such as industrialization. I find that he gives a uniquely clear anatomy and historicization of the notion of *personality,* a concept which has become central to both our current economy and culture.

According to Sennet, the increased centrality of 'personality' over the last century has had major consequences in the west:

It has meant the advent of a culture of widespread ruminating, self-doubt and self-consciousness, an atomizing obsession with the 'true self' and 'real connections'; a devaluing of processes and projects that are 'impersonal', ie mass divestment from any project not framed in 'personal' terms;
 an obsession with 'intimacy' to the point of devaluing any social interaction that does not involve 'intimate' shared knowledge of the self; 'cult of personality' style relationships to politicians and artists; and, ultimately, a loss of finesse and faith in any collective action, especially aggressive action, or any ambitious reimaginings of social structures.

Sennet argues that to a great degree, people in the west no longer believe they can, should, or would ever want to actually act collectively in public, or be together, unless 'united' by increasingly rigid concepts of identity and high-stakes abstractions of shared 'collective personality'.

Even though Sennett published this book in 1979, I am convinced the points made in this text have astonishing relevance in 2022. I wanted to excerpt key parts but I recommend reading the whole book.
I have added emphasis.

The text in its entirety is available on archive.org.
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from **Part Four: The Intimate Society**

ch. 11, The End of Public Culture

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I have not assembled this picture of the rise and fall of secular public culture in order to produce regret; I have assembled it to create a perspective on beliefs, aspirations, and myths of modern life which seem to be humane but are in fact dangerous.

The reigning belief today is that closeness between persons is a moral good. The reigning aspiration today is to develop individual personality through experiences of closeness and warmth with others. The reigning myth today is that the evils of society can all be understood as evils of impersonality, alienation, and coldness. The sum of these three is an ideology of intimacy: social relationships of all kinds are real, believable, and authentic the closer they approach the inner psychological concerns of each person.

This ideology transmutes political categories into psychological categories. This ideology of intimacy defines the humanitarian spirit of a society without gods: warmth is our god. The history of the rise and fall of public culture at the very least calls this humanitarian spirit into question.

The belief in closeness between persons as a moral good is in fact the product of a profound dislocation which capitalism and secular belief produced in the [19th] Century. Because of this dislocation, people sought to find personal meanings in impersonal situations, in objects, and in the objective conditions of society itself.

They could not find these meanings; as the world became psychomorphic, it became mystifying. They therefore sought to flee, and find in the private realms of life, especially in the family, some principle of order in the perception of personality. Thus the past built a hidden desire for stability in the overt desire for closeness between human beings. Even as we have revolted against the stern sexual rigidities of the Victorian family, we continue to burden close relations with others with these hidden desires for security, rest, and permanence. When the relations cannot bear these burdens, we conclude there is something wrong with the relationship, rather than with the unspoken expectations.

Arriving at a feeling of closeness to others is thus often after a process of testing them; the relationship is both close and closed. If it changes, if it must change, there is a feeling of trust betrayed. Closeness

burdened with the expectation of stability makes emotional communication--hard enough as it is--one step more difficult. Can intimacy on these terms really be a virtue?

The aspiration to develop one's personality through experiences of closeness with others has a similar hidden agenda. The crisis of public culture in the [19th] Century taught us to think about the harshness, constraints, and difficulties which are the essence of the human condition in society as overwhelming. We may approach them through a kind of passive, silent spectatorship, but to challenge them, to become enmeshed in them, is thought to be at the expense of developing ourselves. The development of personality today is the development of the personality of a refugee.

Our fundamental ambivalence toward aggressive behavior comes out of this refugee mentality: aggression may be necessary in human affairs, but we have come to think of it as an abhorrent personal trait. But what kind of personality develops through experiences of intimacy?

Such personality will be molded in the expectation, if not the experience, of trust, warmth, of comfort. How can it be strong enough to move in a world founded on injustice? Is it truly humane to propose to human beings the dictum that their personalities "develop," that they become "richer" emotionally to the extent that they learn to trust, to be open, to share, to eschew manipulation of others, to eschew aggressive challenges to social conditions or mining these conditions for personal gain? Is it humane to form soft selves in a hard world? As a result of the immense fear of public life which gripped the last century, there results today a weakened sense of human will.

And finally, the history of public life calls into question the mythology built up around impersonality as a social evil. Beginning with the crack in the balance of public and private produced by the Wilkesite movement, fully displayed in the control Lamartine exercised over the Parisian proletariat, the mythology that men are more important than measures (to use Junius's phrase) is revealed really as a recipe for political pacification.

Impersonality seems to define a landscape of human loss, a total absence of human relationships. But this very equation of impersonality with emptiness itself *creates the loss*. In response to the fear of emptiness, people conceive of the political as a realm in which personality will be strongly declared. Then they become the passive spectators to a political personage who offers them his intentions, his sentiments, rather than his acts, for their consumption. Or, the more people conceive of the political realm as the opportunity for

revealing themselves to each other through the sharing of a common, collective personality, the more are they diverted from using their fraternity to change social conditions.

Maintaining community becomes an end in itself; the purge of those who don't really belong becomes the community's business. A rationale of refusing to negotiate, of continual purge of outsiders, results from the supposedly humanitarian desire to erase impersonality in social relations. And in the same measure this myth of impersonality is self-destructive. The pursuit of *common interests* is destroyed in the search for a *common identity*.

In the absence of a public life, these supposedly humane ideals hold sway. To be sure, these diseased beliefs did not begin when the public ended; the very crisis in public life engendered them in the [19th] Century. Just as the 19th Century public culture was linked to that of the Enlightenment, the present absence of belief in publicness is linked to its confusion in the 19th Century. The connection is twofold.

Personality in public was a contradiction in terms; it ultimately destroyed the public term. For instance, it became logical for people to think of those who could actively display their emotions in public, whether as artists or politicians, as being men of special and superior personality. These men were to control, rather than interact with, the audience in front of whom they appeared. Gradually the audience lost faith in itself to judge them: it became a spectator rather than a witness. The audience thus lost a sense of itself as an active force, a "public".

Again, personality in public destroyed the public by making people fearful of betraying their emotions to others involuntarily. The result was more and more an attempt to withdraw from contact with others, to be shielded by silence, even to attempt to stop feeling in order for the feelings not to show. The public thus was emptied of people who wanted to be expressive in it, as the terms of expression moved from the *presentation of a mask* to *the revelation of one's personality*, of one's face, in the mask one wore in the world.

To speak of an end of public life is secondly to speak of a denial. We deny there was any value, indeed any dignity, in the repressiveness the Victorian world imposed on itself as the confusion of public behavior and personality grew more acute. Yet we attempt to "liberate" ourselves from this repression by intensifying the terms of personality, by being more straight, open, and authentic in our relations with one another; we are confused when this seeming liberation produces distress akin to that Victorians felt in their repressive efforts to create emotional order.

We deny, again, that there ought to be any barriers in communication between people. The whole logic of 20th Century communications technology has bent to this openness of expression. And yet, though we have enshrined the idea of ease of communication, we are surprised that the "media" result in ever greater passivity on the part of those who are spectators; we are surprised that under conditions of audience passivity, personality becomes more and more an issue on the air, especially in terms of political life. We do not connect our belief in absolute communicativeness to the horrors of the mass media, because we deny the basic truth which once formed a public culture.

Active expression requires human effort, and this effort can succeed only to the extent that **people limit what they express to one another.** Or again, in sheer physical terms, we deny any limits on physical motion in the city, invent a transport technology to facilitate this absolute personal motion, and then are surprised when the result is a disastrous deadening of the city as an organism.

The Victorians struggled with the idea of a boundaryless self; it was the very essence of the discontent produced by the confusion of public and private. We simply deny, in these various ways, limits imposed upon the self. But to deny is not to erase; in fact, the problems become more intractible because they are no longer being confronted. Through contradictions inherited from the past and through the denial of the past, we remain imprisoned in the cultural terms of the 19th Century. Thus the end of a belief in public life is not a break with 19th Century bourgeois culture, but rather an escalation of its terms.

The structure of an intimate society is twofold. Narcissism is mobilized in social relations, and the experience of disclosure of one's feelings to others becomes destructive. These structural characteristics also have links to the 19th Century.

For narcissism to be mobilized in a society, for people to focus on intangible tones of feeling and motive, a sense of group ego must be suspended. This group ego consists in a sense of what people need, want, or demand, no matter what their immediate emotional impressions. The seeds of erasing a sense of group ego were planted in the [19th] Century. The revolution of 1848 was the first appearance of the dominance of the culture of personality over these group ego interests, expressed then as the interests of class.

For destructive gemeinschaft to arise, people must believe that when they reveal their feelings to each other, they do so **in order to form an emotional bond**. This bond consists of a collective personality which they build up through mutual revelation. And the seeds of this fantasy of being a community by sharing a collective personality were also planted by the terms of 19th Century culture. The question then becomes,

what is the effect on our lives of being in bondage to the past, to a culture whose effects we deny, even as we do not challenge its premises?

The clearest way to answer this question would be to see how each of the structures of an intimate society has grown upon its 19th Century roots. The suspension of ego interests has grown into a systematic encouragement of narcissistic absorption by centering social transactions on an obsession with motivation. The self no longer concerns man as actor or man as maker; **it is a self composed of *intentions* and *possibilities***. Intimate society has entirely reversed Fielding's dictum that praise or censure should apply to actions rather than actors; now what matters is not what you have done but how you feel about it.

The sharing of collective personality traits has grown into a systematically destructive process as the size of the community which can share this personality had shrunk. The Dreyfus Affair involved the formation of community feeling at a national level; in contemporary society, this same formation of community is now tied to localism. The very fear of impersonality which governs modern society prompts people to envision community on an ever more restricted scale. If the self is narrowed to intentions, the sharing of this self is now narrowed to exclude those who are much different in terms of class, politics, or style. Absorption in motivation and localism: these are the structures of a culture built upon the crises of the past. They organize the family, the school, the neighborhood; they disorganize the city and the state.

Although tracing these two structures would make an intellectually clear picture, it falls short, I think, of conveying the trauma which the reign of intimacy produces in modern life. Often against our own knowledge, we are caught up in a war between the demands of social existence and the belief that we develop as human beings only through contrary modes of intimate psychic experience.

Sociologists have unwittingly invented a language for this warfare. They speak of life in society as a matter of instrumental tasks--we go to school, to work, on strike, to meetings because we must. We try not to invest too much in these tasks because they are "inappropriate" vehicles for warm feeling; we make our life in them an "instrument," a means rather than a reality in which we make commitments of our sentiments. Against this instrumental world, sociologists then contrast affective or holistic or integrative experience; the jargonistic terms are important because they reveal a certain mentality, a belief that when people are *really feeling* (affective), *really alive* to the present moment (holistic), *fully disclosing themselves* (integrative)--in sum, when they are engaged--they are having experiences that are antagonistic to experiences of survival, struggle, and obligation in the world at large. Not unnaturally, the scenes in which sociologists speak of this affective life transpiring are intimate scenes: the family, the neighborhood, the life passed among friends.

It is necessary to see narcissism and destructive gemeinschaft organizing this warfare, giving the struggle between instrumental and affective social relations form. But the quality of the warfare itself can be brought to life by posing two questions, and organizing our inquiry around the answers to them. How is society injured by the blanket measurement of social reality in psychological terms? It is robbed of its *civility*. How is the self injured by estrangement from a meaningful impersonal life? It is robbed of the expression of certain creative powers which all human beings possess potentially--**the powers of play**--but **which require a milieu at a distance from the self for their realization.** Thus the intimate society makes of the individual an *actor deprived of an art*. The narcissistic focus on motivation and the localization of communal feeling give a form to each of these issues.

It is difficult to speak of civility in modern life without appearing to be a snob or reactionary. To recover [an] obsolete meaning of civility and relate it to the frame of public life, I would define civility as follows: it is the activity **which protects people from each other and yet allows them to enjoy each other's company**. Wearing [an affective] mask is the essence of civility. Masks permit pure sociability, detached from the circumstances of power, malaise, and private feeling of those who wear them. **Civility has as its aim the shielding of others from being burdened with oneself.**

If one were religious and believed that the impulse life of man was evil, or if one took Freud seriously and believed the impulse life of man an internal war, then the masking of the self, the freeing of others from being caught up in one's inner burden, would be an obvious good. But even if one makes no assumptions about, or has no belief in, an innate human nature, the culture of personality which has arisen in the last [two centuries] would give civility this same seriousness and weight.

Civility is treating others **as though they were strangers *and* forming a bond upon that social distance**. The city is that human settlement in which strangers are most likely to meet. The public geography of a city is civility institutionalized. I do not think people now need await a massive transformation of social conditions or a magic return to the past in order to behave in a civilized way.

In a world without religious rituals or transcendental beliefs, [affective] masks are not ready-made. The masks must be created by those who will wear them, through trial and error, through **a desire to live with others rather than a compulsion to get close to them.** The more such behavior takes form, however, the more would the mentality of, and love for, the city revive.

To speak of incivility is to speak of reversed terms. It is burdening others with oneself; it is the decrease in sociability with others this burden of personality creates. We can all easily call to mind individuals who are uncivilized on these terms: they are those "friends" who need others to enter into the daily traumas of their own lives, who evince little interest in others save as ears into which confessions are poured. But incivility is also built into the very fabric of modern society itself. Two of these structures of incivility will concern us.

One is the appearance of modern political leadership, particularly in the work of charismatic leaders. The modern charismatic leader destroys the distance between his own sentiments and impulses and those of his audience, and so, focusing his followers on his *motivation*, deflects them from measuring him in terms of his acts. This relationship between politician and followers began in the mid-19th Century in terms of the control of one class by the leaders of another; it now suits the needs of a new class situation, one in which the leader must shield himself against being judged by those whom he represents.

The electronic media play a crucial role in this deflection, by simultaneously overexposing the leader's personal life and obscuring his work in office. The incivility which this modern charismatic figure embodies is that his followers are burdened with making sense of him *as a person* in order to understand what he is doing once in power--and the very terms of personality are such that they can never succeed in that act.

It is uncivilized for a society to make its citizens feel a leader is believable because he can dramatize his own motivations. Leadership on these terms is a form of seduction. The structures of domination especially remain unchallenged when people are led into electing politicians who sound angry, as if ready to change things; these politicians are, by the alchemy of personality, freed from translating angry impulses into action.

The second incivility which will concern us is the perversion of fraternity in modern communal experience. The narrower the scope of a community formed by collective personality, the more destructive does the experience of fraternal feeling become. Outsiders, unknowns, unlikes become creatures to be shunned; the personality traits the community shares become ever more exclusive; the very act of sharing becomes ever more centered upon decisions about who can belong and who cannot. The abandonment of belief in class solidarity in modern times for new kinds of collective images, based on ethnicity, or *quatrier* or region, is a sign of this narrowing of the fraternal bond. Fraternity has become *empathy* for a select group of people allied with rejection of those not within the local circle. This rejection creates demands for autonomy from the outside world, for **being left alone by it rather than demanding that the outside world change itself.**

The more intimate, however, the less sociable.

For this process of fraternity by exclusion of "outsiders" never ends, since a collective image of "us" never solidifies. Fragmentation and internal division is the very logic of this fraternity, as the units of people who really belong get smaller and smaller. It is a version of fraternity which leads to fratricide.

The war between psyche and society is fought on a second front, within the individual person himself. He loses the capacity to play and playact, in a society which allows him no impersonal space in which to play.

The whole history of public culture in the 19th Century was of people who were gradually losing belief in their own expressive powers, who on the contrary elevated the artist as someone who was special because he could do what ordinary people could not do in everyday life; he expressed believable feelings clearly and freely in public. And yet social relations can be aesthetic relations, because they share a common root. That common origin lies in the childhood experience of play. Play is not art, but it is a certain kind of preparation for a certain kind of aesthetic activity, one which is realized in society itself if certain conditions are present.

This may seem an involuted way to make a simple statement, but it is necessary because so much of the current psychological investigation of "creativity" proceeds in such generalized terms that it is difficult to connect specific creative work to specific experiences in a life history. Play prepares children for the experience of playacting by teaching them to treat conventions of behavior as believable. Conventions are rules for behavior **at a distance from the immediate desires of the self**. When children have learned to believe in conventions, then they are ready to do qualitative work on expression by exploring, changing, and refining the quality of these conventions.

In most societies, adults realize and elaborate these strengths of play through religious ritual. Ritual is not self-expression; it is participation in expressive action whose meaning ultimately steps beyond immediate social life and connects with the timeless truths of the gods. The public behavior of the 18th Century cosmopolitans shows that religious ritual is not the only way people can playact with each other for purposes of immediate sociability. But [even outside of religious ritual] the terms on which they do so are still of *contriving* expression *at a distance from the self*; **not expressing *themselves*, but, rather, *being expressive.*** It was the intrusion of questions of personality into social relations which set in motion a force making it more and more difficult for people to utilize the strengths of play. This intrusion in the last century burdened an expressive gesture to others with a self-conscious doubt; *is what I'm showing really me?* The

self seemed present in impersonal situations, beyond the power of the self to control. *Self-distance* was on the way to being lost.

As belief in the public domain has come to an end, the erosion of a sense of **self-distance**, and thus the difficulty of playing in adult life, has taken one more step. But it is an important step. But it is an important step. **A person cannot imagine playing with his environment, playing with the facts of his position in society, playing with his appearances to others, because these conditions are now part and parcel of him*self*.** The problems of middle-class ideologues in working-class movements at the end of the 19th Century derived from one difficulty with having no self-distance; such middle-class radicals were prone to be rigid in their positions lest, through changes in their ideas, they might change or deligitimate themselves. They could not play.

To lose the ability to play is to lose the sense that worldly conditions are plastic. This ability to play with social life depends on the existence of a dimension in society which stands apart from, at a distance from, intimate desire, need, and identity. For modern man to have become an actor deprived of an art is thus a more serious matter than the fact that people prefer listening to records rather than playing music at home. The ability to be expressive is at a fundamental level cut, because one *tries to make one's appearance represent who one is*, to join the question of *effective* expression to the issue of *authenticity* of expression.

Under these conditions, everything returns to *motive*: Is this what I really feel? Do I really mean it? Am I being genuine? The self of motivations intervenes in an intimate society to block people from feeling free to play with the presentation of feelings as objective, formed signs. Expression is made contingent upon *authentic feeling*, but one is always plunged into the narcissistic problem of never being able to crystallize what is authentic in one's feelings.

The terms on which modern man is an actor without an art oppose play to narcissism. At the conclusion of this study, we shall try to bring out this opposition in terms of class. To the extent that people feel their social class is a product of their personal qualities and abilities, it is hard for them to conceive of playing with the conditions of class--they would be changing *themselves*. Indeed, especially in classes which are neither proletarian nor bourgeois but messily in the middle, people are more prone to ask, what is it in themselves which has led them to occupy this nondescript, faceless position in society? Class as a social condition, with rules of its own, *rules which can be changed*, is lost as a perception. One's "capabilities" determine one's standing; play with the facts of class becomes hard, because one would seem to be playing with facts very close to the inner nature of the self.

Having explored how an intimate society encourages uncivilized behavior between people and discourages a sense of play in the individual, I want to end this book by asking, in what sense is intimacy a tyranny? A fascist state is one form of intimate tyranny, the drudgery of making a living, feeding the children, and watering the lawn is another, but neither of these is appropriate to describe the peculiar trials of a culture without a public life.

from **Part Three: The Turmoil of Public Life in the 19th Century**
Chapter 10: Collective Personality

Today, impersonal experience seems meaningless and social complexity an unmanageable threat. By contrast, experience which seems to tell about the self, to help define it, develop it, or change it, has become an overwhelming concern. **In an intimate society, all social phenomena, no matter how impersonal in structure, are converted into matters of personality in order to have a meaning.**

Political conflicts are interpreted in terms of the play of political personalities; leadership is interpreted in terms of "credibility" rather than accomplishment. One's 'class' seems to be a product of personal drive and ability rather than of a systematic social determination. Faced with complexity, people reach for some inner, essential principle amid the complex, because converting social facts into symbols of personality can only succeed once the complex nuances of contingency and necessity are removed from a scene.

The entrance of personality into the public realm in the 19th Century prepared the ground for this intimate society. It did so by **inducing people to believe that interchanges in society were disclosures of personality**. It did so by framing the perception of personality in such a way that the contents of personality never crystallized, thus engaging men in an obsessive and endless search for clues as to what others, and themselves, were "really" like. Over the course of the hundred years, social bonds and social engagement have receded in the face of an inquiry about "what am I feeling?" Indeed, the task of developing personality have come to appear antithetical to the tasks of social action.

Intimate society is organized around two principles, one which I have defined as narcissism, the other which I shall define in the course of this chapter as destructive gemeinschaft. This social-science barbarism

has, unfortunately, a useful but non-translatable meaning. The entrance of personality into the public life of the last century paved the way for each one.

Narcissism is the search for gratification of the self which at the same time prevents that gratification from occurring. This psychic state is not created by a cultural condition; it is a possibility of character for any human being. But narcissism may be encouraged by cultural developments and can vary in expression from era to era, so that in some circumstances, it may seem tiresome, in others, pathetic, in others, an affliction shared in common.

Narcissism depends on an elementary part of the psychic apparatus going into suspension. This is "enlightened self interest," or what is technically called a "secondary ego function". To the extent a person can form in his own mind an idea of what he wants, what serves his own interests, what does neither, he tests reality in a particular way. He judges *what's in it for him*, rather than *if it is him*.

The word "enlightened" in the economic jargon catches this more clearly than does the psychoanalytic jargon. Any particular reality is "lightened" of the burden of having to sum up a state of being, having to suffice as an expression of the person in it. Once "lightened" in this way, it will not be found systematically wanting, as occurs when a person tries to use concrete, limited relations to symbolize himself. Enlightened self-interest also has the connotation of bringing light to bear on a situation, putting it in perspective, finding out what real pleasure a situation offers by defining the limits of the situation itself. I have often thought that the best definition of an ego-function might be derived from this; it is **learning how to take rather than to desire**. That sounds possessive and domineering; in fact, however, those who have learned to take are more modest than those who are rooted in the narcissism of an unfocusable desire.

For a culture to encourage narcissism, it has therefore to discourage people from taking; it has to divert them from a sense of their own self-interest, suspend the faculty of judging new experience, and stimulate the belief that this experience at each moment is absolute. This diversion of judgment is what the entrance of personality into the public realm in the last century began.

We saw in the last chapter how the personality of the artist in public was allied to a problem of "text"; he focused attention away from the text being played. Now we are to see how, when it is a politician who is the public personality, he also focuses attention on himself to the degree that he focuses attention away from a "text". That text is the sum of the interests and needs of his listeners. To the extent that a politician in public arouses credence in himself as a person, to that extent those who are credulous lose a sense of

themselves. The suspension of judgment by the modes of passivity and self-doubt we have already seen at work in an artistic public context. Instead of *judging him*, his listeners want to be *moved by him*, to experience him. The same thing is true of a political "personality"; his listeners lose a sense of themselves too. They focus on *who he is* rather than *what he can do for them*.

This process I shall call the suspension of the ego interests of a group--not an elegant phrase, but a useful combination of the economic and psychoanalytic. This process began to appear in the political life of the 19th century capitals.

The second characteristic of present-day intimate society is a strong emphasis on **community**. In its garden-variety definition, a community is a neighborhood, a place on the map; this definition makes good common sense now precisely because of the atomizing of the city which took place in the 19th century, so that people living in different places in the city lived different kinds of life. This garden-variety definition is much too narrow, however; people can have all sorts of experiences of community which do not depend on living near one another.

The sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies tried to portray the non-geographical sense of community in contrasting gemeinschaft to gesellshaft. The first is community in the sense of **full and open emotional relations with others**. In opposing this idea of community to gesellshaft (society), Tönnies meant to create an historical contrast, rather than depict two different states of living which can exist at the same time.

For him, gemeinschaft existed in the pre-capitalist, pre-urbanized world of the late Middle Ages, or in traditional societies. Gemeinschaft, the full and open emotional communication with others, is possible only in a hierarchical society. Gesellschaft relations by contrast are appropriate to modern society, with its division of labor and unstable classes rather than fixed statuses. Here people will apply the principle of division of labor to their feelings, so that in each of the encounters they have with other people they will engage themselves only partially. Tönnies regretted the loss of gemeinschaft but believed only a "social Romantic" could believe it would ever appear again.

We have become the "social Romantics" Tönnies wrote about. **We believe that disclosure of oneself to others is a moral good in itself, no matter what the social conditions which surround this disclosure.** Recall those interviewers described at the opening of this book; they believed that, unless they revealed themselves every time their clients disclosed something, they would not be engaged in a *humane and authentic* relationship with the clients. Instead, they would be treating their clients like an "object," and

objectification is bad. The community idea involved here is a belief that when people disclose themselves to each other, a tissue grows to bind them together. If there is no psychological openness, there can be no social bond. This principle of community is the very opposite of the "sociable" community of the 18th Century, in which the acts of disguise, the masks, were what people shared.

Any kind of community is more than a set of customs, behaviors, or attitudes about other people. A community is also a collective identity; it is a way of saying who "we" are. But if the matter is left there, any social grouping, from a neighborhood to a nation, could be considered a community, as long as the people in the group could come up with a picture of themselves as one whole. The question is how these pictures of collective identity become formed, what are the tools people use to forge a sense of who "we" are.

The simplest way in which a communal identity is formed is when a group is threatened in its very survival, such as war or other catastrophe. While taking collective action to meet this threat, people feel close to one another and search for images that bind them together. Collective action nourishing a collective self-image: this alliance stretches from the ideals of Greek political thought to the speech of 18th Century coffeehouses and theaters; the shared speech yielded people the sense of constituting together a "public". In general, we can say that the "sense of community," of a society with a strong public life, is born from this union of shared action and a shared sense of collective self.

But in times when public life is eroding, this relationship between shared action and collective identity breaks down. If people are not speaking to each other on the street, how are they to know who they are as a group? You may say, in that case they will simply stop thinking of themselves as a group; the conditions of public life in the last century show that this is not so, at least in modern times. Those silent, single people at cafes, those *flaneurs* of the boulevards who strutted past but spoke to no one, continued to think they were in a special milieu and that other people in it were sharing something with themselves. The tools they had to work with in constructing a picture of who they were as a collectivity, now that neither clothes nor speech were revealing, were the tools of fantasy, of projection. And since they were thinking of social life in terms of personality states and personal symbols, what they began to do was create a sense of a common personality in public created by, sustainable only in, acts of fantasy.

Given the fact that the symbols of personality were in actuality so unstable, that the act of reading personality was so difficult, it makes sense that the enlarging of terms of personality to encompass the personality of a collective group could work, if at all, only through acts of fantasy and projection.

This, then, is the form of community we are going to study: **a community which has a collective personality, a collective personality generated by common fantasy.** It is a long way from the garden-variety meaning of community in the city as social life, but then, that garden-variety definition is a long way from encompassing the depth and seriousness of the phenomenon of community itself. Furthermore, we are going to try to see what this sense of community as shared personality has to do with the questions of group ego interests discussed above. Between the phenomenon of projected collective personality and the loss of group interest there stands a direct relationship: **the more a fantasied common personality dominates the life of a group, the less can that group *act* to advance its collective interests.** This brutal cause-and-effect took form in the last century, most obviously and seriously in the politics of class warfare.

What has emerged in the last hundred years, as communities of collective personality have begun to form, is that the **shared imagery becomes a deterrent to shared action**. Just as personality itself has become an antisocial idea, collective personality becomes group identity in society hostile to, difficult to translate into, group activity.

Community has become a phenomenon of collective *being* rather than collective *action*, save in one way. The only transaction for the group to engage in is that of purification, of rejection and chastisement of those who are not "like" the others. Since the symbolic materials usable in forming collective personality are unstable, communal purification is unending, a continual quest after the loyal American, the authentic Aryan, the "genuine" revolutionary. The logic of collective personality is the purge; its enemy, all *acts* of alliance, cooperation or United Front. Broadly stated, **when people today seek to have full and open emotional relations with each other, they succeed only in wounding each other.** This is the logical consequence of the destructive gemeinschaft which arose when personality made its appearance in society.

Since both the suspension of ego interests and the fantasy of collective personality are politically loaded topics, because they invite rhetoric, I want to deal with each of these seeds of an intimate society in terms of specific events and persons.

1848: Individual Personality Triumphs over Class

A new mode of politics paralleled the rise of the orchestra conductor. At moments of great stress, the bourgeoise was sometimes able to employ codes of personality in public as a tool to dominate workers in revolt. This transpired through a new agency: the politician who had become a believable, moving public performer, a personality of authority who could impose on his working-class audience that *discipline of silence* which the bourgeois audience normally imposed on itself in the domain of Art. The result was the temporary, but often fatal, suspension by workers of their own demands.

To speak of the bourgeois politician as a performer dominating the workers is to raise an uncomfortable problem. It is all too easy to look at politicians as conscious manipulators of the public, or as people who understand their own powers. A picture of class struggle in the 19th Century society results, then, filled with bourgeois villains and working-class virgins seduced. But the great, and the true, drama of class domination in the last century lay precisely in the blind imposition of rules of cognition on those below which the bourgeoise used to dominate and suppress *itself*. The fact that these rules produced effective passivity during revolutionary stresses, those who employed them understood and appreciated no more than they understood the business cycle that made them rich, or indeed understood that their fear of being found out by their psychological appearance formed part of a whole social psychology.

The revolution of February to June 1848 marks the appearance of two new forces in conjunction with each other; 1848 was a moment at which 19th Century terms of culture and of class intersected. It is the first moment in which the codes of ethology, silence, and isolation--the codes of bourgeois public culture--were sufficiently developed to affect the experience people had of a revolution. It was also the first revolution in which questions of class and class conflict were consciously on the minds of those engaged in the upheaval.

In any revolution or any social movement, an observer who desires can discern class interests playing a role. Situations in which the actors themselves speak openly of their own class interests are a different matter. The appearance of a consciousness of class sets off 1848 from the prior revolution in France, that of 1830, in which class was not on the minds of those who may have been motivated by class nonetheless. Capitalist industrial production itself only began to flower in the eighteen years preceding 1848; it was only natural that certain issues present to those who struggled in 1848 were not consciously present to those who struggled in 1830.

It is common to call the revolution of 1830 a "bourgeois revolution." The term is misleading if we then imagine that the bourgeoise composed the street crowds of Paris, or was at one with those deputies engaged in the constitutional struggle with the Restoration government. This was a revolution led by middle-class journalists and politicians, which gathered behind it in the streets of Paris manual laborers with different grievances all their own; the crowds were a motley group, wherein there were absent only the extremes of the very poor and the very rich. But the term "bourgeois revolution" is accurate if it is taken to represent a certain view of the "people" which permitted this diverse assemblage to draw together for the moment.

Delacroix's *Liberty Guiding the People*, painted in 1831, is the most famous representation of this community called "the people". Up over the barricade, across sprawling dead bodies, come three living figures; in the center is an allegorical "Liberty," a woman in a classical pose but with a flag in one hand and a gun in the other, urging the people on who come behind her. The "people" are, most prominently, on the left, a gentleman in a top had, black broadcloth coat, and on the right, a young worker with shirt open at the throat and two pistols in his hands. The "people" are thus composed of two representative figures led by an abstraction, an allegorical Liberty. It was the solution of the problem of Wilke's time--the human representation of liberty--in terms of a composite myth of the "people". But it was a myth of the "people" that could not survive. In his brilliant book *The Absolute Bourgeois*, T. J. Clark concludes a study of this painting with the following words:

> *That was the trouble with the bourgeois myth of revolution. The very term of the myth--the story the bourgeois told himself--suggested its own dissolution... If the new revolution really was heroic and universal, if it went to make a new definition of man, if people and bourgeois were true allies, then the people must be represented--and the bourgeois was going to find himself in their midst, one against four, or one against a hundred, a colonial planter surrounded by slaves.*

By 1848, this image of the "people" as one body no longer constituted a believable revolutionary community. In the visual arts, there were a few attempts to use Delacroix's 1831 painting as an icon of sorts for 1848: a few anonymous painters tried to revive Delacroix's figures to depict the new revolution, but the attempts were unpopular, and visual disasters. The middle classes gradually disappear from representations of the revolution--even though in 1848, as in 1830, they play a dominant role in leadership. When hostilities first broke out in February of 1848, Daumier moved from the 1831 imagery (as in *The Uprising*, c. 1848) to images of the "people" as the destitute, or the disciplined manual laborer (as in *Family of the Barricades*, c. 1849).

What happened in painting happened in the writings of workers themselves and their intellectual champions. In 1830, *journaux de travail* would speak of their interests as "distinct" from those of the men of property. In 1848 they spoke of their interests as "antagonistic" to those of the bourgeois classes. To be sure, "working class," "proletarian," "*menu peuple*," and the like had little consistent meaning: the Marxian definitions of these terms were not dominant, or even relatively popular. But it was in 1848 that many workers became suspicious for the first time of middle-class intellectuals who wanted to act as their champions. The worker-writers who founded *L'Atelier*, for instance, expressly excluded white-collar sympathizers from the management of this popular newspaper.

People from all social strata could be found in revolt, then, but only those from the working classes could be imagined to be. The liberal bourgeois in 1848 is truly a man in the middle. He can be opposed to vestiges of the *ancien regime*, he can be for constitutional government, for the expansion of industry, for reform, but at the same time he is on the defensive. He is at once a rebel and the object of rebellion; he is for a new order, but he is for order in and of itself.

Revolutions distort time. In the minds of those who live through them, immense changes appear to be wrought in the social fabric overnight; manners and habits which have been practiced for years or centuries are suddenly abandoned; it is almost impossible to judge the meaning of events, to know whether they are of cataclysmic importance or may mean nothing a day later. The very turmoil of revolutionary events prompts people to disconnect one moment from the next; each exchange of fie, each impromptu speech becomes a world of its own; one wants to plumb it for clues about what is happening, and yet there is no time. Fighting has broken out in the next street, or a speech is to be made across the city, or one simply has to flee.

In revolutions, therefore, the question of how one will make sense of momentary encounters, how one will know whom to believe, become all-important. Codes for making sense of appearances by strangers acquire an inflated importance as history is speeded up and time suspended.

In times of revolutionary disarray, it is common for codes of meaning to remain operative but to jump their normal channels. Aristocrats can suddenly see with the eyes of workers, and feel what in untroubled times they would be too blind even to notice. Conversely, those in revolt can during the moments of upheaval suddenly begin to see with the eyes of those above them, and this vision can obscure a sense of themselves. One may suddenly try to understand what is happening by reference to the world-view of

seemingly more self-assured and educated groups, to make sense of one's own interest--which may be to destroy the groups above.

Such a displacement of cognition is what occurred in 1848.

Alphonese de Lamartine played a crucial role in that displacement. Lamartine was, by the 1830's, recognized as a great Romantic poet. He did not fall accidentally into politics; from the late 1830's on, he had interested himself deeply in national affairs. Throughout the 1840's, he was spoken of as a man of finer stuff, more worthy to lead the nation than the bourgeois king, Louis Philippe. When a revolution broke out in Paris, he became the personality most in the eye of the Parisian crowds.

On February 22 and 23, 1848, discontents which had been smouldering for years against Louis Philippe's rule suddenly burst into revolution. Everyone thought of the great days of 1830, the great years after 1789, but this revolution of 1848 was at the outset virtually bloodless. There was something almost gay about it; to Marx, the period after February was "dramatic" rather than real:

> *This was the February revolution itself, the common uprising with its illusions, its poetry, its imagined content and its phrases.*

In March, April, and May, disorder within Paris grew stronger and stronger. In June, with great turmoil in the streets, the Parisians were put down by violent "forces of order" under General Cavaignac. The nephew of Napoleon I arrived on the scene; by December 1848, he was the overwhelming victor in national presidential elections, and soon after began to prepare the way for becoming dictator of France.

Lamartine, a man of the February days, was supreme in March and April; by June, worn out; in December, he received 17,000 votes for president against the young Napoleon's 5,500,000. Lamartine was no revolutionary plotter in the early days, although his *Histoire des Girondins*, appearing in 1847, revived the memory of the Great Revolution among wide sections of the bourgeois public, making the fall of the *ancien regime* seem a humane event.

To understand why a public personality should give a man power to pacify aroused workers, it is necessary to understand the importance of words in this February revolt, what Marx scorned as "its illusions, its poetry." Theodore Zeldin tells us:

> *There was suddenly the liberty to speak as one pleased, without fear of the police, to publish any book one liked, to issue newspapers without tax, caution, money, or censorship.*

An enormous number of newspapers suddenly sprang up, three hundred in Paris itself, with huge circulations. The cloak of silence which we have observed workers to wear in cafes was for a moment thrown off. That Lamartine was valued for his ability to speak in public made sense in this milieu where it was for once possible to speak unrestrainedly.

Let us follow Lamartine through one day, the day of February 24, 1848. All through that day, the provisional government was meeting in the Hotel de Ville, the building surrounded by an enormous mob of people. The people of this crowd were not the dregs of Paris; they were workers from all strata of skilled and unskilled labor, and most were unacquainted with each other. They were intensely angry; anyone who attempted to hold the reins of power seemed suspect.

Seven times that day Lamartine came out to address the crowd. By evening many of his listeners were drunk; eyewitnesses tell of pistols suddenly being cocked, of a man hurling a hatchet at him. Each time, when he initially appears, the crowd jeers at him; in the evening someone calls for his head.

Lamartine's response in the evening, as throughout the day, is extraordinary. He does not plead with the mob or seek to mollify them. He challenges them instead. He recites poetry, he tells them that *he* knows what it is to be alive at a revolutionary moment. He calls them fools, he tells them flatly that they do not understand what is happening. He is not condescending; he is outraged by them and lets them know it.

The logic of the situation is that, after the first sentence he speaks showing his contempt, Lamartine ought to be dead. But it is exactly this show of contempt, this refusal to truck with them, which quiets the mob in the evening as it has done all day. Whitehouse, Lamartine's biographer, tells us that Lamartine's defiance abashed the crowd. They became "fascinated" by Lamartine as a person, and began to act penitently. Elias Regnault, an eyewitness, recalled that Lamartine acted "proudly, imperiously"; but it was difficult for him to remember what Lamartine said.

Lamartine's triumphs in February, March and April were those of a man who disciplined mobs who were calling once again for liberty, equality, and fraternity--by calling them rabble to their faces. He told them he was better than they, because he could express "restraint and power," while they could only emote like animals. When he showed them just how fine and noble were his own sentiments, they became subdued and respectful. Their own demands they put aside in his presence that is, his personality in public repressed the expression of their interests.

He was their conductor.

The events of the next day, February 25, show all the ingredients of this authority in public crystallized: the emphasis on the immediate moment when a politician speaks to a crowd; their sense that his rhetoric is the revelation of a superior personality; the imposition of silence; the temporary abandonment by the crowd of its own interests.

All revolutions have moments where some trivial issue acquires momentous symbolic value. It can be the pulling down of a statue of an old leader, the destruction of a monument built to glorify a past battle. At the end of February 1848 it was the color of the flag: should the flag be red, symbolizing revolution, or the tricolor, symbolizing the nation? Foreign governments are on the move, plots and counterplots abound, but the color of the flag is passionately debated. On February 29, again a great crowd of workers draws around the Hotel de Ville. Again Lamartine becomes the emissary of the government to quell the mob, so that the representatives of the People can deal with the metaphysical meaning of red cloth.

But Lamartine does not speak to them directly about the flag. He speaks about his own feelings; he compares the red cloth to a banner of blood, and then recites a poem he has made up about banners of blood waving in the sky. Above all he speaks to them about how he and they are separate and unequal, as long as they resist his poetry. In his memoirs he recalls that he ended his speech by saying:

> *As for me, never will my hand sign this decree you seek. Until death overtakes me I will refuse to accept this banner of blood. And you ought to repudiate it just as emphatically as I do.*

Perhaps it was easy for Lamartine to remember these lines; he had written them once before, in his *Histoire des Girondins*, where they were put in the mouth of one of the principle Girondists of 1791. Thanks to the researches of Barthou on Lamartine's oratory, we know that most of his speeches were rehearsed, and that Lamartine often worked in front of a mirror. He gave the appearance of spontaneous inspiration, but this appearance was as minutely calculated as Garrick's study of the tones of his own voice.

What were the signs of the crowd's passivity? A hostile eyewitness, the woman aristocrat whose pen name was Daniel Stern, gives a detailed account. The crowd had to pay attention to the flow of his words to get what he was up to, she reported, since it was not an ideological question with him, not a matter of what position he took, but how he spoke.

What they got when they paid attention was something very static; a glimpse of him feeling. Coming under the power of his performance, Stern tells us, the crowds on these days became "irrationally still". They forgot their own grievances, their own interests. When he told them he could feel without shouting, that he was in control of himself, there was a humiliating contrast to their own noisy, unfocused protests. "He subjugated the... passion of the mob by the force of incomparable eloquence alone," we are told. No one really cared what he said, they cared that he could be so poetic and fine. **When we say the masks became the face of such a man, we mean simply that being able to generate emotion in public showed that the person acting had a superior, because "authentic," personality.**

In this way, the politician used personality as an anti-ideological force; to the extent that he could arouse interest, respect, and belief in the quality of his appearances in public, to that extent he could divert his audience from dealing with either his or their own position in the world. It is this power of personality which horrified Tocqueville, even though he was more conservative than Lamartine and thus the beneficiary of these restorations of public order from February to the middle of May. Tocqueville wrote:

> *I do not believe that ever anybody inspired such keen enthusiasm as that to which [Lamartine] was then giving rise; one must have seen love thus stimulated by fear to know with what excess of idolatry men are capable of loving.*

Lamartine at work was like De Gaulle at work in the Fifth Republic or, in a bastardized form, Richard Nixon at work defending himself against charges of corruption. If the leader can focus attention on his capacity to *feel* in public, he can delegitimize the demands of those who press in upon him. But the parallel is inexact in one way. In this 19th Century revolutionary upheaval, the leader succeeded in imposing what were middle-class standards of propriety--that is, silence in the face of art--on a working-class audience, outside the theater and at a moment when the working classes were thoroughly aroused. The modern politicians worked the same suppression on an audience diverse in its class structure. Moreover, no longer is flowery rhetoric itself the fashion; but it is the use, the function, of the rhetoric which connects past and present. What we are seeing in Lamartine during these early fierce days is the power of the culture of personality over class interest. Marx made an appalling error in dismissing the "poetry and fine phrases" of this revolutionary moment as irrelevant to the "real struggle," because it was poetry and fine phrases which defeated the class struggle.

One difference between 1830 and 1848, we have seen, was that by 1848 the People seemed no longer a community whose heterogeneous interests could be served by common measures. By 1848, the bourgeoise were at once the leadership class of the revolution and the enemy in the eyes of a crowd.

Lamartine believed in the People in principle, but was unhappy with them in the flesh. He believed the "sentiment of nobility" should govern a nation, but waffled on whether noblemen best embodied the principle. He believed that "poetry" made a nation great, but was uncertain what relationship verse had to twelve hours of labor six days a week, or an apartment infested with rats. Men of Lamartine's class had great trouble, therefore, in understanding the events they led. They were not false Republicans; they were genuinely ambivalent men.

In speaking to the Parisian crowd, Lamartine faced the extreme edge of popular, working-class sentiment during the revolution. In the elections of April 1848, the Parisian working classes often voted for middle-class candidates; only twelve socialist deputies were elected, and prominent radicals like Blanqui and Raspail failed. Yet the sense of antagonism between classes was everywhere. The most antagonistic were the most vocal and active on the streets; they were ready to seize those chance opportunities by which even a popular regime can be destroyed.

Lamartine's ability to silence these extreme elements is a testament to the power of personality in public, but also a sign of an ironic limit on public personage itself. In having finally come to terms with the necessity for order day by day, after mid-May the people of the streets quickly tired of Lamartine. They became indifferent, as though they had exchanged their own willingness to be dominated for his person; by May's end, they had squeezed him dry.

If we seek to trace back to its source this power of personality to suspend group interest, we come again upon the doctrine of immanence, the belief in the immediate, which came to rule in the 19th Century. The power of personality is one in which a public appearance at a given moment can suddenly diffuse the weight of the past, the memory of old injuries, the convictions of a lifetime. For a crowd to be pacifiable on these terms, the appearance and behavior of a forceful person must be taken as an *absolute situation*. Loss of memory occurs when the crowd ceases to measure and test the public figure in terms of his actions, his achievements, his ideology. Codes of immanent meaning are inimical to the exercise of group ego interest. These codes are the terms of modern secularism.

It is common to assume that the crowd is always fickle, a mob easily brought to heel if only a strong man stands up in it. This common-sense assumption is incorrect.

How crowds are controlled, the way in which they submit to a leader, depends on the very principles of belief governing a society. The price for doing away with [religious] magic, with dogmas of the

transcendental, with priests and all their mumbo-jumbo, is that [in a secular society] the people are highly susceptible to be narcotized by a great political speaker. There are no standards of reference, there is no reality, outside the quality of his performance. The priest, however, is always tied to his role as a representative of a transcendant power. He may embody divine grace; he can never claim to own it. The priest brings mental idiocy to those who believe in him, but *leaves free their expressive powers*--indeed, encourages them to share God with him by all the dramatic acts which go under the name of ritual. [But] the secular politician gives his followers faith in the *absolute reality of the concrete*, the immediate moment, and in so doing destroys their powers to express themselves and [act on] their own ego interests. Under religious and secular conditions, the people are taking two different kinds of drugs, the first blocking their heads, the second, their will.

When a discipliner, be he priest or secular orator, says to a crowd, "You are vile," or "You need me," who is the "you" he refers to? The priest refers not to the whole human being, because the human being is not wholly involved in that dramatic relationship, or in any worldly affair. A part of him, the part that God can touch, is always at a remove from the world, and the person's sins of the world. Paradoxically, this is why the priest could say that you are vile *and* expect you to redeem yourself; part of the "you," your will, is at a distance from your sins.

In modern secular culture, in which the immediate is the real, when a crowd is convincingly told, "You are vile," how are they to cease being so? *All* of the self feels indicted. The only way to cease being vile is therefore to cease asserting oneself. When the orator says, "You need me," if you believe him then for the moment you surrender to him fully. People are rendered vulnerable to suppressing their ego interests as a group. The issue of emotional inequality stands out more and more in the relations of the orator and his audience. Because this inequality is felt as so absolute in the relationship, the lesser party *falls silent.* And the anticlericals, natural scientists, philosophers of the phenomenal--all those who have made the immediate and empirical the standard of truth--have unwittingly sharpened this political instrument.

The word "charisma" means that Grace has entered into a person. For a priest, the meaning of "Grace" is that god's power temporarily infuses him, while he administers a ritual, an office, or a rite. For a priest of the streets, we would want to modify this somewhat and say that he demonstrated his charisma by inducing in his audience those feelings which make them want to change their lives. As long as he serves as a catalyst to their own actions of reform, he seems to them a messenger of God.

If it makes any sense to call Lamartine a charismatic performer, we would have to say that he can induce in his listeners a feeling that *he has something as a person they absolutely lack*. But what this something is, what his Grace consists of, is a mystery to them. "Everyone was moved by M. Lamartine," Ledru-Rollin wrote to a friend, "but I cannot recall his words or his subject." Ledru-Rollin, a leader of the Left-center, did have a strong text to preach to the workers of 1848, a text which spoke to their interests and demands. But he aroused precious little enthusiasm, week after week, compared with Lamartine, whose words and subjects were so hard to remember.

In the years from 1825 to 1848, politicians began to think about their rhetoric and their public appearances in relation to the appearances of stage artists--particularly male actors and male musical soloists. ... The excitement people of diverse views once felt about politics they began to "transfer" to the arts. As the Napoleonic legend faded, the Artist took his place as the image of a really believable public personage. Once that transfer was made, politicians subsequently modeled themselves on the public idea of what artists suffered and how artists behaved, for this suffering and behavior constituted a new standard of heroism.

Lamartine was the first representative figure of the politicians who followed in the wake of this transfer of charismatic imagery. The distance Lamartine's society had traveled from the days of Napoleon was great. Napoleon's character was deduced from *what he did*, whereas Lamartine *needed to do nothing in the public eye*. The rules of performance in the formal arts led to a transcendence of text; politicized, these rules **divorced the performer from his acts**. Personality, no longer read by Lamartine's generation in terms of action, acquired an independent status of its own. That divorce is what makes his age the germ of ours.

The hidden power of a speaker like Lamartine is that he harnesses mystification. He has no text, and so escapes being measured by any outside standard of truth or reality. He can make the quality of his intentions and sentiments a self-sufficient basis of his legitimacy to rule, and thus, if he is a Goebbels, make large numbers of normally intelligent people believe that Jews are both Communists and international bankers. Whether this is more or less mystical than convincing large numbers of people of a virgin birth is an open question.

The age of proletarian revolutions is over; so is the age of the Romantic performer. Without the color, the passion, the bombast, what has survived is the cognitive structure: **a believable public event is created by a believable public person rather than a believable action.** The genuine aesthetic qualities of the

meeting of politics and the arts having disappeared, what remains is only the obscurantist, paralyzing effects of a "politics of personality".

Gemeinschaft

Lamartine's experience can be read as a lesson to the Left: belief in personality can destroy the working class's sense of itself and its own interests.

The lesson would be that personality, such as it is conceived in modern culture, is the enemy of a truly political community. But this lesson is too simple. The very materials of personality, the very symbols of self-expression used by a Lamartine, can be used collectively by groups caught up in a political struggle. The warring camps can see themselves as warring persons; you belong to one camp or the other by your resemblance to other persons in one camp or another; you construct this resemblance not by observing how they behave and comparing it to your own behavior, nor by deciding whether their needs resemble your needs. You construct an idea of your resemblance to others, your shared identity, by what was called in Chapter 8 "decoding".

Decoding means you take a detail of behavior as a symbol for an entire character state. Just as, say, the color of a scarf or the number of buttons undone on a blouse may [in the 19th Century] symbolize a woman's sexual looseness, so small details of appearance or manner can symbolize a political stance. These details seem to indicate *what kind of person* espouses the ideology. If, for instance, a working-class speaker happens to be elegantly dressed, you focus on this incongruity in his personal appearance in such a way that you come to believe whatever he is saying is an illusion. In this case, you have decoded *what he means by how he looks*.

A sense of political community can be built out of such acts of decoding. You look for details of behavior among the person espousing one view or another to decide which best corresponds with the sense of yourself. Those details become for you a revelation of the true character of the conflict; they symbolize what the conflict is about.

As ideology becomes measured as to whether it is believable or not through these details of behavior, political struggle itself becomes more personal. Political language becomes miniaturized, little moments or events seeming of immense importance, because through these details you are learning who is fighting, and therefore, on which side you belong.

A political community formed in this way is a gemeinschaft. People are seeking for others to disclose themselves in order to know where to belong, and the acts of disclosure consist in these details which symbolize *who believes what, rather than what should be believed*. **Baring of a self becomes the hidden agenda of political life**. And when, in fantasy, these details revealing who is fighting are then blown to stand for a collective person, political community becomes moralistic rather than ideological in tone.

A society with a very low level of interaction between its members, dominated by ideas of individual, unstable personality, is likely to give birth through fantasy to enormously destructive collective personalities. Fantasy of the collective person tends to be grandiose, because there is very little actual knowledge of others like oneself, only a small number of symbolic details. The collective person has abstract characteristics, for the same reason. This collective figure goes easily out of focus, in part because of its abstractness, in part because the very modes of perceiving personality destabilize the personality perceived.

And finally, once formed, collective action for the community is difficult because people's constant worry is who belongs and who is to be excluded from this grandiose, unstable identity. Such a community is hostile to outsiders, and competition is rife among those within over who is "really" an embodiment of the collective personality, who is really a loyal American, a pure-blood Aryan, a genuine revolutionary.

The fractures in public culture during the last century encouraged this kind of destructive communal fantasizing to take form. The entrance of personality into the public realm meant that a collective person seemed as though it ought to be in essence like a concrete person. Conversely, a concrete person ought to be able to *recognize himself* in the collectivity; in this scheme, social relations do not transform the nature of personality. This is one reason why, by the midcentury, Delacroix's allegorical Liberty leading a revolutionary community no longer aroused belief; an allegorical personage transmutes personality; in its place, there has to be a fantasized collective person who could be concretized as a single individual. Those who recognize themselves in this individual *need not talk directly to each other*; indeed, the 19th Century taught them that they have a right to be left alone, in silence. And thus was the basis of destructive gemeinschaft laid: **emotional relations with other people as a state of being, rather than as actions shared. Community in society became akin to an engine which runs only in neutral gear.**

In conflict and in radical politics, the language of community made institutional or ideological issues into psychological questions. As the masks people wore in conflict or radical leadership came to seem

disclosures of their personality, these issues could quickly metamorphose into attempts to justify one's appearance; one's stand on the issues became a matter of justifying oneself.

Common stands and common beliefs then could become confused with *common selves*.

These communities in politics are not "urban" in the sense that the political fights or revolutionary struggles go on in the great city and nowhere else. These political communities are urban in the sense that a code of interpreting appearances which arose among strangers in the city came to influence general political language. The politics are "urban" in the second of the two senses of the word, that of a mode of cognition which originates in the capital city and then spreads out through the whole of society, so that regardless of geography, people come to see with the eyes of those who come from a special place.

From identification of community feeling as a sharing of a personality, it becomes quite natural to see the language of negotiation, bureaucracy, and management relations as all in a different realm. Thus, there developed by the opening of the present century the rationale for thinking that the life of a community and the life of a state were different *in kind*.

If the community itself is worth caring about, it is ruled by a perverse domino theory. Negotiation becomes the great threat to community: change positions or alter them, and the communal spirit itself is weakened. It becomes more important to declare who you are than to traffic with others unlike yourself.

Who Is a Real Radical?

This language of community began to appear in the [19th] Century in a domain where it should have been forbidden, the domain of radical politics. It served bourgeois radicals as a way to think of themselves as having a legitimate place in proletarian movements. Let us see why collective personality ought not to have appeared in Marxian movements in particular, and then how in fact it did.

Perhaps the greatest inheritance of the 19th Century still untaxed today is a view of history in which events follow logically, even inevitably, from social conditions. This idea included as believers those who imagined nations had "destinies," many 19th Century anarchists, some followers of Saint-Simon, most of the social Darwinists, as well as those who followed Marx.

To speak of a Marxian dialectic of history is to speak of stages of experience, each produced out of contradictions in the stages which have come before. Ironically, having learned this catechism by heart, we have also witnessed events that discredit it.

No single generation, and certainly no single book, can explain the paradox of this displaced destiny. Yet the cycle of urban culture traced so far in these pages can throw light on at least one dimension of the paradox: the psychological deformation culture works on those who are committed to radical, dialectical change, so that they become defensive when history flies in the face of theory.

What does it take, psychologically, for a person to be able to reformulate his beliefs? To think dialectically? If a belief has become to its espouser so deeply and intensely *personal*, if what a person believes has come to define his or her identity, then any change in belief involves a great upheaval of the self. The more personal and self-involving belief becomes, that is, the less likely it is to be changed.

Thus, a dialectical consciousness seems to require an almost impossible human strength. Here is an ideology of passionate concern about the world, a passionate commitment against its injustices, and yet an ideology which demands that as historical situations change, the nature of those commitments must be suspended, rethought, and re-formed. Belief is to be at once intensely held and yet at a distance from the self, so that the belief can be changed without carrying the burdens of personal loss or a sense of intimate jeopardy.

When the matter is put this way, we realize that what Marx imagined as a dialectical imagination is close to a concept we have explored in terms of city life: the concept of public behavior. To the dialectical in one's perceptions, one must be out in public, away from the symbolization of personality through belief or social action. If Rousseau was an enemy of man in public, Marx was his champion.

Yet, there is the all too familiar creature who calls himself Marxist and yet detests this flexibility. Sometimes he is termed an "ideologue," sometimes a "dogmatist"--convenient labels to subsume a radical movement by the character structure of its worst exponent. He is more accurately and narrowly a person from the middle classes who out of humane motives or anger at his past, or anger at himself, becomes a radical, identifying the interests of justice and right in the society with the working class. If his motives for championing the oppressed vary from case to case, his problem in relationship to the working classes does not: how is he legitimately a part of their movement, how does this man with is education, his sense of decorum, his sense of propriety, legitimate his presence in the community of the oppressed?

This sectarian passion is directly a product of the secular codes of imminent personality. A believable appearance is one in which a personality is disclosed--but here it is of necessity a displaced personality. His very displacement, his very past, can only make those whom he hopes to join as comrades perceive him as alien. The term for belonging to which he then resorts are those which define him as a new person by virtue of the *strength* of his beliefs. His mask must be immobile, must be fixed, for him to believe in himself.

If he converts radical intellection into puritanical passion, he does so not because he has an "authoritarian" personality, although in particular cases this may be true, but because he wants to legitimate himself in an alien community. The modern ideologue takes every stand as non-negotiable because on each hinges the troubled question to him of whether he really *is* as he appears, whether he legitimately has a place in the legions of the oppressed.

The loss of distance between public behavior and personal need means more to the secular revolutionary than it does to the Puritan. It means a loss of his very reason for acting.

Someone alive to the dangers of Stalinism might here strongly object, saying that ceasing to consider personal needs in relation to public questions can wind up in a barren world where the "needs of the revolution" dehumanize society. But I am here after something else. The tragedy of 19th Century politics, and it is a tragedy, lay in the fact that forces of culture so often imprisoned those who revolted, just as they imprisoned those who defended the existing economic order, in a ferocious self-declaration through political means. This culture could make radicals inhumane. Further, there was increasing paralysis of consciousness among political intelligentsia. This paralysis arose from destructive tendencies in cosmopolitan culture, not in the supposedly absolutist features of revolutionary dogma.

The culture of the 19th Century capital cities set in motion a powerful *weapon against change*. When the mask became the face, when appearances became indices of personality, self-distance was lost.

What freedom have people when they are as they appear?

How can they engage in those acts of self-criticism and change which depend on self-distance? Belief too is loaded. The culture of bourgeois urban life undermined the freedom of too many bourgeois radicals. This culture robbed dialectic ideology of its dialectic, by accustoming people to think of their rhetorical positions, their ideas stated in public, as disclosures of *themselves psychologically*. The people on the left

increasingly found themselves in the position of defending personal "integrity," "commitment," "authenticity," in defiance of changing material conditions. They exchanged dialectic for the sense of belonging to a radical community, a Movement. Again, we arrive at the same inward-turning language; rigidity for the sake of feeling bound up in a group, a defiance of the dissonances of history for the sake of community.

Far from destroying fraternal community, the 19th Century cosmopolitan culture **made community seem too valuable**. Cities appear in present-day cliches as the ultimate in empty impersonality. In fact, the lack of a strong, impersonal culture in the modern city instead has aroused a passion for fantasized intimate disclosure between people.

Myths of an absence of community, like those of the soulless or vicious crowd, serve the function of goading men to seek out community in terms of a created common self. The more the myth of empty impersonality, in popular forms, becomes the common sense of a society, the more will that populace feel morally justified in destroying the essence of urbanity, *which is that [we all] can act together, without the compulsion to be the same.*