

**Self-Help in the 1990s:
The Management of the Self in the Clinton Era**

By

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A Thesis

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Abstract

In the 1990s, there was a presumption that the election of Bill Clinton marked a new kind of politics, one marked in part by the heightened visibility of therapeutic language and concepts in political discourse. This thesis questions that presumption by placing trends in the mainstream of self-help (as articulated directly in books and television talk-shows and indirectly in Hollywood cinema) alongside the policy agenda of successive administrations. A comparison of the Clinton era and the preceding Reagan-Bush era does indeed reveal parallels between the dominant strains of therapeutic culture and the dominant politics of each era. Some have sought to explain these parallels by arguing that therapeutic culture displaces traditional forms of legitimisation in the political system. Such an argument suggests that the therapeutic ethos succeeds where “traditional” institutions of all kinds (mainstream religion, the family, the law) are in a post-1960s state of decline. Others find that the influence works in the other direction: that the ethos of personal responsibility within contemporary self-help reflects the growing strength of neoliberalism as practiced by the state since the late 1970s. Neoliberalism here appears not just as an economic agenda but as a wholesale displacement of the social as an organising principle within people's lives - explaining away structural inequalities as the result of individual success and failure. In this argument, neoliberal policies under Clinton may differ in inflection but are essentially continuous with those under Reagan and Bush Snr.

By contrast, this thesis argues that the prominence of therapeutic culture in the 1990s represents neither the decline of the social nor the rise of individualism. Following Nikolas Rose and the Foucauldian model of governmentality he uses, I argue that, on the contrary, there was, in the Clinton era, a deep concern both for the therapeutic healing of the self and for the reparation of the social fabric in the midst of a supposed “culture war.” However, the subject and object of that reconciliation differ in kind from that of the Reagan era. While Reagan-era neoliberalism associates freedom with the creation of markets in which rational, choice-making individuals can succeed on their own terms, the centrist politics of the Third Way under Clinton presupposes a world in which partnership not competition is the basis for a new ethical citizen-subject. A close reading of both eighties’ Recovery literature and nineties’ New Age literature shows that while the opposing themes of freedom and responsibility are foregrounded in both eras, the context,

rationale and ultimately the *meaning* of these themes is distinct because they address two different kinds of subjectivity. Similarly, while the actual policies of the Clinton era may resemble those of the Reagan era, the rhetorical terrain of government had shifted: from the market unleashed to the community empowered. I argue that an analysis which seeks not to separate but align the personal and political provides the basis for more nuanced cultural history of both therapeutic culture and contemporary American politics.

Acknowledgements

Living in London, sometime in 2002, I happened upon an extraordinary BBC documentary about the development of modern selfhood; not just a history of psychology but a history of techniques, psychological, political and otherwise, by which people are made into certain kinds of subjects. That documentary, which I later learned was Adam Curtis' *The Century of the Self*, was just one of the seeds from which this project grew, but it deserves some special recognition here.

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Introduction

In the historical imagination, American presidential campaigns tend to be reduced down to a few significant moments. In the 1992 campaign, one such moment occurred during the second of three debates between Bill Clinton, George Bush and Ross Perot, in Richmond, Virginia.¹ It was the Clinton campaign's suggestion that, for the first time in presidential debates, the Richmond debate be conducted in a town hall format, where ordinary citizens would be allowed to ask their own questions. Already known as a uniquely warm and relatable politician, Clinton was in his element. The decisive moment came when a member of the audience stumped Bush with a question about the national debt:

How has the national debt personally affected each of your lives? And if it hasn't, how can you honestly find a cure for the economic problems of the common people if you have no experience in what's ailing them?

Clinton seized the moment by apprehending that the question was not really about the remote issue of the national debt but about the recession and the economy more generally. His initial response capitalised upon the way in which the question itself was therapeutically framed, posed in terms of ailments and cures, and most of all, in terms of personal experience:

I have seen what's happened in this last four years when – in my state, when people lose their jobs there's a good chance I'll know them by their names. When a factory closes, I know the people who ran it. When the businesses go bankrupt, I know them.

After his initial remarks, Clinton deftly pivoted to his criticism of Bush's "failed economic theory" and offered government investments in education and infrastructure as a solution. Most people, however, only remember – or mis-remember – the way in which Clinton had listened to the concerns of the "common people" and replied "I feel your pain." In fact, Clinton never uttered these words. Nevertheless, Clinton's response to this question

¹ Second Presidential Debate in Richmond, Virginia, October 15, 1992. Transcript: <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/16/us/the-1992-campaign-transcript-of-2d-tv-debate-between-bush-clinton-and-perot.html?pagewanted=all>.

became known as his “I feel your pain” moment and the town hall debate as the “talk show” debate. In other words, Clinton’s performance was mostly interpreted in terms of his mastery of a new empathetic style of politics or, in terms of an analogy between the new political style and other cultural forms: daytime television, soap opera and a fascination with celebrity.

It is probably true that Bill Clinton had some special talent as a politician that enabled him to listen and connect with voters. It is also probably true that, like a daytime talk-show, the format of the Richmond debate was helpful in eliciting a certain kind of intimacy from Clinton and from the audience-participants. However, each of these perspectives taken on their own are rather limited. The first posits Clinton as a unique historical actor rather than explaining how his leadership style might have been shaped within the crucible of the various post-war social movements. The style of political engagement that emerged in the 1960s and which has been called “populist, participatory, and personalist” is of particular importance here.² The second perspective is perhaps more sophisticated because it acknowledges that contemporary politics not only takes place within a media context but is actively structured by that context, enabling and constraining the range of what politicians do and say. Yet, the analogy between talk shows and the “talk show debate” remains superficial if it implies that the therapeutic aspects of Clinton’s campaign were not deeply intertwined with his critique of Bush as an out-of-touch member of a patrician elite and his critique of Bush’s economic record. The “talk show debate” was not just about intimacy and testimony. As the audience member’s question had suggested, politicians were often perceived to be out of touch, so the Richmond debate was an opportunity for a different kind of democratic participation, one in the “common people” were at the centre. In his answer, Clinton did promise to “bring the American people together again,” but not only with warm words but through real economic reform. In Clinton’s vision, personal pain and the economic pain of the middle-class were brought together.

If, I am suggesting, the 1992 election signalled a new alignment of the personal and the political, how would this compare to the “populist, participatory, and personalist” style of the 1960s? Or to put it another way: if, in the 1960s, the politicisation of the everyday took place in sit-ins, consciousness-raising groups, and psychological encounter sessions, where would we locate a comparable process in the Clinton era? Therapeutic culture and

² David Michael Ryfe, “Presidential Communication as Cultural Form: The Town Hall Meeting,” in *Politics, Discourse, and American Society: New Agendas*, ed. Roderick P. Hart and Bartholomew H. Sparrow (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 181.

the media manifestations thereof are significant to this historical shift. Indeed, the analysis of self-help literature and other therapeutically-inflected media is at the heart of this thesis. However, before considering what this new alignment would look like in more detail, it is important to develop an appropriate mode of analysis. This must be first distinguished from two styles of thought that I have so far been gesturing toward and reacting against. These two modes of analysis consider the situation of the 1990s as a part of two broad historical trajectories: either as the psychologisation of politics or as the mediatisation of politics. In other words, therapy and media are treated as having some essential qualities that are meaningful in and of themselves.

The first mode of analysis belongs to a sociological tradition which has, since the 1960s, made a number of contributions to the study of therapeutic culture.³ Writing in the midst of the Clinton era, one such sociologist, James Nolan, finds late twentieth-century America in the grip of what Habermas called a legitimisation crisis. According to Nolan, the “codes of moral understanding that legitimated the early American political order” were in decline. In place of these older codes, a “therapeutic ethos” had “infused the modern American state, thus offering the state an alternative source of legitimation.” In Nolan’s schema, the crisis infects both the institutions of the state and those cultural institutions that have, in their role as custodians of tradition and morality, justified the state’s coercive power. Thus he cites both measurements of low public trust and participation in politics (such as declining voting turnout) as well as offering a declensionist narrative about a contemporary culture in which rapid change and a multitude of choices supplants the old verities of church-going and the Protestant work ethic. Though he promises not to offer “yet another jeremiad against America’s therapeutic culture,” in Nolan’s telling, therapy is situated at the end of moral history, characterised as an entirely “self-referential” system, absent of “externally derived points of moral reference.” It is in this context that Clinton is painted by Nolan as a “Therapeutic President” and the 1992 Clinton-Bush-Perot debates are characterised as the first presidential debates in which “therapeutic symbols and codes provided the dominant form of legitimation.” In this interpretation, the “talk show debate” was an unambiguous sign that politics had been colonised by the personal; both Weber’s

³ Notable examples in this tradition would include Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979). Or for a more recent example see Frank Furedi, *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

legal-rational justification for authority and Habermas' model of rational-critical debate had been swept aside in favour of pathos.⁴

An alternative interpretation of the talk-show debate fits better with what I call the postmodern view of the Clinton era. In this view, the Richmond debate resembled a talk-show not because it was a forum for therapeutic self-reflection or healing but because, like a daytime talk-show it was a highly-mediated event, a spectacle in which the candidates would display their empathy (or enmity) through a series of carefully-honed sound-bites, which would later be packaged and picked over by a cynical press. The debate itself never really rose to the level of confrontation that we might associate with nineties' tabloid fare such as *Ricki Lake* or *Jerry Springer*. In fact, within the debate, several questioners expressed disquiet with the "mud" thrown on the campaign trail and the apparent willingness of candidates to focus upon the "trashing" of character rather than issues of substance. There was also a clear mandate from the audience for politicians to speak and act independently of "spin doctors." However, this advice was promptly forgotten. As documented in films like *The War Room* (1993), such advisors had already made themselves indispensable to the "information war" of modern campaigning and the post-debate "spin room" was now fully instituted into debate coverage. Shawn Parry-Giles draws on Baudrillard to argue that American politics exists in a state of hyperreality, where media strategies of "authenticity" are continually exposed *as strategies*, thereby further contributing to the public's cynicism towards the messaging of politicians.⁵ Paul Apostolidis goes further by projecting the cynicism of the media onto the public, describing the centrist politics of the 1990s as the product of waning ideological commitments on the both the left and the right. Apostolidis finds the public to be weary of traditional forms of "participation in political institutions" but concludes that politics does "indeed have a vital presence in the everyday lives of Americans today – but *as culture* [and] above all as source of commercial entertainment."⁶ In these postmodern interpretations, Clinton's therapeutic style is more a manifestation of a politics which no longer inspires than a coherent worldview in itself. Here then, it is the *popular* which subsumes the political.

⁴ James L. Nolan, *The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End* (New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1988), 21, 2, 21, 41-45, 2, 3, 235, 266, 269.

⁵ Shawn J. Parry-Giles, "Political Authenticity, Television News, and Hillary Rodham Clinton," *Politics, Discourse, and American Society* (see note 2), 211-215.

⁶ Paul Apostolidis, "Action or Distraction? Cultural Studies in the United States," *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 147, 148.

The sociological critique and the postmodern critique succeed in identifying some of the ills besetting democracy in late-century America. However, they cannot be the proper basis for an analysis of the relationship between individual subjectivity and national politics because they are animated by a series of antinomies that assume from the outset that the personal and the political are in conflict. This conflict is posed as the violation of one domain by another but in such a way that the essential features of each domain are left static and untouched. Thus, therapeutic culture or tabloid culture steadily encroaches upon what is imagined as the serious, rational or traditional workings of politics. Having set up politics in advance as a privileged domain, the supposed colonisation of politics by psychology, celebrity or simply “culture” can only inflect it in a negative way; making politics less serious, farther removed from tradition, governed by emotion rather than logic. This negative inflection then hardens into a declensionist narrative for both the sociological critique and postmodern critique. One could argue that the former affirms the emergence of a new form of therapeutic legitimation and the latter celebrates the supposed triumph of culture over politics but mostly the tone is elegiac or ironic. In other words, both critiques reflect the feeling that the Richmond debates were designed to overcome: that modern politicians were out of touch, that traditional political participation was in decline and that in an era of centrism, politics itself was somehow being de-politicised, evacuated of its ideological meaning.

This thesis begins with the basic presumption that the material continuities and contingencies that unite state and society, the public sphere and the private sphere, law and lore are more meaningful than the abstractions which divide them. This presumption derives from an entirely different way of analysing political power, Foucault’s concept of governmentality. Governmentality gives rise to a different set of questions. For instance, rather than asking why a therapeutic form of legitimation comes to supplant the supposedly rational basis of political rule, the question turns to how it is that the health of the democracy is problematised, through the “healing” language of therapeutics, but in other ways too. The first type of question assumes (1) the centrality of state power, (2) that there is only *one* form of political rationality possible, and (3) that the intersection of self-help discourse and politics is a recent invention. The second line of questioning, which I associate with governmentality or the *analytics of government*, opens politics up beyond the state and beyond the realm of public policy. It assumes that the minds, bodies and souls of the citizenry have *always* been objects of government. Rather than seeing therapy as the

opposite of religious belief, scientific knowledge or political rationality, the question becomes: what commonalities are there between therapeutic practices and similar practices in other domains? How are these practices articulated in relation to other beliefs, knowledges, and rationalities over time? This would constitute a history of the technologies of subjectification, a history of the resources which people, consciously or unconsciously, draw on in order to improve themselves, to work towards certain ideal forms of subjectivity and avoid others. The thesis contributes to this history, in particular the interrelation between political government and the management of individual conduct.

Popular self-help books form the evidential base for much of the analysis I am describing. However, in the latter part of this thesis, I also turn to other forms of popular media in the 1990s, specifically instances of what John Hartley calls “democrataintment.”⁷ A number of such sites mixing the popular and the political are covered in the last chapters: a new aggressive and intrusive form of tabloid journalism cataloguing the unfolding soap opera of the Clinton presidency, the revitalisation of late-night political talk and satire, the heyday of daytime talk “trash TV” and the disruptive move that Oprah Winfrey made within the genre on the way to becoming the undisputed queen of daytime. To be sure, most of these sites of democrataintment invoke a therapeutic perspective or some other kind of “common sense” perspective which can be broadly thought of as shaping subjectivity in some respect. However, in this section, in addition to technologies of subjectification, I also think about democrataintment in terms of the historical intersection of two other related technologies: consumption and citizenship. At times, consumption and citizenship inevitably pull in different directions, though not always in predictable ways. Whereas the primary relationship that I draw between the personal and the political is one of alignment, the relationship of the popular and the political is more far complicated and unruly; a relationship of articulation but also dis-articulation.

We can say that the postmodern critique is correct in the sense that, in the Clinton era, the politicisation of the everyday took place in a highly-mediated environment, located in new hybrid forms of news, comedy, therapy, conspiracy and “talk” television. We could also say that the sociological critique is correct to the extent that the concepts and language of self-help obtain a heightened visibility in the Clinton era, as the mystery of the presidential office was eroded, as Clinton himself sought a closer connection to the people and as the aforementioned media forums opened up the President for unprecedented level

⁷ John Hartley, “Democrataintment,” in *The Television Studies Reader*, eds. Robert C Allen and Annette Hill (London: Routledge, 2004).

of ridicule and criticism. However, if governments have *always* sought to align their strategic goals with the hopes and fears of the population, then it remains to ask: how can we describe the *particular* historical alignment that occurs in the Clinton era with reference to therapeutic practices and to all the related practices which translate governmental objectives into everyday conduct? In the remainder of this Introduction, I look at how therapeutic motives were applied to Clinton but in a haphazard, uneven way. Rather than taking therapy to be meaningful *per se*, I argue that what is important is the specific *kind* of therapeutic model that is at work. Yet in this transitional period of the early nineties, it is not always easy to separate one model from another. I argue that it is only taking into account the political culture, the media culture *and* the therapeutic culture that the new alignment comes into focus.

Before I proceed further, I must acknowledge that the sociological and postmodern critiques that I have so far mentioned are certainly not the only perspectives that could be brought to bear upon the relationship between subjectivity and power. While Chapter One goes into more depth on the theoretical basis for this project, it is useful to define this project by making some broad distinctions here. Firstly, this thesis does not argue that therapeutic culture has consolidated the power of economic or political elites nor does it argue that therapy can be used as a tool to *resist* domination in any straight-forward way. The diversity of contexts in which therapy is practiced is altogether too great to be ascribing any *particular* political function to it (although I argue against the view that the meaning of therapy is apolitical or asocial). While I provide examples of the intersection of therapeutic culture and capital, in terms of both consumption and labour, I am agnostic with respect to this kind of Marxist analysis. Similarly, while the thesis is, in part, a history of psychological thought, I am agnostic with respect to the “truth” of the various branches of Freudian or post-Freudian psychoanalysis or the efficacy of any other contemporary psychological practices. While I have might have occasion to describe the context or limitations of such practices I do not seek to argue against the sincerity of such approaches where they claim some measure of relief or liberation for their participants. Thirdly, I do not attempt to extricate either a psychological or economic subtext from those books or films that constitute my primary objects of analysis, much less attempt to subject individuals (authors, filmmakers, or political leaders) to psychological evaluation. Following what I consider to be a Foucauldian reading strategy, for the most part I simply take these cultural forms and figures at face value. The analysis consists not of recovering

some hidden meaning or political utility *within* the texts but of finding correspondences across different fields of inquiry (what I later describe as lateral analysis). The Foucauldian approach to history is nevertheless a critical intervention in the sense that it demonstrates the fragility of the status quo: how what is could easily have been otherwise.

New Liberalism, New Age

Although it is always something of a contrivance to argue that a particular historical period is transitional in nature, the period between the end of the Cold War and the election of Bill Clinton did seem to mark the waning of one set of priorities without affirming a new geopolitical agenda. What should have been a triumph for free-market capitalism did not in fact translate into support for George H.W. Bush's economic leadership and it was dissatisfaction with the economy that left Bush as a one-term President and definitively ended the neoliberalism of the Reagan-Bush era. Though there is a large gap between what Bill Clinton promised to do and what he actually accomplished, this thesis will demonstrate that a coherent agenda *did* emerge with the new Democratic administration. I do not see Clinton's administration as a continuation of Reaganism but rather affirm Clinton's New Liberalism as a new and distinct kind of politics, a new *political rationality*. Of course, looking at Clinton's record one cannot help but notice that elements of neoliberalism survive but I argue that those elements take on new meanings within the reconfigured context of New Liberalism, or as it is called in Britain and elsewhere, Third Way politics. It is at the intersection of these two political rationalities, neoliberalism and New Liberalism, that I situate a similar transition between two kinds of self-help, Recovery literature and New Age literature. Looking at a snapshot of the media's various attempts to solve the psychological riddle of Bill Clinton (what *exactly* was his problem?), the tensions between these competing interpretations rise to the surface. While everyone it seems could agree that his candidacy and Presidency had a therapeutic character, two distinct kinds of therapy were conflated: on the one hand, the cold, pathological discourse of Recovery literature, and on the other, the discourse of enchantment and abundance associated with the New Age.

In the early years of Clinton's rise to power, the tension between the fading popularity of Recovery literature and the mainstreaming of New Age literature is illustrated by a tendency in the press to apply these labels to Clinton interchangeably. For

instance, in a story in which Maureen Dowd and Frank Rich of the *New York Times* call Clinton “the first post-therapy President,” the authors refer both to Clinton’s use of the “trendy language of co-dependency,” and to a “New Age-Bubba.”⁸ While press coverage of Clinton made frequent riffs on the idea of the inner child (“Mr. Clinton’s inner child,”⁹ his “inner President,”¹⁰ or efforts to heal the “inner Democrat” of the electorate¹¹), they were generally parodic rather than serious attempts to link this to some wider political purpose on Clinton’s part. Similarly, even as it became received wisdom that therapeutic culture was in the air, the actual object of all this therapy becomes quite diffuse, so the oft-repeated assertion that Clinton was in need of a therapist (an opinion shared by various health and relationship professionals,¹² public opinion polls¹³ and even former presidents¹⁴), is joined by descriptions of government by “group-therapy,”¹⁵ descriptions of both Hillary and Bill’s links to therapists,¹⁶ the notion that Clinton was using the office of the presidency to address his therapeutic needs,¹⁷ the notion that he was using the press to the same end,¹⁸ or that Clinton himself was becoming a “television therapist.”¹⁹ Clinton’s character problem was also variously defined: perhaps he was a narcissist who looked to others to maintain the “fiction of his own perfection,”²⁰ or perhaps the “Boy

⁸ Maureen Dowd and Frank Rich, “Democrats in New York – Garden Diary; I’m in Therapy, You’re in Therapy,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/15/news/democrats-in-new-york-garden-diary-i-m-in-therapy-you-re-in-therapy.html>.

⁹ Arthur Hoppe, “Mr. Clinton’s Inner Child,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 13, 1995, <http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/Mr-Clinton-s-Inner-Child-3048547.php>.

¹⁰ Leslie Kaufman-Rosen with Tessa Namuth, “Getting In Touch With Your Inner President,” *Newsweek*, January 16, 1995, 125, no. 3, 72.

¹¹ Tom McNichol, “The New Co-Dependent Covenant: Sure, He’ll Lead – But Can Clinton Heal Your Inner Democrat?” *Washington Post*, February 28, 1993, C1.

¹² Lynette Clemetson and Pat Wingert, “Clinton on the Couch,” *Newsweek*, September 28, 1998, 132, no. 13, 46.

¹³ According to an opinion poll cited by *The Independent*, “Almost 50 per cent of Americans think President Bill Clinton needs psychological therapy over his admitted affair with a former White House trainee.” See “Clinton ‘Needs Therapy,’” *The Independent* [London], August 27, 1998, 10.

¹⁴ The president in question was Gerald Ford. Noel Young, “Bill Clinton was a Sick Sex Addict, According to Former President Ford,” *The Daily Mail*, October 29, 2007, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-490549/Bill-Clinton-sick-sex-addict-according-President-Ford.html>.

¹⁵ Howard Fineman, “The New Age President,” *Newsweek*, January 24, 1993, <http://www.newsweek.com/new-age-president-192172>.

¹⁶ Karen De Witt, “Dial 1-800-MY-GURU,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1995, E2. Matthew Cooper, “The Bill-and-Newt Gurus,” *U.S. News & World Report*, January 23, 1995, 118, no. 3, Section: Outlook. Kenneth T. Walsh, “Clinton’s Journey Inward,” *U.S. News & World Report*, December 13, 1993, 115, no. 23.

¹⁷ Cal Thomas, “To Clinton, the Presidency is Therapy,” *Denver Post*, November 6, 1994, http://www.worldmag.com/1998/05/clinton_on_the_couch.

¹⁸ Sally Quinn, “To the Couch, Mr. Clinton!: On Therapy, the Presidential Press Corps and the Sudden Need to Be Nice to Bill,” *The Washington Post*, July 18, 1993, C1, C4.

¹⁹ Joseph Dolman, “Clinton Therapy Is a Multicultural Thing,” *Newsday* [Long Island, N.Y.], December 4, 1997, A53.

²⁰ David Tell, “Bill Clinton’s Narcissism,” *The Weekly Standard*, August 10, 1998, 3, no. 46, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Protected/Articles/000/000/009/150ampza.asp>.

Clinton” was stuck in perpetual adolescence, in a Peter Pan complex that he was unable to grow out of.²¹

Most famously, in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Clinton became the most well-known sex addict in the world, a diagnosis that was bolstered by the Clintons’ own interpretation. Prior to the presidency, Bill Clinton had gained familiarity with the twelve-step programme through his attendance of therapy sessions with his brother Roger, whose own problems with anger and addiction were well-documented. At that time, he had hinted that some of his own behaviour could be seen in the same light. A decade later, *Talk* magazine scored a minor scoop for its 1999 inaugural edition, when Hillary linked her husband’s latest infidelity specifically to an upbringing “scarred by abuse” and alcoholism.²² Ultimately, it was this interpretation of events, which dominated media accounts of Clinton’s psychology, explaining both his strengths as a compulsive overachiever and his weaknesses as an impulsive eater, rage-aholic and womaniser. While proposing his own (entirely different) explanation for Clinton’s flaws,²³ clinician John Gartner admits that contemporary accounts of the President’s character problem were more or less uniform:

Virtually all of the attempts to understand Bill Clinton psychologically have centred on the impact of his growing up in a home with an abusive, alcoholic stepfather. And indeed, most of Clinton’s publicly discussed attempts to understand himself therapeutically have been framed in the language of the Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) movement.²⁴

Thus despite the often ambiguous, superficial, and less-than-clinically-detached accounts of Bill Clinton’s relationship with therapeutic culture, his image as president also stabilises around a narrative which leans towards the “diseasing” discourse of Recovery. By extension, Recovery’s association with “trash TV” and a culture of victimhood were hard for Clinton to shake. From the left, Clinton’s association with therapy would be mocked as evidence of a distasteful populism. Richard Levine of *Mother Jones* described Clinton as an inhabitant of “‘Oprahland,’ a place populated by victims of one darn thing or

²¹ R. Emmett Tyrrel, Jr., *Boy Clinton: The Political Biography* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1996).

²² Hillary Clinton cited in Lucinda Franks, “The Intimate Hillary,” *Talk Magazine*, September 1999, 174.

²³ According to Gartner, Clinton suffers from hypomania, a mild form of mania which predicts both a talkative, confident personality but also uninhibited or risky behaviour. See John Gartner, *In Search of Bill Clinton: A Psychological Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008).

²⁴ Gartner, 108.

another.”²⁵ Similarly, Wendy Kaminer imagined Clinton and Oprah together on her talk-show (before the fact of his 2004 appearance) addressing the nation with a cheerful confession: “Hi, I’m Bill and I’m addicted to sex, power, junk food.”²⁶ From the right, it was argued that his vulnerabilities made him unfit for leadership and that the Recovery thesis was simply a justification for immoral behaviour – as one Bush spokesperson retorted, “Real men don’t get on the couch.”²⁷ In a sense then Trysh Travis is right to call Clinton, “America’s first recovery president.”²⁸

However, Bill Clinton the man is not Bill Clinton the politician. In terms of his campaign rhetoric as well as his actual policy agenda, I would suggest that Clinton, faced with America’s social pathologies, was expressing the same impatience for change that Oprah Winfrey had expressed (“What are you willing to do about it?”) when she adopted a New Age makeover in the mid-1990s (see Chapter Five). As Howard Fineman of *Newsweek* noted when he predicted that America would be getting a “New Age president,” Clinton was what I call a *centrist* New Ager, a mixture of the traditional and the counter-cultural. Hence, Fineman says of Clinton, that Biblical “old-time spirituality blended right in with the soul-searching of his generation.”²⁹ That is to say, overt religiosity, conservative morality and a strong ethical concern for the well-being of the nation were as much a feature of Clinton’s Third Way politics as the more “touchy-feely” aspects of New Age spirituality that so captivated the press. While Clinton’s efforts to reclaim “family values” for the left look hollow in retrospect, if the 1992 campaign really was about the “economy, stupid” (to use James Carville’s memorable phrase) then he was the perfect messenger. Clinton’s version of the Third Way – sometimes called New Liberalism – expanded the definition of “values” to include the economy. Clinton argued that that the need for social mobility was not only an economic imperative; it was an ethical responsibility, one which Bush had failed to fulfil. According to Craig Allen Smith’s analysis of the 1992 campaign, Clinton used “metonymy to advantage” by arguing that each American had a “personal moral responsibility” to make America a better place. Not only did Clinton make the argument for change in a changing world, he, much more than

²⁵ Richard M. Levine, “I Feel Your Pain,” *Mother Jones*, July/August 1993, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/1993/07/motherjones-ja93-i-feel-your-pain>.

²⁶ Wendy Kaminer, *I’m Dysfunctional, You’re Dysfunctional* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993 [1992]), xi.

²⁷ Torie Clarke cited in Maureen Dowd, “O.K. on the Self-Realization; What About the Economy?” *New York Times*, July 27, 1992.

²⁸ Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 20.

²⁹ Howard Fineman, “The New Age President,” *Newsweek*, January 24, 1993, <http://www.newsweek.com/new-age-president-192172>.

Bush, *embodied* this change in his life-story. Underlying the idea that the “path to future success was to be found in a return to traditional values of responsibility,” Clinton placed his life-story within the larger campaign theme of the New Covenant, a solemn social compact that was meant to recall not only the New Deal but the Old Testament. Though for Smith, the New Covenant was a “jeremiad,” a declensionist narrative about the death of the American dream, when Clinton accepted his party’s nomination he did so with a speech called “A Place Called Hope.”³⁰

Clinton’s nomination speech and its accompanying film encapsulate the convergence between Clinton’s private and political ambitions and the turn towards an optimistic, expansionist outlook that is characteristic of both New Liberalism and the New Age. As Kaminer astutely notes, the “A Place Called Hope” speech arrived just when “the recovery movement was actually beginning to decline.”³¹ Hence it was pitched perfectly to acknowledge but not dwell on dysfunction:

Clinton shrewdly made only fleeting references to his childhood, revealing enough to make himself seem likeable and one of us but not dysfunctional. But it was clear that triumph over addiction and abuse could become our new log cabin story: people who didn’t have to endure outdoor plumbing could still claim to have survived a dysfunctional family.³²

Kaminer was right in the sense that after Clinton’s 1992 success, we can point to numerous examples, both on the left and the right, where politicians sought to take advantage of the new media environment in order to speak directly to the public in a way that humanised them; whether it was laughing along with late-night comedy hosts or giving tearful confessions on the likes of *Oprah* and other daytime talk shows. However, while overcoming dysfunction may have become a new type of “log cabin story,” it did not displace the old log cabin story, the narrative of social mobility that Clinton, the candidate, was able to claim as his own.

In fact, Clinton was, masterfully, able to weave these two discourses together. Clinton’s willingness to be in touch with his feelings and capacity to demonstrate empathy towards others was but one aspect of a post-1960s narrative of liberation which could

³⁰ Craig Allen Smith, “Conclusions: The Struggle for Interpretive Dominance” in *Presidential Campaign Discourse: Strategic Communication Problems*, ed. Kathleen E. Kendall (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 297.

³¹ Kaminer, xiii.

³² Kaminer, xii.

extend both to culture and economics. On the other hand, many of the same elements of his biography that placed him within the Recovery paradigm – his abusive stepfather, for instance – could be reconstituted within a narrative of responsibility that moves past earlier traumas. In his analysis of the film which accompanied Clinton's nomination speech, Philip Abbott notes that Clinton's private family dysfunction was merged with a public search for justice that also harked back to the era of civil rights. Thus, the film recounts the abuse, but in a way that turned it into a lesson on the importance of standing up to injustice; a message that was underscored with images of Jack Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Rather, than risk presenting Clinton as a sixties' radical-turned-yuppie, the film also deliberately omits Clinton's record as a campus activist and his accomplishments as "Rhodes scholar, Yale Law School graduate, law professor, and governor."³³ Thus the campaign struck a finely-tuned balance between the twin narratives of liberation and responsibility, between a sensitive, ethical man who would bring prosperity to the "forgotten middle-class" and "slick Willie," the version of Clinton advanced by his enemies: "a 'Coat and Tie' radical, who adopted the doctrine of liberation to advance his own career."³⁴ Though the tension between freedom and responsibility also exists within the Recovery paradigm, as it does in all self-help, this thesis argues that Clinton's New Liberalism better fits within the ethos of the New Age, in which the burden is to *transcend* the problems of the world by imagining them differently.

Returning to the question I first posed near the beginning of this Introduction, it is now possible to define the alignment of the personal and the political more clearly. The thesis will demonstrate that, in the Clinton era, this alignment should be thought of in terms of the relationship between the New Age and the New Liberalism. That is to say, New Age represents the emergence of a historical shift within subjectivity, while New Liberalism represents the emergence of a new dominant form of political rationality. Using this definition, and a mode of analysis derived from Foucault's concept of governmentality, I will illustrate how the micro-politics of everyday conduct is articulated alongside the macro-politics of the state.

³³ Philip Abbott, "A 'Long and Winding Road': Bill Clinton and the 1960s," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 8.

³⁴ Abbott paraphrasing R. Emmett Tyrrell (see note 21), 9.

Plan of the Work

In Chapter One, I outline a methodology for the thesis. After this, the rest of the thesis is divided into three parts. The rationale for this division is both methodological and topical although there is significant overlap in both cases. The second chapter introduces the two historical contexts under discussion, the Reagan-Bush era (from 1981 to 1992) and the Clinton era (from 1993 to 2000). I define each era both politically and culturally, with specific reference to the dominant strain of self-help literature in each period. So Reaganism is paired with Recovery literature and New Liberalism is paired with New Age literature. I also make a distinction between these *political formations* (Reaganism and New Liberalism) which are specific coalitions of political interests that could not have existed in any other context and *political rationalities* such as neoliberalism and Third Way politics (or community to use Rose's term) both of which have had broader implications for other liberal democracies outside the US. Using specific case studies, the second chapter looks at how science has authorised the truth of therapeutic culture, how the media disseminates these truths and how political rationalities such as neoliberalism and the Third Way are always framed therapeutically in the sense that each culture elevates certain traits and pathologises others.

The second part of the thesis is comprised of three chapters, all of which are focused on those exemplary texts which define the therapeutic culture of each era. I argue in these chapters that Recovery literature has two phases. In Chapter Three, I outline the first phase of Recovery literature, which is also often identified as the literature of the co-dependency movement. Recovery had an audience of single, white, middle-class women, who were struggling to reconcile neoliberal ideals of autonomy with a cultural backlash against feminist values. In order to give some context to Recovery, I also look at late seventies survivalist literature and early eighties success literature. These sub-genres respectively project a superman or a superwomen, who, through cunning and belligerence "takes it all," or through hard work and a sexually liberated attitude "has it all." Co-dependency literature may actually be seen as an unconscious backlash against the fantasy contained in these earlier books; the fantasy that everyone, including women, can be a "winner" without the help of others. By the late 1980s, Recovery has moved on to a second phase, a systematic critique of modernity that argued that dysfunctional families were producing a dysfunctional society. In Chapter Four, I argue that although this critique

was derived from the New Left, it matched the stridency of the New Right in its obsessive (but selective) concern for the safety of children. I argue that this too was mostly a fantasy, a fantasy of dis-empowerment among middle-class men *and* women that was swiftly resolved within Recovery itself as the needle swung back in a more optimistic direction. The late eighties' figure of the "inner child" marked a transition towards the full-blown re-enchantment of New Age literature. This transition is the subject of Chapter Five. I argue that the New Age marks a kind of acceptance of worldly imperfection which works in tandem with a heightened sense of the self's cognitive abilities. The point now was not to change the world but to perceive it in a new, beautiful light.

The last chapter of the thesis is also the last of the three parts. There, I turn from literature to other kinds of popular media. This includes "traditional" forms such as Hollywood cinema but also new hybrid media forms that arose in the nineties. On the one hand, there was a definite move towards tabloidisation, towards the everyday lives of celebrities and politicians. On the other hand, political talk and satire shows re-emerged as viable genres, particularly those which gave voice to the "common sense" opinions and concerns of ordinary citizens. The turn from self-help book to popular culture in general, is therefore a turn towards an examination of sense-making procedures more generally, in politics, in history and in the economy.

1 Governmentality, Culture, Citizenship

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate the theoretical orientation and methodology of the thesis. The key task of such a methodology is to re-politicise therapeutic culture (and popular culture more generally) by locating it within historically contingent relations of power. The project accomplishes this by drawing on Foucault and the intellectual inheritors of Foucault in a number of ways. In fact, we could say that there are many Foucaults. While Foucault was still alive, his ideas were taken up in different institutional settings in many parts of the world and in each of these settings, his corpus was given a different emphasis and interpretation. Since that time scholars have no doubt debated to what extent all these different interpretations represent the “real” Foucault or whether Foucault himself was internally consistent. There is no attempt to engage with these arguments here. However, I *am* concerned with integrating a particular approach to social and political theory derived from governmentality with a discourse analysis approach to the study of culture. The latter is also derived from Foucault but has until more recently focused on texts rather than on material practices, institutions or policy. I also introduce a third term: cultural citizenship. Not all approaches to cultural citizenship follow Foucault but, in the example of Toby Miller and others, we have a relevant cluster of concerns (political economy, popular culture and media history) brought together under the sign of governmentality. I am unconvinced as to whether that example amounts to a well-defined methodology, let alone a grand synthesis of the first two approaches under consideration. Rather, the approach here will be more pragmatic, along the lines of the “theory as toolbox” metaphor. That is to say, each theoretical component should be assessed on the degree to which it is useful and germane to the material. The analytics of government, discourse analysis and the more recent interventions associated with cultural citizenship should all be seen in this light: what work does this tool perform, which are the best tools for each respective object of analysis?

As I discussed in the Introduction, the bulk of the thesis (everything excluding the Introduction and this chapter) is organised into three parts. Each part gives more emphasis to certain critical tools than others. The middle part of the thesis – Chapters Three, Four and Five – are perhaps the most “textualist” in their orientation since the focus here is upon canonical self-help texts. This section has a fairly conventional “text and context”

methodology in which discourse and history serve to explicate each other. Indeed, this is a kind of discourse analysis, traceable to Foucault, but filtered through other influences. I shall discuss below why I think the Foucauldian influence is there but muted. However, we should also note that Foucault is not prescriptive about what he means by “discourse,” let alone discourse analysis. Chapter Two also utilises a form of discourse analysis but one with a more definite intellectual history and methodology. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault developed a comparative style of analysis in which disparate fields of knowledge were found to have surprising correspondences across a particular slice of history. It was this comparative technique that gave the new historicism school of literary studies much of its theoretical force. The last chapter of the thesis also forms the third part of the analysis. That chapter is orientated around film and other kinds of popular media rather than self-help *per se*. I use these examples to show that therapeutic culture overlaps with but is not fully contained within the popular. While I frame this last section in terms of cultural citizenship, as I will explain below the methodology here is very close to that found in governmentality. Indeed, since all of the foregoing relies on Rose’s historical distinction between different regimes of liberalism all the chapters can also be said to rely on governmentality, in terms of their understanding of history and politics. While the Introduction made the case for governmentality over what I call the sociological and postmodern critiques, the following discussion outlines both Foucault’s original conception of governmentality and the important work undertaken by Rose to extend the analytics of government into the late twentieth-century.

1.2 Discourse, Practice, Genealogy

Despite many attempts to construct one, according to Derek Hook, “no strictly Foucauldian method of discourse analysis” exists.¹ There are some theoretical reasons for this which I will attend to but there is also the fact that Foucault was taken up differently by different scholars, in relation to their existing areas of interest. Thus Lawrence Grossberg has spoken of a Lacanian Foucault, an Althusserian Foucault and a Deleuzian Foucault. Grossberg goes on to speak of “broad ways of using Foucault,” which would include Foucault as historian, as a philosopher, as a theorist of power, and, finally, as a

¹ Derek Hook, “Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History: Foucault and Discourse Analysis,” (London: LSE Research Online, 2001), 36, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/956>.

theorist of discourse.² Naturally, there is also a substantial overlap between these two categories. Nominally, I have referred to two kinds of discourse analysis, the second of which I relate to literary studies in general and new historicism in particular. It may in fact be truer to say that new historicism is closer to a Foucauldian mode of historicising than it is to a theory of language. However, for the first type of discourse analysis, discourse is very much about language. I refer here to Stuart Hall and the encounter between Foucault and the British tradition of cultural studies.

Hall refers to as a “cultural turn” within the humanities where culture is no longer a “dependent variable” as it was in Raymond Williams or Althusser. For Hall, the cultural turn means that culture is *constitutive* of social, economic and political relations not merely dependent upon or determined by them. However, in Tony Bennett’s assessment, the cultural turn is also a “linguistic turn” because, for Hall, “culture functions like a language.” Furthermore, what Hall means by language is probably closer to Derrida than it is to Foucault. For Foucault, sign systems are technologies; they are less systems of meaning than they are codes which transform an inert world into something which is amenable to action. Hall, by contrast, represents a cultural studies tradition in which conceptions of identity are grounded in post-structural notions of *difference*. The practical consequence of applying a “linguistic paradigm” to the social is that differences of race, class and gender (to which we could add sexuality, regionality, or nationality) are foregrounded, much more so than in Nikolas Rose, for example, who has a more intersectional approach. It may be true that Hall’s concept of culture leaves it “empty of any definite content of its own.”³ However, this view of the interrelationship of discourse and culture gets to the heart of prejudice in a way that is under-theorised elsewhere: the operations of power cannot simply be explained in terms of conduct (what people do), it must also be explained in terms of identity (who people are). Hall himself makes a related point in his critique of the early “archaeological” Foucault: “[the early works] offer a formal account of the construction of subject positions within discourse while revealing little about why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others.”⁴

² Lawrence Grossberg cited in Jeremy Packer, “Mapping the Intersections of Foucault and Cultural Studies: An Interview with Lawrence Grossberg and Toby Miller, October, 2000,” in *Foucault, Cultural Studies and Governmentality*, ed. Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer and Cameron McCarthy (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2003), 26.

³ Tony Bennett, “Culture and Governmentality,” in *Foucault, Cultural Studies and Governmentality*, 56, 48, 52.

⁴ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, Peter Redman (London: Sage, 1996), 23.

Rather than attempt to resolve this rather fundamental division between meaning and action, I turn instead to some of useful distinctions that can be made between discourse and practice in other Foucauldian approaches, before suggesting that these distinctions may be more abstract than real. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the object of analysis subtly changes depending on the type of analysis performed. Self-help, the relevant example here, changes depending on whether one approaches self-help *as a book* – a text on the subject of how to achieve health, happiness and success – or whether one approaches self-help *as a therapeutic practice*, which may include religious rites, psychological counselling, medical interventions and so on. In the first instance, the book is construed as a text amongst other texts. A close reading is performed, asking how particular claims to truth are made and shared between these texts. This is the literary approach used by schools of thought such as new historicism, an approach that was among the first attempts to bring Foucault to bear upon culture. The relevant relationship between texts in this approach was *synchronic: across time, and across different disciplines*, showing how historical texts, scientific texts and cultural texts all belong to a particular regime of truth. In the second instance, the book is construed as a practice, a kind of cultural technology acting upon the subjectivity of the reader. The relevant relationship here is between the everyday conduct of the individual and large-scale transformations in the dominant political rationality. In other words, in the analytics of government, the resemblance is *across scale, from micro to macro*. But governmentality also cuts across those arbitrary divisions – public and private, statutory and voluntary – that I would associate with conventional approaches to sociology and political science.

For Nikolas Rose and so-called Anglo-Foucauldian school with which he is associated, ideas do not simply diffuse themselves around a culture; they are embedded in material practices whose history can be traced with a high degree of empirical precision. For him, culture is simply too ephemeral, lacking the solidity of what we might call “extra-discursive” objects: material things, the organisation of space and time, or the various ways in which knowledge is “technologised,” used in a purposeful way in order to act upon human conduct. We are not used to thinking of the experience of art or literature as performing a strategic goal (although self-help literature would, more often than not, qualify). However, by the same token, few in today’s academy would advocate for some kind of “art for art’s sake” exemption for culture. If material practices support certain discourses, it is also true that the production and dissemination of texts are themselves

material. Therefore, the distinction between discourse and practice, while useful for the sake of methodological clarity, is actually an artificial one.

In fact, it is clear that Foucault did not define discourse in opposition to practice. On the contrary, Foucault's theory of discourse is an attempt to grapple with what he describes as its "formidable materiality"; to understand that what is spoken, written and thought is not limitless but rather, in a sense, materially constrained because the institutional power that gives discourse its material existence is the same power that places limits upon it.⁵ It might be said that there is no purely extra-discursive space – not because everything can be read as a text (a dubious pan-textualism) – but because discourse, in the sense that Foucault employs it, always implies practice and vice versa. The charge that new historicism is overly textualist would only be valid if the conditions under which the discourse was produced were not foregrounded, yet this is the very *raison d'être* of this kind of analysis. In fact, there is a purposeful ambiguity between what belongs to the text and what belongs to the institution in new historicism that can be traced directly to Foucault. For example, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* the notion of the discursive formation refers both to a textual unity and an institutional unity. The discursive formation is textually unified as a body of statements, grouped according to patterns of regularity. Institutional unity comes from the order that a particular discipline imposes upon what may be known and spoken about. Furthermore, since the discursive formation gives definition to an epoch (what Foucault called the *episteme*), it also has a historical unity.

Before we can consider the methodological implications of the discourse-practice couplet more needs to be said of this relationship between discourse and history. I refer to Foucault's historiographic method as genealogical, accepting that scholars have found it difficult to clearly define this method on its own or in opposition to the so-called "archaeological" works of the sixties.⁶ What we can say is that Foucault's goal with genealogy was not to provide a more thorough contextualisation so that the meaning of a given text could be better understood. Rather, it was to work towards our stated goal of re-politicising discourse. While therapeutic discourse does seem like an especially de-politicised kind of discourse, it is not a special case. Foucault reminds us that wherever discourse attempts to ground itself with claims to sincerity, nature or science, it introduces "an ethic of knowledge, which promises to give the truth only to the desire for truth

⁵ Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying The Text: A Post-Structural Anthology*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 52.

⁶ Linda J. Graham, "Discourse Analysis and the Critical Use of Foucault" (Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education 2005 Annual Conference, Sydney).

itself.”⁷ Inspired by Nietzsche, Foucault’s genealogical approach always involves displacing this supposedly disinterested desire for truth (the will-to-know) with the history of a will-to-power (Foucault asks, “what is at stake in the will to truth ... if not desire and power?”)⁸ In such a history, changes in the rules that govern the opposition between truth and error are linked to changes within the wider exercise of power. The effect of this approach is to introduce a theoretical problem: how can the notion of discourse analysis can be expanded to include external, material and tactical forms of power? Foucault is quite explicit in his rejection of any analysis that is simply that of the text and its significations: “The history which determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.”⁹ Against an interpretative analysis, which digs deeper into the text in order to uncover its secrets, Foucault proposes the principle of exteriority. Rather than moving from discourse to its interior, this would involve examining the mechanisms by which truth claims are authorised, an understanding of discourse’s “external conditions of possibility.”¹⁰ For the depth model of meaning, the genealogical approach substitutes a lateral movement, a view of power as spread out across the widest possible breath. From this “overview, from higher and higher up...depth is re-situated as an absolutely superficial secret.”¹¹

Foucault’s reluctance to be prescriptive is reflected in the open-ended nature of his methodology. However, among the few general principles that Foucault marked out, the principle of exteriority does seem to offer some practical guidance. As I have already intimated, the lateral movement that we find in Foucault’s genealogical approach is also relevant to the other types of analysis I speak to here.

Firstly, I outline the literary approach by considering the contributions of cultural materialism and new historicism in relation to Foucault’s positioning of culture. These kinds of textual analysis do not position culture above other kinds of production nor is culture considered as an *effect* of power. Rather, as Foucault said: “discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle.”¹² Therefore the analysis does not consist of interpreting the text in isolation but placing it in relation to other kinds of contemporaneous discourse: political,

⁷ Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” 65.

⁸ Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” 56.

⁹ Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings By Michel Foucault, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 114.

¹⁰ Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” 67.

¹¹ Foucault cited in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), 106-107.

¹² Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” 52-53.

historical, scientific and so on. The analytical movement is therefore *across* a single historical period or discursive formation. Secondly, I establish a short précis of governmentality. Again, the emphasis is upon the relational aspect of government, the breadth of its conception as it stretches out over networks of power. Thus, as I said before, the lateral movement here is *across scale*: from the micro-politics of self-government in the everyday to the macro-politics of the state. Thirdly, I look at cultural citizenship, in two senses: how citizenship is produced in a theoretical sense and how it is produced in a historical sense, with reference to a contemporary cosmopolitan world where identity, culture and media is more multivocal and fragmented. Whereas the sociological critique of therapeutic culture focuses on the collapse of the public and the private, the postmodern critique of culture in the nineties focuses on the collapse of the “serious” politician into the “unserious” tabloid celebrity, talk-show host, comedian *and* therapist. Rather than accept that nineties’ centrist politics was somehow stripped of political content, I work towards another lateral analysis, *across the popular and political*. This mode of analysis opens up a space of contestation where there are mis-alignments as well as alignments between therapeutic culture, popular culture and the culture of political elites.

1.3 Literature and History

The type of intelligibility that I try to produce cannot be reduced to the projection of a history – a socio-economic history, say – onto a cultural phenomenon so as to make it appear as a necessary and extrinsic product of that cause. There is no unilateral necessity: the cultural product is also part of the historical fabric. That’s why I feel obliged to do historical analyses myself. Making me out to be someone who denies history is really ludicrous. I don’t do anything *but* history.¹³

– Michael Foucault, Interview from 1978

In the 1980s, two critical methodologies emerged in literary studies – new historicism and cultural materialism – which represented a “turn to history and politics.”¹⁴ Of course, the study of literature had made use of history prior to this turn – works detailing the life and times of canonical authors had been produced in order to explicate the meaning of the texts they produced. In this kind of analysis, broadly liberal humanist in orientation, the literary work is primary, while historical detail is secondary, a source of “background

¹³ Michel Foucault cited in D. Trombadori, “Interview with Michel Foucault,” *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984: Power*. James D. Faubion, Ed. (London: Penguin Press, 2002), 278.

¹⁴ John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 185.

information.” Then there was another type of analysis to which Foucault alludes to above. This type of analysis, Marxist in orientation, instead saw literature as the cultural expression of a more fundamental economic rationale. Here, the literary object is always secondary to and determined by a deeper history – that is to say, the socio-economic histories favoured by Marxists. However, in the late seventies, Raymond Williams, the British socialist critic, broke away from the Marxist base-superstructure model that separated culture from society. Williams coined the term “cultural materialism” to describe this new conception of culture – culture not simply as a means of communicating social relations but culture as itself a material practice or mode of production embedded in the social.¹⁵ Around the same time, in the United States, new historicism emerged with the work of Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and D.A. Miller. Miller made explicit the debt of new historicism to Foucault, in describing his project as a Foucauldian reading of the novel, by which he meant that literary texts and institutions had a role to play in the same disciplinary processes that Foucault had found elsewhere in society.¹⁶ New historicism and cultural materialism therefore arrive at similar conclusions to Foucault regarding the status of the cultural object in relation to history: history should not be seen simply as the background context that helps us to interpret the transcendent and universal meaning of the text; nor should it be seen as the stable context that fixes the text in place. Rather, culture *and* history, context *and* text should both be open to contestation and revision.

Since the mid-nineties, new historicism itself has waned. Cultural materialism has largely adopted the Foucauldian vocabulary of new historicism while branching outside of literature entirely. Though the debate between these competing literary approaches is in the past, I would argue many of the practical tools for the analysis of discourse serve equally well in the present. I focus here only upon those areas in which new historicism and cultural materialism form are consistent with Foucault. I have suggested that, for instance, that the principle of exteriority is a useful theoretical injunction by Foucault because it can be translated into a methodology common to both cultural materialism and new historicism.

The principle of exteriority belongs to a set of “methodological requirements” that Foucault uses when dealing with discourse. The most basic principle he identifies is the principle of reversal; an over-turning of the traditional history of ideas. For Foucault, the

¹⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5-6.

¹⁶ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988), vii n.1.

history of ideas had, up till that point, viewed discourse as a “swarming abundance” and the figures of the author and the discipline as playing a “positive role” in its proliferation. Therefore, the analysis of discourse was dominated by procedures that identified the origin of an idea, associated the creation of the idea with its author, and set about interpreting the “infinite treasures of buried signification” contained within the text. By contrast, Foucault’s interest is in a “negative action”: the identification of the forces which produce and therefore limit discourse and the recognition that certain kinds of statements are in fact excluded from discourse altogether.¹⁷ To recognise these limits means to go outside the discourse, hence the principle of exteriority. This principle is specifically opposed to signification. According to Hook, the endless commentaries devoted to understanding the text’s meaning can only challenge the discourse on its own terms and therefore risk furthering its canonical status.¹⁸ There is also the problem of textual relativism – alternative interpretations are always possible. By contrast, an analysis of the *conditions of possibility* that support the text can appeal to reference points outside the text. To be sure, these conditions are themselves multiple and open to dispute. Nevertheless, this is an important epistemological move because it places the production of the text on the same level as other material practices. This move enables what I have described, following Hook, as a lateral line of analysis.¹⁹ Statements are no longer considered as the passive recorders of history, they become micro-historical events in their own right. As Foucault puts it, “to say something is an event.”²⁰

Foucault pioneered this kind of lateral analysis in his 1966 book *The Order of Things*. The novel aspect of the book was in the way it compared three fields of knowledge with no obvious connection – linguistics, biology and economics. Using this comparative approach, Foucault discovered “regularities” – the development of a certain worldview – emerging at roughly the same time in all three fields. Foucault was looking for the internal coherence of a particular historical period in the rules that governed what could be evaluated as truthful. These rules determine what counts as an object of study, how subject positions are distributed, how different modes and genres of representation interact. Two aspects of this kind of analysis are relevant. Though the discursive rules that shape the reality of the culture’s participants in a profound way, they were at the same time completely invisible to them. While prohibitions on speaking exist, for the most part the

¹⁷ Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” 67-68.

¹⁸ Hook, 32-34.

¹⁹ Hook, 24.

²⁰ Foucault, “Interview,” 277.

discourse is self-policing. This then is very much a bottom-up view of power. Power is conceived as a lived experience that “speaks itself” within a system of representation. The second aspect is Foucault’s opposition to the Hegelian view of history in which the past is always continuous with the present; for Hegel past events are seen as the seeds of ideas which inevitably come to fruition, guided by some great trans-historical force of reason. Foucault, for his part, stressed the radical discontinuity of history – the rules he discovered in one period could, he claimed, change abruptly between periods or epistemes as he termed them. In the three epistemes discussed in *The Order of Things* – the Renaissance, the Classical and the Modern – he insists that there was no necessary connection between them. Though he later accepted there was some overlap between epistemes, the basic point was that the past should be treated as an alien culture with assumptions about the world very different from our own.

While *The Order of Things* compared across different forms of scientific knowledge, new historicism and cultural materialism apply a lateral approach to the comparison of literary and non-literary texts. Literature and other forms of culture are not considered as special kinds of language or modes of production; in fact these critics make a point of blurring the line between fiction and fact, literary works and “real” historical accounts. One aspect of this fluidity crossing of boundaries is the expansion of what can be considered historical. As Foucault said, the formulation of a discourse “is not situated above history or off to the side: it’s as much a part of history as a battle or the invention of the steam engine, or an epidemic.”²¹ If literature plays a part in history and the shaping of historical consciousness, it follows that literature is also inherently political, even in those instances where the literary text appears to have little or no references to politics. (This of course is the case with most self-help literature.) Cultural materialism and new historicism share a commitment to re-politicise literature in this way. As Catherine Belsey notes, both forms of analysis enable one to draw a kind of “political history from the raw material of literary texts.”²² This is not the kind of history produced by political historians. As John Brannigan notes, new historicism “pay little or no attention to the minutiae of parliaments, dictators, trade unions or any narrowly political details.”²³ Rather, as Brannigan continues, “[it] is political in that it focuses on the formation and operation of power in discourses.”²⁴ The questions asked by new historicism are therefore about how power is represented in

²¹ Foucault, “Interview,” 277.

²² Catherine Belsey, “Literature, History, Politics,” *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, ed. Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (Harlow: Longman, 1992), 43.

²³ Brannigan, 151.

²⁴ Brannigan, 151.

the text: Who is given the power to be represented in the discourse and what is to be counted as an object of knowledge? Which subjects and objects are excluded from representation and how does this exclusion define the edges of a discourse?

As in *The Order of Things*, the typical strategy of new historicist analysis is to begin with a “surprising” correspondence between two or more objects that would appear to have little in common. John Brannigan notes how such a reading strategy usually begins with an anecdote – a political speech or a science report, perhaps – which is then compared with the fictional or dramatic work in question. The surprising resemblance between the literary and non-literary text, once established, is then revealed to be the product of the same discursive formation. Brannigan, for instance, notes that actual travel narratives from the late Victorian era such as Henry Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent* closely replicate the same types of representation found in fictional accounts of colonial exploration such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In this case, the similarity is not particularly surprising; both works may be said to belong to the travel narrative genre and may even be an example of direct influence. However, Stanley’s record of exploration is firmly grounded in a “discourse of truth,” not simply because it announces itself as non-fiction but because it incorporates and is legitimated by the scientific language of anthropology.²⁵ The outlines of a larger discourse – in this case, the discourse of European colonialism – are defined not because of any similarity of genre but because the “other” – the African native – is always the object of knowledge and never the subject. Even a novel like *Heart of Darkness*, which has few illusions about the “civilising mission” of colonialism, is nevertheless thoroughly imbricated in this worldview. For new historicism, literary genres take their place amongst other kinds of knowledge, all circulating within limits defined by a discourse. The effect of this particular way historicising literature is not to relativise other kinds of knowledge as “fiction” but rather to acknowledge that culture serves an important role in sustaining the “truth” of science or history.

Self-help books would seem to occupy a grey area between fact and fiction. They are nominally categorised as non-fiction but in their efforts to impart some essential wisdom about the self, they are more likely to draw from personal testimony or anecdote than rely on journalistic sources of evidence. In fact, whether self-help literature is fact or fiction is immaterial to the kind of comparative analysis I have suggested. What matters is that we are able to find correspondences – surprising or otherwise – with a wide range of

²⁵ Brannigan, 142-143, 134.

other types of writing and in doing so begin to sketch the outlines of a larger discourse at work.

1.4 Governmentality

While new historicism and cultural materialism represented a turn to history and politics in the study of literature and beyond, the type of questions asked were around how power is *represented* in the text. One more recent tendency has been to turn to more macroscopic questions of how power is *exercised* at the level of governance. By no means does this mean returning to the view that the state is the origin and endpoint of power. Rather, as I have suggested, the micro-political analysis of the statement can work in tandem with the analysis of political power, or governmentality, as Foucault termed his approach. Indeed, it is the connection across scale that concerns us here; the relationship between self-help at the level of individual subjectivity and wider transformations in governmental reason that, over a period of centuries, constitutes the history of liberalism. I use the concept of therapeutic culture to capture the range of practices which work upon subjectivity, including those psychological techniques recommended in self-help books and other media channels but also those administered by professionals in clinics, in the work place or on the population at large, through the institutionalisation of government policy.

More specifically, my concern here is in the relationship between self-help as an instance of therapeutic culture and the political formation of neoliberalism. Valuable contributions have come from sociological literature toward this end. However, as I have noted the sociological critique of therapy tends to cast it as a form of social control, displacing tradition only to foster new forms of dependence. By contrast, governmentality insists on two features. Contra to forms of neo-Marxian thought, Foucault argued that power was not maintained “through the propagation of pseudo-knowledges or ideologies.”²⁶ According to Nikolas Rose, sociological critiques of therapeutic culture are almost always founded upon just such a “false consciousness” thesis; they view the psychological sciences as creating “a knowledge of subjective life [that] is, in some significant sense, false or wanting; perhaps, even, that it is because it is false that it can have a role in systems of domination.”²⁷ The second school of thought that Foucault

²⁶ Colin Gordon in Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault: Power*, xix.

²⁷ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, 2nd ed. (London: Free Association, 1999), 3.

argued against was neo-Freudianism. This is the view that “power acts like a lawgiver that forbids and represses.”²⁸ Foucault’s interest was less in the functioning of totalitarian regimes than in what might be termed “technologies of freedom,” techniques utilised in the context of Western liberal democracy, where the individual’s autonomy is not seen as repressed by government but, on the contrary, something indispensable to the functioning of liberal rule. As I outlined in the Introduction, conventional sociological analysis is rooted in a series of antagonistic binaries that assume from the outset that the interests of the personal and the political are in conflict. By contrast, the history that I wish to construct here is focused precisely upon the relationship between the personal, where psychology claims special knowledge, and the social, where politics claims special influence.

In a lecture on the “political technology of individuals,” Foucault posed the problematic of government as how it is, through this technology, individuals recognise themselves “as a society, as part of a social entity, as part of a nation or of a state.”²⁹ Foucault identifies such a technology at the beginnings of the modern state in the seventeenth century. At this time, two doctrines emerged: a theory of police and reason of state. In both these doctrines, Foucault notes a double movement – on the one hand, towards the centralisation of the state (towards totalitarianism) and on the other hand, towards an individualised care, which revives the archaic model of the Christian pastorate. For instance, following the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, the new German territories developed an administrative apparatus with an exhaustive knowledge of the province’s inhabitants. The “science” and practice of the police was not simply directed to issues of law and order but extended to the well-being and happiness of the individual, in other words, to many of the traditional concerns of the church. It was therefore a secular form of what Foucault called pastoral power. Around the same time, Foucault notes that political treatises began to address themselves to a new political rationality, a *raison d’Etat*.³⁰ According to Foucault, reason of state is closer to other kinds of scientific rationality than it is to abstract legal arguments concerning the rights of people and the legitimacy of the state. Yet reason of state is also an art based on certain rules: an “art of governing people” which is “rational on the condition that it observes the nature of what is governed, that is, the state itself.” For the first time, the state was an end in itself. A

²⁸ Gordon, xix.

²⁹ Foucault, “The Political Technology of Individuals,” *Essential Works of Foucault: Power*, 404. The lecture is from 1982.

³⁰ Foucault, “The Political Technology of Individuals.” Much of the material in this lecture recaps material previously presented in 1978-79 and collected in *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

“concrete, precise and measured knowledge” regarding the state’s capacities was assembled and targeted towards a new object, the population.³¹ Furthermore, the politician is considered as a new kind of leader, someone who was not simply wise but also able to use this knowledge to the state’s advantage. Whereas the Christian leader governs in accordance with divine laws and the sovereign governs to preserve his rule against internal or external enemies (Machiavelli’s *The Prince* is the exemplary text here), the politician governs not immortal souls or sovereign subjects but “living beings” as resources for the state. By the end of the eighteenth-century, the duty of care for “individual life” had passed to the state, embodied in systematic programmes such as those developed for the management of public health.³²

Reason of state was an interventionalist doctrine; the expansion of the state was considered justified as long as it increased the strength of the state. But almost as soon as the state became synonymous with government, a principle of limitation emerges, not based on natural law but on the actual effects of governmental practice. As Foucault explains, “a government that ignores this limitation will not be an illegitimate, usurping government, but simply a clumsy, inadequate government that does not do the proper thing.”³³ Foucault links a new art of government, liberalism, with “the introduction of economy into political practice.”³⁴ The original meaning of “economy” was the proper government of the household by the father. Again the problem was to establish a mechanism by which the state could manage an entire population but also give individual attention “to each and all.”³⁵ The science of political economy would be one of the most important instruments by which the individual is integrated into the state yet it would also form the rationale for placing limits on state intervention. Political economy comes to acquire two related meanings. The first is the study of the economy in terms of how wealth is produced and distributed. The second meaning given by Foucault is “any method of

³¹ Foucault, “The Political Technology of Individuals,” 406, 408.

³² Foucault, “The Political Technology of Individuals,” 416, 404. Foucault’s example is a book by the German author J.P. Frank, published in six volumes from 1779 to 1790, and which he considered as the “first great systematic program of public health for the modern state.” The emphasis Foucault places on life and living beings is connected to his notion of biopower. This was supposedly the theme of *The Birth of Biopolitics* but the lecture series turned much more to the question of governmentality and the history of liberalism.

³³ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michael Sennelart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), 10.

³⁴ Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *Essential Works of Foucault: Power*, 207. This lecture was originally presented in the academic year 1977-1978.

³⁵ Foucault, “Governmentality,” 207. Here the phrase “to each and all” refers to the family metaphor – the level of attention that a father could give to his household and his family. Foucault used the same phrase in Latin for the title of two later lectures given in 1979. In these lectures, “Omnes Et Singulatim,” Foucault compared the shepherd-flock metaphor of the Christian pastorate to the individualised attention give by police to urban residents of the early modern state.

government that can procure the nation's prosperity."³⁶ As Foucault points out, the idea that effective government is "economic government" becomes "tautological."³⁷ It is economic both in the sense of governing less (achieving the same ends with fewer resources and effort) but also in the sense that it corresponds to the new theory of markets. As Adam Smith had argued, the market directed individual actions efficiently but on the basis of more information than any one person could know. Political economy therefore informs a kind of Kantian critique of excessive government within liberalism: government should not go beyond what it could know.³⁸ Like reason of state, liberalism is directed at the population and has the same basic goals of security and prosperity but, through the theory of the markets, a different standard of truth comes to be applied. Liberalism uses information about supply and demand as "a site of veridiction" from which to "discern which governmental practices are correct and which are erroneous."³⁹

For Foucault, the advent of liberalism is historically significant not as a political philosophy or ideology – that is, as the recognition and defence of freedom for all citizens. Rather, the political technologies and rationalities he describes forms part of his ongoing investigations into subjectivity; how it is that human beings are made into subjects. The notion of free enterprise is just one element of the liberal attitude that, for the first time recognised human beings as *capable* of being free and therefore of governing themselves within a civil society distinct from the state. However, Foucault does not regard the new autonomy given to the self as a withdrawal of the state; rather he views "the state as a modern matrix of individualization, or a new form of pastoral power." The traditional functions of the church "are spread out into the whole social body," distributed between the state and civil society.⁴⁰ The social sciences are among a vast array of institutions born at this time, dedicated to understanding the subjectivity of the "normal" individual and society itself, considered as a new terrain of government.

Sociological accounts of the growth of social sciences over the course of nineteenth-century often render these new domains of knowledge as an extension of State control over the population. Revisionist histories of psychology have pointed to the ways

³⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 13.

³⁷ Foucault, "Governmentality," 207. The full quote is "Francois Quesnay speaks of good government as 'economic government'. This latter notion becomes tautological, given that the art of government is just the art of exercising power in the form, and according to the model, of the economy."

³⁸ At times Foucault placed himself in the Kantian tradition. The link between liberalism and the Kantian critique of reason (reason should not beyond experience) is made by Colin Gordon. See Gordon in Foucault, *Essential Works: Power*, xxvii-xxviii.

³⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 32.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984: Power*. James D. Faubion, Ed. (London: Penguin Press, 2002), 334,335.

in psychology was shaped by factors external to science – patriarchy, attempts to discipline the labour market, professionals working to enhance their reputations as well as alliances formed with the State in institutions such the asylum and the prison.⁴¹ Each perspective on their own adds something valuable to our understanding of the history of psychology but taken as a whole the picture is far from cohesive, let alone centrally co-ordinated. Speaking to attempts to make the state the origin and endpoint of power, Foucault says, “the state ... does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor, to speak frankly, this importance.”⁴² Rather under liberalism, the state is itself subject to a “governmentalisation.” As Foucault puts it, the state becomes just one part of an “ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power.”⁴³ Within this complex assemblage of power, Rose finds one alignment to be absolutely clear – far from constituting a repression of the self, the explicit and shared goal of psychology and liberalism as a form of political reason is the freedom of the individual.

To review: the path suggested by Foucault does not seek to contrast reason with unreason. Nor does it seek to undo the work of the Enlightenment by presenting science as beholden to its own interests or as a tool of some larger dominating force. Foucauldian analysis does not ask whether the techniques, devices and practices of government are rational or irrational, it simply asks what kind of rationality justifies those practices and how each specific rationality is historically superseded by another. Bringing the discussion up to the present day, Rose argues that there are at least three “liberalisms” or rationalities since the late eighteenth-century.

The “classical” liberalism of the nineteenth-century is a response to the problem of the over-reaching State. It argues for freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of trade. It sought to balance the need for governments to maintain order and morality but to otherwise restrict government wherever possible. The problematic nature of this balance was resolved through expertise, that is, “authority arising out of a claim to knowledge, to neutrality and to efficacy.”⁴⁴ While political philosophy stresses the separation of church and state, the freedom of markets from political interference and the opposition of public and private domains, Rose argues that these dividing lines are internal

⁴¹ Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 44.

⁴² Foucault, “Governmentality,” 220.

⁴³ Foucault, “Governmentality,” 219.

⁴⁴ Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies,” in *Foucault and Political Reason*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (London: UCL Press, 1996), 39.

to government as Foucault understood it.⁴⁵ It is expertise that allows this supposed separation to work in practice: firstly, the philanthropist, then the engineer, the civil servant, the bureaucrat and the scientist. Though the subjects of government were too numerous to know or control individually, a new knowledge of the collective – the population – emerged with its own characteristics distinct from that of individuals.⁴⁶

The Second Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth-century brought with it rapid social mobility but also claims upon government to limit the undesirable consequences of modernisation.⁴⁷ This is not only because it saw the birth of the psychological disciplines – psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis and others – but because many of the elements of a distinctly American form of religious therapy were also brought together at this time. From a governmental perspective, “society” had become the dominant object and formula of rule. The success or failure of individuals to integrate into the new reality of society became the matrix through which the problems of industrialisation came to be addressed by expertise. Again, forms of authority such as psychology operated in what Rose calls an “extra-political sphere” – an apparently neutral space at arm's length from the State.⁴⁸ In accordance with the tenets of liberalism, the State would not deem to prescribe acceptable standards of personal conduct, yet various professionals within civil society could do exactly that, maintaining regulatory norms in relation to “the social.” According to Rose, the development of the welfare state in the twentieth-century, did not take place under a separate rationality but in the name of the social as an already-existing context. Forms of social welfare, social insurance, social solidarity and so forth had already been formed independently of the State. Therefore, when the State set up the public institutions to regulate these forms what appeared to be a dramatic break was really a continuation and extension of the dominant form of rationality.⁴⁹

According to Rose, the welfare state in the late twentieth-century has changed so much as to be almost unrecognisable from that of the post-war world. This gives rise to two lines of critique. The first critique suggests that welfarism is a victim of its own success. Many of the objectives, made in the name of the social, had been achieved. Not only has the health, wealth and productivity of the population improved under welfarism,

⁴⁵ Rose, “Governing,” 37-38.

⁴⁶ Rose, “Governing,” 39.

⁴⁷ Nikolas Rose, “Government, Authority and Expertise in Advanced Liberalism,” *Economy and Society* 22, no. 3 (1993): 284-5.

⁴⁸ Rose, “Governing,” 40.

⁴⁹ Rose, “Governing,” 39-40.

the State had succeeded in aligning these national goals with the individual aspirations of the citizenry. This had been achieved by allowing for the proliferation of expertise and a fluid pathway between those experts inside the public sector and those outside. A second critique, mounted by neoliberal critics of the welfare state, was therefore well-positioned to argue that provisions for the delivery of welfare from the private or “third sector” were in place. These critics might argue for the defence of “individual rights and private morals.” However, neoliberalism is best known as series of economic reforms, based on the contention that many of the functions of the State can be more efficiently allocated according to the pricing mechanism of the market. The discipline of the market extends an economic rationale – “competition, accountability and consumer demand” – to areas previously dominated by the logic of the social. This economising rationale also extends to a particular conception of the human being under what Rose describes as advanced liberalism. Inclusive of but not limited to the neoliberalisms of Reagan and Thatcher, advanced liberalism posits the self as a choosing self. The sociological observation that we are no longer limited to one place, one job, one partner, and one set of tastes is obviously relevant here. But more than having the freedom to choose, Rose places an emphasis upon an *obligation* to be free; to express something authentic about oneself through these choices and, at the same time, to transform, to *become* this authentic self. Within the context of advanced liberalism, the role of psychological expertise becomes clearer. Whether it is credentialed practitioners of psychology or individuals, acting upon themselves using the resources of popular culture, experts must develop ways to organise everyday life, to give purpose to the freedoms accorded to the individual.⁵⁰

1.5 Cultural Citizenship

In the last chapter of this thesis, I turn from an examination of self-help literature to other kinds of popular media. This also represents a turn from therapeutic discourse in itself, towards the production of sense-making procedures more generally, in politics, in history and in the economy. Using the example of three films – two Hollywood features and an independent documentary – I return to the theme that therapeutic discourse is best understood not as a special, self-enclosed type of logic but one which builds upon and informs existing popular logics. Toby Miller defines these logics as *technologies of truth*

⁵⁰ Rose, “Governing,” 40, 41.

(“popular logics for establishing fact”).⁵¹ In his 1998 book of the same name, Miller plays on the double meaning of technology as both a logic, a means of evaluating and producing truth (through reference to sincerity, nature or science) and an instrument, the means by which “truth” is distributed through media (radio, television, internet and so on). In this way, Miller weds an appreciation for popular culture to political economy; social movements are linked to issues of economic ownership and structural transformations within media are linked to issues of national sovereignty. Culture *and* citizenship are therefore at the heart of *Technologies of Truth* as they are in Miller’s definitive statement, *Cultural Citizenship* (2007).

Whereas much of nineties’ commentary around globalisation revolved around a “whither the state?” line of questioning, Miller avoids this, because of his fidelity to a more Foucauldian view of state power. In fact, there are many different applications of the idea of cultural citizenship but probably all of them would accept that long-standing models of citizenship *are* currently being challenged. Citizenship has traditionally been thought of in terms of the legal framework of liberalism, as a set of rights adhering to each individual within the sovereign space of the nation. If, as is the case, citizenship is now theorised as a set of cultural rights, citizenship can no longer be considered exclusively a property of the individual nor is it *necessarily* bounded to the nation-state (although probably the “with the state” thesis is overstated). However, following the thesis of governmentality which I just outlined, the centrality of state power is challenged not because of conditions under globalisation or neoliberalism but because the state was *always* an insufficient condition for an understanding of power in liberal democratic societies. Like Foucault’s rationale for governmentality, Miller’s concept of cultural citizenship is part theory and part history. For both, the citizen of state is theorised not solely, or even primarily, as a subject that lies inside or outside of a political-legal framework but rather as a subject that is continually and actively produced in the everyday; that is, as moral subject as much as a subject of rights. For Foucault, the citizen-subject takes on a particular resonance in the transformation from feudalism to liberalism; for Miller the *cultural* citizen takes on a particular resonance in the political and economic transformations of the last thirty or forty years and the dazzling variety, reach and volume of new media forms, technologies and content. Indeed, if citizenship is a part of the

⁵¹ Toby Miller, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia, P.A.: Temple University Press, 2007), 5.

everyday, the mediatization of contemporary life will have some consequences for citizenship.

I return to Miller but it is useful to step back to look at citizenship outside the context of popular culture and technology. Barbara Cruikshank's work – which has a mutual point of departure in Foucault – addresses democratic theory more directly and contrasts it with what she calls *technologies of citizenship*.⁵² Nominally at least, liberal democracies have evolved three kinds of formal guarantees for its citizens: *political rights*, the right to reside, vote and be represented; *civil rights*, the right to receive equal treatment under the law; and certain basic social protections, which T.H. Marshall in the context of the post-war welfare state, designated as *social rights*.⁵³ Cruikshank sees governmentality as a solution to an impasse within democratic theory which has debated why, despite formal equality, economic and other forms of inequality persist. Does the citizen act rationally in their acquiescence or does their disinterest indicate the invisible hand of power and manipulation? Against universal formalism, an understanding of citizenship as a kind of social contract which guarantees the freedom and equality of all citizens, Cruikshank argues that citizenship should instead be viewed as a kind of continuous, ubiquitous “social fabrication.”⁵⁴ According to Cruikshank, “Citizens are not born, they are made.”⁵⁵ The actions of citizen-subjects are continually regulated at the microscopic level of everyday life in ways that contribute to their empowerment, often expanding their range of freedom even in instances where government programmes that aim to empower are also coercive in nature. Restating Foucault in this way, Cruikshank sees that one of the key faults within democratic theory is that it mistakes the absence of participation or resistance “for an absence of politics”:

Democratic theory, with important exceptions, counts voting and open rebellion as “political” actions, for example, but neglects or dismisses the constitution of citizens in the therapeutic, disciplinary, programmatic, institutional, and associational activities of everyday life. Dismissing these activities and their locations as administrative, social, “prepolitical” or “depoliticizing” reduces

⁵² Barbara Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1-2.

⁵³ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 15.

⁵⁴ Cruikshank, 4.

⁵⁵ Cruikshank, 3.

democratic criticism to documenting the exclusion of certain subjects from the homogenous sphere of the political, from the places and powers of citizenship.⁵⁶

Cruikshank writes mainly in the area of welfare reform, that is to say, social rights. However, there is a parallel here, I think, between the kinds of divisions that democratic theory makes and the kinds of divisions routinely ascribed to mass media.

Democratic theory assumes that the citizen is properly “political” at the point that he or she participates in the visible and “serious” business of casting a ballot or attending a street protest. Similarly, as Laurie Ouellette has noted, those who criticise neoliberal reforms of broadcasting (including those made under Clinton) often do so from the point of view that deregulation will lead to the decline of visibly “political” content such as “hard” news.⁵⁷ Her point is not that those critics are wrong or that maintaining public service journalism is not important. Rather, she argues that such critics are assuming that the popular cannot be political and vice versa. Using a framework inspired by Rose and Cruikshank, Ouellette suggests that media consumption, much like self-help, is in a way *more* profound in its ability to shape conduct than those genres specifically marked as “political,” precisely because the TV experts exercise their authority at a distance. When advice on living is dispensed within the context of entertainment, whether delivered through fictional plots and characters or “real-life” celebrities, it is naturalised by the viewer as *common sense*, a kind of disinterested truth. For Ouellette, the primary relationship between her text and neoliberal discourse is one of alignment, although even in this one example there are also moments of slippage. There is then the suggestion that the effects of liberalisation – in terms of media regulation and in terms of social attitudes more generally – may be more contradictory. Indeed, in the nineties we saw the spectacle of centrist politicians who had consistently voted to enhance the economic freedom of the media, speak out against the type of “trash TV” and “cultural rot” that was, in some ways, the predictable outcome of such reforms.⁵⁸

When Miller writes of the “uneasy interdependence of citizenship, consumption, and politics,”⁵⁹ he points towards this more fluid and complicated arrangement. In *Technologies of Truth*, Miller defines these as “technologies [which] congeal forge loyalty

⁵⁶ Cruikshank, 28.

⁵⁷ Laurie J. Ouellette, “Take Responsibility for Yourself: *Judge Judy* and the Neoliberal Citizen,” *Feminist Television Criticism: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Charlotte Brundson and Lynn Spigel (London: Open University Press; 2008), 139.

⁵⁸ Howard Kurtz, “‘Trash TV’ Ads Play No Favorites; GOP Donors Among Bill Bennett’s Targets,” *Washington Post*, December 7, 1995.

⁵⁹ Miller, *Cultural Citizenship*, 28.

to the sovereign state through custom or art.”⁶⁰ Making a similar point as Ouellette, Miller notes that though popular culture may “forge loyalty” to the nation, it does so at a distance “through the cultural citizen...a citizen in need of daily maintenance through lore as much as its homonym [law].”⁶¹ In this distance from the state, Miller’s cultural citizens are rather more unruly and multi-vocal in their truth than is suggested by a simple alignment of the political and the popular. Technologies of truth are “popular logics” in the sense that they are widely understood and adhered to. However, these popular logics also carry the shadow of *popularism*, an unhealthy permissiveness that has, throughout modernity, been ascribed to “low” culture, to emerging media forms and new cultural formations. Cultural citizenship is further complicated by the fact that the contemporary discourse of rights no longer takes place in reference to a singular, bounded space of sovereignty but in a globalised world. For Miller, the rise of cultural citizenship is a response to a new global division of labour: the freeing of trade, of foreign investment and the movement of people. In this context, cultural citizenship, which was fermented within social movements as a form of what I have labelled progressive multiculturalism, is as “open to commodification by corporations, and appropriation by far-right Christian fundamentalists” as it is to “expressive protest.”⁶² When Miller says that “cultural citizenship and media deregulation are coefficients of globalization,” he reminds us that formal rights are materialised within the forces of political economy.⁶³ In the last chapter, I speak particularly to the idea of the New Economy that sprung to prominence in Clinton’s second term. In the booming tech-sector, we see the liberal tolerance of multicultural (and indeed, therapeutic) practices within global capital. What remains out of sight are those migrants who lack the “human capital” to achieve political rights or those working-class citizens whose social rights in the forms of wages, benefits and pensions are under pressure due to the ubiquitous demand for global competitiveness.

To review: Ouellette posits a model of analysis where the citizen-consumer is interpellated into neoliberal discourses through texts whose “common sense” truths naturalise a uniform construction of the ideal citizen as one who, at all times, exercises personal responsibility independently of the state. Miller adds a wrinkle in his suggestion that the same discourse of liberation that has, since the 1960s, given impetus to identity politics and multiculturalism, has also given birth to the forces of deregulation. In this

⁶⁰ Toby Miller, *Technologies of Truth: Cultural Citizenship and the Popular Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 4.

⁶¹ Miller, *Technologies of Truth*, 4.

⁶² Miller, *Cultural Citizenship*, 35.

⁶³ Miller, *Cultural Citizenship*, 55.

view, the will of the people, expressed through popular culture in the form of consumptive acts of choice, is perhaps more heterogeneous and contradictory. The *vox populi* is just as likely to give rise to reactionary ideas as progressive, and just as capable of shifting these positions, generating all manner of strange coalitions, all manner of ways of re-allocating freedom and un-freedom. Neither Ouellette nor Miller are of the view that “responsible” political government can be assumed to be separate from “irresponsible” pop culture. But neither are they of the view that democratic participation is some kind of carnivalesque, free-for-all (a vision which, at the risk of caricaturing his position, I associate with pop culture celebrants like John Fiske). In the next chapter, I follow Rose, by suggesting that freedom and responsibility are best understood not as abstract notions but as moral ideals which take shape within a particular rationality of government. Crucially, while each regime of government is defined by a certain ideal, few citizens can ever completely fulfil this ideal and many citizens fall short not by virtue of their behaviour but because of discriminatory stereotypes.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered self-help and popular culture from a number of perspectives, each of which can ultimately be traced back to Foucault. There are two types of textual analysis. The first which I call simply discourse analysis, I have associated with Stuart Hall and the British tradition of cultural studies. The value of Hall’s approach is that it highlights the role of identity and cultural differences (race, class, gender) in a way that other approaches do not. The second “textual” or discursive analysis is derived from literary criticism (new historicism and cultural materialism) but is, in some ways, less concerned with language than history. I would define this second kind of analysis in terms of its characteristic move, the “surprising correspondence.” Here, the discovery of the surprising correspondence (often between a literary and non-literary text) becomes the basis for the discovery of a whole system of resemblances, which, in turn, form the outline of the entire discursive formation. New historicism and cultural materialism remain valuable because of their insight that the study of culture could be placed on an equal footing with other ways of doing history. Using the same strategy of reading laterally across a range of writing, I argue that the claims made by self-help literature are not isolated to this particular genre but are distributed more widely.

While the focus of new historicism and cultural materialism is at the micro-historical level of the statement, a complementary analysis takes a macro-historical view of power relations. This perspective is provided by Foucault's concept of governmentality, which addresses the relationship of the state and civil society in liberal democracies. However, the same political rationality that informs particular policy initiatives can also be seen to be acting upon individuals at the level of the everyday, governing their conduct in a way that is aligned to liberalism, and more latterly, neoliberalism. The second object of analysis is therefore self-help as a series of material practices and institutions within the culture.

If governmentality constitutes a second type of lateral analysis (across scale, from macro-politics to the micro-politics), cultural citizenship may constitute a third: across hierarchies of taste, where the "laws" of state or science are translated into more popular, democratised kinds of truths. While governmentality aligns the political and the personal, cultural citizenship posits another space, between the *popular and the political*, which is not necessarily one of alignment but may be a space of dis-articulation as well as articulation. Obviously, in democratic societies, political government relies on popular support. But there is always a slippage or gap. In the next chapter, I address this by making some distinctions between the relative solidity of political reason and the instability of political formations.

2 Political Rationalities, Political Formations

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, I introduced Foucault's concept of governmentality and the work undertaken by Nikolas Rose to develop governmentality into a historical series of three political rationalities unfolding over the last century: welfarism, advanced liberalism and community. This purpose of this chapter is (1) to demonstrate how these political rationalities relate to the dominant themes of American politics between the 1980s and the 1990s; (2) to show how these same rationalities also relate to the dominant trends within self-help literature over the same period and; (3) to present case studies of a convergence between self-help and government policy. The main task of the chapter will therefore be to map out what I consider to be a significant correlation between successive genres of self-help and successive political administrations: firstly, between Reaganism and the Recovery movement and, secondly, between New Liberalism of Clinton and the New Age movement. The case studies below illustrate how the political and the personal come to resemble each other, less as a matter of direct influence, and more due to the existence of an underlying rationality, albeit one which is articulated differently across a diverse set of institutions and practices.

Firstly, some notes about the different methodological approaches I outlined in the previous chapter. Among these approaches were three "lateral" approaches (the fourth approach which I associated with Stuart Hall is more applicable to the three chapters subsequent to this one). The first lateral approach is the one that was developed by Foucault in *The Order of Things* and which I have identified by the characteristic of the "surprising correspondence" across multiple, apparently unconnected domains. This first type of lateral analysis may be wedded to two other kinds of lateral analysis: firstly, governmentality, an analysis across scale, from the macro-politics of the state to the micro-politics of the everyday, and secondly, cultural citizenship, which runs across hierarchies of taste. Cultural citizenship is the main concern of the sixth and last chapter, in which I explore the alignments or articulations between the popular and the political, as well as the dis-articulations, those moments or spaces in which the popular will departs from the prevailing political reason. However, disarticulation also occurs *within* the political. Since the political space is quite obviously a space of contestation, I use the term *political formation* to distinguish political culture from *political rationality*. This first term is meant

to invoke the way in which political coalitions coalesce and fall apart. It is also meant to invoke the way in which public opinion is amenable to myth-making, misdirection and competing forms of “common sense” as much as it is to sober analysis. Indeed, the use of the term political formation encapsulates a sense of political culture which is as unstable and heterogeneous as culture itself. In Foucauldian thought, political rationalities are also plural. But that is because Foucault wanted to preserve political reason as historically contingent, separate from some absolute and trans-historical notion of reason (the same logic would apply to “truths” or “knowledges”). Like political formations, political rationalities fail but not because they are irrational; theirs is an inconsistency of application, rather than of will. Everyday politics, on the other hand, is often conducted in half-truths and tactical compromises. Political formations like Reaganism and New Liberalism are always internally incoherent at some level because they always describe a coalition of forces which, at the same time, must also bend to the popular will. An analytics of government, on other hand, will find many neoliberal elements *across* both Reaganism and New Liberalism as well as many “neoliberalisms” operating *outside* the context of American politics, conceivably even in the context of authoritarian rule.

All three of the types of analysis that I have described here inform this chapter. However, there is a particular stress upon the first kind of comparison (the “surprising correspondence”), which looks across different types of categories of sense-making: political, therapeutic and scientific. Taken altogether, these sense-making procedures become the measure of an entire era, establishing a particular kind of naturalised truth about workers, family members, citizens, and, at bottom, human beings. To clarify, the two eras I want to compare here are the Reagan-Bush era and the Clinton era and the two main types of discourse I want to compare are therapeutic culture and political culture. This is just a starting point, however, since I do not want to suggest that this is just a matter of the “influence” of self-help upon politics or vice versa. Rather, I look outside of these two domains, to see how science serves to authorise the truth of therapy and how, in turn, these psychological technologies become instituted into the whole machinery of government. In the Reagan-Bush era, the language of medicine serves to authorise the disease concept of addiction. In Recovery literature, the disease concept is extended to a whole range of behaviours in personal relationships and family life. In the Clinton era, social science statistics perform a similar function, authorising an equally conservative version of community and family life. This bucolic image of community is echoed in the

new and strangely conservative sub-genre of New Age literature which I call *centrist* New Age.

By the end of the 1980s, Recovery literature had reached a kind of *ne-plus-ultra* of paranoia which seems to almost necessitate the redemptive counter-trend of New Age literature. According to one unattributed but endlessly repeated “statistic,” 95 percent of American families were dysfunctional.¹ Pessimistically, the disease concept within Recovery seemed to imply an equivalence between pathology and subjectivity itself. However, we could argue as Philip Cushman does, that every period of history has had its characteristic “cultural illnesses,” its defining maladies and cures. According to Cushman, these illnesses have a dialectical relationship to that era’s cultural imperatives and are embodied in certain marginalised subjects. Each culture has its folk-devils, its figures of hate, and from identifying these kinds of cultural villains we can, working backwards, also deduce the kinds of qualities that are privileged within the culture as heroic.² Living within a particular discursive regime, the therapies and sicknesses which define us are often transparent to us. Instead, we need to look for what Sally Falk Moore calls diagnostic events.³

Diagnostic events are prominent moments within the culture; moments that are, in fact, inexplicable but are not apprehended as such because they conform perfectly to a hitherto unseen cultural logic. In this chapter, I use the example of two moral panics, in order to show how the media too, play an important authorising function, by highlighting the bounds of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. In the first part of this chapter, covering Reaganism and Recovery, I look at the moral panic surrounding the supposed “crack epidemic.” I examine the media’s fascination with the drug crack, the “ghetto” lifestyle of crack addicts and the appalling images of shaking, shrieking “crack babies” who had apparently inherited their addiction from neglectful mothers. These stories and images, taken from the frontlines on the war on drugs, served to justify an often draconian response by the state. Yet, in time, most of the assumptions underlining the media narrative would fall apart. In the second part of the chapter, I look at the controversy around the TV show *Murphy Brown*, which was stirred up just prior to Clinton’s election in 1992. Using this example, I follow Judith Stacey in arguing that social science has been

¹ The statistic is sometimes attributed to John Bradshaw, and sometimes to his publisher, Health Communications.

² Philip Cushman, *Constructing The Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 24-25.

³ Sally Falk Moore, “Explaining the Present: Theoretical Dilemmas in Processual Ethnography,” *American Ethnologist* 14.4 (1987): 727–36.

used to resurrect a conservative family values discourse within the new ethical context of responsibility not only to oneself but to the community.⁴

The two moral panics I outline are condensed into two short case studies at the end of each of the two main sections. In the kind of excessive condemnation they provoke, moral panics highlight the limits of a particular regime. The main focus of the chapter, however, is to demonstrate how cultural imperatives *do not* draw attention to themselves, but appear to us as neutral and objective, especially when authorised by science or the media or some other legitimating institution. Cultural illnesses, like as those described by Cushman, do not announce themselves as such, rather they build up through the repetition of negative stereotypes about certain types of women, certain types of workers, certain types of nationalities and so on. These illnesses and their respective “villains” work in tandem with their privileged opposite, a culturally-specific definition of what it means to be successful, embodied by certain heroic stereotypes.

There are two pairings of healthy and unhealthy subjectivities that I address here in relation to the Reagan-Bush era and the Clinton era, respectively. Each of these pairings is linked to a governing political rationality and to the history of liberalism as given by Nikolas Rose (though perhaps more schematically than he would allow). In its simplest demarcation, I align the Reagan-Bush era to *neoliberalism* (what Rose calls “advanced liberalism”) and the Clinton era to what Rose calls *community* (better known as Third Way politics or New Liberalism).

Firstly, I argue, following Rose, that the ideal form of subjectivity under neoliberalism is something I have variously described as a choosing self, an enterprising self or an economising self. The Reaganite “winner” that I describe in Chapter Three is someone sober, disciplined and focused on achievement; working hard and playing hard, the “winner” is concerned with the maximisation of freedom, expressed in a series of newly-expanded lifestyle and consumptive choices. If autonomy is the privileged term within neoliberalism, dependence is stigmatised as unhealthy. Those whose choices are restricted because of their dependence on intimates (partners, friends, family) or larger collectives (the state, unions, local communities) are therefore less than ideal according to this somewhat implausible standard. My analysis of Reaganism makes the analogy (the “surprising correspondence”) between psychological, biological and social dependency in a comparison of two domains. I compare the rise of Recovery literature – which,

⁴ Judith Stacey, “Scents, Scholars, and Stigma: The Revisionist Campaign for Family Values,” *Social Text*, 40 (1994): 51-75.

significantly, is also known as co-dependency – with the circumstances in which a theory of welfare dependency was linked to a poor, black, urban “underclass.” In the first instance, the Recovery movement argues that its audience of predominately affluent, white women were literally addicted to unhealthy relationships (terms like “love addiction” and “man junkie” are not unusual). Without going into Recovery and “working the programme,” they would never be truly free, always doomed to repeat bad relationship choices. In the second instance, the New Right urged cuts in welfare spending, based on the argument that members of the underclass were unable to make “good choices” because over-reliance on the state had degraded or perverted their sense of personal responsibility.

In the second part of the chapter, I turn to the Rose’s notion of community as it applies to the Clinton era, and also to what I call centrist New Age literature. While the policy agenda of Reaganism marked a clear break from the welfarist rationality of post-war American politics, many critics have suggested that the Clinton administration merely gave the same neoliberal policy agenda a kinder, softer face. I argue that Clinton *was* neoliberal but only in the narrow sense of adopting a benign attitude to market-based reform. Beyond that, there is a real sense that whereas the neoliberalism of the Reagan-Bush era pitted the lone individual (the “winner”) against their peers in a zero-sum game of competition, the neoliberalism associated with the Clinton era proposes an alternative to me-firstism. Therefore, I follow Rose in interpreting Third Way politics – or New Liberalism, as it has been called in the American context – as a new and distinct kind of politics. According to Rose, the revived liberalism of the 1990s reconstituted the idea of social justice alongside a new conception of the human being as an essentially “ethical creature.”⁵ At the same time, the field of collective interaction and responsibility is reinvented not as society but community. Rather than working from an “us versus them” dynamic, New Liberalism and New Age both start from the presumption that there is no “us” or “them.” The philosophical consequences of this new ideal are twofold: social conflict is rendered incomprehensible, a thing of the past; but at the same time, there is no “them” to blame either. This is why I argue that the Clinton era retains and perhaps even amplifies its conservative impulse towards personal responsibility.

How then does the “ethical creature” of community manifest this impulse towards personal responsibility? Unlike the economic rationalism of Reagan-Bush era neoliberalism which gave rise to the entrepreneurial, economic or choosing self, the new normative citizen-subject of the nineties looks to enhance their capacities in a spiritual,

⁵ Nikolas Rose, “Inventiveness in Politics,” *Economy and Society*, 28, no. 3 (1999): 474.

creative or empathetic direction. Reagn-era Recovery was almost purely defined in negative terms, as a pathological subjectivity relentlessly policed for transgressive behaviours and duly punished. The new therapeutic consensus is, by contrast, orientated around the language of healing and communal unity, a shift that Bill Clinton's political style seemed to almost embody. However, following Cushman, we must make a more dialectical argument: each age has its illness but also its cures. Therefore, the cliché that Clinton adopted a kinder, softer neoliberalism than Reagan and Bush does not suffice.

Instead of working backwards from the punishment of certain marginalised subjects as we did for Reaganism, the substance of New Liberalism can be deduced from the sort of outsized praise which Clinton and other centrist politicians heaped upon the voting public for merely occupying the middle-ground. The “mainstream” voter, the “average” American, the “hard-working” middle-class: centrist politics relentlessly courted the majority opinion at the same time as they gave it a kind of ideological force which they then used to paint those on either side of the political centre as extremists and “special interests.” In later chapters, I refer to Antonio Raul de Velasco's notion, the politics of transcendence, which suggests that the over-riding goal of politics in the Clinton era was to transcend ideological conflict and thereby maintain civility and cohesion (in rhetorical terms if not in terms of *actual* social cohesion).⁶ This gives the politics of New Liberalism its characteristic centrist hero – the politician who applies traditional values to the modern world, who learns from the public rather than imposing their will, and who brings people together rather than divides them. This same notion of transcendence arguably defines the New Age as a technology of healing. The New Age see itself as a paradigm which transcends “old” science and “old” religion in the same way as the Third Way transcends the “old” left and the “old” right. Like the politics of transcendence, the personal transcendence that followers find in New Age spirituality has a tendency to displace conflict away from human nature, which they see as a powerful force for good, and towards the world, which they see as corrupt. It goes without saying then that traditional party politics is anathema to New Agers. In the context of a broad skepticism towards politics as usual, the challenge for the centrist politician in the nineties was to learn the art of doing politics in a de-politicised way. To be seen as advancing some narrow political interest was to be inauthentic or worse, “outside the mainstream.”

⁶ Antonio Raul de Velasco, “Claiming ‘the Center’: The Rhetoric of Political Transcendence in the Clinton Era,” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2005).

2.2 Part 1: The Reagan-Bush Era

In this section I offer an analysis of the Recovery movement, perhaps the most dominant strand of self-help in the 1980s. I argue that Recovery literature is a technology of healing that draws much of its power and intelligibility from the political formation of Reaganism. Reaganism can be defined both as a neoliberal economic programme that emphasises the role of the “free” market and as a form of social conservatism that emphasises the role of the “traditional” nuclear family. In practice, I argue that there was a contradiction between these two positions. Indeed, it was precisely within this contradictory space that Recovery literature would thrive. It did this by simultaneously embracing the liberal privileging of the free and autonomous individual while universalising (and thereby partly normalising) the dysfunctional family. While holding up a certain kind of ideal subjectivity – someone who is sober, disciplined and focused on achievement – in fact, Recovery suggests that this is a standard that is almost impossible to achieve. Indeed, in the late 1980s, what I describe in later chapters as “second-wave” Recovery literature implied that almost everyone is dysfunctional. In the analysis of authors like John Bradshaw, the Western world was systematically, if unwittingly, teaching children a “poisonous pedagogy,” an unhealthy mode of relating to the self and others. This poisonous pedagogy was spread primarily through the mechanism of the nuclear family.

I focus here on the “first wave” of Recovery literature, whose audience was almost exclusively women. Even while acknowledging the difficulties of living up to the ideal of the independent woman, the first blockbusters of the Recovery genre stigmatised gendered forms of emotional dependency as an illness. At the same time, a comparable racialised concept of welfare dependency came to prominence at the level of public policy. In both instances, structural changes in the economy were written out of the media narrative, which focused exclusively on psychological dysfunction within the family unit. While alcoholism and drug addiction were very real dysfunctions in many of these families, the metaphoric linkage of addiction and family allowed for a space in which dependence on others was now seen as a disease with quasi-biological characteristics. While the dependence-as-illness trope is prominent in both Recovery literature and social science theories of welfare dependency, marked differences emerge between these two types of discourse. It is instructive to compare Recovery and related anxieties about the disintegration of the traditional family with the hysteria surrounding the media’s discovery

of “crack babies” in the late 1980s. In the first instance, white, middle-class women were treated as worthy and capable of being helped. Later, in second-wave Recovery, these same women (and increasingly middle-class men) were asked to seek redemption, to get in touch with their “inner child.” On the other hand, so-called “crack babies,” born to black single mothers on welfare, were not treated as innocents. Instead, they were viewed as inherently “toxic” kids who would forever be a burden upon the state. In both cases, personal and social pathologies are linked through the suggestion of a national epidemic.

2.3 Reaganism, the Family and “Backlash” Politics

I begin with some definitions and a basic outline of the project of Reaganism. I distinguish here between the *political rationality* of neoliberalism, as practiced in the Reagan-Bush era, and Reaganism, as a *political formation*, that is to say, a coalition of military hawks, fiscal conservatives and social conservatives. The contradictory impulses within the Reagan coalition inevitably led to inconsistencies in the practice of government. This is not to say that the Reagan administration (and to a lesser extent the Bush administration) were not successful in managing these contradictions – from the viewpoint of securing three successive electoral victories, they were very successful. Nevertheless, critics of Reagan, the New Right, and the Christian Right, have noted how the coherence of Reaganism came to rely on a series of myths and misdirections. For some, these tactics were not only disingenuous; they amount to “social warfare” – the deliberate pitting of one group against another.⁷ For instance, the same year the sociologist James Davidson Hunter declared that America was in the midst of a “culture war,” Susan Faludi published *Backlash*, the subtitle of which speaks of “an undeclared war on women.”⁸ I hold on to the idea of the political formation as I think it speaks to the premise that a government *can* gain political capital by employing deception or by stoking the resentments between various interest groups within the population. Ultimately though, liberal democratic governments succeed by tapping into a more fundamental – and a more intersectional – understanding of what it meant to run a good economy, to live a responsible life and to fulfill one’s duties as a citizen. I would frame the neoliberalism of the Reagan-Bush era as

⁷ Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, *Understanding Foucault* (St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 82-88.

⁸ James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Control The Family, Art, Education, Law, And Politics In America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Vintage, 1991).

one such political rationality, as an imperative which extends beyond any particular policy and into everyday conduct, through the production of a particular kind of subjectivity. For this more thorough-going understanding of how the personal and the political interrelate, there can be no question of qualifying neoliberalism as bad economics, bad philosophy or an act of bad faith. Rather, we must take seriously the idea that, under neoliberal rule, the maximization of human freedom becomes the measure of good government. Political rationalities are inconsistent not because they themselves are incoherent but because the standards of good conduct that each member of the workplace, family, and community are expected to meet, are unevenly applied according to cultural differences such as race, class and gender.

In the two case studies I present here in relation to Reaganism – one which concerns affluent, suburban white women, and one which concerns impoverished, inner-city black mothers and infants – I have tried to draw out a kind of negative intersectionality. There is no sense that these two groups are engaged in a common struggle or have a common enemy. Rather, they are united by the common “disease” of dependency. Firstly, they have failed to be properly neoliberal, to succeed without reliance on others, and secondly, they have failed to be properly conservative, to uphold traditional family life. Many critics of Recovery have noted how the movement takes women to task, simply for assuming the compassionate role of someone who takes care of others. For Faludi, this “blame the victim” dynamic is prominent throughout the discourse of Reaganism. While Ronald Reagan lauded hard work and individual initiative as traditional American values, he also campaigned on an image of traditional family values in which career-focused women were conspicuously absent. Indeed, the proposition that women should compete with or be independent from men would actually be a departure from traditionalism. Embedded within Reagan’s promise to restore American greatness there was another contradiction. Wedding the virtues of the Protestant work ethic with a mythical notion of America’s past, Reagan concealed the degree to which his economic programme was not traditional at all but a series of radical reforms. While Faludi is able to identify these tactics of myth-making and misdirection in *Backlash*, her larger project is to show how these tactics corrode the credibility of feminism as a political and social movement. Arguably, however, backlash politics exists wherever the consequences of social pathologies are disarticulated from their causes. That is to say, we can think of backlash politics in a more intersectional way, in terms of subjectivity and citizenship.

Despite the radical economic reforms of the 1980s, the breakdown of the nuclear family was seen as a failure of responsible citizenship, a failure that justified a punitive backlash.

Though the broad strokes are perhaps familiar, it is worth reminding ourselves of those economic reforms. Reagan's policy was known as monetarism or supply-side economics. By lowering barriers to investment through deregulation, reducing government spending, and tax incentives, Reagan sought to increase production or *supply*. Monetarism reverses the Keynesian economics of the post-war period, which held that government should maintain the level of aggregate demand by stimulating the economy in periods of recession. Such a policy was politically controversial, even in Reagan's own party, because it would deliberately sacrifice jobs and thereby exert pressure downward on wages. As the economic historian Joyce Kolko puts it, the idea was "to put the economy 'through the wringer' in order to squeeze inflation out of the system."⁹ Tight monetary controls to dampen inflation were actually first introduced under the Carter administration but the full impact did not hit until 1982. Though the recession wreaked havoc, Reagan was able to argue that short-term economic pain was needed in order to grow the economy and to make the US internationally competitive over the long term. However, this argument was already some way from the traditional patriotic appeals to the free enterprise system, a system in which hard work and ability were always rewarded. Reagan was now asking for workers to accept redundancies, lower wages and job insecurity in return for uncertain rewards in the future. While cloaking itself in the rhetoric of national solidarity, Reaganism consciously rejected a policy of full employment in order to create a situation in which unionism and other forms of class solidarity were undermined. Workers were now forced to compete against each other for fewer jobs. The new worker was "free" – no longer tethered to a job for life – but they would have to compete not only through physical toil but by making the "right choices" in the newly deregulated labour and capital markets. Thus far from restoring traditional values, Reaganism as an economic programme is accurately described as the beginning of a neoliberal revolution. It was revolutionary not only in its belief of the market as a self-regulating system but in its creation of a new kind of American worker, a new context for economic citizenship.

If Reagan's economic agenda was not in the conventional sense "conservative," his social agenda certainly was. Reaganism sought to restore a nostalgic view of the family that harked back to the post-war boom of the 1950s. The nuclear family was always a much more historically and socially delimited phenomenon than the popular imagination

⁹ Joyce Kolko, *Restructuring The World Economy* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 33.

has supposed. Nevertheless, to the extent that the mythology was real, that reality was made possible *because* of the post-war boom and the continuing legacy of the New Deal. As Reagan started rolling back the consensus that was forged between government, business and labour, he undermined the conditions that helped preserve the “ideal” arrangement of one working father, one stay-at-home mother. Despite a growing economy and an overwhelming mandate in the 1984 election, there was sense of uneasiness setting in during Reagan’s second term. The decline of the family as represented in media depictions of divorce, unwed mothers and spousal abuse seemed to be a threat not only to the families involved but to the health of the nation as a whole. However, rather than correlate this malaise with declining standards of living, a backlash ensued against the very people who were worst affected: women, minorities and the poor. Though the aims of Recovery literature and right-wing moralists were in many ways antithetical, Recovery’s analysis of the family merely reinforced the view of social conservatives who also found the source of wider social pathologies in the family. What then was this analysis and how did it arise?

2.4 Recovery, Addiction and the Disease Concept

In Chapter Three, I explore the overlapping terms “Recovery” and “co-dependency” in relation to a number of best-selling self-help books in the mid-eighties with names like *Co-dependent No More* and *Women Who Love Too Much*.¹⁰ I use this space to instead give some of the background of Recovery in relationship to the political formation of Reaganism and the political rationality of neoliberalism. At a time when the Christian Right’s calls to protect the family and the nation were increasingly shrill and apocalyptic, the Recovery movement emerges as an equally paranoid reaction to the so-called breakdown of the family. But rather than advising women to seek solace in their traditional gender roles, Recovery seems to pathologise the compassionate role of the caregiver. The thousands of American women who read Recovery books and, as a result, attended Recovery support groups would confess that their need for love and companionship was an addiction from which they were recovering. The idea that intimate relationships could *literally* be addictive – a kind of mental or physical dependence on a par with alcoholism

¹⁰ Melody Beattie, *Co-dependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself* (Center City, M.N.: Hazelden, 1987); Robin Norwood, *Women Who Love Too Much: When You Keep Wishing and Hoping He'll Change* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1985).

or drug addiction – was a dramatic enlargement of the disease concept of addiction. The idea that alcoholism should be treated as a disease has had a long history. It had been an important part of the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) literature since its beginnings in the 1930s and, since about the 1960s, it had also become the orthodoxy of the American Medical Association, among other representatives of the medical establishment.¹¹ However, in the 1980s, the Recovery movement translated long-standing AA traditions into a new set of conditions. This translation substantially altered the meaning of the 12-step programme from a welfarist programme which aimed to protect society *from* dangerous individuals to a neoliberal programme which aimed to enhance the freedom *of* the individual.

The first evidence of a major shift away from “classic AA,” took place in the late 1970s, with the growth of AA-related support groups such as Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA).¹² Influenced by family systems theory, AA and ACOA members began to apply the disease model to refer to not only alcoholics themselves but *families* of alcoholics. Whereas Freudian notions of family trauma might have been employed in the past, new labels were developed in family systems therapy. While practicing abstinence, an alcoholic was always said to be in “recovery.” A co-dependent, by contrast, is a spouse or child who “enables” alcoholic partners and parents to continue drinking. By the mid-1980s, Recovery and co-dependency began to refer to the same thing: a kind of self-help literature and support-group movement aimed specifically at women who found themselves in relationships with uncaring or abusive men. Some of these women suffered mental or physical abuse growing up as children in the families of alcoholic fathers. Many of the stories of the adult women were about partners who were distant because of alcoholism and some of the women in the stories were *themselves* alcoholics. But in fact the connection with the so-called “primary” addictions (alcohol, drugs, food) became less and less important as the focus turned to an uncomfortable realisation: there appeared to be an epidemic of dysfunction within the lives of women at a same time they were being told that they were independent, that they could “have it all.” Cultural historians of co-dependency agree that despite the fact that it grows out of classic AA and makes use of the disease concept, it operates according to set of very different assumptions about illness,

¹¹ American Medical Association. *Manual on Alcoholism* (Chicago: AMA, 1968).

¹² Classic AA is Elayne Rapping’s term. See Elayne Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

repression and society.¹³ For AA, the sickness is *in* the individual and attempts to shift blame elsewhere, to the family or the society, should be dismissed as what followers of the programme call “stinkin’ thinkin’.” On the other hand, the slogan of ACOA thinking represents the exactly opposite view: “no one gets sick alone.” For the Adult Child, conformity to the institution of the family (and by extension, the social relations which produce that institution) is itself the problem. ACOA is therefore part of a new post-sixties consensus which no longer subscribes to welfarist institutions insofar as the institutions themselves are seen as unhealthy or corrupt.

In order to understand how ACOA and then Recovery differs from classic AA, it is useful to consider the precise wordings of the Twelve Steps. According to the Basic Text or “Big Book” of AA, first published in 1939, alcoholism is not a moral deficiency. Rather, it is a physiological addiction that leaves alcoholics unable to drink in moderation. Even the founders of AA doubted that alcoholism was literally an allergy in the manner that the Big Book implies. However, co-founder Bill Wilson argued that only by conveying the complete “*hopelessness*” of the condition could a paradoxical sense of empowerment emerge.¹⁴ Thus, the first of the Twelve Steps asks that the alcoholic admit they are completely “powerless” over the disease. The second and third steps follow from the first. Since the addict is powerless in the face of their disease; they must turn their “will” and their “lives” over to a “power greater than” themselves. While some versions of the text speak only of a “Higher Power,” the Twelve Steps clearly refer to God in some form, giving a holistic, spiritual form to the disease of addiction.¹⁵ Indeed, if alcoholism and other forms of addiction are physical diseases, they are diseases without cures. Once diagnosed – or rather confessed – the only remedy for the alcoholic or addict is total abstinence. The literature refers to alcoholism as a progressive disease, meaning that failure to abstain inevitably leads to deterioration and, finally, death. Arguably, it is only when addiction is considered more holistically, as a physical, mental, and spiritual sickness, that following the rest of the Twelve Steps (or “working the programme” as

¹³ John Steadman Rice and Leslie Irvine both give good introductions to the history and meaning of the Recovery movement as it develops out of the addiction treatment industry, on the one hand, and family systems therapy, on the other. See John Steadman Rice, *A Disease of One's Own: Psychotherapy, Addiction, and the Emergence of Co-dependency* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998). Leslie Irvine, *Codependent Forevermore: the Invention of Self in a Twelve Step Group* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Ernest Kurtz, “Alcoholics Anonymous and the Disease Concept,” *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 20, no. 3/4 (2002): 10. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism* 4th Ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, 2001), 59-60.

recovering addicts call it), makes sense as a form of liberation from what it is, on the face of it, a grimly deterministic fate.

Janice Haaken, a feminist critic of Recovery, has been an astute observer of the way in which ACOA and Recovery groups have subtly altered the language of classic AA in order to apply the disease model of addiction to an ever-widening circle of objects. According to Haaken, the co-dependent's experience, like that of the alcoholic, is labelled as one of "powerlessness."¹⁶ In this way, a kind of metaphorical bridge is built between the primary addiction (alcohol) and into the dynamics of the family generally. However, there is also a slippage between the sense that the co-dependent is a victim – someone forced to adapt to the pathological behaviour of a partner or parent – and someone who is themselves pathological, a person whose apparent tendency to care for others is actually an act of covert manipulation. For Haaken, one of the more troubling aspects of labelling someone a co-dependent is that it establishes a diagnostic and thus moral equivalence between the alcoholic and their "enabler":¹⁷

According to the literature, [co-dependence] originates in all sufferers in an equivalently understood, repressive, addictive family system, it progresses in an equivalent way toward ultimate self-destruction, and it requires the same redemptive solution [the 12-step programme]. The person who attempts to hold the family together is the same as the alcoholic who abandons it; the person who depends upon drugs for a sense of well-being is the same as the one who depends upon people for the same feelings.¹⁸

The feminist critique of family systems theory is that it imagines the family as a kind of organism in which the behaviour of a family member elicits an equal and opposite reaction. In the case of alcoholism, this metaphor assumes that the behaviour of the alcoholic could never be sustained without there also being some level of "enabling" behaviour within the family. However, this biological model of interaction overlooks the role of socially-inscribed hierarchies such as patriarchy within family relationships. The highly gendered aspect of Recovery was, however, obvious from its overwhelming female

¹⁶ Janice Haaken, "A Critical Analysis of the Co-dependence Construct," in *Challenging Codependency: Feminist Critiques*, ed. Marguerite Babcock and M. Christine McKay (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 54.

¹⁷ Haaken, 59.

¹⁸ Haaken, 65.

membership – few men identified as co-dependent and those that did were regarded as anomalies.¹⁹

During the eighties, co-dependence began to be applied outside the context of chemical dependence altogether, referring now to any kind of interpersonal conflict. Yet, at the same time, even systems theory's insights into relationship dynamics were put in suspension. Norwood, for instance, treated irresponsible and emotionally unavailable men as immovable objects to whom women must simply adapt. Neither Norwood nor Beattie actually counselled women to leave unhappy relationships; they insisted that without recovery a co-dependent was simply doomed to repeat the cycle of dependence. Thus, the onus of change went solely on women. While excessive attention to the feelings of others was stigmatised and labelled as a personality disorder, the notion within the wider culture that caring for others was "women's work" went unchallenged. Haaken speculates that the popularity of the Recovery movement coincided with a simultaneous decline of a maternal identification among women (many of whom were now economically independent) and a lack of compensatory identification with alternative feminist models. Limited as it was, Recovery literature gave comfort to women in speaking a certain truth: in a society that prized self-sufficiency, the tendency to take responsibility for others *was* experienced as dysfunctional.²⁰

However, cutting across the neoliberal ethos were other strands of the Reagan coalition, the New Right and the Christian Right. Social conservatives adopted a moral framework on the issue of family dysfunction. In their analysis, feminism was to blame for encouraging women into the work force and thereby rejecting their "natural" gender roles as nurturers. According to this view, it was the women's selfishness that led them to abandon the home, creating a breakdown in the family that led to social pathologies such as alcoholism and drug abuse. Proxies for Reagan such as the author George Gilder, was quite open about his opposition to feminism, which he claimed threatened not just the family but the entire system of free enterprise.²¹ However, in the assessment of Susan Faludi, most of the media backlash towards women in particular was more subtle. Rather than place the present-day choices of women within the context of economic disruption or structural inequalities, an alternative correlation developed. This placed the liberation of women (supposed already achieved) alongside the frequent assertion that women were

¹⁹ Haaken, 60-61.

²⁰ Haaken, 57.

²¹ George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, L.A.: Pelican Publishing, 1986), 108, 149.

miserable: hence, “women’s equality [was] responsible for women’s unhappiness.”²² One of the media forums implicated in this narrative was the daytime talk show, which typically placed the experience of women front and centre. Despite the stated goal of empowering women, shows like that hosted by Oprah Winfrey, were, according to Janice Peck, failing to articulate a truly feminist critique of power and were instead falling back on the kind of therapeutic analysis such as that offered by Recovery literature. For Peck, the focus on women and their problems was “transmuted” through the therapeutic lens into something more insidious, “the problem with women.” This therapeutic mode of address was perhaps preferable to the kind of righteous condemnation meted out by social conservatives. But, as have I explained, the tendency within Recovery literature to medicalise rather than moralise, leads to a kind of false equivalence between the pathologies of the oppressor and those of the oppressed, both apparent victims of the same disease. However, perhaps the most important difference between the Recovery movement and advocates of “family values” was that the values of Recovery were ultimately closer to neoliberal’s model of the autonomous individual. The selfishness of women that was denounced by conservatives was, in a way, the avowed goal of Recovery. While in the context of the market, self-interest is expressed as a series of rational choices to economic incentives, Recovery is the predictably perverse result of maintaining this self-interested stance within the family. Indeed, as Peck notes, Recovery’s vagueness on what a genuine recovery would look like is symptomatic of a philosophy that “consider[s] all efforts to help others as symptomatic of disease.”²³ Thus, as in Reagan’s approach to the market economy, efforts to intervene are pathologised and viewed as ultimately self-defeating.

2.5 Dependency: Biological, Psychological and Social

Up to this point, I have focused on co-dependency or “love addiction” as a gendered, emotional form of dependency, which through the use of medical discourse becomes a “real” disease. However, co-dependency is an individual pathology: there was no real governmental response to what was apparently an epidemic of emotional addiction within middle-class, suburban homes. Rather, co-dependency was treated as essentially a private problem with a private and compassionate solution in the form of therapy. At the same time, another form of dependency gained media attention: welfare dependency. Since the

²² Faludi, 230.

²³ Janice Peck, *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era* (Boulder, C.O.: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 83.

concept of welfare dependency was linked to urban areas with a predominance of African-Americans, it was probably more racialised than gendered (though I would still stress the intersectional nature of the analysis). Welfare dependency was different in another way, even though, like co-dependency, it was linked to problems caused by drugs and alcohol and therefore had a quasi-biological component. Welfare dependency was seen more as a *social pathology* than an individual pathology. The problems of the urban, mainly black, poor were not seen as private problems that would stay in the home but problems that could overwhelm the streets, the hospitals and the schools. These social pathologies were therefore considered issues of huge public interest, especially in terms of the possible downstream costs of intergenerational poverty and addiction upon the government purse.

I use the example of the so-called “crack baby” crisis at the end of this section in order to show, not only how inner-city drug problems might be deserving of a stronger public policy response than middle-class alcoholism, but to show how the figure of the innocent crack baby was used to elicit a sense of moral outrage against welfare recipients. The association of welfare dependency with horrific neglect, crime and drug addiction made it harder to justify the apparent failure of liberal policy prescriptions and easier to justify harsh punishments against anyone who would tolerate such depravity. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the “crack baby” crisis was not that the moral panic about crack babies relied on the thinnest of evidence but the sense that the crack baby was not really innocent at all but somehow doomed to repeat the sins of the mother and the father. The collective sense of punishment was extended even to children. This marks another vivid contrast between co-dependency and welfare dependency. According to Wendy Kaminer, even if Recovery literature is vague in terms of what the process of recovery actually entails, one of its core beliefs is that addiction masks “true feelings and the true childlike self.”²⁴ The inner child proposed by Recovery (especially second-wave authors like John Bradshaw) is always innocent, “essentially good, and, most of all, redeemable.” Meanwhile, the crack baby was labeled as irredeemably toxic; a member of what one neoconservative author coined the “bio-underclass.”²⁵

Given the large gap between the myth and reality of the crack baby crisis, it might be said to constitute another example of a diagnostic event. Indeed, according to Ana Teresa Ortiz and Laura Briggs, the way in which the myth of the crack baby was so readily

²⁴ Wendy Kaminer, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993 [1992]), 18.

²⁵ According to Charles Krauthammer, “bio-underclass” was coined by Douglas Besharov, a scholar at the conservative think tank, the American Enterprise Institute and former director of the National Center on Child Abuse. Charles Krauthammer, “Children of Cocaine,” *Washington Post*, July 30, 1989, C7.

accepted and circulated through the media is only inexplicable by a certain pre-existing discourse linking childhood, race and poverty.²⁶ Just as Recovery literature attaches words such as “toxic” to emotions such as shame and guilt in order to bring them into the same discursive realm as chemical dependence, Ortiz and Briggs describe a “biologization” in the discourse of poverty in the social sciences. And just as in the discourse of Recovery, social science terms like “culture of poverty” and “underclass ideology” come to imply that pathological behaviour is transmitted from person to person and from parent to child, creating an unfortunate resonance with the long history of social Darwinist thought.²⁷ Terms like these have circulated since the sixties and seventies respectively and have tended to follow a trajectory whereby a concept coined by crusading liberals is appropriated and re-defined to fit a conservative agenda. This shift was particularly pronounced in the Reagan era as the recession caused public sympathies towards welfare recipients to change dramatically.

Like “culture of poverty,”²⁸ the term “underclass” was initially meant to induce sympathy and motivate action that might alleviate problems such as drugs, crime, poor housing and high unemployment. David Ray Papke traces the term “underclass” to its rise during the 1970s. At this time it was a conceptualisation used by journalists, sociologists, and politicians in order to direct public attention to the plight of the urban poor living in “the decaying cores of America’s increasingly postindustrial cities.”²⁹ Race and geography tended to reinforce each other in definitions of the underclass. Though there were of course poor Caucasians, they were not as concentrated within ghettos as African-Americans and Latinos. The practice of exclusionary zoning by outlying suburbs exacerbated this isolation. The Carter administration devoted a commission to the problems of the underclass noting that poverty rates soared during the seventies as industry moved out of inner cities. The commission noted that the underclass was excluded from the mainstream economy: “Avenues of escape are shrinking, unreliable, and inadequate.”³⁰ Without systemic intervention, the problems were predicted to escalate, becoming entrenched in successive generations.

²⁶ Ana Teresa Ortiz and Laura Briggs, “The Culture of Poverty, Crack Babies, and Welfare Cheats: The Making of the ‘Healthy White Baby Crisis,’” *Social Text* 21, No. 3 (2003): 39-57.

²⁷ Ortiz and Briggs, 40.

²⁸ For a brief history of the “culture of poverty” thesis see Ortiz & Briggs, 42-44.

²⁹ David Ray Papke, “The Rise and Fall of the ‘Underclass’: An Exploration of Ideology and the Legal Arena,” Legal Studies Research Paper Series, Research Paper No. 10-40. (Milwaukee, W.I.: Marquette University Law School, 2010).

³⁰ President’s Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties, *Report of the Panel on Policies and Prospects for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan America: Urban America in the Eighties* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), 16-23.

Rather than drawing attention to the issue, however, Papke recounts how the 1982 recession instead sparked a backlash against the underclass. As used by prominent conservatives, the term was increasingly used to pass judgment upon the lifestyles of the poor rather than to argue for their assistance. Myron Magnet, a journalist for *Fortune* magazine, was indicative of this trend. Crucially, Magnet claimed that what defines members of the underclass was “not so much their poverty or race as their behavior – their chronic lawlessness, drug use, out-of-wedlock births, nonwork, welfare dependency, and school failure.” Therefore, underclass “is at least as much a cultural as an economic condition.”³¹ In a similar vein, the conservative sociologist Christopher Jencks suggested that differences between classes are overshadowed by “larger differences that exist within classes.”³² The argument was that while many people deserved temporary assistance during hard times, there was a category of people for whom no amount of help would be effective. The underclass did not simply lack money or jobs; they were predisposed to squander what little they had, to make “bad choices” in life. Following Reagan’s election, this view was reflected in aggressive cuts made to federal antipoverty funding and heavy restrictions placed on eligibility for those same programmes. Throughout the Reagan administration, policy advice from conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute, American Enterprise Institute, and Hudson Institute entrenched the conservative view of the underclass within the social science literature.³³ Despite its populist and inflammatory tone, Charles Murray’s *Losing Ground* (1984) was considered among the most influential books on the social policy of the Reagan era. Murray argued that government interventions such as the War on Poverty had “inadvertently built a trap” for the poor, making them dependent on welfare and only “produced more poor.”³⁴ Murray amplified the distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor in way that was pure social Darwinism: “Some people are better than others,” he argued, “They deserve more of society’s rewards.”³⁵ By the end of the 1980s, the re-definition of “underclass” as a signifier of moral, cultural or genetic failure was so complete as to force even those sociologists who had pioneered the term to give up on it as hopelessly pejorative.

³¹ Myron Magnet, “America’s Underclass: What To Do?” *Fortune*, May 11, 1987, 130.

³² Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 201-02.

³³ Papke, 18.

³⁴ Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-80* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 9.

³⁵ Murray, 234.

As I explain below, the specific diagnosis of “crack baby” may be said to constitute a specific diagnostic event but the wider *conditions of possibility*, to use Foucault’s phrase, were prepared in advance by decades of social science. This research set a template for talking about the problems of the inner city. Interventions designed to assist the urban poor would not work, not necessarily because the poor were ungrateful but because their unwillingness to be productive was “hard-wired” into them at an early age.³⁶ The immediate moral panic around crack babies was related to the specific dangers of crack cocaine. But the policy context which made the media reporting legible had already framed black solo mothers and their children as “addicted” to welfare. First, racialised, then criminalised, the television images of quivering “addicted” babies merely cemented in the public’s mind that welfare dependency was a biological phenomenon, an epidemic with a hopeless prognosis.

2.6 Case Study: The Crack Baby Myth

The “crack baby” crisis of the late 1980s began when Dr. Ira Chasnoff published an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1985.³⁷ Preliminary in nature, the article highlighted the possibility that drug use by pregnant women could lead to developmental problems later in life. Since it was already known that alcohol and tobacco use in pregnancy could harm the baby, this possibility was taken extremely seriously. However, the scientific evidence soon took a backseat to a set of cultural assumptions. Even while they admitted that Chasnoff’s research was far from conclusive, reporters, armed with the skeletal elements of the story began a series of exposes, many of which focused on establishing crack as more addictive and damaging than other kinds of drugs on the black market. In fact, Chasnoff’s article never mentioned crack – he referred only to cocaine, a drug which is pharmacologically identical to crack. This then was a significant clue that the trope of the “crack baby” was being used to further a pre-existing narrative that in retrospect is rightly called a myth.³⁸

Many of the relevant facts were overlooked during the crisis. Firstly, the negative effects of cocaine on infants were limited and not life-threatening. Despite predictions of a

³⁶ Ortiz and Briggs, 43.

³⁷ Ira J. Chasnoff, William J. Burns, Sidney H. Schnoll and Kayreen A. Burns, “Cocaine Use in Pregnancy,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 313 (1985): 666-669.

³⁸ Reinerman and Levine identify and debunk no less than five myths associated with the usage of crack cocaine. Craig Reinerman and Harry G. Levine, “Crack in the Rearview Mirror: Deconstructing Drug War Mythology” *Social Justice*, 31, no. 1-2 (2004):182-199.

“tidal wave”³⁹ of maladjusted children flooding social services and public education, later studies found “no observative impact on children” from cocaine in isolation.⁴⁰ This was important because mothers who consume cocaine or crack rarely do so in isolation from other drugs such as alcohol and tobacco. Not only was the label of “crack baby” misleading but these other drugs were both more widely used and more harmful. Incredibly, the entire policy response to crack was based on its demonisation relative to other drugs (including cocaine which is essentially the same drug snorted rather than smoked). But not only was the reporting of crack’s harmful effects inaccurate, the notion that its rates of usage constituted an epidemic was a single statistic that was unreliable, overstated then later disproven: there was no increase in crack usage between 1988 and 1994 as the percentage of the population that used it remained absolutely uniform over that time.⁴¹ Some researchers noticed another disturbing trend in the television coverage of babies that were supposedly suffering withdrawal symptoms from intrauterine exposure to crack. These shaking, shrieking babies were not crack babies at all but babies suffering heroin withdrawal or the negative effects of premature delivery.⁴² Though not exclusively, the babies featured on television were predominately black. However, as one newspaper report on crack makes clear, “middle-class women used illicit drugs at virtually the same rate” as low-income minorities.⁴³ The racial and class disparity in the coverage of illegal drugs (not to mention legal pharmaceuticals) was accompanied in the coverage of crack with the suggestion that crack mothers were not only more despicable than other sorts of addicts (and therefore worthy targets for retribution) but that they and their “toxic” children were burdens upon the state. Even this particular frame was one-sided because while both law enforcement and spending on social provisions rely on taxpayer money, it was the only the massive hypothetical costs of public health, welfare and education that was cited alongside crack baby stories. It was in this context that George Miller, a Democratic Congressman, called crack babies “the most expensive babies ever born in

³⁹ T. Berry Brazelton, *Identifying the Needs of Drug-Affected Children: 1990 Issue Forum* (Washington, D.C.: Office for Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990), 1.

⁴⁰ The full quote: “One recent study conducted at Emory University even suggested that, by itself, cocaine has no observable impact on children and that the worrisome condition of so called crack babies results from a combination of factors, such as inadequate pre natal health care and general neglect and abuse.” R. Craig Sautter, “Crack: Healing the Children,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 74, no. 3 (1992): K3.

⁴¹ Ortiz and Briggs, 45-46.

⁴² Dr. Claire Coles cited in Dan Baum *Smoke and Mirrors: The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 217-218.

⁴³ Sautter, K2.

America.”⁴⁴ Indeed, crack babies were the ultimate “welfare addicts” since, according to the right-wing columnist Charles Krauthammer, their “biological inferiority is stamped at birth.”⁴⁵

2.7 Part 2: The Clinton Era

Up until this point, I have used the term Reaganism to describe a political formation covering the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush Snr. as well as a description of particular coalition of interests. The term New Liberalism fulfils the same function for the years in which Bill Clinton held the presidency. As with Reaganism on the political right, New Liberalism encompasses several different strands within and beyond the political left, not all of which sit easily together. It captures something of what Bill Clinton meant when he described himself as a New Democrat or an advocate of Third Way politics. However, New Liberalism goes beyond the arena of public policy to form new context for therapeutic culture with its own distinctive configuration of self, illness and cure. In this section, I therefore also turn from Recovery to an introduction of New Age literature, the dominant mode of self-help during the 1990s. Far from upholding the counter-cultural ideals that one usually associates with the more esoteric end of the New Age spectrum, the *new* New Age literature – which I call centrist New Age – is philosophically radical but culturally quite conservative. While the New Age movement rejects the paranoid assumptions of Recovery, the management of the self is, more than ever, the responsibility of the individual. Centrist New Age literature therefore presents itself as the remedy to a kind of irresponsible thinking, specifically that which compartmentalises the world into competing interests or egos rather than a more holistic interpretation of reality. In the same way as the New Age literature of “personal growth” sets itself the goal of transcending division, New Liberalism sacrifices the many “special interest” groups within the Democratic Party for a consensus primarily organised around the need for economic growth. Indeed, Clinton came to accept neoliberal orthodoxy on many issues, famously declaring that “the era of big government is over.”⁴⁶ Clinton also seemed to accept that the majoritarian values of the centre were socially conservative. The

⁴⁴ George Miller reported by Michelle Gillen in an NBC news segment. Michelle Gillen, “Spotlight: Cocaine Kids: Part II of II,” *The NBC Nightly News*, October 25, 1988.

⁴⁵ Krauthammer, C7.

⁴⁶ Bill Clinton, “State of the Union Address,” January 23, 1996. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=53091>.

chapter concludes with case study following comments made by the Republican vice-president Dan Quayle about a fictional solo mother on the TV sitcom *Murphy Brown*. By following the response of the Clinton campaign and administration, we can see how conservative ideas were, in effect, endorsed by Clinton but at the same time given new meaning within a new context.

2.8 Governing Through Community

The Third Way ends the ideological paralysis which so weakened Labour for thirty years. It asserts our mutual responsibility, our belief in a common purpose. And it also asserts that there is no such “thing” as society; not in the way in which Mrs. Thatcher claimed, but because society is not a “thing” external to our experiences and responsibilities. It is us, all of us.⁴⁷

– Jack Straw, Home Secretary under Tony Blair

New Liberalism might usefully be regarded as a form of Third Way politics specific to the US context. Naming Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and Germany’s Gerhard Schroder amongst its adherents, Alex Callinicos claims that the Third Way has “set the agenda for the moderate left on a European, and indeed a global, scale.” As Callinicos points out, the most common criticism of the Third Way from the left is that it is the economic programme of neoliberalism “pursued by other means.”⁴⁸ This criticism is accompanied by skepticism towards the particular rhetoric of the Third Way – its concern for “values” – and the suggestion that beneath the warm words and the professed commitment to social democracy, there is nothing of real meaning or substance. Nikolas Rose makes these same criticisms in his analysis of Anthony Giddens, the social theorist, who, more than anyone, has defined the intellectual canon of the Third Way. He notes Giddens’ use of “‘therapeutic individualism’ (the language of self-realization),” his “naïve enthusiasm for the mantras of managerial gurus” and his use of political language “suffused with hypocrisy and double-speak.”⁴⁹ The connection that Rose makes between the Third Way and therapeutic culture is obviously of note. But, rather than argue that the Third Way is a case of style over substance, Rose’s criticisms are peripheral to his analysis which suggests

⁴⁷ Jack Straw, “Building Social Cohesion, Order and Inclusion in a Market Economy,” speech given to the Nexus Conference on Mapping out the Third Way, July 3, 1998, available from <http://www.netnexus.org/events/july98/talks/straw.htm>. para. 67.

⁴⁸ Alex Callinicos, *Against the Third Way* (London: Polity Press, 2001), 1, 3.

⁴⁹ Rose, 474.

that the particular language used by Giddens and others points to something genuinely new and significant within the Third Way.

Rose's analysis construes the Third Way of Clinton and Blair as a political rationality quite different from the neoliberalism of Reagan and Thatcher. What emerges most forcefully is a new spatialisation of the collective. In his speech cited above, Jack Straw, a member of Tony Blair's cabinet, reminds us of Margaret Thatcher famous aphorism: "there is no such thing as society." In Thatcher's view, the individual is supreme; society on the other hand is simply an aggregate of individual behaviours analogous to the kind of interactions observable within the marketplace. Derived from the discourse of classical economics, the self within this account of society is a rational being, a self who constantly seeks to maximise their own self-interest. In a surprising move, Straw agrees that Thatcher was, in a sense, correct. There is no such thing as society "because society is not a 'thing.'" Our relationship with society, Straw suggests, is shaped not by its existence as a sociological fact but in our everyday interactions with others. According to Rose, the reason that "community" seems to displace "society" within the vocabulary of the Third Way is that it better corresponds to this relationship; one which emphasises not only the rights accorded to the individual but also the individual's ongoing responsibilities to others. Here, community does not denote a geographical space or even a social space so much as "an affective and ethical field" of relations. The Third Way represents a different way of articulating the tension between the volatile forces of the market and the "durable relations" espoused by conservative politics: marriage, a long-life contribution to the work force, trust in institutions.⁵⁰

In the view of the New Right, cultural elites had somehow conspired with members of the underclass in undermining fixed moral standards of right and wrong. Therefore, in Rose's analysis, there a paradoxical recognition within conservative circles that, despite the invectives directed at "big government," the resources of the state – the "us" in this equation – were needed to fight this war against a lawless, immoral "them." Far from distancing themselves from a moral discourse, the Third Way proposes a "new *moral* vocabulary" through which the emotional demands of the community are channelled, sometimes resulting in even harsher impositions upon moral outlaws.⁵¹ In this way, however, the "us" of the state is expanded and dispersed to include all the members of the community. In the new inclusive vocabulary of public-private partnerships, mutual

⁵⁰ Rose, 476.

⁵¹ Rose, 474. Emphasis in original.

obligations, and voluntary initiatives, the responsibility for social cohesion falls to the community as a whole. On the one hand, the community is given autonomy to pursue its own means of civic renewal; on the other hand, moral diversity is inevitably sidelined in order so that the community can speak with a unitary voice. As Rose says of the UK experience, the “inescapably agonistic arena of the racial, sexual and cultural politics of conduct is effaced, as a single set of moral principles are proclaimed as if they were self-evidently universal.”⁵² While he suggests that the US experience was more complicated, it is clear that the New Democrats signalled their move to the centre by subtly adopting conservative positions on these same contentious areas, distancing themselves from an association with minorities and “special interests.” The ethical citizen-subject of the Third Way proclaimed that it had subsumed the other and transcended the old historical binaries but neoliberalism and its culture war discontents rumbled on.

2.9 New Liberalism

Janice Peck’s analysis of New Liberalism draws substantially from Nikolas Rose’s analysis of the Third Way but ties it to the specificities of American electoral politics.⁵³ According to Peck, New Liberalism represents a coalition of groups within the Democratic Party, similar to the Reagan coalition which brought together conservatives on fiscal, social and national security issues. Peck names three groups in particular: the neoliberals, the communitarians and Southern Democrats.⁵⁴ The neoliberals focused on economic policy and tended to take a libertarian stance on social issues. The communitarians supported those regulations that may be necessary to re-orientate businesses towards community interests. The neoliberals opposed both the regulation and the idea that the government should be an arbiter of community ethics. Meanwhile, the Southern Democrats, offended both neoliberals and communitarians with their desire to win back white voters by asserting their dominance over left-liberal and black constituencies. As a presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, a former governor of a Southern State, was not only a messenger for all three elements of New Liberalism, he was deeply involved in crafting this message of opportunity, responsibility and community.

⁵² Rose, 480.

⁵³ Peck, 114-125.

⁵⁴ This schema is borrowed from Adolph Reed. See Adolph Reed Jr., ed., *Without Justice For All: the New Liberalism and our Retreat from Racial Equality* (Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, 1999), 1-2.

New Liberal philosophy within the Democratic Party was born from the ashes of the disastrous 1980 election defeat to Reagan. Thereafter, the Democrats engaged in a period of strategic soul-searching. In 1981, the CPE or Committee on Party Effectiveness was born, which according to Jon Hale, was “the first organizational embodiment of the New Democrats.”⁵⁵ The membership of the CPE, self-described centrists, were concerned that the Democrats had become a party of “gloom and restraint,”⁵⁶ whereas the Republicans had taken the traditionally Democratic mantle as the party with a “sense of mission.”⁵⁷ After a second presidential election defeat in 1984, a second organisation known as the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) was inaugurated to carry forward CPE policy recommendations. The DLC quest to move the Democrats to the centre seemed even more vital after a third straight presidential loss in 1988. At this point, Bill Clinton, who had been involved with the DLC since its early days, took on a more active role. He assumed the chair of the DLC in 1990 and oversaw a rapid growth in membership. Not only could Clinton count on this membership to raise money for his presidential bid, he was also able to promote a ready-made policy agenda. This agenda responded to polling that showed that the Democrats were vulnerable in areas such as “crime, affirmative action, welfare, and economic justice.”⁵⁸ The New Democrats subsequently moved to weaken the power of liberal activists within the party while also adopting a “pro-family” platform tailored to white, suburban swing voters, the so-called Reagan Democrats. The political calculation that the New Democrats would make is that by focusing their messaging exclusively towards the middle-class they would lose their *identification* with the poor, working-class and minorities yet still retain their traditional voting base. Specifically, Clinton de-emphasised the redistribution of wealth and emphasised his ability to restore growth for all. In other words: rather than cutting the economic pie up differently, the New Democrats would simply make the pie bigger for everyone. Without endorsing the crass materialism of the eighties, the Democrats sought to reclaim from Republicans an optimistic and inclusive vision of the future.⁵⁹ This vision was a synthesis of neoliberals’ understanding of the modern economy and an ethical discourse derived from the communitarians. I examine this alignment in more detail

⁵⁵ Jon F. Hale, “The Making of the New Democrats,” *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 3.

⁵⁶ Doug Henwood, “Clinton’s Liberalism: No Model for the Left,” in *Socialist register 1997*, ed. Leo Panitch (London: Merlin Press, 1997), 162.

⁵⁷ Hale, 2.

⁵⁸ Philip A. Klinkner, “Bill Clinton and the Politics of the New Liberalism,” in *Without Justice for All*, ed. by Adolph Reed Jr. (Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, 1999), 11-28, 12.

⁵⁹ Peck, 115-116.

below, with a particular attention to two concepts: the twin theories of human capital and social capital. The relationship between human and social capital represents the conceptual alignment of neoliberal and communitarian thought at the heart of New Liberalism.

Neoliberalism itself seems to have gained currency as a term in the early 1980s, meaning a neoliberalism of the American left. Randall Rothenberg's 1984 book *The Neoliberals* takes this perspective and name-checks several Democratic senators, representatives, governors and economists including Gary Hart and Robert Reich.⁶⁰ Apprehending a crisis of productivity in the 1970s, the Keynesian model of state-supported demand is questioned. If, as the neoliberals argued, the US had entered a new post-industrial phase, the old economic model could no longer guarantee the progressive ideals promised by the New Deal or the Great Society. Instead, Rothenberg documents how many in the left were now looking to investment in high-tech industries – the essence of what become known as the New Economy. In order for this re-shaping of the economy to take place, the neoliberals argued for more flexible labour regulations and the removal of barriers to risk-taking. As Rothenberg states, the neoliberals called “a return to economic growth as the first principle of liberalism.”⁶¹ Solving the problem of inequality would not come from redistributing a shrinking GDP but by encouraging new types of jobs and a framework in which everyone could succeed. The economic pie would be made bigger but not through a traditional Keynesian stimulus but rather through spurs to private investment and innovation. Therefore, in practice, left neoliberalism would seem to differ little from Reagan's trickle-down policies. It is notable, however, that competition between individuals is de-emphasised in favour of a more socially responsible image of progress. On the one hand, Rothenberg's neoliberals valourised the charismatic individual in the form of the high-tech entrepreneur. On the other hand, they had already developed an ecological consciousness about limited natural resources which a clean, green, information-based economy would protect.⁶²

The transformation of the American workforce was theorised by the neoliberals using the concept of “human capital,” a term borrowed from the work of Chicago economist Gary Becker. Human capital is the sum of an individual's knowledge, skills, and training. As Nikolas Rose points out, all social behaviour can be rendered economically rational: human capital is maximised through an economic calculation of the best possible

⁶⁰ Randall Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

⁶¹ Rothenberg, 45.

⁶² Rothenberg, 80.

choice.⁶³ For Democratic neoliberals, the post-industrial economy is “human-capital intensive”⁶⁴ because it relied not on the simple, repetitive tasks of the factory but on varied, complex tasks requiring the application of knowledge. Education is no longer seen as a marker of class, producing a well-rounded or “cultured” citizen whose knowledge extends beyond what his job requires. Instead, in a human capital perspective, all the advantages of education are rationalised according to the demands of the market. Because individual choice is a building block of neoliberal economic theory, social issues are sidelined. Such is neoliberalism's belief in *individual* competition, the existence of antagonistic relations in the social structure is denied. Therefore traditional antagonies – public versus private, the ruling elite versus the working class, and competition between nations – are reinterpreted as forms of co-operation. Arguably, the end of the Cold War also gave significant impetus to this argument as a truly global “community” emerged from the ashes of communism as a viable form of socio-economic organisation. For Clinton and Blair, there was no necessary contradiction between the support that neoliberals enjoyed from big business and their promotion of communitarian notions of co-operation and community.

The communitarian wing of New Liberalism, like Reaganism, emphasised personal responsibility and a “narrative of moral degeneration.”⁶⁵ But unlike Reaganism, the communitarians also stressed mutual obligation and the government's own responsibility in renewing civic culture. Looking to the work of Robert Bellah, Amitai Etzioni, and Robert Putnam, communitarians interpreted social disorder as a result of the “decay of the networks of civic trust.”⁶⁶ Putnam, a Harvard political scientist, promoted the value of participating in civic and community association and quantified this value over a range of statistics. For example, he compared social isolation to smoking in terms of its negative health outcomes. However, he also found the *quality* of contemporary institutions wanting, and warned of declining democratic participation. While neoliberals favoured the term human capital, Putnam popularised “social capital,” a term borrowed from Chicago sociologist James Coleman. Social capital theorised that “Groups whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish more than comparable groups that lack trustworthiness and trust.”⁶⁷ Whereas human capital

⁶³ Rose, 483.

⁶⁴ Rothenberg, 87.

⁶⁵ Rose, 470.

⁶⁶ Rose, 479.

⁶⁷ James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 304.

emphasised competition and a restless sense of innovation and reform, social capital was more conservative in its outlook; it harked back to a day where majoritarian norms were respected and civic and community associations were well-attended. From this, a new rhetoric of “rights and responsibilities” achieved prominence in Third Way politics.⁶⁸ In substance, however, New Liberal policy differed little from the backlash politics of Reaganism: criminals and welfare beneficiaries were targeted and fused together as “irresponsible” members of the community, those who had not met their obligations and were therefore excluded from mainstream values. Clinton's consistent messaging towards “hard-working” and middle-class Americans was an implicit rebuke to the urban poor. As a Southern Democrat, Clinton was also well-versed in the kinds of subtle cues that would communicate his distance from the disputed areas of racial, sexual and class politics.⁶⁹ Thus communitarian notions, what one Clinton pollster called “a discourse about virtue,” formed a bridge between those who believed who felt that community values were a *casualty* of increased competition under Reagan and those who felt that Democrats were out of touch with the kinds of values *promoted by Reagan*.⁷⁰

2.10 New Liberalism Meets the New Age

By the end of the 1980s, the popularity of the Recovery movement had peaked. As I alluded to in the Introduction, the press core developed a way of speaking about Clinton's distinctive empathetic style that frequently confused Recovery and New Age – an unwitting acknowledgement that, at least in the minds of casual observers, one was now merging into the other. However, Recovery was about to be displaced by a new dominant, that I refer to here as centrist New Age literature. Centrist New Age bears little relation to the New Age of the countercultural sixties or even the New Age practices of the 1980s, which gained the movement some popular recognition if not acceptance. For most Americans, New Age practices such as aura cleansing, crystal healing, tarot card reading and trance channelling remained too esoteric for their tastes. The New Age subculture became a mainstream phenomenon by focusing less on material artefacts – the fashions

⁶⁸ Democratic strategist William Galston and communitarian theorist Amitai Etzioni founded the journal *The Responsive Community: Rights and Responsibilities* in 1991. This is the probable source for this particular trope.

⁶⁹ Henwood, 163-164.

⁷⁰ Stanley Greenberg, *Middle Class Dreams* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1996).

and tools which marked it as different – and more on what it had in common with the middle-class beliefs and practices.

The basic outlook of New Agers and their fellow contemporary “seekers” like Neopagans is defined by what the historian Sydney Ahlstrom calls *harmonial religion*: “those forms of piety and belief in which spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being are understood to flow from a person’s rapport with the cosmos.”⁷¹ This is a pantheistic religious tradition with its origins both in Eastern spiritualities and the European occult. It not only integrates the classic dualism of spirit and matter but implies that the self, as a part of a divine Nature, is itself sacred. In periods of turbulent social change, harmonial religion has delivered a reassuring message: the self is not alone in the world; it is connected to the universe and its infinite powers. The paradox of harmonial religion is that it aims to re-enchant the rationalised world of modernity but, at the same time, it tells its followers that they are at the *vanguard* of modernity, on the verge of beautiful new era, a New Age. This would not appear to be a conservative message because seekers in many ways reject established social norms. It is true that, at least in North America, harmonial religion has been associated with a tradition of religious dissidence that encourages adherents to discover a higher, inner truth; to follow their own path in life. Yet, in the 1990s, without in fact changing its philosophically radical content, New Age literature seemed to find a new audience of white, suburban women who were anything but dissidents. The specific contours of this conservative turn can be understood in the light of the historical and political context of the early 1990s.

As the United States went into the 1992 election, it was mired in recession. Even prior to the Los Angeles riots of May 1992, the confidence of the country had been profoundly shaken. Michael Lerner, psychotherapist and the founder-editor of *Tikkun*, a liberal Jewish journal wrote that the rational, competitive values which prevailed had given rise to:

a crisis in values, the decline of family life, the instability in relationships and friendships ... a deep sense of alienation and loneliness that leads people to hunger for communities of meaning that will transcend me-firstism.⁷²

⁷¹ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 1019.

⁷² Michael Lerner, “Hillary’s Politics, My Meaning,” *Washington Post*, June 13, 1993, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1993/06/13/hillarys-politics-my-meaning/9d9136fb-9c84-40e7-a1e5-ca0ff2581116/>

Lerner's concept, "the politics of meaning" would be transformative for the both Hillary and Bill Clinton (they had been reading his work since 1988). Lerner, for his part, applauded Bill Clinton's re-interpretation of health and success in psychic as well as economic terms. Thus alongside a plan to grow the economy, Clinton and his running partner, Al Gore, spoke of the need to "heal America." That there was a spiritual as well as therapeutic dimension to their plan was made clear in its title: "A New Covenant." The New Liberalism distanced itself from the old liberalism by investing its economic proposals with the kind of majoritarian values so successfully exploited by Republicans. Firstly, New Liberalism marketed itself as a pro-growth agenda. While Mondale and Dukakis had run on a message of austerity, Clinton argued that with prudent physical and social investments America could return to high rates of growth. This represented a mild Keynesianism but more importantly, it was a message of expansion, abundance and optimism for the future. Secondly, Clinton said he would not be a tax-and-spend liberal but foster a "government that offers more empowerment and less entitlement." Promising middle-class tax cuts and stressing the element of choice in government services, Clinton mischievously hinted that taxpayers would somehow only pay for those services they actually used while at the same time subtly stoking enmity against "something-for-nothing" welfare recipients. If these two positions seemed to pull in opposite directions, Clinton and Gore resolved the contradiction by imagining theirs as "a new kind of leadership ... not mired in the past, nor limited by old ideologies." The grand ambitions of the politics of meaning were revealed in a speech by Hillary Clinton, a few months after Bill Clinton first took office at the White House. In the speech, Hillary asked the audience to be "willing to remold society by redefining what it means to be a human being in the twentieth century; moving into a new millennium."⁷³

This belief that Third Way politics should not be beholden to the past is perhaps the most obvious link between New Liberalism and the New Age. Distinguishing the New Age movement from related beliefs such as Neopaganism, Sarah Pike observes that, while drawing from ancient mysticism, "New Agers tend to look toward the future."⁷⁴ This faith in a more enlightened and egalitarian future, of course gives the New Age movement its name. However, New Age seekers were also taking practical steps to shape this future. For example, New Agers were disproportionately involved in the early days of the World

⁷³ Hillary Rodham Clinton in a speech dated April 6, 1993. Cited in Michael Kelly, "St. Hillary," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 1993. <http://semper-fido.blogspot.com/2007/08/saint-hillary-excerpted-from-things.html>.

⁷⁴ Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 34.

Wide Web. Like Al Gore, they embraced the techno-utopian image of the “global village.” Indeed, the Internet formed a potent metaphor for the New Agers and their ambiguous relationship to community. As Pike notes, unlike the cults to which they are unfavourably compared, New Agers have “a tendency to privilege internal over external authority.”⁷⁵ The decentralised nature of the early web mirrored the restless eclecticism of seekers. Something of this tendency can be explained by the large percentage of baby-boomers within the movement. Like many of their baby-boomers peers (including Clinton himself), New Agers grew up to be sceptical of the way that power is exercised, a feeling that extended from their perception of mainstream religion to the political system as a whole. Third Way politics taps into this feeling by emphasising personal responsibility, choice, and by looking for ways to divest power away from centralised government. Of course, if, as Peck says, New Liberalism is a “healing technology,” it is one directed at the entire polity not the kind of self-selecting communities found in the New Age movement. In its popularised form, New Age would not only “eschew social division and conflict,” it would deny the external world of society altogether.⁷⁶

The attitude of the New Age towards society in the 1990s forms the basis of its contrast with its nineteenth-century counterpart New Thought and its immediate predecessor, the Recovery movement. New Age authors presented themselves as a cure to the same crisis of meaning that Michael Lerner had diagnosed and to which New Liberalism responds. But while Lerner suggested that politics could be invested with spiritual values and so “cure” social pathologies, the popularity of New Age belief suggested a darker reality – not only was there a deficit of trust felt by voters towards their fellow citizens, there was also no confidence in politicians to provide solutions. A March 1992 poll, registered the nation’s disillusionment with politics as well as a deep-seated fear of the future:

the American Viewpoint Survey...asked 1,000 voters if they agreed with the statement: “The entire political system is broken. It is run by insiders who do not listen to working people and are incapable of solving our problems.” In a stunning vote of no confidence, 73 percent of them said that reflected their views.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Pike, 26.

⁷⁶ Peck, 111.

⁷⁷ Martin Walker, *Clinton: The President They Deserve* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), 140.

While the New Age revived the old cures of New Thought, the *illness* that gripped American in the early 1990s could be said to be quite different. Whereas the New Thought movement of the late nineteenth-century imagined a sunrise – of the middle-class, of consumer culture, of women’s rights – in 1992 the nation was gripped by the feeling that America itself was a sunset industry. As Clinton’s opponent in the Democratic primaries, Paul Tsongas, liked to say: “The Cold War is over. Japan won.”⁷⁸ The steep decline of US manufacturing under Reagan was followed by round after round of downsizing and outsourcing of white-collar jobs lost to more efficient technologies and global competitors. If this programme of rationalisation was the illness – an absence of meaning – it could not be the cure. This explains why the answers provided by the Recovery movement no longer sufficed. Recovery was, in the end, a rational technology, the application of a kind of cost-benefit analysis to one’s relationships. Whereas Recovery folded disease and self into each other, New Age located pathologies completely apart from the self, in a society that appeared damaged beyond repair.

As an alternative to Recovery literature, New Age offers an ideal of selfhood based around a cosmic alignment of self and world. The self in this schema was essentially good, uncorrupted by society. The natural world too is perfect and eternal, according to this view, but it is concealed by the trappings of society. Seekers believe they can access the divine power of nature, through the technology of the psyche. Where New Thought would likely suggest that correct thinking could transmute itself into material abundance, an opposing trend could also now be observed. New Age encouraged followers to focus on psychic well-being and away from the expectation, promoted in the 1980s, that one could have it all. In a sense, this was a compensatory technology, an acknowledgement that winning through the projection of physical strength or resources was no longer possible. Rather than compete against the other, the competitive drive was psychologised, turned inward. New Age captures this turn, in the concept of *personal growth*. Now one competed within oneself, in the ineffable arena of the spirit. The challenge was to express oneself in creative and authentic ways. Insofar as it was separate from one’s true self, the material world did not exist.

New Age authors like Marianne Williamson embrace this philosophical idealism. Speaking to Oprah Winfrey, in one of her regular appearances, Williamson claimed that “Love is real and nothing else truly exists ... Love is always available regardless of what is

⁷⁸ Walker, 38.

appearing to happen on the earth plane.”⁷⁹ According to Williamson, rational thinking is the “thinking of the world” and is inevitably associated with negativity: “thoughts like competition, struggle, sickness, finite resources, limitation, guilt, bad, death, scarcity, and loss.” Rather than simply accept this negative reality, Williamson asks readers to use a form of cognitive psychology to alter their thoughts and by doing so “return to love,” the natural bond between self and “a world full of enchantment” that every child is born with. (The inner child metaphor, common to Recovery literature, is reworked here in a New Age mode). Arguably, the most notable aspect of Williamson’s cosmology is not its radicalism – the denial of matter – but its conservatism. This is evident in Williamson’s use of Christian symbolism; her consistent references to God, prayer, angels, and miracles. Far from the anti-capitalist impulses of the counterculture, Williamson tends to hide her critique of corporatism or consumer culture behind psycho-spiritual abstraction (although it becomes more explicit in her later works). Above all, centrist New Age’s understanding of psychology places personal responsibility and choice at its heart. Just as in Recovery, the enchanted self is subject to unending work and revision.

2.11 Case Study: The Murphy Brown Controversy and its Aftermath

In May 1992, Los Angeles was devastated by the worst rioting in the city’s history. On May 19, Dan Quayle, the vice-president leapt into the fray with a speech which presented the case for understanding the riots within the same “culture of poverty” thesis that had been applied to the underclass during the Reagan era. Over the next month or so, Quayle extended this cultural explanation to all manner of social ills, specifically targeting “cultural elites” – in media, entertainment and academia – who he blamed for endorsing a failed liberal experiment whose consequence was the “breakdown in family structure, personal responsibility and social order.” However, what really inflamed the controversy was a lone sentence aimed at the popular TV sitcom *Murphy Brown*. Here, Quayle singled out a recently-aired episode that, for Quayle, was symptomatic of an absence of moral standards in the wider culture:

It doesn’t help matters when prime-time TV has *Murphy Brown* – a character who supposedly epitomizes today’s intelligent, highly paid, professional women –

⁷⁹ Marianne Williamson as cited from an episode of the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, June 24, 1992. See also Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another “lifestyle choice.”⁸⁰

That *Murphy Brown* was watched and enjoyed by tens of millions of viewers goes somewhere to explaining the heated reaction generated by this attack – the story immediately became headline news on all three of the major television networks.⁸¹ Yet despite the strength of feeling expressed in opposition to Quayle’s comment, Republicans did not walk back their commitment to family values. On the contrary, Republicans saw this as a winning strategy, a message reinforced throughout the election season and highlighted once again during their party conference.

Craig Smith provides some context for Quayle’s attempt to reassert the Republican party’s ownership of family values discourse. Firstly, there was the issue of timing. In the immediate aftermath of the LA riots, the public seemed to equate the destruction of the city with a failure of leadership on the part of President Bush. This was not simply a question of law and order or even the spectre of racial tensions. In the midst of a recession, the riots were just another moment that symbolised the despair felt within the electorate. Despite George Bush’s best efforts, fully a third of the voting public had indicated their support of Ross Perot, a populist billionaire. In terms of a longer-term strategy, Republicans were probably right to think that their commitment to the family was one area in which they had supremacy over the likely Democratic nominee Bill Clinton, who at that point was mired in an adultery scandal. However, as Smith points out, they appeared to overplay their hand. The traditional supporters of “pro-family” campaigns, the Christian Right, were in a slump. Figures such as Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggert had been discredited while another, Jerry Falwell, had pared back his national ambitions. Overt displays of reactionary sexual politics – directed towards feminists and homosexuals – were no longer as palatable to the general public as they had been during the 1980s.⁸²

However, as Judith Stacey explains, the election of Bill Clinton did not mark the end of family values discourse. While Clinton expressed pride in his humble, single-parent upbringing, within a year the president would begin to support what Stacey calls a

⁸⁰ Dan Quayle, speech to Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, May 19, 1992. Cited in J. E. Yang & A. Devoy “Quayle: ‘Hollywood Doesn’t Get It,’” *Washington Post*, May 21, 1992, A17.

⁸¹ Craig R. Smith, “Dan Quayle on Family Values: Epideitic Appeals in Political Campaigns,” *Southern Communication Journal* 60 (1995): 152-64, 153.

⁸² Smith, 153-154.

“revisionist campaign for family values.”⁸³ By December 1993, Clinton had even begun to endorse Quayle’s position:

Remember the Dan Quayle speech? There were a lot of very good things in that speech... Would we be a better-off society if babies were born to married couples? You bet we would.⁸⁴

The beachhead of a campaign that was intended to eventually reach the general population was a series of articles directed at the very cultural elites that Dan Quayle had so offended. The first sign was an April 1993 cover story in the *Atlantic* magazine, written by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, and provocatively titled: “Dan Quayle Was Right.”⁸⁵ On the face of it, the title alone should have annoyed the *Atlantic*’s solidly liberal audience. Instead the magazine reported widespread approval, “the single strongest public response to any issue ever published by the *Atlantic* since at least 1981.”⁸⁶ While Whitehead’s article was subsequently reprinted and repurposed in other periodicals, its core message was backed up by another op-ed by David Popenoe in the *New York Times*. Like Whitehead, Popenoe stood at the head of a new kind of centrist think-tank that self-identified as New Democratic. Like Whitehead, Popenoe promoted what he touted as “The Controversial Truth: Two-Parent Families Are Better.”⁸⁷

As Stacey rightly points out, the campaign was no more or less than a programme “to restore the privileged status of lifelong, heterosexual marriage.”⁸⁸ She expresses surprise at the swiftness with which Clinton’s priorities seemed to have changed. However, the context of New Liberalism, articulated above, provides a framework for parsing what was new about this campaign from the kind of backlash politics that dominated the Reagan period. Indeed, rather than consider this as debate between conservatives and liberals, it can be located in tensions already internal to New Liberalism, specifically the tension between communitarians and Southern Democrats. From a Foucauldian perspective, this was the pursuit of moral imperatives by other means. As the Republican’s evangelical power base was waning, heterosexual privilege was to be

⁸³ Stacey, 51.

⁸⁴ Bill Clinton cited in Michael Kranish, “In Bully Pulpit, Preaching Values,” *Boston Globe*, December 10, 1993, 17.

⁸⁵ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” *Atlantic* 271, no. 4 (April 1993), 47-84.

⁸⁶ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Was Dan Quayle Right?,” *Family Affairs* 6, nos. 1-2 (Winter 1994), 13.

⁸⁷ David Popenoe, “The Controversial Truth: Two-Parent Families Are Better,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1992, 13.

⁸⁸ Stacey, 53.

preserved, not through the intersection of church and government but through the language and institutions of science and the academy.

This was another kind of surprising correspondence since academics were in fact one of the favourite targets of New Right. Quayle himself painted universities as a hornet's nest of atheists, Marxists and anti-family feminists. In the initial *Murphy Brown* speech and its similarly-themed follow-ups, Quayle drew the connections between these liberal, ivory tower elites and the urban poor that had just wrecked havoc in Los Angeles (a view which exactly matches Nikolas Rose's analysis of the New Right's culture war strategy cited earlier). The perception, evident in the *Murphy Brown* speech, was that liberals sustained the underclass both economically, through perverse incentives built into the welfare system, and ideologically, through their tolerance of anti-social attitudes. Calling attention to the class and racial coding inherent in Quayle's attempt to link a "lawless" underclass to Murphy Brown's "lifestyle choice,"⁸⁹ Stacey described the attack as "an ill-fated attempt to play the Willie Horton card in whiteface."⁹⁰ Yet whereas the Willie Horton ads proved effective for Bush four years earlier, Quayle's *Murphy Brown* speech was a flop. In one poll, three times the number of respondents felt that Quayle was "completely unjustified" than believed he was "completely justified."⁹¹ However, while voters were alienated by an attack on a much-loved, wealthy and *fictional* single mother, interrelated questions of race and class would still be very much in play over the next few years.

While the Republican's message to evangelicals was plain, the resurgence of the Democrats was based on a more carefully-worded strategy. The business-friendly policies adopted by the New Democrats went alongside what Mike Davis calls the "suburbanization of economic growth" in the 1990s. By 1992, suburban residents had become "the political majority in the United States."⁹² Suburbanites were a mixture of working class and middle-class voters but in their racial make-up they were overwhelmingly white. In order to pull Reagan Democrats back into the fold, Clinton crafted a message that hinted that his sympathies were with the suburbs. Because, as Davis says, "urban" had acquired a "semantic identity" with "non-white," even apparently innocuous Clintonian phrases such as "the forgotten middle-class" served to placate white

⁸⁹ Quayle in Yang & Devoy, A17.

⁹⁰ Stacey, 65.

⁹¹ From a Time-CNN poll conducted in June 1992. Cited in William L. Benoit & K. Kerby Anderson, "Blending Politics and Entertainment: Dan Quayle versus Murphy Brown," *Southern Communication Journal* 62, no. 1, 73-85 (Fall 1996): 79.

⁹² Mike Davis, *Dead Cities* (New York: New Press, 2002), 256.

voters who felt their interests were not being protected, while simultaneously reminding them of George Bush's dismal record on the economy.⁹³ The fact that in Clinton's policy document, *Putting People First*, welfare reform was highlighted while urban problems were omitted was, however, a more obvious signal of intent.⁹⁴ As Paul Frymer notes, the book

had only one reference to race, and this was to oppose the use of racial quotas as a remedy for employment and education inequality. A chapter entitled "Cities" did not mention the problems of inner cities or the continuing existence of de facto racial segregation, while the chapter on civil rights devoted more space to people with physical disabilities than to African Americans.⁹⁵

Bill Clinton's own visit to post-riot Los Angeles only seemed to echo Republican talking points with references to the underclass, the culture of poverty and moral degeneration.⁹⁶ Most visibly, he used the opportunity to attack a controversial rap artist called Sista Souljah accusing her of inciting black-on-white violence. Dan Quayle seemed to actually follow Clinton's lead in this regard, later wading into a controversy over a song called "Cop Killer" by Body Count, a rock band featuring the gangster rapper Ice-T. Again, Quayle held that elites legitimised urban violence by allowing it to be glamorised in music. He called for the record company, Time Warner, to exhibit "corporate responsibility."⁹⁷ Indeed, Republicans and Democrats seemed to be swapping roles. In his choice of staging and rhetoric, it was Clinton that was now given to overt displays of religiousity. Standing in front of First African Methodist Episcopal Church, Clinton spoke "in rhythmic cadences like those of the Baptist clergymen" as he called for a national day of prayer. Drawing from his Southern roots, Clinton was able to bring the underclass ("Just below the mainstream") into a narrative of redemption. Clinton also used the occasion to stress what was new about New Liberalism, by invoking "a spirit of genuine community," staging his visit amongst volunteer efforts to clean up the damage wrought by the riots.

⁹³ Davis, 255.

⁹⁴ Bill Clinton and Al Gore, *Putting People First: How We Can All Change America*. (New York: Times Books, 1992).

⁹⁵ Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁹⁶ Robert Pear, "Riots In Los Angeles: Challenger; Nation Needs Healing, Clinton Says," *New York Times*, May 4, 1992, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/04/us/riots-in-los-angeles-challenger-nation-needs-healing-clinton-says.html>.

⁹⁷ Dan Quayle cited in Smith, 153.

Indeed, the speech was a tapestry of New Liberalism themes, weaving together its diagnosis (the failure of trickle-down economics) and with its distinctive cures (the healing power of prayer):

Just below the mainstream, there is another stream of Americans living apart from our values, apart from our institutions, apart from the warm embrace of a church like this, with no connection to a society or a higher power.⁹⁸

In speeches such as the one cited above, Clinton mixed religion with social science into what Rose calls the “new moral vocabulary” of communitarianism. In framing his argument within the social capital thesis, Clinton avoided the “old” liberal themes of racial and economic disparity and moved to the notion that the urban poor suffered from a lack of “durable relations.” As Rose says, communitarians originally privileged “durable relations” of all sorts; it was meant to apply to schools, housing, hospitals and so on. Yet, under Clinton, communitarianism was increasingly directed to the one institution only: the family. Policy institutes, think tanks and commissions with names like the Institute for American Values (co-directed by Whitehead) and the Council on Families in America (co-chaired by Popenoe) were set up with the goal of validating heterosexual marriage as what Popenoe called the “*ideal* family environment for childrearing.”⁹⁹ Through what Stacey calls “social scientific sleights of hand,” a wealth of statistics that appears to bear out this “truth” was disseminated and eagerly consumed within media circles.¹⁰⁰ *Newsweek* columnist and Clinton supporter, Joe Klein, railed against Hollywood and the “fashion” for out-of-wedlock births in a manner strikingly similar to Quayle. However, according to Klein, his view was incontrovertible:

there’s now a mountain of data showing illegitimacy to be the smoking gun in a sickening array of pathologies – crime, drug abuse, physical and mental illness, welfare dependency.¹⁰¹

Though Klein’s views are apparently formed with the benefit of science, his invocation of the disease metaphor seems designed to do exactly what social conservatives

⁹⁸ Bill Clinton cited in Pear, n.p.

⁹⁹ David Popenoe, “Scholars Should Worry about the Disintegration of the American Family,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 14, 1993, A48.

¹⁰⁰ Stacey, 56.

¹⁰¹ Joe Klein, “The Out-of-Wedlock Question,” *Newsweek*, December 13, 1993, 37.

had done in the Reagan era – make disreputable any deviation from the nuclear family by associating it with a reflexive contempt for the underclass. Stacey does note several areas where revisionists, many of whom identified as communitarians, moderated their tone, particularly in the area of gender equality. However, even communitarian founder, the sociologist, Amitai Etzioni admitted that the movement “completely avoided” issues of sexual politics “such as abortion and gay rights.”¹⁰² Such occlusions served to reinforce the perception that the communitarians chose not to grasp social realities as they really were but rather framed them through a commitment to a unitary, normative ideal. Though it was of course fictional, Murphy Brown’s onscreen rebuttal of Dan Quayle demonstrated that when faced with the reality of unconventional families, this “moral” ideal was itself disreputable. Nevertheless, as a formative plank of the project of New Liberalism, it would continue to shape mainstream thinking throughout the Clinton Era.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the Foucauldian conception of political reason is related to the dominant themes of American politics in the late twentieth-century: neoliberalism under Reagan and Third Way politics under Clinton. At the same time, the specific American context in which Reaganism or New Liberalism arose as *political formations* is distinguished from neoliberalism and the Third Way as *political rationalities*. Thus the governmental strategies of neoliberalism or community (to use Nikolas Rose’s term) are made distinct from the everyday manoeuvring and messaging of political parties. These strategies are instead related to the production of objective knowledge about what a human being is and how they should conduct themselves in order to increase the health and prosperity of the individual and the nation.

In the two case studies I have presented for each period, I have been broadly sceptical of this knowledge, produced respectively by medical science and social science. Yet, rather than viewing it as false knowledge produced under conditions of domination, the analysis is not presented as a judgement upon the medical laboratories, think tanks, government officials, members of the opposition, and news media, all of whom bear some responsibility in producing and circulating this information. On the contrary, the more dubious the information and the wider the consensus about this reality, the more it speaks

¹⁰² Amitai Etzioni cited in Karen Winkler, “Communitarians Move Their Ideas Outside Academic Arena,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 21, 1993, A13.

to the alignment of political rationality, on the one hand, and subjectivity, on the other. In both the case studies I have presented, there is a cluster of problems – drug addiction, poverty, crime, and racial enmity. Yet, arguably, they rise to the level of national consciousness because they are framed first and foremost as moral outrages, as problems which are not only corrosive of the nation’s physical strength but of its values. Over the next three chapters, I examine the Reagan-Bush and Clinton eras again, but through an examination of popular self-help books. Here too, the answers to physical health, economic health and moral health are all delivered as the answers to the same basic questions, posed within the same configuration of self, illness and cure.

3 Self-Help In the Eighties

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the context for an examination of therapeutic discourse, looking outside of self-help to wider historical and political changes. Over the next three chapters, I return to Recovery literature and New Age literature in relation to the period in which they enjoyed their greatest popularity, the Reagan-Bush era and the Clinton era respectively. However, the focus of these chapters is on the literature itself. In addition to a handful of texts that I take to be exemplary of Recovery and the New Age, I also look at a few texts peripheral to those particular variants of self-help. Widening the circle in this way, demonstrates something of the internal dynamics of self-help. Of course, neither Recovery nor New Age literature arrived on bookshelves as fully-formed generic types but were themselves responsive to existing trends inside *and* outside of therapeutic discourse. As I have argued, these trends can be said to be connected to something more than the ephemeral winds of fashion or topicality. Rather, they suggest that, over a period of some thirty years, therapeutic discourse was both reflecting and contributing to major changes in how people related to themselves, to their peers and to figures and institutions of authority. I have identified this perspective by Foucault's concept of governmentality.

Governmentality, in the hands of theorists such as Nikolas Rose, provides a comparatively strong historicisation of therapeutic culture where the mechanism and shape of social change is sharply defined. In Chapter Two, I used Rose's historical schema to describe the political rationality of the Reagan-Bush era as one dominated by competition, choice and individual autonomy – in short, neoliberalism. Nothing in the following reading of eighties' self-help leads me to question this. And yet, just as there are tensions between the social conservatism of Reaganism and the abiding political rationality of the period, there is a messiness to the way that self-help concretely expresses the neoliberal ideal that is revealing. An analysis of self-help literature at the level of metaphor is revealing in two respects. Metaphors are of course inherently messy; they are employed in irregular and contradictory ways. However, this variety is not infinite: broad patterns of representation are clearly identifiable; each book under analysis stands in for dozens of similarly-themed titles.

Firstly, following these broad patterns, there is a clear historical trajectory that can

be traced between the mid-seventies and the late eighties. Secondly, by tracing a limited set of metaphors – survival, self-realisation and disease – we can see how the neoliberal ideal is unevenly applied, along the axes of race, class and gender. In particular, this chapter looks at how in women’s self-help responds to neoliberalism’s demand for autonomy in ways that are distinctly gendered and how, over time, this demand created a pathological identity that was nevertheless claimed by women in the name of freedom. In order to understand how apparently reactionary or repressive practices were, during the 1980s, regarded as empowering, this chapter counterposes the Foucauldian view of liberal rule against sociology’s “essentially negative” view of freedom.¹ To this end, this chapter forms of dialogue between authors like Rose and other more sociological readings of eighties’ self-help.

3.2 Psychology From Adjustment to Liberation

In previous chapters, I have outlined in broad strokes the transition from welfarism to neoliberalism; how it was that governments moved from developing policies in the name of society to a situation where policies would be developed in the name of the individual. According to Rose, this transition is not simply one of adjusting policy settings; it occurs at the level of subjectification, whereby human beings become, in an almost literal way, different kinds of animals. Thus, while the welfare state simultaneously produces a *society* inhabited by *social beings*, the neoliberalism of the Reagan-Thatcher years produces new markets to be navigated by a new kind of economic animal, *homo economicus*. In all areas of life, the economic self is governed by the obligation to choose, to maximise his or her self-interest through rational decision-making.² The role of neoclassical economists such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman in objectifying this shift has been much discussed.³ Arguably, though, the lead role has been played by the psychological sciences.

John Steadman Rice provides a useful breakdown of this change as it relates to a few core assumptions about the interaction of human nature and culture. According to Rice, the emergence of what he calls “liberation psychotherapy” in the 1950s gave rise to “fundamentally different rules for truth” than the “discourses of adaption” that preceded

¹ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

² Nikolas Rose, “Inventiveness in Politics,” *Economy and Society* 28, no. 3, (2009): 474.

³ For just one example, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

it.⁴ Adaptation or adjustment psychology, associated with the height of Freudian theory in America insisted that:

(1) humans are by nature aggressive and potentially dangerous, and (2) culture, as the source of human morality and civilized existence, is both valuable and necessary for social order.⁵

According to adjustment psychology, the repression of individuals within society is justified by an appeal to the greater public good. In a sense though, this repression – or *regulation* to put it in terms more amenable to governmentality – is also justified in the name of freedom, not individual freedom but the *freedom through solidarity* characteristic of welfarism. (This distinction is important in the difference between the “classic” form of Alcoholics Anonymous and the discourse of Recovery that I discuss later in the chapter.) The advent of liberation psychotherapy, which Rice associates with the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, completely inverts the guiding assumptions of adaptation. It is no longer the case that “the sick individual throws the system out of balance,” instead it is “the system [that] makes the individual sick.”⁶ Preceding neoliberalism by many decades, Rogers and Maslow’s humanistic psychology, nevertheless provided the rules by which a new kind of free autonomous being could operate. In contrast to Freud, humanistic psychology argues that:

(1) the individual is innately “constructive and trustworthy,” (2) this individual, moreover, is the “true self,” sequestered behind a wall of defences born of repressive cultural authority, and (or) (3) emotional experience and expression best access the nature of the self.⁷

Rogers and Maslow were themselves rather staid, conservative academics who considered their ideas as an addition to, not a rejection of Freudianism. Nevertheless, by the mid-sixties, the basic ideas of humanistic psychology had been swept into the whirlwind of the counterculture. Student politics, civil rights, feminism, experiments in sexual freedom, altered consciousness and Eastern religion: all these would have points of contact with humanistic psychology or its more popularised counterpart, the Human

⁴ John Steadman Rice, “Discursive Formation, Life Stories, and the Emergence of Codependency: “Power/Knowledge” and the Search for Identity,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 33, no.3 (Autumn, 1992): 340, 341.

⁵ Rice, 341.

⁶ Rice, 347.

⁷ Rice, 348.

Potential Movement (HPM). The characteristic techniques of HPM were meditation, the ingestion of psychedelic drugs, “body work” (physically-intensive forms of therapy); *techniques of the self*, as Foucault would say. Most of all, the premises of what Maslow called “self-actualisation,” were technologised in the form of the encounter session: a long, intense group therapy session dedicated to breaking down the phoniness of “culture” and reveal the truth of the self in all its benevolent and expressive glory. The impulse towards what might variously be called self-actualisation, self-realisation, or simply self-fulfilment forms one pole of the self-help spectrum. It finds its strongest articulation in HPM-style groups that proliferated in the late sixties and seventies, under the umbrella of what Steven Starker has termed selfist psychology.⁸ Selfism, encompassing both groups and books on the topic, may have promised worldly success but it is, in the first instance, focused on the ineffable search for self-knowledge – not through the intellectual technology of the talking cure but through the primacy of experience. Crucially, however, the other pole, a kind of anti-therapeutic, libertarian form of self-help known as survivalism, also shares some of the same precepts of humanistic psychology. It too believed in the liberation of the individual and the repressive nature of society especially as it was embodied in institutions and collectives. Like selfist psychology and the counterculture more generally, it could trace its roots back to the nineteenth-century and beyond. My interest here is in the specific ways that these two long-standing and apparently contradictory discourses come together in the self-help of the eighties. This was possible because, under neoliberalism, a more fundamental consensus was reached about the human being and the need to respect the freedom of the individual. Though the pendulum clearly swung away from expressivity and towards rational modes of thought during the Reagan-Bush era, self-realisation as an ideal never went away entirely and returned more strongly in the nineties.

For Rose, political rationalities do not correspond in any direct way to social realities nor does the articulation of political thought automatically translate into the desired social consequences. Nevertheless, somewhere in the mid-1970s, a major social change was occurring that appeared to precipitate the birth of neoliberalism as a systematic form of government. This change was prompted by a sense of crisis that went by many names: a crisis of the welfare state, a crisis of productivity, as well as what Jimmy Carter called a “crisis of confidence,” a lack of trust that applied not only to individual politicians but to the whole democratic process and its ability to effect positive change within

⁸ Steven Starker, *Oracle at the Supermarket: the American Preoccupation with Self-Help Books* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

people's lives.⁹ In the United States, the indices of this crisis were everywhere: Vietnam, Watergate, the oil shocks, double-digit inflation, the ghettoisation of the inner cities and growing labour unrest. The counterculture, which was at first energised by an optimistic view of the future, had now fractured and dissipated. What arose in its place was on the one hand, a series of radical political collectives, and on the other hand, a series of increasingly radical therapies associated with the HPM. From common beginnings, the latter split from the former, dispensing with the idea of collective transformation or believing that such a distant dream could only be fulfilled by first liberating individuals from within. In a famous 1976 cover story for *New York* magazine, the writer Tom Wolfe's labelled the seventies as the "Me" decade. Among Wolfe's many claims, one that did seem to have predictive power was that whether one belonged to one of the New Left groups or whether one belonged to the more psycho-spiritual tribes, the technique of the encounter session was moving people in a more mystical direction. In this movement lay a considerable historical irony: within this rejection of bureaucratic conformity, lay the seeds of a revitalised conservative movement. For instance, as Wolfe notes, there was a direct route from the hippie commune to groups such as the Jesus People, the very same evangelical Christians who would prove so important to Ronald Reagan's election campaign.¹⁰ As groups such as *est* showed, the discovery of the true self could also be big business; founder Werner Erhard had developed a massified version of the encounter session reaching, over time, hundreds of thousands of people. In fact, the inward turn associated with the countercultural left would prove to be more subtle yet much more pervasive than these limited examples suggest. Like a wave, the desire to express one's individuality was sweeping America and it would soon be harnessed by business and politics alike.

Rose actually makes a similar point. Like Rice, Rose gives the psychological sciences a central role in the shift from the welfare state (or "social state"), to neoliberalism (or "advanced liberalism," as Rose prefers). Psychological science would provide one of two clusters of technologies of importance, the other being technologies of consumption.¹¹ There has been a substantial overlap between these two clusters across the twentieth century. During the seventies, the interaction of consumption and psychology was changing, encouraging people to think about themselves in ways no longer bound to

⁹ Jimmy Carter, "Crisis of Confidence" Speech, July 15, 1979. This special, televised speech is very often known as the "malaise" speech though Carter never actually used that word.

¹⁰ Tom Wolfe, "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening," *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976. <http://nymag.com/news/features/45938/>.

¹¹ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 84-85.

traditional affiliations of ethnicity or class. The benefits for the political right in such situation were obvious: if one could completely satisfy one's desires through the mechanism of the market or through the insights of psychology, the state's role could be vastly reduced. This is not quite Rose's argument, however, because for him it is not a question of greater or lesser influence for the state, for the market, or for psychology. For Rose, advanced liberalism is characterised by active not passive government, coordinated by but not limited to the functioning of the state. The work of governing autonomous individuals meant reforming every aspect of their lives to maximise choice and thereby responsibility. While policies that favoured deregulation or privatisation might mean less direct state control, the state could not rely on freedom to spring forth naturally from the interaction of individuals and markets, such a freedom would have to be created.

3.3 Survivalism and "Having It All"

For Rose then, neoliberalism as was practiced during the 1980s was not a return to classical *laissez-faire* liberalism. However, as the sociologist Micki McGee points out, there was, during the mid-seventies, a very definite trend in self-help that harked back to the social Darwinism of the late nineteenth-century. This was the trend towards what she calls survivalist literature.¹² At the same time as it looked backward, survivalist literature anticipated Reaganism (though its conservatism was of a very different sort) and, finally, reflected its own time, the sense of deep crisis that seemed to permeate the mid-to-late seventies. Survivalism differed in kind from most business-orientated advice books on the market in its cynical and often apocalyptic tone. For instance, some of the more literal interpretations of the survivalist theme counselled readers how to survive the collapse of the state or the economy or the food supply. Nor did survivalism have much in common with selfist psychology; it was not therapeutic in the sense that therapy can be defined as a secular form of soul-searching. Survivalist literature uses psychology not as a device for truth-telling; on the contrary, its usefulness is in its ability to create little lies – small tricks designed to turn the weaknesses of others to one's own advantage. According to McGee, the dominant metaphors in survivalist literature are the "metaphors of life as a game and the world as a jungle."¹³ Among the most popular titles of the survivalist trend were two

¹² Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc. Makeover Culture in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 49-55.

¹³ McGee, 52.

by libertarian author Robert J. Ringer: *Winning Through Intimidation* (1973) and *Looking Out for Number One* (1977).¹⁴ The blunt social Darwinism of authors such as Ringer is obvious in his depiction of the marketplace as a space operating according to the laws of nature. Though these laws are rational and immutable, the likening of the business world to the jungle is clearly not a neutral metaphor; like the jungle, business is said to exact a brutal judgment upon failure. The hero of such books is a savage predator but one whose ruthlessness is justified as the alternative is to be cast in the role of victim. However, a second metaphor, that of life as poker game, betrays a certain paranoia in Ringer's writing. Whatever the "winner" has accumulated through his constant strategising might suddenly be taken away, by blind chance or even by the "losers" in life: "people who genuinely want you to get what you want, but wind up swiping your chips anyway."¹⁵ This fear of victims and victimhood seems to be a new addition to libertarian's traditional fear of the mob. Rather than returning to Victorian values, it appears as a response to a more recent memory, the various civil rights movements of the 1960s, wherein collective victimhood was the starting point for collective action. For Ringer, there is "weakness in numbers, not strength."¹⁶ What is interesting here is that his dismissal of collective action as beset by "bureaucratic muddling" not only prefigured a key theme of Reaganism, it coincides with the shift within in social movements towards more personal forms of liberation, some no doubt also frustrated by factionalism.¹⁷ Despite the gulf that separates them, that there should be any affinities at all between survivalist literature and the new therapeutic forms of the counterculture demonstrated that the ground on which the state was built was shifting, producing a new kind of freedom articulated by those on both the left and the right. Both these groups associated this new freedom with an elevation of the market; in the first instance as a rational (if sometimes violent) allocator of resources, creating and destroying indiscriminately, and in the second instance as a vehicle of consumer desire, intimately connected to the hopes and fears of the individual.

It would be difficult to wholly reconcile the political formation of Reaganism with either view of the market thrown up in the turmoil of the mid-seventies. Nevertheless, elements of both survivalism and selfist psychology survived in self-help books of the early 1980s, particularly those written for a female audience. As McGee notes, the notion

¹⁴ Robert J. Ringer, *Looking Out for Number One* (Beverly Hills, C.A.: Los Angeles Book Corp., distributed by Funk and Wagnalls, 1977). Robert J. Ringer, *Winning Through Intimidation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1974 [1973]).

¹⁵ Ringer, *Winning Through Intimidation*, 34-35.

¹⁶ Ringer, *Looking Out for Number One*, 110.

¹⁷ Ringer, *Looking Out for Number One*, 132.

that women might “have it all” intensified during the ten-year period from 1973 to 1983, the same period where women’s participation in the labour force increased dramatically.¹⁸ “Having it all” acquired a specific meaning: equal participation in private and public life. However, one should be attuned to the ways in which this division was gendered in the first place. One should also be aware of the ways in which the sociological vocabulary is wedded to these divisions. For instance, in McGee’s analysis the two strands of self-help – survivalist and self-expressive – are given a specific inflection when introduced into women’s self-help of the early 1980s. This “gendered split” from “unisex literature” (invariably masculinist by default) also reproduces the public and private split: on the one hand, the dog-eat-dog sense of competition that we find in survivalist business advice was softened for a female readership uncomfortable with “breaches of gendered propriety” while, on the other hand, the expectation that one should be fulfilled in one’s personal life was amplified for women.¹⁹ Within the terms of the “gendered split” set up by McGee, this observation holds true. However, the underlying analysis struggles to go beyond the dichotomous language of sociology. As Rose points out, the tendencies within traditional sociology lead to an impoverished, “essentially negative” definition of freedom.²⁰ This is most obviously the case when McGee accuses the new women’s self-help books of “reactionary” tendencies because they advocated a version of autonomy that was “modeled on traditional masculine versions of an isolated individual.”²¹ According to McGee, women were failing to respect the boundaries that held public and private spheres apart, by applying the language and principles of business to friends and family. This appears to be a coded if familiar critique of neoliberalism, that it extends market principles to all spheres of existence. However, McGee fails to distinguish neoliberalism as a particular instance from her more general claim about the “collapse” of public and private spheres.²² The negative inflection given to this “collapse” is almost demanded by the sociological narrative of detraditionalisation – the long breakdown of traditional codes of authority and civility over the course of the twentieth-century. Yet feminists have also shown how these codes were often oppressive, how the separation of work and home worked to exclude women from public life and how the personal and the political should be understood as

¹⁸ The percentage of women employed in the US civilian labour force increased from 44.7 percent in 1973 to 52.9 percent in 1983, nearly an 8 percent increase. During the same decade male labour force participation declined by nearly 2.5 percent (from 78.8 percent to 76.4 percent). Cited in the *Economic Report of the President* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000, 2003).

¹⁹ McGee, 81, 84.

²⁰ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 1.

²¹ McGee, 83.

²² McGee, 69.

mutually constitutive. This is consistent with the Foucauldian approach, which is not to apprehend the relative influence of private and public spheres (as if our innermost desires could ever be truly divorced from larger cultural imperatives) but to establish how the particular arrangement of forces in one period marks a break with the previous form of government. Rather than evaluate these strategies in terms of their relative repression, the Foucauldian approach takes seriously the claim that neoliberalism (or more precisely Reaganism) is, like other forms of liberal rule, invested in its claims to enhance freedom. The problem for sociologists like McGee is that they cannot reconcile the positive image of freedom presented by Reaganism with a feminist perspective. This is plainly because the Reagan period brings a kind of women's self-help which rejects many of the ideals of second wave feminism and regards all forms of solidarity as an imposition.²³

The new Reagan-era self-help for women essentially abandons the collective idea of the sisterhood in order to promote the virtue of competition, through the omnipresent Reaganite figure of the *winner*. Winning as a metaphor for conduct has clear ties to seventies' survivalism, yet the expressivity of selfist psychology is not entirely lost either. As the Reagan era begins, however, this particular mixture of existing cultural ideas is mapped on to a new governmental context, which in turn gives rise to a different kind of political-economic subject. Accordingly, Rose aligns neoliberal government with a form of subjectivity he calls the "enterprising self."²⁴ While an enterprising self can be calculating, these rational strategies are put towards the ultimate goal of self-fulfillment, the expansion of one's autonomy. The Reagan period does of course signal a different *kind* of freedom to that of the counterculture. For example, countercultural experiments in communal living expressed a desire to create one's own standards, independent of society. The enterprising self's freedom is, however, validated within the competitive space of the market. One's success – one's ability to compete and win – becomes the test and measurement of one's individuality. Yet because this is an almost moral impulse, rather than the expression of a strictly economic rationalism, the limits of competition are unevenly defined according to cultural boundaries of gender and class.

²³ I am not saying that, during the eighties, women's self-help rejects feminism *per se*. Indeed, Helen Gurley Brown expresses admiration for Gloria Steinem at one point. However, the overall tenor of the book is quite at odds with second wave feminism and the notion of collective political action specifically. See also Elayne Rapping as on the "aristocratic fantasy" aspect of Reaganism and its connection with the glitzy media construction, of the so-called New Women. Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 60.

²⁴ Nikolas Rose, "Governing the Enterprising Self," in *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate*, ed. Paul Heelas, Scott Lash and Paul Morris (London: Routledge, 1992), 141-64.

A useful place to begin a discussion of the gendered nature of Reagan-era self-help is to revisit McGee's point about the collapse of public and private spheres. As she noted, there exists a kind of neoliberal women's self-help which extends the language and ethos of business to family, friends and, especially, lovers. However, the attempt to conflate financial independence and sexual liberation only serves to mark the difference between women's autonomy and that of men's in the early 1980s. Rather than demonstrating how business and pleasure are seamlessly merged together, governed by the same logic of calculation and competition, self-help exposes how only certain types of competitive behaviour by women is accepted. For example, titles like Irene Kassorla's *Nice Girls Do!* present the assertion of sexual freedom, the expansion of choices for women, as daringly modern.²⁵ Indeed, for Kassorla, fulfillment in terms of sexual satisfaction is central to one's overall identity as a "winner."²⁶

However, the advice for business is quite different. *Having It All*, the 1982 best-seller by Helen Gurley Brown, advocates that women compete among themselves *for* men but in the world of work, they should subordinate themselves to the demands of their, invariably male, bosses. (The workplace is an excellent place to meet men and women should actively foster these relations, she suggests.)²⁷ To make her point, Brown even coins her own neologism, the "mouseburger."²⁸ "Mouseburgering" is Brown's euphemism for the small humiliations, which she supposes, are happily endured by female white-collar workers. Though the term itself hardly commands respect, Brown draws on her own experience, to argue that every mouseburger is a servant with the potential to become a master (or as Brown says, recalling the jungle metaphors of survivalism, "you look *tame* but there is this fierceness").²⁹ Even if she lacks extraordinary beauty or intellect, the application of a Protestant work ethic makes the mouseburger so effective as to become indispensable to an organisation. Yet the format of *Having It All*, suggests something quite different to traditional Protestant verities. While Brown preaches the virtue of self-discipline in chapters such as "Diet," "Exercise," "Your Face and Body," and "Clothes," this is self-discipline formed through the matrix of competition. Specifically, women are

²⁵ Irene C. Kassorla, *Nice Girls Do—and Now You Can Too!* (Los Angeles: Stratford Press, 1980).

²⁶ The winning theme dominates Kassorla's sequel to *Nice Girls Do!*, entitled *Go For It!* Section titles include "Winning Beats Losing," "Winners Get Going," "Winners Are Positive," and "Winners Are Real." See Irene C. Kassorla, *Go for It! How to Win at Love, Work and Play* (New York: Delacorte, 1984).

²⁷ Helen Gurley Brown, *Having It All: Love-Success-Sex-Money, Even If You're Starting with Nothing* (Reprint, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1983 (1982)).

²⁸ The second and largest chapter of *Having It All* is devoted to this subject: "How to 'Mouseburger' Your Way to the Top." Brown, 16-96.

²⁹ Brown, 14.

asked to “win” male attention inside and outside of the workplace. While the arrival of the sexually liberated woman, which Brown herself pioneered in her 1962 bestseller, *Sex and the Single Girl*, was no doubt a personal revelation for many, it did little to threaten the status quo as far as women’s access to economic or political power.³⁰ After a generation of heightened feminist consciousness, Brown still reverts to this status quo, suggesting that a woman’s best chance to “win” was not to challenge men but to gain power *through* them, playing according to their rules.

Helen Gurley Brown’s investment in the status quo is also revealing in terms of class. Whilst drawing from her own experience, Brown simultaneously taps a reservoir of aristocratic fantasy, so prominent in the popular imaginary of the Reagan era. Brown’s worldview rests to a large degree upon this experience as a best-selling author, long-time editor of the popular women’s magazine *Cosmopolitan* and wife of a Hollywood movie executive. Having gone through her own hard times in her youth, Brown is clearly invested in her own rags-to-riches narrative, the self-help trope that says “if I can do it, so can you.” However, when Brown reflects upon her transformation from mouseburger to magazine power-broker, an uneasy tension opens up. Brown seems to vacillate between, on the one hand, a version of social Darwinism that condemns most women (those without exceptional beauty or talent) to a life of dependency and, on the other hand, the neoliberal belief that *investments* may be made in one’s *human capital* that can secure one’s place above the rabble, if only through dependence on a man. It is this economistic sense of the self – the purposeful management of one’s personal capacities – that Brown seems to extend to the whole of life: the management of one’s time but also the managing of one’s desires, one’s emotional commitments and one’s presentation.³¹

Near the beginning of *Having It All*, Brown recalls a little epiphany that speaks to Brown’s rationale for writing the book; its value to the public justified in terms of its fidelity to her own experience. However, projected on to an unknown young woman, the anecdote (which I quote at length here) is revealing of her own anxieties, a sense of self-doubt that occasionally forces Brown to admit that even she does not “have it all.” Like many of the anecdotes in the book, Gurley finds herself not at the office but entertaining

³⁰ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: Avon Books, 1962).

³¹ According to Colin Gordon, human capital translates to *always* being at work in the sense that one is already working on one’s self, applying the same rational strategies to “the whole ensemble of individual life” See Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: an Introduction,” *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 42, 44.

the rich and famous. In this instance, she is holidaying at Martha's Vineyard, while her husband overlooks the production of the movie *Jaws*. As Brown recounts:

I saw a rather pretty girl – twenty-two perhaps – sitting in a canvas chair out on the dock. She had a nice body, long legs, which she was toasting in the sun. I studied her – the face isn't as good as the body I decided ... nose a little big, eyes a little small, mouth a bit thin. Nice girl, nothing special.³²

Musing to herself, Brown assesses the women's chances in life which she immediately connects to the women's ability to attract and marry a male partner:

What if she ran into a desirable man up here in Martha's Vineyard? I asked myself – the young director on this picture, Steven Spielberg, the actor Richard Dreyfuss? Would she have a chance with, say, Woody Allen, Jack Nicholson, Mick Jagger, Warren Beatty, Al Pacino, Cary Grant, Jerzy Kosinsky or any other – at that time – well-known bachelor? She would have a chance as a hanger-on, I decided ... a little cookieburger that one of these men might take on for an evening, for, after all, she is nubile and pleasant-looking and probably not unintelligent. But unless she turns out to be the millionaire dock-owner's daughter (millionaires' daughters frequently do okay) or had some other illustrious family member to help her (people tend rather to like to collect famous politicians' children) there probably would be no way she could appeal to these men on her own – there's just nothing that accomplished to *listen* to.³³

Here Brown does not simply celebrate fame but a certain kind of *autonomy* embodied in the aristocratic lifestyle of the Hollywood playboy or millionaire bachelor. It is therefore doubly removed from the situation of the young woman described, being neither rich nor a man. Nevertheless, with a sufficient work ethic, such a woman can entertain the possibility that "people will listen to her":

Yet I know as I walk past with David and the *Jaws* production man that if that girl *wants* to ... if she craves everything out of life as much as I have craved it – longs

³² Brown, 94. Emphasis in original.

³³ Brown, 94. Emphasis in original.

as much as *I* have longed – she can have her man – a good and “heavy” one as well as a place in the sunshine that will make people listen to *her* and not reject her because she looks okay but not great. Drive and need and longing can get her to that place and that point – *any* intelligent woman can get there.³⁴

Even supposing a young woman *could* realise the remote scenario that Brown outlines (in defiance of her supposed biological inferiority), Brown paints a bleak picture of gender relations in which the most a women can aspire to is not to be entirely ignored. At the same time, it is also a bleak picture of class relations in Reagan-era America which “winners” are celebrated and the poor are simply absent. Since her personal experience is the basis of *Having It All*’s “surmount all obstacles” narrative, Brown makes no attempt to include a diversity of experience. Indeed, as the first chapter makes clear, the book is specifically written for the upwardly-mobile, who like Brown, regard envy and selfishness as necessary attributes for success.³⁵ This exclusion goes some way to explain why the book’s survivalist tropes are, for the most part, delivered in a cheery tone, despite being published in the midst of a devastating recession. Yet, even in absentia, the pathologies of the poor are clear – they lack the “drive,” the agency by which to succeed.

Brown’s ignorance of the working class is perhaps exemplified by her treatment of children and the family. The short shrift given to family in *Having It All* is remarkable given that the phrase “having it all” is very often used to refer to exactly this balancing of work and domestic duties. Yet, having decided not to have children, Brown pays little attention to the topic. Her solution is blithely dished out: simply hire a housekeeper or nanny and carry on as before.

3.4 Recovery Literature

As outlined in Chapter Two, by the mid-eighties, a new wave of women’s self-help *was* bringing the family, front and centre. The Recovery movement, the tenets of which were spelled out in innumerable titles during the Reagan-Bush years, was in many ways the polar opposite of traditional self-help. Books like *Having It All* were in the tradition of old-fashioned etiquette manuals, in which small nuggets of advice are offered on a whole

³⁴ Brown, 94-95. Emphasis in original.

³⁵ In Chapter 1. “Who Are You?” Brown lists the attributes of readers who will find the book useful. Point numbers 8 and 9 are headed, “Envy is not unknown to you” and “You’re more selfish than altruistic.” Brown, 12.

range of topics. Recovery literature, on the other hand, was not just self-reflective, it offered an entire psycho-spiritual worldview. Recovery said the American family was in crisis and that nothing less than sweeping changes were required. That the tone of the Recovery movement was relentlessly negative suggested that, while the wider culture celebrated the opulence of the *nouveau riche*, families across America were in fact being torn asunder.

The depth of despair felt, by women especially, was in fact connected to a period where women were realising one of the promises of feminism, gaining access to the workforce in record numbers. As Janice Peck points out, working outside the home, or more precisely, the *choice* to work outside the home was a key demand of liberal feminism.³⁶ By 1983, over half of women (52.9%) were in paid employment.³⁷ However, viewed through the prism of choice, the outcome – that women were increasingly miserable – would seem a bitter pill for feminism to swallow. Indeed, conservatives who connected the supposed decline of the nuclear family to any number of social pathologies could blame feminism for this situation and at the same time frame their argument through a rhetoric of choice consistent with neoliberal economic policies. Since Susan Faludi's 1991 book of the same name, these kinds of arguments, designed to discredit feminism, have been synonymous with the term "backlash" or "backlash politics."³⁸ However, looked at through the lens of *economic* as opposed to moral deprivation – that is, *concrete* rather than abstract choices – the data paints a different picture. As real wages fell, women did choose to work, but they likely did so in order to maintain the stability of household incomes. By one calculation, "without the work of wives, the entire bottom 60 percent of the US population would have had real income losses between 1970 and 1986."³⁹ Having found jobs, women then found that they were being actively discriminated against; given fewer opportunities than men, paid less than men for the same jobs, and at the same time, were expected to provide childcare and other domestic responsibilities with or without the assistance of men. As the feminist revolution stalled, women in particular seemed to be suffering and sociologists began to speak of a "feminization of poverty."⁴⁰ This

³⁶ Janice Peck, *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era* (Boulder, C.O.: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 41.

³⁷ *Economic Report of the President*.

³⁸ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Vintage, 1991).

³⁹ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 260.

⁴⁰ The term "feminization of poverty" belongs to Diana Pearce, who, in 1978, noted that two thirds of the poor over age 16 were women. See Pearce, "The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work and Welfare," *The Urban and Social Change Review* 11, no. 23-36 (Winter-Spring 1978).

formulation described the correlation of rising poverty rates with households maintained by women alone, a trend first noted in the late 1970s and which continued to be tracked through the recessions of the early 1980s. While feminism had earlier broken some of the taboos around divorce, there was, as Faludi notes, a media backlash, which began to single out female-headed families for criticism. Rather than discuss the economic and institutional reasons for female poverty, the data was manipulated in such a way to “prove” the superiority of the traditional nuclear family. Nevertheless, the unhappiness within families was real and it was the Recovery movement’s cultural explanations and not feminism’s political explanations that dominated the national conversation.

The rise of Recovery in the mid-eighties divided feminists, a debate which returns us again to the relationship between the personal and the political. Despite its jokey title, Wendy Kaminer’s *I’m Dysfunctional, You’re Dysfunctional* takes seriously what she regards as the authoritarian, cult-like power of the Recovery movement, specifically the importance that the movement places on surrendering to a “higher power.”⁴¹ According to the basic text of Narcotics Anonymous, one of the first groups to branch off from AA:

Complete surrender is the key to recovery, and total abstinence is the only thing that has ever worked for us. In our experience, no addict who has completely surrendered to this program has ever failed to find recovery.⁴²

Kaminer notes the infantilisation of adults within the movement, who are directed to see themselves through the eyes of their own childhood, to get in touch with their “inner child.” For Kaminer, Recovery’s attempt to universalise suffering – its famous claim that 96 percent of the population from dysfunctional families – actually works to reinforce gendered notions of victimhood among its overwhelmingly female audience. Kaminer’s solution is a dose of old-fashioned stoicism, in which people make their own decisions without deferring to figures of authority. Communications scholar, Elayne Rapping responds sympathetically to Kaminer’s contention that in Recovery, “The personal subsumes the political.”⁴³ However, Rapping sees Kaminer’s position as evidence of a liberal feminist position in which equality may be pursued by conventional political means (for example, support for pay parity laws or state-funded childcare) but the broader structure of society remains untouched. A more radical feminism would seek to reconnect

⁴¹ Wendy Kaminer, *I’m Dysfunctional, You’re Dysfunctional* (New York, Vintage Books, 1992), 6.

⁴² Narcotics Anonymous, *Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text*, 5th Ed. (Van Nuys, C.A.: World Service Office, 1988), 87.

⁴³ Kaminer, 156.

the personal and the political, it would not simply “deny,” as Rapping says, “the political nature of personal problems.”⁴⁴ According to Rapping, Recovery’s success is, in part, attributable to the way in which it recognises anxieties, often lying just below the surface of everyday life, as *real*. She draws the link to the consciousness-raising groups of second-wave feminism. Feminism also identified “situations [that] were not right, not acceptable, not what one should tolerate” but rather than focus on the pain itself, its solutions took into account the causes of that pain, “the social context in which our suffering is born and grows.”⁴⁵ For this reason, she regards Recovery as a palliative rather than a genuine cure.

However, Rapping fails to separate the social and political context within which the Recovery movement operates from the disease model of addiction itself. She presents the metaphor of disease as part of a “master narrative” that is itself driving social change, spreading to all areas of life (much like a disease itself).⁴⁶ But Recovery is not some abstract, autonomous process imposed upon society; it is circulated through what Rose would call technologies of consumption – daytime talk shows, prime-time docudramas and self-help paperbacks – and the technologies associated with psychology, specifically, treatment programmes as they are integrated into the infrastructure of public health and state law. While Rapping recognises the role of the mass media (indeed the way her book is structured suggests as much), her analysis, like McGee’s, is wedded to a narrative of decline. But if Recovery is really “reactionary and repressive” as Rapping claims, its repression can only be relative, measured against a hypothetical notion of absolute freedom.⁴⁷ (In other words, freedom is used as a measurement of degree not of kind). Rapping must admit, for instance, that in speaking openly, and in a sense, normalising “family dysfunction,” Recovery has at least banished an even more repressive Freudian model of psychology.⁴⁸ This feminist critique of Freud does not, however, acknowledge the way in which the larger project of adjustment psychology also serves an affirmative principle, actively constituting subjects, in their concern for society, as *social beings*.

In Chapter Two, I described how the Recovery groups of the eighties were modeled on the various Anonymous groups, chiefly Alcoholics Anonymous. For Rapping, the transition between “classic AA” and Recovery is essentially continuous because she views it from the point of view of the diffusion of the disease model to any and all addictive behaviours. From the point of view of governmentality, however, the techniques of the self

⁴⁴ Elayne Rapping. “Needed: A Radical Recovery,” *The Progressive*; January 1993; 57, 1, 34.

⁴⁵ Elayne Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery*, 6-7.

⁴⁶ Rapping, 13.

⁴⁷ Rapping, 7.

⁴⁸ Rapping, 4.

associated with classic AA are put to quite different uses in the eighties. For decades, AA was a product of the adjustment model of psychology, which I have linked to the welfarist regime of government. The emphasis in such a regime is upon conformity not individuality. Indeed, AA concealed the identity of its membership precisely because the social stigma attached to any kind of abnormal behavior was so high. The two main constitutive techniques used in traditional AA, as identified by Tara Lyons, are confession and abstinence.⁴⁹ In the context of the neoliberal era, these techniques constitute a different kind of subject when deployed within Recovery. The subject is no longer a social being but a rational, *entrepreneurial* subject who must manage their own risk. Confession, in the era of daytime talk shows, becomes a public, mediated event. Abstinence no longer simply refers to addiction to biological agents such as alcohol and drugs but to a whole range of interpersonal behaviours, where the aim is not necessarily to achieve restitution *with* others but rather to take back power and control *from* others. In a neoliberal environment, addiction is pathological because it limits the individual's capacity to make choices. The techniques of the 12-step programme can be seen as working towards the liberation of the individual, inasmuch as the individual is free and able to *exercise the choice* to confess and abstain. Neoliberalism confers particular responsibility upon the individual for their health. As Sarah Nettleton has noted, this also creates a situation where expertise in health is not paternalistically handed down but must be also be actively chosen.⁵⁰ The explosion of variety seen in AA-style groups during the 1980s – private, voluntary groups all – is itself evidence of this market logic at work.

To “classic AA” and NA, a host of organisations such as ACoA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) and CODA (Co-Dependents Anonymous) were added to the Anonymous movement in this period. Much of the coherence of these individual groups, however, can be attributed to a handful of blockbuster self-help titles. In Chapter Two, I briefly introduced the most influential books in this respect: Robin Norwood's *Women Who Love Too Much*, which was translated directly into a thriving network of WWLTM groups, and Melody Beattie's *Co-Dependent No More*, which was most people's written introduction to the concept of co-dependency. These canonic titles (along with the works of John Bradshaw and Ann Wilson Schaef) define the way that Recovery subtly altered the

⁴⁹ Tara Lyons, “The Constitution of Entrepreneurial Subjects: The Alignment of Narcotics Anonymous and Neoliberalism,” (Masters diss., Concordia University, 2005).

⁵⁰ Sarah Nettleton, “Governing the Risky Self: How to Become Healthy Wealthy and Wise’ in *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, ed. R. Bunton and A. Petersen (London: Routledge, 1997), 207-222.

language and dogma of classic AA.⁵¹ Liberation is not a word one readily associates with the sub-genre of Recovery; if the goal of Recovery is self-knowledge, the truth revealed is invariably cold and hard. Yet, returning to these texts here, one can see in more detail how the rhetoric of personal liberation operates within the words of these authors, *despite* the kinds of material and ideological constraints that I have outlined above. Put simply, the Recovery movement emerges in the gap between a cultural ideal – the neoliberal dream of complete autonomy – and the reality, especially for women. This gap is already apparent in the success or “winners” literature of authors like Helen Gurley Brown; most obviously in the description of the winner as a subject position – usually rich, single and male – from which almost all readers are excluded. For Brown, however, the glass is still half-full. While the ideal is held out as a glorious (if unlikely) possibility, she assumes that once one begins to climb the ladder of success one can never slip back down. Recovery literature, on the other hand, builds on the most paranoid assumptions of survivalism: for Recovery, the impossible ideal of autonomy, is the now the minimal condition for survival. At the very moment that neoliberalism works to create new markets, multiplying the range of choices available to the entrepreneurial subject, Recovery works to make these choices the object of restless internal and external scrutiny. From sex to shopping, choice is no longer seen as a vehicle for self-expressivity but that which must be carefully managed within a narrow range of action. The comparison with earlier self-help texts like *Having It All* is instructive since it points to rapid change of tone within the field over a period of only a few years. It is useful to consider then how the roots of Recovery lie not only in feminism or in classic AA but in relation to the earlier self-help tropes.

Robin Norwood’s place in the canon of Recovery was secured by virtue of the fact that her book was the first bestseller to turn what was ostensibly a male problem – distant, alcoholic men – into a female problem – an *addiction* to these same dysfunctional men. According to Norwood, love addiction is a “form of addiction as dangerous and degrading as alcoholism.”⁵² Describing emotional dependency as functionally equivalent to biological dependency is the first of a number of strategies by which the former is metaphorically grounded in biology. It also enables Norwood to claim that Recovery from love addiction is a matter of literal survival:

⁵¹ See, for example, John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw On: The Family* (Deerfield Beach, F.L.: Health Communications, 1988) and Ann Wilson Schaef, *When Society Becomes An Addict* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

⁵² Robin Norwood, *Women Who Love Too Much* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1985), vi.

It was clear that both partners in these couples were equally in need of help, indeed that both were literally dying of their addictions, he from the effects of chemical abuse, she of the effects of extreme stress.⁵³

The controversial idea that addiction to emotional pain is a “specific syndrome” is further bolstered by two other lines of thought.⁵⁴ The first is that the love addict may themselves become addicted to alcohol, drugs, and food; a sort of contagion effect. Secondly, Norwood introduces biology through the mechanism of genetic inheritance. In trying to manage the affairs of their out-of-control alcoholic partners, she claimed that these women “were unconsciously recreating and reliving significant aspects of their childhood.”⁵⁵ Norwood offers several examples of women who, through the therapeutic process, come to realise the extent of their father’s drinking problem. While Norwood weaves psychological and biological explanations together, a double-standard is apparent in her analysis. Norwood does not excuse men for being “inappropriate, uncaring, or unavailable,” but neither does she target sexist behaviour or a sexist culture, preferring to understand alcoholism as a biological disease, the cure for which would be to stop drinking.⁵⁶ On the other hand, women are not encouraged to change their material circumstances. As Rapping points out, the obvious equivalent of abstinence in love addiction would be for women to simply leave their deadbeat partners, a solution not even broached by Norwood. Instead, the prescription for women is cultural, they should not live differently, but think differently. Men are not asked to change; instead women must change their “pattern of relating to men.”⁵⁷ Beyond attending Recovery meetings, what this change might consist of is left conspicuously vague. The important thing is the confession, claiming one’s identity as a *recovering* addict as opposed to an addict. Inhabiting this identity “will be frightening, threatening, and constantly challenging”⁵⁸ and for this reason, many readers will be in *denial*, a word which would later extend to anyone skeptical of Recovery.⁵⁹ However, the consequences of not changing are potentially fatal: “if you don’t change your pattern of relating ... your struggle will not be toward growth but merely toward

⁵³ Norwood, 3.

⁵⁴ Norwood, 2.

⁵⁵ Norwood, 2.

⁵⁶ Norwood, 1.

⁵⁷ Norwood, 5.

⁵⁸ Norwood, 5.

⁵⁹ According to Norwood, “We all need to deny what is too painful or too threatening for us to accept.” In this way, anyone who does not identify as an addict is assumed to be in denial. The same logic could be applied to outsiders critical of recovery. See Norwood, 4.

survival. The choice is yours.”⁶⁰ Despite the hints of social Darwinism – the suggestion that certain people are simply born damaged – Norwood’s survivalism is not one of ruthless, hierarchical competition. Rather the disease metaphor serves as a great equaliser: everyone (that is to say, middle-class women) is laid low, made to focus not on external success but on the inward rewards of “grace and dignity.”⁶¹ In this way, Recovery literature anticipates the theme of spiritual consolation in New Age literature.

While Recovery may be seen as a reaction against the impossibility of “having it all,” Norwood, like Brown, still foregrounds the importance of making good choices. Noting the prevalence of the Recovery narrative in daytime television talk shows, Janice Peck argues that:

the centrality of the notion of “individual choice” in framing the discussion of women’s lives helps keep at bay the connection between the personal and the political...choices are understood purely at the level of individual action ...⁶²

While Peck’s point is well-taken, one still needs to “flesh out” the concept of choice as it appears in Recovery thinking and neoliberalism more generally. This enables us to go beyond the agency/structure binaries associated with sociology. Understood within the framework of governmentality, choice is not understood in the abstract but as part of the history of liberalism. Understood in this way, the relationship between the personal and the political is one of alignment to the dominant political rationality. Techniques of the self, such as those that exist in Recovery, turn political thought into personal practice. As Rose reminds us, these techniques work to “to align political, social, and institutional goals with individual pleasures and desires, and the happiness and fulfillment of the self.”⁶³ While competition and choice have always been important aspects of liberal rule, the conflation of choice and freedom may be seen as a recent phenomenon associated with neoliberalism. Rose describes this as an intensification of liberalism: “modern individuals are not merely ‘free to choose,’ but *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice.”⁶⁴

Significantly, Recovery, and its near synonym, co-dependency not only require the addict to see their own life in terms of choices but also to see their relationships through

⁶⁰ Norwood, 5.

⁶¹ Norwood, vi.

⁶² Peck, 44.

⁶³ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Press, 1989, Second Edition, 1999), 261.

⁶⁴ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 87.

this strategic prism. The subtitle of Melody Beattie's *Co-Dependent No More* handily summarises this interpersonal dynamic with a demand to "stop controlling others and start caring for yourself."⁶⁵ Like Recovery, the co-dependency movement highlights a dramatic shift in the object of addiction, defined not in terms of substances but relationships. It also places renewed emphasis upon the notion of "self-care"⁶⁶ as opposed to the "common welfare"⁶⁷ of the group, a notion inscribed in the first of AA's Twelve Traditions. Another core tenet of the 12-step programme is the acknowledgement of the addict's debt to society and the steps that must be taken towards restitution.⁶⁸ Beattie's argument, however, goes in the opposite direction: it is our efforts to intervene in the lives of others that are pathological. According to Beattie, "the basics of self-care" begin with detaching oneself from an excessive concern with other people and their problems:

Detachment is based on the premises that each person is responsible for himself, that we can't solve problems that aren't ours to solve, and that worrying doesn't help....If people have created some disasters for themselves, we allow them to face their own proverbial music. We allow people to be who they are. We give them the freedom to be responsible and to grow. And we give ourselves the same freedom. We live our life to the best of our ability. We strive to ascertain what it is we can change and what we cannot change. Then we stop trying to change things we can't.⁶⁹

If *Having It All* was a tacit endorsement of the status quo, Beattie argues quite forcefully that intervention in "the market" of human conduct is self-defeating. Indeed, a clearer articulation of the neoliberal ethos one could hardly hope to find. By allowing others to make bad choices, Beattie seems to say, failure can make its own judgement upon individuals and preserve the higher principle of individual choice. Intervention would be ultimately corrosive with respect to our own choices, the sum of which defines who we are as individuals.

⁶⁵ Melody Beattie. *Co-dependent No More* (Melbourne, Australia: Collins Dove, 1987).1989 edition

⁶⁶ Beattie, 53. "The Basics of Self-Care" is the name given to Part II of *Co-dependent No More*. Self-Care is the substance of the book, covered across sixteen chapters.

⁶⁷ The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous were partly formulated and published at the same time as the Twelve Steps in 1939. They were revised in 1946, formally adopted by the membership in 1950 and published in book form in 1953. The first of the Twelve Traditions states: "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA unity."

⁶⁸ Two of the Twelve Steps speak to the idea of restitution or to "make amends."

⁶⁹ Beattie, 60.

But Beattie's emphasis upon the status quo ("making the most of what we have") seems to come at the expense of self-transformation.⁷⁰ The sense that there is only limited scope for actual, concrete changes – as opposed to the abstract choice of labeling oneself an addict – pervades the literature of Recovery. Despite the way that Recovery frames addiction as an object of scientific truth, rather than the product of social and economic pressures, in fact the latter re-assert themselves in the way that co-dependency becomes a universal category. As Beattie runs through pages and pages of bullet-points, she details every conceivable problem that might afflict her audience. (Every problem, that is, besides those attributable to capitalism or patriarchy.) Each problem leads to same diagnosis of co-dependency, even those that are direct contradiction to each other. According to Beattie, co-dependents tend to "come from troubled, repressed, or dysfunctional families." But a co-dependent is also someone who would "deny their family was troubled, repressed, or dysfunctional." Similarly, co-dependents can "be extremely responsible" or, at the same time, "be extremely irresponsible." Co-dependents "look strong but feel helpless," "appear controlling but in reality are controlled themselves," and so on and so forth. One is even a co-dependent irrespective of gender, since Beattie is keen to extend the category to men too. In this way, the one choice which is privileged by co-dependency – the choice to confess and abstain – is presented not as a choice at all but a pre-ordained conclusion. Therefore, while the presentation of co-dependency as a universal condition works to reduce the social stigma of the "disease," it does little to achieve the autonomy that is the professed goal of Recovery.⁷¹

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at two quite different genres of self-help, combining two different interpretative strategies. Though published only a few years apart, there is apparently little commonality between my main examples: Helen Gurley Brown, on the one hand, and Norwood and Beattie, on the other. As I have said, Brown's *Having It All* represents a rather old-fashioned kind of self-help, combining the autobiography of a successful person with "rules" regarding social etiquette and self-presentation that, applied properly, will help the reader find similar success. It is an instance of what the social historian Richard Weiss described as success literature, famously epitomised by a series of

⁷⁰ Beattie, 61.

⁷¹ Beattie, 42, 49, 51.

books written by the late-nineteenth century author Horatio Alger.⁷² Just as in Alger's stories, the plucky hero of *Having It All* climbs the ladder of success, rising through the ranks of society. I have suggested that Brown's book represents a variant of success literature with might be called *winner's literature* in recognition of the strong emphasis upon competition within the book. While Alger's books recognised *luck*, the element of divine favour, just as much as *pluck* or self-determination, Brown's narrative tries to minimise those factors that might excuse failure, preferring instead to insist that winners simply surmount those obstacles that others, lacking the same determination, do not. While this may seem to be just another iteration of the self-made success formula, I have suggested that – in its triumphalism, its celebration of wealth, and most especially, its extension of business rhetoric to *all* one's capacities – *Having It All* places itself firmly within the cultural context of Reaganism.

The comparison between Brown's glamorous superwoman and the harried victim of Recovery literature could hardly be starker. While Brown instructs one in the little lies of impression management, Norwood and Beattie counsel complete honesty. While Brown reaches for the stars, Recovery can only promise that one's life will once again be manageable. However, what I have tried to demonstrate is that the popularity of Recovery literature in the mid-to-late 1980s actually responds to the same victim-blaming dynamic that is buried within *Having It All* and which, despite her best intentions, Brown cannot entirely repress: the demand for independence, for competition and choice in the abstract is, in reality, stifled by ideological and economic barriers placed in front of women and the working class. Hence, in Brown, a muted survivalism: competition is fostered but only at arm's length; one's success never comes at the expense of another, direct challenges to patriarchy or capitalism are out of bounds. Similarly, in Recovery literature, the inability to satisfy the drive towards self-sufficiency leads to a perverse logic: empowerment comes in the form of self-knowledge but, ironically, this "knowledge" is the recognition that one is in fact powerless. To be in Recovery, to work the programme, is to acknowledge that you will in fact never recover.

The other element of continuity between winner's literature and Recovery is a heightened sense of responsibility. In Brown, the notion of the emotional bank account is used to apply a kind of cost/benefit analysis to one's time and energy. For Brown, this is a tool by which the self is made accountable for time spent away from "productive" activities, or similarly, a way to turn relationships into opportunities for self-advancement.

⁷² Richard Weiss, *The American Myth of Success* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988 [1969]).

In Recovery, however, the subject is governed by metaphors of disease: each and every interaction with others becomes a potential site of addiction or abuse. Unlike Brown, this is also the expression of a profound dissatisfaction with the status quo. Beattie, for example, believes that the caretaker role taken up by women should be refused along with other similar “lies”:

Don't be selfish, always be kind and help people, never hurt other people's feelings because we make them feel, never say no, and don't mention personal wants and needs because it's not polite.⁷³

Culture, as embodied in the institutions of the family, the school or religion, is therefore under attack in Recovery, just as it was in the counterculture of the sixties and the survivalism of the seventies.

The important point here is that cultural trends in self-help – rational, expressive, *laissez-faire* or reformist – are not randomly distributed nor are they, as McGee sometimes suggests, the result of a linear processes spanning across several centuries.⁷⁴ In the 1980s, the call for freedom in the name of the individual is made consistently, instituted in policies with broad political support (such as those discussed in Chapter Two), and in the type of personal conduct advocated by self-help literature and less directly in many other forms of cultural production. Thus, while a cultural history of the self cuts across the more stable periodisation associated with governmentality, it is the latter which determines the context in which these more ephemeral trends are received. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the rules for truth that govern how we understand human subjectivity underwent a complete inversion in the middle of the twentieth century and those rules have buttressed the legitimacy of neoliberalism as a political rationality. By the same token, however, the legitimacy of any form of government is constantly being tested. The uneven application of neoliberalism with respect to certain parts of the population, as evidenced by internal inconsistencies in the kinds of self-help I have just discussed, created the hesitant beginnings of a new form of government in the 1990s. This form of rule was not made not in the name of society or the individual, but in the name of community. In the following chapter, I look at nineties' self-help, from the point of view of the relationship between the new territory of community and the authentic form of subjectivity which it presupposes.

⁷³ Beattie, 93.

⁷⁴ McGee, 76-77.

4 Second-Wave Recovery

4.1 Introduction

This chapter follows the framework of Chapter Three: the textual analysis of a genre or sub-genre of self-help is aligned to a historical shift in subjectivity which, in turn, is aligned to the dominant political rationality of a given period. In the preceding analysis, the success literature of the early 1980s and the Recovery literature of the mid-to-late 1980s are both aligned to an economically rational form of subjectivity (*homo economicus*) and the political rationality of neoliberalism. This political rationality should be seen as something that survives the Reagan presidency but survives in an environment increasingly hostile not only to market-based reforms but to the very idea that choice was equivalent to freedom; that from the expansion of choice, the expansion of individual freedom would necessarily follow. Freedom would have to be found elsewhere, in the emergence of another political rationality which I, following Nikolas Rose, call *community*. The ethos of community, better known as the New Liberalism or the Third Way, has been canvassed in Chapter Two. I will also return to this theme in the next chapter. However, in 1988 this ethos had not yet arrived. The authentic, enchanted subject which displaces the calculating, choosing neoliberal subject would be realised in the New Age literature that truly came to the fore *after* the election of Bill Clinton. In the realms of both popular culture and politics, the late eighties and early nineties can therefore be regarded as a transitional period.

In politics, even in wake of the 1987 Wall Street Crash, even with supply-side or “trickle-down” economics apparently discredited by a wave of financial and political scandals, the Democratic Party’s candidate Michael Dukakis could not defeat George Bush Snr. The traditional Democratic brand of welfarism and solidarity with the poor appeared to be out of political favour. As evinced by Dukakis’s defeat, the country was still drifting to the right in terms of its societal attitudes, even as the Christian Right was on the back foot with its own leadership scandals. In world events, the existential threat posed by the Cold War receded but in its place was a vacuum of ideas of how the West should now govern itself in this enemy-less universe. (Bush did grandly suggest the onset of a “New World Order” modelled on neoconservative aspirations but it was really only pressed into service in the lead-up to the First Gulf War and dropped soon after.) Despite his military success, Bush’s popularity was eroded by economic concerns. By July 1990, the US

economy was in the midst of an eight-month recession followed by a weak, “jobless” recovery into June of 1992. That is to say, even as economic growth returned in early 1991, unemployment continued to rise as both corporates and the state (especially in defence) took the opportunity to downsize their workforces. As in geopolitics, in economics no new theory supplanted Reaganism and the public apprehended Bush’s more pragmatic approach as inconsistent – symbolised by his broken promise not to introduce new taxes. In the long nomination process leading up to the 1992 presidential election, populist candidates from the left (Jerry Brown), the right (Pat Buchanan) and the centre (Ross Perot) filled the discursive void.

In this chapter, I interpret this populism as the first twinges of a new political rationality that gives expression to a renewed desire for authenticity in politics. As Nikolas Rose says, community has been developed as a new territory for government, a “kind of natural, extra-political zone of human relations ... somehow, external to politics and a counterweight to it.”¹ Thus policies enacted in the name of community are different to those enacted in the name of the individual (neoliberalism), or in the name of society (welfarism); community is seen as an authentic space, external to the logic of both the market and the state. If community emerges as a response to the perceived failures of the neoliberal experiment, New Age literature responds to the perceived failure of the Recovery paradigm.

This chapter looks in more detail at the transition between these two dominants. In particular, I focus on key aspects of Recovery author John Bradshaw’s work. Most commentators (Peck, McGee, Rapping, Rice) have grouped the Recovery literature of Robin Norwood and Melody Beattie together with the likes of Bradshaw and similarly-orientated authors – for example, Anne Wilson Schaef and Robert Subby. By contrast, I divide them into two branches or *waves* of Recovery literature: first-wave and second-wave. While Bradshaw comes to public attention with a televised special on PBS in 1984 – that is to say, even before the *Women Who Love Too Much* phenomenon sparked by Norwood – his books, over the course of the late eighties, introduced new themes that mark them as a distinct sub-genre which I label *second-wave Recovery literature*.

In the previous chapter, I invoked John Steadman Rice’s term liberation psychotherapy, an umbrella term for a range of post-Freudian therapies. Of liberation psychotherapy in general, Rice says that “repression is assumed to be the central

¹ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 167-168.

mechanism of socialization in American culture.”² Much more than the first wave, second-wave Recovery is marked by this deep scepticism towards the prevailing mode of socialisation. For Bradshaw, addiction is not caused by an absence of control but by an *excess* of “obedience, orderliness, logic, rationality, power and male supremacy.”³ It follows that since everyone in the West is subject to the rationalising machines of school, work and organised religion that everyone is in some sense “sick.” This diagnosis, which borrows in part from the New Left, is clearly of a different order and magnitude to that of first-wave authors where there is still some tangible connection either to the primary addiction (alcohol, drugs, food) or at least to the family situation in which these primary addictions arise. In Bradshaw’s analysis, there is an implicit critique of the first wave of Recovery which places its faith in a rational, biomedical discourse and an autonomous subject capable of exercising control over itself – the ability to practice abstinence, for instance. As it becomes increasingly clear that no one in Recovery actually “recovers” in any medically defined sense of the word, the second-wave shifts the meaning of Recovery to a psycho-spiritual discourse in which breakthroughs are promised through healing the memories of the past. Along with the diagnosis of specific behaviours, the pathological language of Recovery – disease, dysfunction and toxicity – is pushed to the background in favour of a cognitive psychology which asks not that one’s world should change, but that one’s *perception* of the world should change. Bradshaw’s introduction of the inner child into the Recovery canon captures this new theme of re-enchantment: from the heights of paranoia and dysfunction in the late 1980s, the redemptive figure of the child shows the way towards the mainstreaming of New Age literature, somewhere in the mid-1990s. Arguably, something of the mechanism by which Third Way politics displaced Reaganism can also be found by returning to the moment of transition between Recovery literature and the New Age. It is revealing to look again at Recovery literature in this light; in terms of the tensions that held apparently contradictory impulses together as well as the linguistic and logical processes of reinvention by which Recovery finally becomes other to itself.

4.2 Recovery’s Second Wave

I would argue that Recovery, as a discursive formation, is more fluid than the sociological view of it suggests. It cannot be that Recovery is a discourse which is somehow colonising

² John Steadman Rice, “Discursive Formation, Life Stories, and the Emergence of Co-Dependency: “Power/Knowledge” and the Search for Identity,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Autumn, 1992), 337-364.

³ John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw: On The Family* (Deerfield Beach, FL.: Health Communications, 1988), 7.

society from without but whose essential message is unaffected by this interaction. In this view, each aspect of therapeutic culture merely confirms its hegemony. For instance, Elayne Rapping, writing in the mid-nineties; makes few distinctions between Recovery, the 12-step programme, and self-help as a whole.⁴ Recovery then is presented as a homogenous discourse. However, looking at the authors that Rapping has identified as canonical, there are key differences between the style of writing of the first group – represented by Norwood and Beattie – and what I designate to be a second wave of authors represented by Ann Wilson Schaef and John Bradshaw.

The second wave begins by running parallel to the first. But as the eighties reach their end, there is an increasing accent on the second, more academically-inclined strain of Recovery. In an unusual juxtaposition, this was also the first evidence of a more mystical direction for Recovery and its treatment of Christianity. Thus a pop-Weberian account of modernisation as a rationalising machine is wedded to a spiritual imperative to discover and explore the true self. This expressive turn is rather at odds with the early medicalised (and thus rationalised) view of Recovery. The same cross-articulation of biological and psychological harm that is characteristic of Recovery survives into the second wave; we see them, for instance, in curious notions like Bradshaw's "poisonous pedagogy" or "toxic shame."⁵ But what distinguishes the second wave from the first is the apparent source of this "contamination."⁶ While Norwood and Beattie focus on managing personal relationships, containing the damage done *to* the family by the sick individual, Schaef and Bradshaw broaden the scope of their analysis to pathologies embedded within society as a whole: a shift neatly expressed in the title of Schaef's book *When Society Becomes An Addict*.⁷ Aligning these authors with liberation psychotherapy, Rice notes, that "this view emphasizes the damage done *by* the family and other institutions."⁸

The idea that individual pathologies are the product of a "sick" society was also New Left orthodoxy. Indeed, Rapping admits that the likes of Schaef and Bradshaw, have been saying "a lot of things feminists and leftists have been saying for twenty years."⁹ Yet, this is perhaps to overstate the case since the second wave was no less inclined towards a

⁴ Elayne Rapping, *The Culture of Recovery* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

⁵ The word choice here ("cross-articulate") comes from Marilyn Ivy. See Ivy, "Have You Seen Me? Recovering the Inner Child in Late Twentieth-Century America," *Social Text*, no. 37, A Special Section Edited by Anne McClintock Explores the Sex Trade (Winter 1993), 227-252, 239.

⁶ Like the words "poison" and "toxic," the word "contamination" (and derivations thereof) have special significance for John Bradshaw and appear throughout his writing.

⁷ Ann Wilson Schaef, *When Society Becomes An Addict* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

⁸ Rice, 347.

⁹ Elayne Rapping. "Needed: A Radical Recovery," *The Progressive*; January 1993; 57, 1, 33.

political solution than the first. The kernel of feminist truth within the Recovery movement – the admission that the family was not working – remained an internal contradiction that was never resolved. Recovery did not recognise its own category mistake and turn towards open criticism of patriarchy or capitalism. Instead, a more complex arrangement of ideas were born out of a drive to expand the reach of Recovery beyond its white, middle-class, female audience. By the late eighties, Recovery literature had created a space in which it was now possible to claim that the entire society was suffering from addiction – now so broadly conceived as to pathologise any kind of obligation or “un-freedom.” Schaef, for instance, manipulates statistics on alcoholism and co-dependence in order to claim that “the number of co-dependents in the United States exceeds the total population.”¹⁰ Bradshaw, for his part, is the usual source for the notorious claim that 95 percent of all families are dysfunctional.¹¹

4.3 The Inner Child and The Wild Man

For Micki McGee, the figure of the victim and the metaphors attached to social problems present another way in which to categorise and historicise trends within self-help. For instance, she contrasts survivalist tropes to the identity politics of the New Left. In the former, “victims are specifically abhorred.”¹² In the latter, the *collective* identification with victimhood “serve[s] as a point of departure for collective action.”¹³ In the winner’s literature of the early eighties, failure is either absent or folded into compensatory narratives. (The ladder metaphor in Helen Gurley Brown, for example, provides an image of upward mobility in which setbacks are always temporary, always surmountable by the application of individual effort).¹⁴ However, in the Recovery movement, a new kind of victim emerges: the child. According to McGee:

¹⁰ Schaef, 15.

¹¹ As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the true source of this statistic is unknown but it is sometimes attributed to Bradshaw himself and sometimes to his publisher, Health Communications.

¹² Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc. Makeover Culture in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53.

¹³ McGee, 54.

¹⁴ McGee, 84-85. It should be noted that the ladder metaphor does not actually appear in Brown but is read into other metaphors of professional advancement – for example, Brown talks about getting “to the top” or being “at the pinnacle.”

... there was but one place left where being a victim was permissible: children (even “adult children”) were exempted from the victim-hating diatribes of self-improvement culture.¹⁵

For McGee, the child-victim of Recovery is distinct from earlier claims of collective oppression in that it was a form of “group solidarity that was thoroughly insulated from any political potential.”¹⁶ Arguably though, the Recovery trope of the “inner child” is not de-politicised so much as it is de-socialised. In fact, the inner child is a perfect metaphor for the political discourse of authenticity that would displace neoliberal thought in the 1990s. In the Third Way, as well as in self-help of the time, the innocence of the child is opposed to both the social realm and the invasive forces of the market.

As McGee intimates, the inner child is closely correlated to the notion of the adult child, already institutionalised in “secondary” 12-Step groups such as Al-Anon and, of course, Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA). The notion of the inner child has precedents in therapeutic culture going back to the 1960s, but it was the theory of the family system in the late seventies that provided the guiding assumptions of what would come to be known as co-dependency.¹⁷ In Chapter Two, I described how, in addition to treating the primary addictions of alcohol or narcotics, family systems therapy considered how the family, *including* the child, perpetuated the behaviour of the male addict, unconsciously “enabling” his addiction. The thesis that “no one gets sick alone” became an article of faith within family systems analysis though the analysis itself was restricted to the closed circuit of the family home. In the first wave of Recovery, the enabling children are now grown up but they continue to seek out alcoholic partners in order to “fix” them as they did their fathers. The enablers are themselves diagnosed as suffering from a form of secondary addiction: relationship addiction or co-dependency. This diagnosis was initially a source of comfort. It had the imprimatur of medical science; thus it offered a model of *rational* self-knowledge, by which to understand one’s own place within the rules of the system. More importantly, the science did not attribute blame but neither did it claim that the child was entirely innocent. As in classic AA, in the family system “the addict is seen as sick, rather than say, intrinsically benign or aggressive.”¹⁸ From this, Recovery

¹⁵ McGee, 89.

¹⁶ McGee, 90.

¹⁷ John Bradshaw acknowledges both W. Hugh Missildine and Eric Berne as early precursors. See W. Hugh Missildine, *Your Inner Child of the Past* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) and Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1964).

¹⁸ Rice, 347.

literature builds a kind of non-judgemental, cost-benefit model by which the adult child measures one's emotional investment in others. The freedom to choose, as well as the responsibility to choose wisely, falls squarely upon the self.

From the first wave to the second wave of Recovery there is a considerable intellectual distance, though the movement is accomplished quite smoothly in two simultaneous steps. In *Bradshaw: On The Family*, based on a PBS series which aired in 1984, John Bradshaw illustrates the first part of this double movement. Without any real commentary on his thinking, Bradshaw simply takes family systems theory to its logical conclusion. No one gets sick alone therefore we *all* are sick together:

The theory of family systems accepts the family itself as the patient with the presenting member being viewed as a sign of family psychopathology. The identified patient then becomes the symptom of the family system's dysfunctionality. The family itself is a symptom of society at large.¹⁹

The first part of the double movement is an expansion the scope of the analysis from the individual family to include what Rice calls the "entire sociocultural order."²⁰ This movement signals a limited incorporation of New Left thinking. However, this paints a picture of society that is broken beyond repair, in which no political cure is available. Similarly, "recovery" in the literal, medical sense of the word is no longer at issue. Recovery is no longer about the hard work of addressing actual behaviours or problems in the world – the practice of abstinence, for instance. Rather, the second part of the double movement deals with the consequences of the first by shifting away from a rational, biomedical discourse of Recovery, to the cognitive realm of thoughts and feelings. Recovery now becomes about the "recovery" of the inner child of the past. The inner child thus represents a retreat from the intractable problems of the present in order that the adult may rediscover an imaginary world full of creative potential.

What then is the inner child? In *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child*, Bradshaw's first book to reach number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list, introduced the American public to the concept:

What I now understand is that when a child's development is arrested, when feelings are repressed, especially the feelings of anger and hurt, a person grows up to be an adult with an angry, hurt child inside of him. This child will spontaneously

¹⁹ John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw: On The Family* (Deerfield Beach, F.L.: Health Communications, 1988), 27.

²⁰ Rice, 349.

contaminate the person's adult behaviour At first, it may seem preposterous that a little child can continue to live in an adult body. But that is exactly what I'm suggesting. I believe that this neglected, wounded inner child of the past is the major source of human misery. Until we reclaim and champion that child, he will continue to act out and contaminate our adult lives.²¹

In this explanation, the inner child appears here somewhere between a theory of developmental psychology and a Freudian return of the repressed. However, *Homecoming* marks a shift away from Bradshaw's earlier psychoanalytical leanings and towards magical thinking. In his earlier books, Bradshaw had borrowed the notion of the poisonous pedagogy from the psychotherapist Alice Miller to describe a set of damaging cultural rules. For Bradshaw, rules imposed upon children through the family system – rules supported by religion, education and law – constitute a wholesale “abandonment” of children.²² Like Maslow and Rogers, it is the “emotional vitality and spontaneity” of children that Bradshaw sees as the truth of human existence, counterposed against the lie of socialisation, the Western obsession with “obedience, orderliness, logic, rationality, power and male supremacy.”²³ It is fitting then that the mechanism by which the innocence of the child is repressed is not explicable by reason. As feminist scholar Marilyn Ivy points out, Bradshaw's notion of toxic shame is somehow a “primordial, naturalized state; it is thus akin in some senses to original sin.”²⁴ In a bizarre poem, describing how the mother literally impregnates the child with toxic shame through “the fluid of your mother's womb,” Bradshaw thus adapts the Christian narrative of The Fall.²⁵ Given Bradshaw's criticism of organised religion in general and the notion of original sin *specifically*, the reference is jarring.²⁶ But what is significant here is that the child is only seen as purely innocent prior to conception, prior to socialisation. With no real connection to anything that could be described as a primary addiction, the disease model of addiction is, in this instance, revealed to be a purely metaphoric construct. However, in the time beyond time where the inner child resides we find not a free play of associations but a set of highly-structured assumptions about the way the world works.

²¹ John Bradshaw, *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child* (New York: Bantam, 1990), 7.

²² John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw: On The Family* (Deerfield Beach, F.L.: Health Communications, 1988), 3.

²³ Bradshaw, *On The Family*, 7.

²⁴ Ivy, 240.

²⁵ Bradshaw, *Homecoming*, 47.

²⁶ Bradshaw, *Homecoming*, 33.

Superficially at least, the inner child is a gender-neutral construct. However, the similarities that exist between *Homecoming* and another bestselling book published in 1990, cause one to suspect that, in Patrica Pace's words, the culture at large was using "the image of the child to recuperate a longed-for, if mythic, masculine authority."²⁷ I am referring to Robert Bly's *Iron John*, the most cited work associated with a "new" men's movement, also known as the Jungian or mythopoetic men's movement. Like Bradshaw, Bly is concerned with "the return we eventually have to make as adults back to the place of childhood abuse and abandonment."²⁸ Like Bradshaw, the return promoted by the men's movement often takes the form of fantasy, play, legend and myth. For Bradshaw, inner child therapy consists of a variety of strategies by which the adult communicates with the self in earlier stages of life from infancy to school-age. One of the more unusual techniques is the use of nondominant hand-writing, in which the child self writes a letter to the adult self using the "wrong" hand, in order to simulate a childlike scrawl. In all these various forms of age regression, the idea is to circumvent rational thought thereby accessing "creative and transformative energy."²⁹ The adult in turn must present themselves to the child as a "wise and gentle" figure whose job it is to "reclaim" and "champion" the child – a process also known as re-parenting or self-parenting elsewhere in the literature.³⁰ In effect, the new parent is the parent that the child would have chosen for themselves; Bradshaw impresses his own inner child by presenting himself as a wise and gentle wizard, apparently drawn from Arthurian legend. Bly draws from a very similar stock of pre-modern imagery for the story of *Iron John*: kings and queens, castles and moats, sexual energy displaced into magical objects. However, while the hero of *Iron John* is a little prince, it is the figure of the Wild Man that represents the "love of spontaneity" that, for Bly, must be accessed in order to overcome what he considers the emasculating effects of industrial and postindustrial society.³¹ As Bly says of the abandonment felt by boys, the "Wild Man is a better guide in some ways to that pain than our inner child is,

²⁷ Patricia Pace, "Robert Bly Does Peter Pan: The Inner Child as Father to the Man in Steven Spielberg's *Hook*," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 20, no. 1 (1996): 113.

²⁸ Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (New York: Vintage, 1990 [1992]), 226.

²⁹ Bradshaw, xv.

³⁰ Bradshaw, 230. Like the notion of the inner child itself, the notion of re-parenting can be traced to Eric Berne (see note 17). In the late sixties, psychiatric social worker Jacqui Schiff introduced the element of age regression. Other more extreme forms of age regression include rebirthing, past life regression and hypnotic age regression. Other notable adherents of re-parenting call it self-re-parenting or just self-parenting. See Muriel James, *Breaking Free: Self-Reparenting for a New Life* (Reading, M.A.: Addison-Wesley, 1981) or John K. Pollard, *Self-Parenting: The Complete Guide to Your Inner Conversations* (Malibu, C.A.: Generic Human Studies, 1987).

³¹ Bly, 226.

precisely because he is not a child.”³² In their analysis of the men’s movement, Kimmel and Kaufman note that while Bly and others imagine that the Wild Man represents an unfettered expression of “deep,” primordial manhood, the iconography and language of the movement is “actually a search for lost boyhood.”³³ More precisely, at a time when feminists were blamed for being victims, the men’s movement wanted “to have it both ways”:

When we speak as sons, we are angry and wounded by our fathers. When we speak as fathers, we expect veneration and admiration from sons. We are thus going to have it both ways, particularly, whichever way allows us to feel like the innocent victim of other people’s disempowering behavior, the victim of what others (fathers or sons) have done to us.³⁴

The men’s movement and the Recovery movement both endorse a certain promiscuity around the use of words like “victim” and “abuse.” But as Kimmel and Kaufman note, this promiscuity is, in turn, authorised by a sense of entitlement. In the story of *Iron John*, the prince must prove his worth through a series of initiation rituals but he is, in the end, *entitled* to become King, to assert his male privilege. This sense of entitlement explains “why the men at the mythopoetic retreats find it so much easier to imagine themselves as sons, to call themselves ‘adult children.’”³⁵ The son feels the absence of power, but they also feel that they deserve that power as of right. That the mythopoetic vision of developmental regression is rooted in misogynist fears of male power being taken away is clear. That Bradshaw, Schaef and company call attention to patriarchy (if only in an indirect and depoliticised way) makes second-wave Recovery a more ambiguous target for such an interpretation. I would nevertheless suggest that the strangely interchangeable tropes of child and adult within Recovery literature can be understood within the interplay of victimisation and entitlement brought into relief by Kimmel and Kaufman. That is to say, we can extend their analysis along the axis of class privilege as well as gender (and for that matter race, as we will see), but it is the middle-class fears of loss of power that unify Recovery and the men’s movement and mark them both as historically distinct.

³² Bly, 226.

³³ Michael S. Kimmel and Michael Kaufman, “The New Men’s Movement: Retreat and Regression with America’s Weekend Warriors,” *Feminist Issues* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 15.

³⁴ Kimmel and Kaufman, 16-17.

³⁵ Kimmel and Kaufman, 17.

Indeed, despite the men's movement's attempts to "recover" masculinity as an eternal, universal category (hence the fascination with Jungian archetypes), it is clear from the perspective of governmentality that this weird coalition of mythic poets and yuppie savages could not have existed at any other time than the early 1990s. Though, for Rose, political rationality shapes social reality rather than the other way around, there is a pattern of cultural change observable in the post-Reagan period consistent with the authenticity associated with Third Way politics. For example, Douglas Holt, a historian and theorist of advertising, notes how, in the early nineties, elites suddenly began to follow the call of the wild. This was at once the rejection of aristocratic wealth and the emergence of a new "national ideology" he calls the "free-agent frontier".³⁶

Gone were Wall Street's buccaneers Professionals no longer savored expensive dining and Rolex watches. Now they groomed their bodies for heated competition by heading into the wilderness for tests of will against white water and mountains. Sports utility vehicles exploded in popularity, and Montana ranches were the new frontier dream. The aptly-named Ford Explorer told us that life had no boundaries. One's manhood was revealed in the tackling extremely difficult and sometimes dangerous challenges, which demanded both mental and physical toughness.³⁷

Holt's description of the free-agent frontier has obvious parallels with the "awakenings" inspired (if not always endorsed)³⁸ by Robert Bly, James Hillman, John Rowan and others. Sometimes these awakenings took the form of workshops or seminars but in the popular imagination they inevitably conjured up images of men "stomping through the woods hugging other men who have taken totemic animal names."³⁹ This was not the first time the idea of the frontier had been pressed into service as a means of bolstering masculinity. As Kimmel and Kaufman observe, the end of the nineteenth-century saw an imaginative recreation of the Western frontier in culture as it disappeared into the reality of corporate monopolisation.⁴⁰ Thus the fraternal orders of that time were responding to rapid changes in the labour market as much as they were to the supposed feminisation of the culture. Similarly, while the free-agent frontier lauds "heroic individual

³⁶ Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principle of Cultural Branding* (Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 50.

³⁷ Holt, 50.

³⁸ Robert Bly appears to have wanted to put some distance between himself and the weekend retreats which with his name is often associated. See Robert Bly and Deborah Tannen, "Where Are Women and Men Today? Robert Bly and Deborah Tannen in Conversation" *New Age Journal* (January-February 1992), 33.

³⁹ Kimmel and Kaufman, 7.

⁴⁰ Kimmel and Kaufman, 14.

achievement”⁴¹, the celebration of the “authentic” hero (one apparently unconcerned with the trappings of wealth or status) was animated by fear as much as hope. As Holt explains, the routinisation of the workplace, already thoroughly achieved in blue-collar companies, was now hitting home for white-collar workers. These workers were being outsourced, downsized and subject to “process engineering techniques” that ruthlessly reduced the autonomy of the office worker. Furthermore, “[e]very company job was up for grabs to the most talented and most tenacious worker, as companies threw out seniority systems in favor of performance-driven meritocracies.”⁴² In this context, it is easier to see that the mens movement’s choice of imagery is not just randomly drawn from a “postmodern, New Age supermarket.”⁴³ Nineteenth-century efforts to re-masculinate men drew upon a “fascination with the classical era – mythical views of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, provided the icons.”⁴⁴ Latter-day Wild Men, on the other hand, rejected this era in some unconscious disavowal of classicism and its rationalist assumptions. Instead, the men’s movement adopted a New Age iconography drawing from “an even more distant mythical past, that of repackaged image of native societies.”⁴⁵ With the passage of time, the Native Americans that were the villains of the old frontier were re-appropriated, redface and all, under the guise of “respect for traditional cultures.”⁴⁶ As Kimmel and Kaufman point out, redface, like the blackface of old, may rely on racist stereotypes, but it is also a projection of the participants’ own “anxieties and longings” onto other cultures.⁴⁷ Thus the free-agent frontiersmen may have been genuine in their desire for brotherhood and respect for nature but what was really at issue was the emergence of the new economy.

Cultural historian Woody Register makes a similar analogy with respect to Bradshaw’s inner child.⁴⁸ In his history of theme park amusements, Register observes that some of the old Protestant objections to the pursuit of leisure have continued to linger. In the 1950s, Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy* magazine mounted a “cultural mutiny” against what Register calls the “breadwinner ethic.”⁴⁹ As Barbara Ehrenreich quipped of *Playboy*, “You

⁴¹ Holt, 50.

⁴² Holt, 10.

⁴³ Kimmel and Kaufman, 14.

⁴⁴ Kimmel and Kaufman, 14.

⁴⁵ Kimmel and Kaufman, 14.

⁴⁶ Kimmel and Kaufman, 10.

⁴⁷ Kimmel and Kaufman, 11.

⁴⁸ Woody Register, *The Kid of Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁹ Register, 305.

could call it ‘immature’ but it already calls itself that.”⁵⁰ However, this immaturity – sexualised or otherwise – was constantly being challenged. Published in 1983, Dan Kiley’s *Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up* was a self-help phenomenon in its own right, selling upwards of 200,000 copies. According to Kiley, men (by which he probably meant white, middle-class men) were “too affluent for their own good.”⁵¹ Kiley’s diagnosis and cure is, as Register says, “politically problematic”: women are the source of men’s troubled infantilisation and hedonism and it is women who “in charge of rehabilitating their juvenile charges.”⁵²

Moreover, the *Peter Pan Syndrome* was written for the deficit, “zero-sum” mentality of the early and mid-1980s. The best it could offer was a careful compromise between responsibility and eternal youth, which with luck and a Tinker Bell playmate would provide abundant quantities of each.⁵³

As Register points out, the inner child therapies of Bradshaw and others surmounted political objections to the likes of Kiley by spreading the suffering to both men and women. Just as importantly:

Bradshaw also shifted the source of the problem from affluence to deprivation, which redirected the focus from the spoiled man to the neglected and impoverished “inner child” (not, it should be noted, to the actual poor).⁵⁴

When Register ties Bradshaw’s *Homecoming* to the “surplus material economy of the 1990s” he seems to forget that in 1990, the US economy was on the cusp of a major recession.⁵⁵ Talk of a new economy was still some four or five years away. But like Bill Clinton, Bradshaw could “feel your pain” and heal it by promising to magically transmute scarcity into abundance. For Bradshaw, it is not only rationalisation that is at fault but the whole Protestant ethic, which says “no” to the child at every turn. Counselling the inner child in his own version of the middle-way philosophy, Bradshaw explains that, “I’m proving to him that we can have *more* pleasure if we delay gratification.”⁵⁶ For Register, the inner child is often less a form of therapy than the entry point into a “world of delight

⁵⁰ Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1983), 50.

⁵¹ Dan Kiley, *Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1983), 28.

⁵² Register, 309.

⁵³ Register, 309.

⁵⁴ Register, 309-10.

⁵⁵ Register, 309.

⁵⁶ Bradshaw, *Homecoming*, 198.

that was consumer culture's principal enticement."⁵⁷ While Bradshaw's "playthings" are not women as they were for Hugh Hefner, they are certainly the kind of privileges reserved for people of a certain income: playing golf, flying first class, riding in limousines, buying "interesting toys."⁵⁸ If the inner child is not gender-specific, it is perhaps because the traditionally feminised realm of consumption is not attached to that sense of shame so poisonous for Bradshaw. Indeed, for Bradshaw, re-parenting the inner child seems to mainly consist of saying "yes" to his boyish whims; the distinctive powers and responsibilities of the adult are often indistinguishable from the power of the purse. To use Register's Peter Pan analogy, parenting "no longer has to be the austere alternative to Never Land that it once had seemed."⁵⁹

4.4 The Child and The Community

If *Homecoming* did not exactly anticipate the new economy to come, it certainly reflected that a change was taking place within the Recovery movement and, as I have argued, within the political rationality to which it was formerly tied. In the second wave of Recovery, peaking at the end of the Reagan-Bush era, the dream is no longer autonomy, but liberation *from* autonomy, or at least from the endless strategising associated with "managing" the self. As economic doom and gloom began to engulf white-collar workers in the late eighties, the neoliberal belief that one could steer one's own destiny began to slip away, along with faith in political and corporate elites. Whereas Norwood and Beattie had counselled personal responsibility above all, the second wave of Recovery shifts the burden of blame to an amorphous elsewhere, to the "poisonous pedagogy" in which "the control of emotions and desires" is the problem not the solution.⁶⁰ Thus while the first wave argued that control should be exerted over the self in order to stop controlling others, now control itself was pathologised. In this context, the rational, calculating discourse of the first wave was out of favour. In order to break out of this diminishing space of freedom in the present, second-wave Recovery orientates itself around the imaginary inner child of the past. But the inner child is not just confined way to a magical pre-social (or pre-modern) imaginary, real children became a very specific project for government in the transitory years between Reagan and Clinton. Just as Recovery's image of the

⁵⁷ Register, 306.

⁵⁸ Bradshaw, *Homecoming*, 176.

⁵⁹ Register, 311.

⁶⁰ Bradshaw, *On The Family*, 7(emphasis removed from original).

dysfunctional family had become received wisdom in media discourse, the redemptive figure of the child proved to be popular salve for middle-class anxieties. Of course, these two discourses pulled in opposite directions – the family is pathologising, the child is, on the other hand, therapeutic. Thus the child is posited simultaneously as a victim, an object of utmost moral concern, and as the repository of newly-prized “adult” values, a well of creativity, spontaneity and bucolic fantasy. Not only did the inner child symbolise these values, it spoke to a new parent-child relationship whereby, paradoxically, the parent would learn from the child. Writing in 1993, Heather Scutter noted this phenomenon, arguing that the contemporary child was no longer opposed to adulthood but in fact “makes a better adult.”⁶¹ Around the same time, the sociologist Ulrich Beck noted an “excessive affection for children” and placed it in a dialectical relationship with a general disenchantment with the uncertain rewards of late modernity, what he labels the risk society. As in Recovery, rationalisation finds its redemption in “the private type of re-enchantment” represented by the child.⁶²

For Beck, the enchanted child stands at the end of a long sociological narrative in which tradition fails to compete with individualism. It is, for him, “the last remaining irrevocable unexchangeable primary relationship” in a world of change.⁶³ Rather than approach things from the point of view of this sociological “fact,” I would, following Rose, argue instead for apprehending what is novel about the valorisation of the enchanted subject in the early nineties. This directs our attention to the links between the treatment of children at this time and the emergence of community or Third Way politics as a political rationality. The healthy subjectivity of the child is represented in two ways. Firstly, as I have said, the child represents authenticity, innocence with respect to a form of socialisation regarded as repressive. But the child also bears a new kind of responsibility towards the adult, and thus also represents an emotional dependability, otherwise unavailable to the contemporary subject. The permanence of the parent-child bond, as noted by Beck, also exemplifies Rose’s definition of community as “a moral field binding persons into durable relations.”⁶⁴ While the “third space” of community invokes the same strategies of inclusion and exclusion as those governing neoliberal rationality, here the mechanism of government is deployed in the service of another kind of freedom: freedom from the twin excesses of government and the market, freedom from neoliberalism itself

⁶¹ Heather Scutter, “Representing the Child: Postmodern Versions of Peter Pan,” Paper presented at Issues in Australian Childhood conference, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane 1993, 12.

⁶² Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992), 118.

⁶³ Beck, 118.

⁶⁴ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 172.

and all the attendant burdens of choice. The child and the enchanted subjectivity associated with childhood embody this freedom. In this context, it makes sense then that anything that would threaten children would be seen as a threat to the values of the wider community. According to Rose, the new importance accorded children gives rise to a heightened sense of their fragility:

Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual, and moral danger.⁶⁵

A raft of new legal protections for children would also be introduced over the course of the nineties. Speaking to one well-known instance, known as Megan's Law, Rose describes how this legislation was not just a new law but a new *kind* of law, "not formed in the interests of the state or the general will" (it may have in fact been deleterious to civil liberties) but rather "in the image of the victim, the parent, the family and the community."⁶⁶ In this way the "private sense of re-enchantment" described by Beck is translated into public law, public health and public education. The desire for authenticity opens up what Rose calls "a new circuit of power" between the moral force of the community and state power.⁶⁷

There is, however, a deep hypocrisy in this concern expressed for children and community, which runs along class lines. As I explained in Chapter Two, the version of community espoused by communitarian scholars such as Etzioni is one built on majoritarian values and culture: "shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity."⁶⁸ I argue that this translated into a political calculation within the Democratic Party that would, under Bill Clinton, consciously direct all its messaging to the "forgotten middle-class."⁶⁹ Traditional Democratic constituencies, especially those receiving welfare, were only recognised insofar as they were convenient scapegoats for resentment. Talk of a "forgotten middle-class" indulged the same fantasy of middle-class neglect as that found in Recovery. As Kaminer explains, the inner child of Recovery symbolises an unwitting parody of the poor, whereby the middle-class could "still claim to

⁶⁵ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul* (London: Routledge 1989 (1999)), 123.

⁶⁶ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 174.

⁶⁷ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 174.

⁶⁸ Ametai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (London: Profile, 1997) 127.

⁶⁹ "Fighting for the Forgotten Middle Class" was the title of a Clinton campaign brochure and was presumably used repeatedly on the campaign trail including in Clinton's acceptance speech at the culmination of the 1992 Democratic National Convention.

be metaphorically homeless” and thereby equate their *feelings* of dispossession with the economic dispossession of those who were actually homeless or deprived.⁷⁰ But, according to Marilyn Ivy, the psychologism of Recovery literature authorises a more sinister turn in public policy: the displacement of a whole class of social problems, including the real and serious problem of child abuse, away from the issue of poverty. Though Recovery authors like Schaef do in fact address patriarchal violence within the home, as Ivy notes:

[A]lmost no attention is given to race or class. Indeed, the model family in these texts is the idealized white, middle-class, nuclear household Nowhere are the narrow premises of nuclear familialism questioned.⁷¹

For all its condemnation of the family and the supposed “abuse” we all suffer at the hands of the “system,” Recovery literature is unable to articulate an alternative form of sociality. Poverty, which Ivy suggests is a “more mundane and pervasive abuse of children,” is written out of the narrative of societal harm at the same time as child abuse becomes a moral panic on a par with drug abuse – a parallel which Ivy suggests is instructive.⁷²

The hyperbolic degree to which the middle-class felt themselves to be threatened by an epidemic of addiction was, at the tail-end of the eighties, matched by the degree to which children were said to be under threat by other social pathologies: child sexual abuse, child abduction and child murder. According to Ivy, the media’s “obsessive interest” in child abuse and the faceless monsters who committed it, was an unfortunate exercise in scapegoating.⁷³ The “lurid explosion of publicity”⁷⁴ surrounding so-called satanic ritual abuse, for example, simultaneously exaggerated the dark forces said to imperil the child while at the same time ignoring the statistical evidence which clearly showed the sad reality of child abuse: violence towards children was much more likely to take place within the home, by family members, than it was to be inflicted by outsiders. (Similarly, child abductions were more likely to be carried out in the context of custody disputes, than they were to be perpetrated by paedophiles).⁷⁵ No doubt the shape of the moral panic around satanic ritual abuse was influenced at the edges by the rise of the Christian Right and by a

⁷⁰ Kaminer, 155.

⁷¹ Ivy, 245.

⁷² Ivy, 245.

⁷³ Ivy, 231.

⁷⁴ Ivy, 232.

⁷⁵ Ivy, 231.

related anti-government paranoia.⁷⁶ However, the deeper problematisation of child abuse was, arguably, more related to a class dynamic; what Costin, Karger and Stoesz describe as a “psychological paradigm of child abuse in middle-class culture.”⁷⁷ According to these authors, child abuse received little attention when it was considered a disease of poverty. Political will was only mobilised in the eighties when child abuse was defined not as neglect or child battery but as sexual abuse, a problem seen as cutting across social boundaries. Redefined as a sickness requiring treatment, the crime of incest was now part of a new model of intervention which “identifies child abuse as an intrapsychic problem affecting parents (often learned from their parents) that required family therapy and psychosocial intervention.”⁷⁸ The incorporation of a therapeutic paradigm, which had its roots in the theories of the family system, resulted in an upward redistribution of much-needed resources:

The adoption of this [psychological] paradigm creates a paradox: while increasing resources are consumed by a rapidly expanding child abuse industry, a rising number of poor, minority children are permanently injured or killed, inadequately protected by the public agencies mandated to serve them Ironically, a public that is sympathetic to the plight of abused and neglected children fails to understand that it foots much of the bill for an out-of-control and demand-driven legal and psychotherapy industry. In the meantime, these businesses consume millions of tax dollars even as resources for abused children wither.⁷⁹

Perhaps what is most disturbing about the reframing of child abuse under Reagan is that the open and systematic problem of child poverty is seen as a problem about which nothing can be done. It is instructive to compare the scare over satanic ritual abuse to the so-called “crack baby epidemic” both of which reached their peak in the late 1980s (see Chapter Two). In the latter, the point was precisely that the crack baby was *not* born innocent, but rather that poor and black children were born irredeemably sick, beyond any kind of meaningful intervention. While the lives of poor children were seen as unavoidably

⁷⁶ Morandir Armson highlights the importance of Christian anti-cult activists in propagating the ritual abuse hysteria. Anti-cultists also targeted neo-pagans, New Agers, actual Satanists as well as more mainstream practices such as heavy metal music or role-playing fantasy games. See Armson, “Signs of the Devil: The Social Creation of Satanic Ritual Abuse” in *On a Panegyric Note: Studies in Honour of Garry W. Trompf*, ed. Victoria Barker and Frances Di Lauro (Sydney: Dept. of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, 2007), 148.

⁷⁷ Lela B. Costin, Howard Jacob Karger and David Stoesz, *The Politics of Child Abuse in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

⁷⁸ Costin, Karger & Stoesz, 6.

⁷⁹ Costin, Karger & Stoesz, 6-7.

contaminated by circumstance – beholden to the cycle of dependency – the life-course of each middle-class child was unique, special, to be cherished and protected at all costs.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the late eighties and early nineties as a transitional period between two political rationalities: neoliberalism and Third Way politics. It seems to me that the paranoid assumptions and apocalyptic rhetoric of Reaganism hit something of a peak in the late eighties and over the course of the next five years it waned and was finally completely displaced by Clinton's Third Way, which even at the time, was recognised to be infused by the therapeutic language of healing and redemption. This, I would caution, should not be interpreted to mean that Clinton was a *more* therapeutic President than Reagan or Bush but rather that the perceived ills of the nation were of a different nature and therefore required different therapeutic interventions: from the neoliberal expansion of choice in the market to the forging of "durable relations" between citizens in the community. Similarly, the idea that the transition between Recovery literature and New Age literature represents an "inward turn" must be disputed on the grounds that it implies that subjectivity can somehow be more or less psychological. A more precise way of representing this transition would be to point out that while first-wave Recovery combines the biological, the psychological (with a focus on group therapy and interpersonal relationships) and mainstream Christianity, the second-wave combines a cognitive psychology with a non-denominational Christianity that is inflected by magic and myth. The second-wave notion that one can somehow "self-parent" and thus retrospectively *choose* the kind of the childhood one wishes for oneself, shows that the notion of consumer sovereignty does not disappear in Third Way thinking but it is increasingly applies to *experiences* as opposed to the artefacts of aristocratic wealth. As I have argued, the popularity of the inner child does not necessarily reflect a societal concern for the well-being of actual children but rather a displacement of the problems of the family and society – which like addiction, is seen as an incurable disease – into the intrapsychic realm of thoughts and feelings. Thus while undeniably a more optimistic brand of self-help, as I discuss in the next chapter, New Age literature's notion of authenticity is layered with majoritarian notions of virtue that justify practices of inclusion and exclusion not dissimilar to those operating within Reaganism.

5 New Age Literature

5.1 Introduction

According to Wouter J. Hanegraaff, New Age spirituality believes itself to be a “third option.” It looks at the dualistic and reductionist tendencies in Western culture – exemplified by the “old” organised religion on the one hand, and the “old” mechanistic ways of doing science on the other – and believes itself to have transcended these tendencies in a holism which combines religion and science in a “higher synthesis.”¹ In this chapter, I will make some definitions and distinctions about New Age spirituality itself. The main task, however, is to establish the New Age movement in relation to the twin histories I have so far been tracing: the history of self-help literature and the historical succession of political rationalities as outlined by Nikolas Rose. In the first instance, I establish New Age as the new dominant in self-help of the 1990s but one which continued and strengthened an anti-intuitional, anti-rationalistic tendency already visible in what I have described in the previous chapter as second-wave Recovery literature. In the second instance, I take the conceptual diagram just described – two dialectical opposites surmounted by a third, “higher” synthesis – as characteristic of both the New Age and the political formation known as the Third Way. I argue that Antonio Raul de Velasco’s notion, the “politics of transcendence,” which he applies to centrist politicians in the 1990s, including Bill Clinton, can also be used to understand a kind of “centrist” New Age literature. The Third Way and the “third option” of the New Age are similar in the sense that both claim to transcend, to go *beyond* their constitutive opposites.

According to Velasco, the tendency toward abstract formulation over messy materialism is representative of how this centrism sees itself in relation to history and politics. The particular celebration of the centre that Velasco ascribes to the nineties is defined by a search for a “unified totality that exists not only *apart* from politics and history, but actually, in its fullest and most ‘perfect’ state, in *opposition* to political conflict.”² From this perspective, the curious problem which the Third Way has chosen to address is the sense that politics is too divisive, *too political*. If, as frequently asserted, Third Way politics takes on the language of psychology or religion, it is perhaps because

¹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden; New York; Koln: Brill, 1996), 517.

² Antonio Raul de Velasco, “Claiming ‘the Center’: The Rhetoric of Political Transcendence in the Clinton Era,” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2005), 11.

the Third Way is searching, not only for the holy grail of the unifying centre, but a way of speaking about politics that is deliberately apolitical. It is important to take notice of this rhetorical shift towards a supposedly more authentic form of politics and the renewed interest surrounding community as an authentic space of government. It will not help us, however, if we take on the sociological habit of simply marking the division between the political sphere and the extra-political sphere, posing the question in such a way as to make it seem that there is something essential about politics which must gain or diminish relative to other kind of discourses and institutions. A Foucauldian analysis would instead think about how these divisions are articulated across the history of liberalism, and observe how politics is, in many ways, not divided from or superseded by other discourses but rather exists in a relationship of alignment. Such is the relationship between the New Age – which already combines religion and psychology – and the Third Way.

If the New Age is a way of imagining a space beyond religion and science, the Third Way is defined as that which transcends the political divide between activist government and free-market capitalism. While it is right to be sceptical of claims that the Third Way simply transcends past political divisions, in the period of Bill Clinton's two terms, one can at least be confident in stating that there was no return to the "big government" or welfarist ethos that marked the post-war period. The question then becomes: was the Third Way a continuation of the neoliberal policy agenda, or did the Clinton era mark a significant break with neoliberalism, opening out upon to something new? I follow Rose in arguing for the latter. According to Rose, the Clinton era was marked not simply by an inflection within neoliberalism but by the birth of a new ethical subjectivity and a new political rationality, which Rose calls "community." Compared to the Reagan revolution, the implementation of policies in the name of the community (as opposed to the society or the individual) has been a modest affair. Yet, in the same way that new markets had to be actively created under neoliberalism, community has been developed as a new territory for government, a "kind of natural, extra-political zone of human relations ... somehow, external to politics and a counterweight to it."³ The belief that civil society best represents this space of authenticity within the polity, external to both the market and central government, gives it a special prominence in the thinking of the Third Way. However, as I have noted in previous chapters, this notion of authenticity

³ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 167-168.

is layered with majoritarian notions of virtue that justify practices of inclusion and exclusion not dissimilar to those operating within Reaganism.

These notions of authenticity and virtue connect Third Way politics to the New Age, the new dominant within self-help literature. While the Third Way was a collective cure for the sickness of the “me-first” society, the New Age was a technology of healing aimed squarely at the soul of the individual. Similarly, if community, as a space of government, emerges as a response to the perceived failures of the neoliberal experiment, New Age literature responds to the perceived failure of the Recovery paradigm. New Age discourse, more specifically a “centrist” or mainstream form of New Age discourse develops the same cultural critique of society that we see in second-wave Recovery but turns it in a more optimistic, openly spiritual direction. As I explained in the previous chapter, the pathological language of Recovery – disease, dysfunction and toxic relationships – had lost its explanatory power. The techniques of the self associated with Recovery promised liberation through self-knowledge. Increasingly however, to identify as an addict was to identify with the very disease of dependency, that middle-class women in particular, were trying to escape. The answer was not to return to a more competitive form of autonomy but to perceive what one had already had differently. In New Age literature, techniques derived from cognitive psychology are combined with a cosmology of enchantment, a belief that the universe, correctly interpreted and acted upon, always provides what one wants or needs. Thus the New Age picked up and expanded upon the theme of spiritual consolation implicit in Recovery. It was not that the post-Cold War world had become less competitive – quite the reverse. Rather, middle-class women and to a lesser extent men, found in the spiritually-infused language of the New Age, a new, authentic relation to the self that was, at the same time, a form of class distinction. As the public image of Recovery began to be undercut by its association with the underclass – particularly through “trash talk TV”⁴ – the spiritual turn within therapeutic culture offered a respective and far more optimistic alternative. Just as the Third Way continued Reagan-era policies towards the underclass but substituted the rationale for such measures, New Age literature did not veer from Recovery’s commitment to personal responsibility but pursued it by other means.

⁴ The phrase “trash talk” or “trash talk TV” likely comes from Bill Bennett’s organisation Empower America. Bennett, a former Secretary of Education, took on corporations in several advertising campaigns including one which asked them “to take the trash out of talk television,” in other words, to divest advertising dollars from talk shows which the campaign designated “cultural rot.” Howard Kurtz, “‘Trash TV’ Ads Play No Favorites; GOP Donors Among Bill Bennett’s Targets,” *Washington Post*, December 7, 1995.

5.2 Oprah's Book Club and The Politics of Transcendence

Many things created the conditions for the successful reception of New Age literature into American culture during the 1990s. However, if one were to credit one individual, that person would surely be Oprah Winfrey, the host of one of the most long-running and successful television shows in history. Since walking away from the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2011, Winfrey's continued ownership of a multi-media empire has ensured that she has kept her place at the top of the global entertainment pyramid. Having made her own life an unqualified success, Oprah has turned herself into a living testimony for the power of self-improvement as well as a marketing dream for those in the self-help industry. It was not unusual for the *Oprah Winfrey Show* to feature consumer endorsements of all sorts but it was on the publishing industry that Winfrey would leave her most significant mark.

With the establishment of Oprah's Book Club in 1996, Winfrey was not only able to change the national conversation in terms of the *selection* of certain books; it is believed that she was able to pull a large non-reading population into the activity of book-reading itself.⁵ As Janice Peck suggests, part of the Book Club's success lay in drawing upon the "mythology of reading and literacy in the Western historical imagination."⁶ To put it in more Foucauldian terms, reading has always been a powerful technology of the self, not just a means to accumulate or share knowledge but a way to inhabit a certain kind of subjectivity. For Peck, the "genius" of the Book Club is the way in which the technologies of literacy are wedded to another set of mental technologies associated with the New Age: meditation, affirmation, prayer and the return of the nineteenth-century notion of "mind-cure."⁷ According to John Howard, successful engagement with these two technologies – literacy and therapy – is narrowly interpreted by Winfrey, not as the outcome of accessing institutional knowledge, but as the result of individual initiative.⁸ On the one hand, Oprah's Book Club serves to reinforce this interpretation of these technologies as tools for self-governing, for taking responsibility for one's own life. On the other hand, in the New Age context, reading and healing are technologies of freedom – they posit a universe,

⁵ It is hard to verify the specific claim that the Book Club generated new readers as opposed to influencing the choices of existing readers, a claim which is doubtless true. Richard J. Butler, Benjamin W. Cowan, Sebastian Nilson, "From Obscurity to Bestseller: Examining the Impact of Oprah's Book Club Selections," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 24, 32.

⁶ Janice Peck, *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era* (Boulder, C.O.: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 176.

⁷ Peck, 176.

⁸ John Howard, "Beginnings with O" in *Stories of Oprah: The Oprahfication of American Culture*, ed. Trystan T. Cotten, Kimberly Springer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

limitless in its abundance, a self which is invested with enormous power over time and space, and a connection between self and world that is rich with meaning, filled with spontaneous flows of affect. Before looking in more detail at some of the bestselling titles that brought the New Age to a mainstream audience, I use the Book Club as an example of how literacy itself is invested with therapeutic values of both responsibility and freedom. Following Trysh Travis, I also argue that it is important to understand the religious dimension of literacy within the Book Club. For example, the Book Club frequently treated authorship “as a mystical practice” and the book “as an enchanted object.”⁹

The Book Club was announced on the September 1996 season premiere of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and continued until April 2002. With some variation the Club would operate according to the following format: every month a new title was announced – usually a recently published piece of fiction – and readers would write letters in response. The Club did continue after 2002 but only infrequently and with a more varied selection of classics, autobiographies and non-fiction. A dedicated section of the Oprah.com website was also opened up for comments. The multimedia aspect of the Book Club, a TV show partnering with a book release which also extended into an online presence, was innovative for the time. Though it was considered a risky venture and one that Winfrey herself was not convinced would succeed, the Book Club was immediately popular and the segment quickly grew to fill the whole hour of the *Oprah* show. A selection of readers, from the thousands that had sent in written responses, were chosen by the show’s producers to attend a conversation between Winfrey and the book’s author. In this way, the relationship between the readers’ lives and the lives of the fictional characters was given almost as much visibility as the views of the authors themselves. Indeed, the construction of a “spectral” public sphere is central to the effect of the Book Club – the Club represented a diversity of opinion even if that diversity was in fact based on the preferences of Winfrey and the show’s producers. The notion of a “spectral” mainstream connects the world of the TV talk-show to a more general thesis about the political climate of the 1990s.¹⁰

Borrowing from Antonio Raul de Velasco’s discussion of centrist politics, I would like to suggest that Oprah’s Book Club promotes a “centrist” form of New Age literature. Beyond the fact they share a similar time-frame, how these two quite different objects of analysis could be analogous requires some explanation. The basis of the analogy is

⁹ Trysh Travis, “It Will Change the World If Everybody Reads This Book: New Thought Religion in Oprah’s Book Club,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (September 2007): 1031.

¹⁰ Velasco, 5.

twofold: first, the construction of a “mainstream” audience which is in fact strongly coded as white and middle-class and, second, an engagement in a process of wilful abstraction which works to reinforce this “mainstreaming” effect by erasing the historical differences that contribute to social stratification. Though it is unfair to compare self-help to the work of its academic critics, one could say self-help has always been guilty of a certain kind of abstraction, by treating human beings as essentially psychological entities rather than the products of a historical milieu. A more even-handed analysis of centrist New Age literature – which first of all must be distinguished from more counter-cultural forms of the New Age – would concede, for instance, that the spiritual tradition here is at least as important as the psychological component. Better still, the aim here is a mode of analysis that would re-insert that which self-help takes out, the complex, material conditions which give rise to the New Age’s surge in popularity, linking it to a specific historical formation. Similarly, an analysis of Third Way politics must counter claims that the Third Way somehow transcends the political divisions of the past or the more modest claim that the Third Way is merely responding to, rather than actively shaping, a series of sociological “facts”: the fall of the Soviet empire, the globalisation of capital, the rise of the Internet and so on. Such “facts” are then used to establish the post-Cold War era as one of over-riding political and economic consensus, such as Francis Fukuyama’s famous pronouncement that we were living at the “end of history.”¹¹ As Velasco points out, the analytical task in this case is, ironically, the re-insertion of politics into politics. He says that the New Democrats under Clinton heralded a new “politics that, paradoxically, made politics into a kind of threat to the sanctity and solidity of the ‘center.’”¹² While psychological and spiritual rhetoric might be said to have penetrated the language of politicians to an unusual degree during the nineties, the valorisation of the centre as the *arche* and *telos* of political activity is really a better basis for a comparison between self-help and politics in the Clinton era.¹³ I begin this comparison by outlining how, despite their obvious differences, the Democratic Party and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, both underwent a process of transformation prompted by a recognition that they were in danger of losing their mainstream audience.

In Chapter Two, I introduced the idea that along with the institutionalisation of the so-called New Democrats within the Democratic Party, there was a renewed intellectual

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).

¹² Velasco, 22.

¹³ See Velasco, 12. Working with Jacques Derrida’s notion of the centre, Velasco posits the centre as the *arche* and *telos* of political transcendence: the *arche*, because it is already there and we must return to it; the *telos*, because it is at the same time, always incomplete, always to come.

ferment within the Party, which coalesced into a political formation known as New Liberalism.¹⁴ New Liberalism is said to be composed of at least three competing interests: the neoliberals, the communitarians and conservative Southern Democrats.¹⁵ Commenting upon the liberal and communitarian influence upon the Party, Velasco notes that that they are “often paired as polar opposites” though both liberalism and communitarianism “have been guided by a similarly constructed challenge”:

how to facilitate the formation of political consensus and stability in the midst of the diversity of U.S. Society ... both schools of thought in recent decades have posited various normative political and philosophical ideals meant to temper political conflict and to ensure greater social cohesion.¹⁶

While social cohesion is *prima facie* a laudable goal, Velasco reads this kind of centrist, consensus politics as a veiled attack on “progressive multiculturalism,”¹⁷ where the actual strategy is to equate diversity with conflict. What Velasco means by the “politics of transcendence” is that the goal of politics is narrowly conceived as the transcendence of ideological conflict. By painting voices on the margins as the enemies of cohesion, the political debate is reduced to fighting over that which political elites already substantially agree on. Within this limited range of political action, the spectacle of fierce debate ensures that calls for greater bipartisan consensus can never lose their relevance but, at the same time, the meaning of this consensus is miniaturised, pared down to a series of trade-offs between professional politicians rather than any actual representation of the views of the wider polity or, indeed, actual social cohesion.¹⁸ This then is the principle of wilful abstraction I pointed to above.

In political terms, the first principle I outlined, the construction of an audience, must be boiled down to sober electoral calculation. New Liberalism represented both a kind of consensus-seeking compromise but also the technical means by which the Democratic Party could again be a viable political competitor for the “mainstream” vote; where, as I explained above, the term “mainstream” is more or less interchangeable with the interests of white, middle-class voters. Though boosters of the Third Way claim that it

¹⁴ For more on New Liberalism, see Adolph Reed Jr., *Without Justice For All: The New Liberalism and Our Retreat From Racial Equality* (Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Reed, 1-2.

¹⁶ Velasco, 17.

¹⁷ Travis, 1017.

¹⁸ This is a summary of Velasco’s first chapter, 1-31. Note that Velasco addresses the claim that “mainstream” opinion is an empirical reality based on polling data. Hence my scepticism that the “mainstream” can be conflated with “actual representation.” See Velasco, 163.

represents a modernisation of politics, neither “old” left nor “old” right in its orientation, the practical effect of the New Liberal coalition was to move the Democratic Party to the right economically, aligning them not with the working class or the poor but with a new class of entrepreneurial elites. I detailed something of the mechanism of the Democratic Party’s transformation in Chapter Two. The move to the centre was achieved through the formation of two lobby groups and a think tank within the Party, first, the Committee on Party Effectiveness (CPE) in the early eighties and, then, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) in the mid-eighties. By the time Bill Clinton became chair of the DLC in 1990, it also had its own think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI). His assumption of the chair coincided with an increase in the influence of the centrist DLC over the direction and messaging of the Party which carried through to Clinton’s successful nomination. Specifically, Clinton distanced himself from groups representing so-called “special interests.” The term “special interests” had a double function: it could be used as a cudgel against Republican opponents perceived to be working for corporate interests but it would also be used by Democrats to subtly distance themselves from their traditionally liberal voting blocs – African-Americans and Latinos, gays and lesbians, feminists and unionists. Constructing the audience in this way also serves to further a particular abstraction of the nation. Velasco argues that the centre is founded on a myth of national unity which seeks to obscure or *transcend* political differences “in the name of the ‘national interest’ over the ‘special interest.’” It might be stated that – as in the New Democrats’ mantra of “responsibility, opportunity and community” – it is the community not the nation that is the preferred territory of Third Way government.¹⁹ That aside, Velasco’s point stands: left-leaning proposals, “initiatives for economic and social equality and the respect of cultural diversity” as he puts it, were deliberately pushed aside as threats to a collective, uniform identity.²⁰ It is this collective “we” that Richard Sennett, in his critique of communitarianism, refers to as the “dangerous pronoun” precisely because it obscures complex realities in favour of superficial commonality.²¹

¹⁹ These three themes were established by Bill Clinton under the slogan of the “New Covenant” in late 1991 and continued throughout his candidacy and presidency. See for instance, Clinton’s “Farewell Address to the Nation,” January 18, 2001: “I have steered my course by our enduring values: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all Americans.” Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=63777&st=&st1=>

²⁰ Velasco, 22.

²¹ The final chapter of Richard Sennett’s *The Corrosion of Character* is entitled “The Dangerous Pronoun,” referring to the pronoun “we.” In short, Sennett’s critique is that, “Communitarianism ... has a very dubious claim of ownership of trust or commitment; it falsely emphasizes unity as a source of strength in a community and mistakenly fears that when conflicts arise in a community, social bonds are threatened.” See

As with the Democratic Party, changes at *The Oprah Winfrey Show* were precipitated by a sense of crisis. In the mid-1980s, the daytime audience-participation talk show was dominated by just four major players: Phil Donahue, Sally Jessy Raphael, Geraldo Riviera and Oprah Winfrey. A decade later, the format was a billion-dollar industry with a weekly audience of over fifty million people. Competition for this revenue had, however, become tough. This manifested itself in the number of competitors – over twenty nationally-syndicated shows – as well as the type of content featured.²² Trysh Travis describes the scene:

In the early 1990s, however, a blizzard of new talk shows appeared, whose young hosts, sensational topics, and production designs aimed to create maximum conflict and disruption among the guests and the studio audience ... each regularly treating topics like “When Your Best Friend Is Sleeping with Your Father,” “Get Bigger Breasts Or Else,” and “Women Who Marry Their Rapists.”²³

The excesses of so-called “trash talk” television came to a head when, in March 1995, Jon Schmitz, a guest on *The Jenny Jones Show*, murdered another guest Scott Amedure, subsequent to the show’s taping. In his defence, Schmitz blamed Jenny Jones for embarrassing him on national TV with the news that Amedure was his secret gay admirer.²⁴ Echoes of this defence were heard in the voices of talk-show critics, who saw in the incident an illustration of the corrosive effects of tabloid-style television. Critics, including both prominent Republicans and Democrats, launched a boycott of some talk-show advertisers, charging that such shows were “cultural rot” that served only to “degrade the human personality.”²⁵ The Clinton administration was pressured into taking action. A summit was organised and a statement was issued from the Secretary of Health and Human Services urging TV producers to exhibit restraint.²⁶ Notably then, the incident was an opportunity for centrist Democrats such as Joseph Lieberman to talk about the importance of “values” and to silence those who occupied the extremes, defined not only in

The Corrosion of Character: the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 142-143.

²² Bernard M. Timberg, Robert J. Erler, *Television Talk: A History of the TV Talk Show* (Austin, T.X.: University of Texas Press, 2002), 175.

²³ Travis, 1025.

²⁴ Timberg, Erler, 175.

²⁵ William Bennett cited in Howard Kurtz, “Morality Guru Takes on Talk TV: Daytime Confessionals Are William Bennett’s New Targets,” *Washington Post*, October 26, 1995, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1995/10/26/morality-guru-takes-on-talk-tv-daytime-confessionals-are-william-bennetts-new-targets/b298eb6f-c957-4471-9c59-0f9b65722182>.

²⁶ Timberg, Erlier, 176.

terms of controversy but a kind of unhealthy subjectivity.²⁷ Thus white supremacists, Satanists, transvestites, AIDS patients, adulterers and members of the underclass were together taken as evidence of a social pathology to which the apparent answer was a more civilised public sphere.

It was exactly this invocation of an idealised public sphere, where “a highly literate citizenry” enjoyed “robust and vibrant” discussion, which marked the reception of Oprah’s Book Club.²⁸ As Trysh Travis notes, defenders of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* have always pointed to the way in which, in addition to the traditional notion of the public sphere, the talk show has opened the way for a swathe of other heretofore excluded voices: “women, children, racial and ethnic minorities, the differently abled, the sexually transgressive, and ‘others’ of all stripes.”²⁹ It is undeniably true, that throughout the first decade of the show’s existence, *Oprah* and shows like it, gave representation to these groups and it is on this basis – as well as Oprah’s own outsider status – that Oprah’s credentials as an advocate of diversity are founded. It has also been claimed that the Book Club served a similar purpose. Cecilia Konchar Farr, for instance, calls it a “leap into cultural democracy.”³⁰ Ted Striphas not only applauds the Book Club for giving critical tools to women readers but defends it from the “demeaning attitudes” of elitist critics.³¹ Putting aside the question of whether representation is in itself empowering, (and in reference to *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Janice Peck’s answer is a resounding “no”)³², we might question whether it was actually the case that, in terms of its preferred reading strategies, the Book Club is really the bastion of progressive politics it appears to be.

As with the re-branding of the Democratic Party, the question of the audience in commercial television is, at bottom, a matter of competitive survival. Oprah Winfrey and her producers had already seen the writing on the wall prior to the *Jenny Jones* incident. Thus the transformation of the *Oprah* show, substantially achieved in the 1994 season, could be considered a kind of pre-emptive campaign against her both critics and her rivals,

²⁷ R. A. Hamilton, “Connecticut Q & A: Senator Joseph Lieberman; What, He Asks, Are the Children Viewing?” *New York Times*, January 28, 1996: Sec. 13, CN 3.

²⁸ Travis, 1017.

²⁹ Travis, 1017.

³⁰ Cecilia Konchar Farr, *Reading Oprah: How Oprah’s Book Club Changed the Way America Reads* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2005), 107.

³¹ Ted Striphas, “A Dialectic with the Everyday: Communication and Cultural Politics on Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20, no. 3 (September 2003): 297.

³² Peck has a sustained critique of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* along these lines throughout her book. For a summary of her rebuttal of claims that talks show are feminist simply because they “make women’s experience the primary content.” See Peck, 68.

which Winfrey, cuttingly, began to refer to as the “trash pack.”³³ Peck looks at the number of initiatives which Winfrey pursued in this season as evidence of her desire to enhance her brand, moving away from the “trash” and towards a more affluent audience, comprised mainly of white, middle-class women. Firstly, Winfrey began 1994 with a double episode “Are Talk Shows Bad?,” tackling the issue head on. According to Peck, *Oprah* was often seen as a tasteful exception to the “trash pack” but by bringing on academic and journalistic critics of the genre and of her *personally*, she was able to elicit support for her new direction from even her harshest detractors.³⁴ The episodes served Oprah’s strategy brilliantly: she admitted and apologised for past wrongs, distinguished herself from hosts that everyone agreed were more culpable and committed herself to a new format emphasising “what’s of value in the world.”³⁵ Secondly, halfway through 1994, Winfrey parted ways with long-time executive producer Debra DiMaio. The separation was apparently hastened by a disagreement over the new direction of the show. Winfrey had already announced her intention to “upgrade, uplift, enlighten and encourage people” while DiMaio, facing a ratings backlash, counselled a return to “hard-edged” fare.³⁶ A large severance payment settled the dispute and cleared the path for the new emphasis on uplift. Finally, in conjunction with changes in the format, Winfrey made a number of publicity appearances in *TV Guide*, *People*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and, later, on *The Larry King Show*, all of which served as opportunities to put distance between her and the “trash pack.” Beyond those rhetorical strategies already advanced, these appearances brought into relief something which was perhaps beyond commercial considerations, the new technologies of healing associated with the New Age over and above those associated with Recovery.

Consider, for instance, this exchange between Oprah Winfrey and Larry King on CNN in January 1995, which took place just *before* the *Jenny Jones* murder hit the national headlines:

KING: Daytime television has become kind of like – it’s a joke.

WINFREY: It’s diseased.

KING: You say daytime television, and you think: “My aunt slept with my sister’s boyfriend while I was out with my mother.” What happened?

³³ M. Lorando, “Oprah Focuses on the Light Side,” *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, November 8, 1994, 1E.

³⁴ “Are Talk Shows Bad?” Parts 1 & 2, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, September 12-13, 1994.

³⁵ “Moral Dilemmas: What Would You Do?” *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, January 14, 1994.

³⁶ Cited in Bill Adler, ed., *The Uncommon Wisdom of Oprah Winfrey: A Portrait in Her Own Words* (New York: Carol Publishing, 2000 [1997]), 120.

The language here is revealing. Winfrey did go on to defend talk-shows, using a framework that I have described as progressive multiculturalism. Winfrey argued that in her past career, she was able to get “taboo” subjects into the open, giving voice to those previously excluded from the public sphere. On the other hand, she bemoaned the “extreme” content on other shows, thereby positioning herself as a more centrist voice. However, the use of the word “diseased” – itself a rather extreme condemnation – positions Winfrey in another way. It suggests that the disease metaphor, which governed the Recovery movement’s understanding of problematic individuals and, in the late 1980s, also came to be a way of understanding social problems, was losing its grip on the mainstream. Now, rather than a way of “empowering” addicts by providing them with a rational, medical explanation of their problems and a cure in the form of the Recovery programme, “disease” becomes an epithet, not dissimilar to “trash.” Disease, dysfunction and victimhood were now markers of marginal status. Winfrey, who was nothing if not a woman in touch with the pulse of Middle America, reinforced this sentiment in another interview from around the same time:

the time has come for this genre of talk show to move from dysfunctional whining and complaining and blaming. I have had enough of people’s dysfunction We’re all aware that we do have some problems and we need to work on them. What are you willing to do about it?... That’s what our shows are going to be about.³⁷

Having spent much of the previous decade enmeshed in the confessions and pathologies of Recovery, Winfrey was now running fast in the opposite direction. Her famous empathy with the downtrodden was replaced by impatience at their failure to change. As Maria McGrath points out, Winfrey’s journey to the light of the New Age had a distinctly dark side which manifested in a tendency to indulge in victim-blaming.³⁸ For instance, Winfrey admitted that “five years ago I would have been more sensitive to it” but that recently her blunt advice to victims of stalking was: “So move. So move!”³⁹ It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that Winfrey’s conservatism was disingenuous or inconsistent with what had come before. Rather, Winfrey had always adhered to the

³⁷ Bill Adler, 76.

³⁸ Maria McGrath, “Spiritual Talk: *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and the Popularization of the New Age” in *The Oprah Phenomenon*, ed. Jennifer Harris, Elwood Watson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 126, 130.

³⁹ Dana Kennedy, “Oprah Act Two,” *Entertainment Weekly*, September 9, 1994, 25.

principle of individual responsibility and it was this principle that became the pivot around which her new brand of spiritual uplift would displace Recovery. As Peck points out, the same publicity appearances that served to promote this new brand were filled with promises to “be more responsible,” “to do more responsible television” and to expect “more responsibility” from her guests.⁴⁰ But in the cosmology of the New Age, the language of responsibility is not invested in simply raising awareness of a social issue or coming to a moment of individual realisation but in a series of technologies designed to transform the self from the inside out.

Though it seems redundant to point it out, one such technology favoured by New Age authors and by Oprah’s Book Club is reading itself. More specifically, the meaning of literacy is shaped by a set of assumptions that, without ever being explicitly stated as such, are derived from a counter-cultural religious tradition in America that can be traced back to the New Thought religious movement of the late nineteenth-century and beyond. In Chapter Two, I noted that despite a tendency to connect New Thought with the emergence of consumer capitalism at the turn of the century, the movement had many features that also link it to the reformist politics of the Progressive Era. There is an argument that many of the titles within Oprah’s Book Club are politicising to the extent that they give representation to persistent and contentious societal problems such as poverty, sexism and racism. Kimberly Chabot Davis, for instance, claims that the Book Club creates “stepping stones for individuals to move towards more public-orientated anti-racist acts” and other kinds of “political engagement.”⁴¹ The Book Club may indeed establish a public sphere for the discussion of political issues but I would argue that, in the context of Third Way politics and its incessant search for a unifying centre, such a politics may fall far short of counter-cultural or progressive ideals. Indeed, as Trysh Travis has argued, several features of the Club associated with modern-day New Age beliefs, work to contain the more troubling aspects of the literature, re-framing them not as “structures of domination and difference” but as opportunities to establish emotional connections.⁴² As Travis has shown, the reading strategy in the Book Club – governed to a large degree by Winfrey’s own preferred interpretation – is to emphasise a kind of ethical bond between the reader and certain characters and their struggles. But the very relatability of these characters often moves readers to the conclusion that they are somehow “just like me,” a conclusion which

⁴⁰ All instances cited by Peck, 127. Original quotes from, in order: Lorando, 1E; Bill Adler, 78; and Kennedy, 28.

⁴¹ Kimberley Chabot Davis’s “Oprah’s Book Club and the Politics of Cross-Racial Empathy,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 2004): 414.

⁴² Travis, 1030.

ultimately dissolves the particulars of their struggle in order to celebrate a mystical form of unity. Like centrist politics, the centrist New Age literature promoted on *Oprah* thus abstracts the historical circumstances in which conflict arises. A consensus is established within which past historical injustice and present-day dissent is conflated, perceived as equally incomprehensible.

As several commentators have noted, the universalising tendency of the Book Club is related to Winfrey's own biography, or rather to the way in which Winfrey and others have chosen to interpret it. John Howard, for instance, sees in Winfrey's rags-to-riches narrative a contemporary, multicultural version of the Horatio Alger story but one which still credits individual strength and spirituality over and above the black institutions which also fostered her success.⁴³ Unlike her peers in these institutions, Winfrey has never seen collective black identity or collective feminist identity as a source of power despite being a champion for authors such as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor. As Howard explains, these literary heroes are "individuated, cast in the singular, as collaborator, friend, or mentor to Winfrey."⁴⁴ Indeed, in telling Winfrey's story, literature usually figures as an escape, both from her life as a poor black farm girl and from her peers, from whom she always felt ostracised. In an interview with *Life*'s Marilyn Johnson, Winfrey confesses that "No one ever told me I was loved. Ever, ever, ever. Reading and being a 'smart girl' was my only sense of value, and it was the only time I felt loved."⁴⁵ Isolated from other children and her own family, Winfrey sought identification with her favourite characters such as Francie Nolan, the protagonist of Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. There is, however, a sense in which reading did presuppose an engagement with a larger community of people. As Mark Hall notes, books provided not only "education, friendship, and solace"⁴⁶ but civic participation: "Getting my library card was like citizenship, it was like American citizenship," Winfrey told Johnson.⁴⁷ But as Hall recounts Winfrey's first adult experience as a literary sponsor, there is a sense in which Winfrey's ideal community is self-selecting rather than genuinely democratic. Both devastated and thrilled by Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Winfrey "handed out copies to all her friends."⁴⁸ But following this act of generosity, Winfrey then says, "I couldn't

⁴³ Howard, 3.

⁴⁴ Howard, 11.

⁴⁵ Marilyn Johnson, "Oprah Winfrey: A Life in Books," *Life*, September 1997, 45.

⁴⁶ R. Mark Hall, "The 'Oprahfication' of Literacy: Reading 'Oprah's Book Club,'" *College English* 65, no. 6 (July 2003): 649.

⁴⁷ Johnson, 48.

⁴⁸ Norman King, *Everybody Loves Oprah! Her Remarkable Life Story* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 134.

have conversations with women who hadn't read *The Color Purple*.”⁴⁹ This pattern of behaviour is repeated in the format of the Book Club, where books selected by Winfrey form the basis of the discussion. The discussion itself is limited to a few handpicked guests, and for most part tends to reinforce a consensus formed around Winfrey's own opinion of the work. According to Kathleen Rooney, Winfrey “resorts to the imposition of various extraneous narratives – including those of the show, herself, and her readers – upon the novels.”⁵⁰ That such a consensus is not wholly representative is demonstrated by the “heated debates” that Chabot finds in the online discussion boards for these same novels.⁵¹

Trysh Travis explores the Book Club in terms of what she describes as a three-stage process of interpretation. As Travis explains, in quizzing Book Club guests about their response to a novel, Winfrey's first line of questioning would often revolve around identification:

She actively solicited that identification, urging would-be guests to explain in their letters to her “how the book touched you” or “how you were affected by it.” Similar questions guided the on-air discussions as well, with Winfrey asking guests, “Did you see yourself?” or, “Is this story like your own in any way?”⁵²

As Travis notes, understanding characters in terms of one's own “psychological validation” is not an unreasonable reading strategy and, indeed, one which is the starting point for most discussions in university tutorials. However, following this, Winfrey encouraged a somewhat deeper engagement in the world of the novel, one in which social hierarchies are explored. Thus Ursula Hegi's *Stones from the River*, a novel about a dwarf who helps Jews hide from the Gestapo, serves as an opportunity for readers to experience the “differentness of being a dwarf,” as one guest put it. From simple identification, the novel moved Winfrey to a place where, as she says, “it's expanded me ... it opened me up in a way.” As Travis states, the second stage could also become “the grounds for social action.” In this particular episode, a guest challenged the terror of the Nazis in a way that suggested that they were not merely an inexplicable force of evil but the products of an acquiescent society. However, according to Travis, such moments were rare and fleeting.

⁴⁹ Johnson, 54.

⁵⁰ Kathleen Rooney, *Reading with Oprah: The Book Club That Changed America* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005), 22.

⁵¹ Chabot Davis, 401.

⁵² Travis, 1032.

Indeed, Winfrey's own openness to difference was short-lived since the ultimate goal of that openness was the dissolution "of the gap between the self and its others." Reflecting on *Stones from the River*, Winfrey concluded by stating that "(even) if you are a dwarf, then ... there is no difference between yourself and myself ... there is no difference, you know."⁵³ The third stage of Winfrey's "pedagogy of openness" is therefore the transcendence of social and political division, achieved by recasting various "isms" as a failure to connect with a higher spiritual unity.

While the particular mode of interpretation pursued on *Oprah* seeks consensus through the transcendence of the self/other binary, the actual contours of the enchanted self can be seen more clearly against the background of the history of print culture, a history from which the Book Club draws significant power and meaning. For Peck, much of our present-day understanding of print culture is rooted in the concomitant development of literacy and the bourgeoisie since the mid-eighteenth century. The rise of the bourgeois public sphere, famously articulated in the work of Jurgen Habermas, was predicated upon the growth of "book clubs, reading circles, and subscription libraries" (as well as the first public libraries) devoted to professional literary criticism."⁵⁴ According to Habermas, the public sphere of the Enlightenment was partly a response to the proliferation of cultural goods, especially books, which had lost their "sacramental character" – in other words, the church lost their "monopoly of interpretation."⁵⁵ Thus the salons and coffee houses buzzed with "rational-critical debate," a collective attempt to make sense of new art-forms such as the psychological novel.⁵⁶ While the European version of public sphere has been critiqued as a model which largely excluded women, mid-nineteenth century book clubs in the United States were in fact dominated by middle-class women. According to Mark Hall, Oprah's Book Club revives this American tradition of "intellectual self-improvement, self-expression and friendship" but does it in a way which suggests that the ideas contained in books can, in a quite a literal sense, change lives (a theme hammered home in 1998 when the entire season of *Oprah* was branded "Change Your Live TV").⁵⁷ In the mid-1980s, Winfrey might have claimed that her show changed lives simply by establishing a public forum for personal problems; that through the technology of the confession, ugliness would be confronted and understood. But ten years later the cures prescribed by the

⁵³ "Selena's Family," *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, April 8, 1997.

⁵⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1989), 51.

⁵⁵ Habermas, 36-37.

⁵⁶ Habermas, 51.

⁵⁷ Hall, 646.

Recovery movement were seen as inadequate. As I have suggested, the Book Club was part of a series of innovations within the *Oprah Winfrey Show* to seize the centre ground, to restrict the space in which unruly and dissenting voices could speak and, furthermore, to tolerate trauma and pathology only up to the point where they could be recuperated within a New Age framework of healing. In the way that the Book Club encouraged openness and inclusivity but foreclosed genuine debate, it was similar to the heavily circumscribed public sphere of political elites described by Velasco. However, perhaps because it was so strongly gendered, both in terms of its subject matter and its empathetic style of interpretation, the Book Club could at the same time be perceived as an attack on “Old World privilege and elitism with her guerrilla force of women readers behind her.”⁵⁸

In truth, the form of participation encouraged by the Book Club is accurately described neither as authoritarian nor radically democratic, neither militantly feminist nor an enclave of privilege. Rather, *Oprah* is closer to what she herself describes as a “ministry,”⁵⁹ one where Winfrey fulfilled the role of a moral authority but is at the same time a best friend, “the nation’s girlfriend” as the *Los Angeles Times* put it.⁶⁰ Though Winfrey is loathe to define her spirituality directly – preferring to speak through the words of her favourite authors – her ambiguous relationship to her audience, as both guru and friend, is, in itself, a commentary about the loose, leaderless style of New Age spirituality. According to Elizabeth Lesser, one of Winfrey’s proxies on oprah.com, morality (“You are your own best authority”) and truth (“The truth accommodates your growth”) are essentially personal decisions that may change according to one’s “journey” in life. Lesser contrasts this “new spirituality” to the “old spirituality” in which morality is set in doctrine and the Church’s hierarchy is well-defined.⁶¹ Taking seriously the religious dimension of Oprah’s mission, clues us into how we might interpret the public sphere in the light of the Book Club’s promotion of literature. In contrast to the Habermasian ideal, Oprah’s Book Club might be best viewed as a way to re-sacralise or re-enchant the printed book and, in turn, the self. In this context, the ideal was not “rational-critical debate” but the construction of a genre and mode of authorship in which liberation was no longer equated with intellectual knowledge. Rather, the Book Club teaches us that the world, much like a

⁵⁸ Farr, 108.

⁵⁹ Janet Lowe, *Oprah Winfrey Speaks: Insights from the World’s Most Influential Voice* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 128.

⁶⁰ Stephen Braun, “How Oprah Reinvented Her Talk Show and Became America’s No. 1 Tastemaker,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1997: Calendar 8+.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Lesser, “Excerpt from *The Seeker’s Guide*,” <http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Read-an-Excerpt-from-The-Seekers-Guide-by-Elizabeth-Lesser> Published September 6, 2008.

book, can be creatively re-interpreted, new connections can be discovered; that reality is not a given but is subject to own authority.

One early review of the Book Club from the *Baltimore Sun*'s Laura Lippman noted that Winfrey's picks reflect "a taste for the tragic ... with an obligatory note of uplift."⁶² Similarly, for Peck, the selections feature "women from 'dysfunctional' families, who through prolonged suffering, finally achieve self-knowledge and emerge as better persons in the end."⁶³ Thus, the characters do not remain mired in misery but use an awareness of their situation to improve themselves. The exceptions to this rule are, however, instructive too. Like the women who were victims of stalkers, Winfrey expressed a certain impatience with the eponymous Ruth from Jane Hamilton's *The Book of Ruth*, a victim of domestic abuse. Having read the book several years earlier, Winfrey told Hamilton, "I was not so empathetic with Ruth this time I have grown and Ruth did not."⁶⁴ In her discussion of authorship in the Book Club, Travis notes another telling exception in the form of Toni Morrison. According to Travis, Morrison, who appeared several times on the Book Club, is "frequently invoked as an exemplary guest" but "she is more accurately viewed as an exceptional one."⁶⁵ Travis notes that the majority of Book Club authors tended to fall into a pattern where the creative process was likened to the harnessing of "efflorescent forces," a connection to a mystical elsewhere.⁶⁶ These descriptions tended to downplay the writer's own contribution to the process, instead emphasising the role of divine inspiration through dreams, serendipity and revelation. Morrison, on the other hand, pushed back against this interpretation, reminding Winfrey that she "had to write every word." Speaking to readers of her novel *Paradise*, Morrison urged them "to have an intellectual response to the issues being debated here." But as Travis relates, Winfrey could, in one moment, praise Morrison for the intellectual qualities in her writing, and in the next moment, return to the dominant interpretation of the Book Club with comments like "don't read this book just with your head!"⁶⁷ A final example, Eckhart Tolle's *A New Earth*, might also be regarded as exceptional. While Tolle's 1997 bestseller, *The Power of Now*, was recommended by Winfrey through her *O* magazine, it was not until 2008 that Tolle appeared as part of the Book Club. According to Ainsley Jenicek, the selection of an "overtly spiritual, non-

⁶² Laura Lippman, "The Oprah Canon," *Baltimore Sun*, June 18, 1997: 1E.

⁶³ Peck, 186.

⁶⁴ "Debbie Reynolds and Albert Brooks," *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, January 22, 1997.

⁶⁵ Travis, 1031.

⁶⁶ Travis, 1031.

⁶⁷ Toni Morrison, "How'd They Do That?" *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, November 18, 1996.

fictional book” for the Book Club was an “unprecedented move.”⁶⁸ What was previously an implicit claim about the spiritual possibilities of reading are made explicit by Tolle right from the outset: “This book is about you. It’ll change your state of consciousness or it will be meaningless. It can only awaken those who are ready.”⁶⁹ The notion that the book was a kind of enchanted object – a gift from the universe, revealing its message to those sufficiently liberated – was there but unstated throughout the history of the Book Club. Years later, in Tolle, it was finally given full expression.

As with the empathetic, affective reading strategies discussed earlier, Winfrey’s treatment of literacy – of genre, of authorship, of the book itself – should be understood in terms of the New Age’s distinctive mixture of therapy and religion. The proviso here is that neither therapy nor religion should be treated as meaningful in and of themselves. As Stuart Hall said of religion many years ago:

[Religion] has no necessary, intrinsic, transhistorical belongingness. Its meaning political and ideological – comes precisely from its position within a formation. It comes with what else it is articulated to.⁷⁰

As I have argued here, one way to understand the discursive formation in which New Age spirituality is articulated is through an analogy with the advent of the centrist political rationality known as the Third Way. Oprah’s Book Club may have been a laudable attempt to get America reading again, to inspire and to empower through the written word. However, like the politics of transcendence described by Velasco, this apparently civilising technology did not come without ideological baggage. As in centrist politics, consensus is privileged over conflict in a way that actually excludes large swathes of the population, limiting the scope of acceptable discourse in order to win over a relatively affluent, homogenous “mainstream.” To employ one of Winfrey’s own favourite phrases, the Book Club was a “makeover,” one of many ways in which, during the 1990s, the *Oprah* show signalled to its viewers that it was no longer part of the talk-show “trash pack.” Perhaps more significantly, the New Age spirituality which pervaded this new phase replaced the previous ethos, which was based in the pathological discourse of the Recovery movement. As journalist Peter Canellos put it, the “spilling of toxic revelations about corrupt

⁶⁸ Ainsley Jenicek, “Worshipping the Enterprising Self: The Oprah Empire’s Brand of Spiritual Self-Governance Thesis” (Master’s Thesis, Concordia University, 2009), 16.

⁶⁹ Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose* (New York: Plume, Penguin Group, 2006), 7.

⁷⁰ Stuart Hall cited in Lawrence Grossberg, “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 (June 1986): 54.

relationships” was replaced by an emphasis upon “Responsibility, gratitude and respect.”⁷¹ In this new phase, literacy was combined with a new therapeutic focus on overcoming pain by seeing it as a temporary, almost illusory phenomenon that obscured a more profound and optimistic truth about the enchanted self and the universe. Thus while opening up a new space of freedom, New Age literature also works to discipline the self in ways that are, in their own way, just as intensive as Recovery. Given the resources to reach transcendence, the *responsibility* of liberation falls again upon the individual.

5.3 Marianne Williamson

Marianne Williamson is a prominent figure in many accounts of Oprah Winfrey’s transition in the early nineties from a discourse dominated by the framework of Recovery literature to one inspired by New Age literature.⁷² Partly due to Winfrey’s support, Williamson’s 1992 debut, *A Return to Love*, was a publishing phenomenon, spending 39 weeks atop the *New York Times* bestseller list.⁷³ Williamson has, in a sense, returned the favour by providing for Winfrey and her audience, an accessible way in which to understand the cosmology of the New Age. *A Return to Love* does this by couching this transition to New Age spirituality through Williamson’s own personal biography. *Return* builds the distance between the older, more esoteric versions of the New Age and the “new” centrist New Age literature of the 1990s into its very structure, the substance of the book being a commentary on *A Course in Miracles*, an early classic of the New Age movement. Williamson’s account of her spiritual journey works to reframe this commentary in a way that makes it more relatable. While *A Return to Love*’s reliance on this earlier source has not been without controversy (certain biblical scholars have attacked *A Course in Miracles* as a work of heresy because it claims to have channelled Jesus Christ),⁷⁴ the book’s success has certainly proven that there is a large audience of middle-class, baby-boomers, like Williamson, who identify as “spiritual” but not necessary

⁷¹ Peter Canellos, “Popular Winfrey Looks Beyond TV,” *Boston Globe*, May 29, 1997: A1.

⁷² See Peck, 105-107 and also Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 258-259.

⁷³ *New York Times*, November 29, 1992. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/29/books/best-sellers-november-29-1992.html>>

⁷⁴ A statement by the Christian Research Institute details the many ways in which *A Course in Miracles* departs from biblical Christianity in terms of “such issues as sin, guilt, and atonement” and “the acceptance of New Age occult teachings, such as pantheism ... and psychic development.” CRI Statement, “A Course in Miracles,” <<http://www.equip.org/articles/a-course-in-miracles/>>

“religious” in the traditional sense of belonging to a particular faith or denomination.⁷⁵ A common sociological narrative places this cohort of unchurched “seekers” within the long decline of “traditional” values and institutions in the face of unrestrained individualism. However, I argue here that Williamson’s cosmology is not separate from but emerges from within the same context that, in the nineties, gave rise to sociological and political anxieties around the lack of civic engagement, diminished trust and reciprocity, declining social capital, and the like. Williamson’s opinion was valued by politicians such as the Clintons precisely because, in *Return*, she successfully articulated in a therapeutic mode what would become the *topos* of the American political centre: “traditional values in a changing world.”⁷⁶ What this means in Williamson’s cosmology, is that “society” is rejected, insofar as it is construed as those large, bureaucratic and corporate institutions which impinge on the freedom of the individual. However, in *A Return to Love* and subsequent works, Williamson can, at the same time, be seen to promote an alternative form of sociality, which we can associate with community. Like the forms of participation ascribed above to Oprah’s Book Club, this community is held together by a mystical form of belonging but also as a matter of free choice rather than imposition.

In the late 1970s, Williamson happened upon *A Course in Miracles*, a text which had recently been properly published and distributed after existing for almost a decade as an unpublished manuscript. By any measure *A Course in Miracles* is an extraordinary work. In its full, three-volume version, it is over 1100 pages. It was initially dictated or “channelled” to the psychologist Helen Schucman in 1965 by a voice which the text implies is Jesus Christ. According to Wouter Hanegraaff:

If we were to select one single text as “sacred scripture” in the New Age movement, the sheer awe and reverence with which *The Course*—as it is fondly called—is discussed by its devotees would make this huge volume the most obvious choice.⁷⁷

Hanegraaff relates that this “reverence” for *The Course* has translated into an “extraordinarily large number of commentaries” over the years, of which Williamson’s

⁷⁵ A 2005 Newsweek/Beliefnet Poll found that more Americans described themselves as “spiritual” (79 percent) than “religious” (64 percent). See Jerry Adler, “In Search of the Spiritual,” *Newsweek*, August 29–September 5, 2005, <http://www.newsweek.com/search-spiritual-117833>.

⁷⁶ Alex Callinicos, *Against the Third Way* (London: Polity Press, 2001), 12.

⁷⁷ Hanegraaff, 37–38.

own is perhaps the most popular.⁷⁸ Williamson's own re-telling of *The Course* began in 1983 when she first began to host discussion groups in the Los Angeles area.

It is not clear from the oblique details given in *Return* whether Williamson's lifestyle changed at the moment she began to offer her own "spiritual psychotherapy" lessons or whether, in the decade prior to the *Return*'s publication, she gradually reformed herself.⁷⁹ However, in the book's first chapter, entitled "Hell," she gently rebukes herself for her formerly liberal attitudes to sex, drinking and drugs. We also learn that Williamson informed herself of "ways out of (her) personal hell;" reading books about positive thinking, practising cognitive therapies, joining 12-step programmes and so on. Although Williamson defines her problem as an addiction ("My negativity was as destructive to me as alcohol is to the alcoholic"), she passed through Recovery programmes without experiencing a breakthrough.⁸⁰ She claims that "neither my intellect nor my willpower" was enough. Williamson often returns to this division between different kinds of knowing: intellectual knowledge, arrogant in its detachment, and a deeper kind of affective truth, open and spiritually connected. Thus, her generation was simply too "hip" or self-conscious to consider "surrendering" to God: "We're disgusted with ourselves because we think we should be better by now." Speaking of own "surrender," she claims it occurred at the point of a nervous breakdown: "That's when your head cracks open and God comes in."⁸¹

Williamson's personal journey through various therapies mirrors trends within Recovery literature towards a "spiritual psychotherapy" that was really psychotherapy in name only. Rather, a series of cognitive techniques are deployed – affirmations, prayer, meditation – all designed to positively change one's perception, to alter the horizon of expectation and challenge various limiting beliefs in one's life. Thus, in New Age literature, Recovery is finally divorced from any diagnosis which might count as a limiting belief; the label of "victim" is banished, as are other attempts to understand the present in terms of past trauma or repression (thus the talking cure survives, if at all, in severely atrophied form). In the previous chapter I discussed the work of John Bradshaw, in which the figure of the inner child works to redeem what is seen as the irredeemably "dysfunctional" nature of the family and society more widely. While this diagnosis of a "sick" society includes elements of New Left critique, at points it is so totalising as to

⁷⁸ Hanegraaff, 38.

⁷⁹ Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on A Course in Miracles* (London: Thorsons, 1996), xviii.

⁸⁰ Williamson, *Return*, 7, 9.

⁸¹ Williamson, *Return*, 9, 10, 11, 6, 12.

appear be there even prior to socialisation; thus “toxic shame” appears not as an object of bodily or mental health but a metaphysical state close to original sin. In *A Return to Love*, however, this image is reversed – the child is born in a state of perfect love and it is the necessity of returning to this state of perfect love to which the title refers:

When we were born, we were programmed perfectly. We had a natural tendency to focus on love. Our imaginations were creative and flourishing, and we knew how to use them. We were connected to a world much richer than the one we connect to now, a world full of enchantment and a sense of the miraculous.⁸²

For Williamson, the process of surrendering or returning to love, is also invested with a sense of responsibility that marks it as quite different to Recovery literature. For Bradshaw, to re-connect with the inner child is to re-connect with a sense of childlike fantasy and play taken away at the hand of our parents’ “abuse.” Williamson, on the other hand, claims that the problem with our generation is that “we never grew up.” She distances herself from the “popular” Recovery tendency to “blame ... everything on our parents.”⁸³ Typically non-judgemental, Williamson would prefer not to apportion blame at all. Hence the “very bad philosophy” we have come to know is simply identified with Western culture in its totality, “the thinking of the world.”⁸⁴ Although it sounds very much like Bradshaw’s “poisonous pedagogy,” the enemy here is not so much a rational worldview but our own “self-loathing.”⁸⁵

We were taught to think thoughts like competition, struggle, sickness, finite resources, limitation, guilt, bad, death, scarcity, and loss. We began to think these things, and so we began to know them. We were taught that things like grades, being good enough, money, and doing things the right way, are more important than love. We were taught that we’re separate from other people, that we have to compete to get ahead, that we’re not quite good enough the way we are The thinking of the world, which is not based on love, began pounding in our ears the moment we hit shore.⁸⁶

⁸² Williamson, *Return*, xxi.

⁸³ Williamson, *Return*, 5, 6.

⁸⁴ Williamson, *Return*, xxi, xxii.

⁸⁵ Williamson, *Return*, 6.

⁸⁶ Williamson, *Return*, xxii.

While Bradshaw's enchanted inner child is still linked to those perspectives, sociological or psychoanalytical, that recognise a context outside the self, for Williamson, "our oppression is internal," and must be first addressed internally through thoughts, words, and prayers in order for our reality to then change.⁸⁷ Her position, like that of the nineteenth-century followers of New Thought, is one of philosophical idealism. Thus, disease and pain become the outward manifestations of fear within the mind (elsewhere she claims that "there actually is no objective outer world").⁸⁸ For Williamson then, the "bad" thoughts she lists are not real, they are illusions that distance us from love which is "the essential existential fact." The truth of love is there but hidden, inaccessible to our eyes or ears. A "shift in perception" is required, both cognitive and spiritual in its orientation. Most of all, the responsibility for this shift is placed on the individual since "perception is a choice."⁸⁹

In 1997, Marianne Williamson decided to venture into politics with a new book, given the Clintonesque title of *Healing the Soul of America*. However, *Healing* is somewhat of a confounding book for someone expecting a policy agenda in line with Clinton's centrism. In fact the book veers from observations inspired by Plato, Jung and Einstein to denunciations of the WTO, the IMF and the GATT trade agreement that put Williamson far to the left of Bill Clinton. There is also a palpable change in Williamson's own position. In *Return*, Williamson had put "free-floating fear" at the root of her generation's problems, disputing the notion that baby-boomers were "lost, apathetic, narcissistic, or materialistic".⁹⁰

We're not being stopped by something on the outside, but by something on the inside. Our oppression is internal. The government isn't holding us back, or hunger or poverty. We're not afraid we'll get sent to Siberia. We're just afraid, period.⁹¹

In *Healing*, by contrast, Williamson highlights poverty ("the pain of millions of Americans"), corruption ("corporations have become a new aristocracy"), materialism ("America's false god [is] our economic obsessiveness") and the citizenry's complacency in the face of the "slow erosion of our democratic freedoms."⁹² She also chides herself for believing that "I only had to heal myself, and the world would take care of itself," warning

⁸⁷ Williamson, *Return*, 5.

⁸⁸ Marianne Williamson, *Healing the Soul of America: Reclaiming Our Voices as Spiritual Citizens* (New York: Touchstone, Revised Edition 2000 [1997]), 17.

⁸⁹ Williamson, *Return*, xxii, xxiv.

⁹⁰ Williamson, *Return*, 5.

⁹¹ Williamson, *Return*, 5.

⁹² Williamson, *Healing*, 165, 26, 126, 27.

that “there is a fine line ... between self-exploration and narcissism.”⁹³ In addressing founding national traumas such as slavery, the genocide of Native Americans, and the Vietnam War, Williamson not only acknowledges the past but recognises its continuing effects in the present – a signal that she had neither rejected her liberal attitudes nor divorced herself completely from the more unsettling aspects of the psychotherapeutic tradition. Indeed, the pop-Weberian historical account that Williamson gives will be familiar to readers of Bradshaw (and Robert Bly too) in its condemnation of the Industrial Revolution as another kind of founding trauma. However, this is overlaid with a pop-Hegelian interpretation of modernity where the “yin” of Enlightenment “wisdom” gives way to the “yang” of the Industrial Age and its supposedly “authoritarian business models.”⁹⁴

The kind of spiritual-historical model that Williamson promotes here, suggests that for all its differences to her previous work, *Healing the Soul of America* belongs fully to the New Age. With her historical dialectic, Williamson sets the scene for the emergence of a new stage of history:

With every generation – including our own – we’ve waged a fiery personal and political contest between our most noble and our basest thoughts. Which would control the destiny of this nation?... Americans have the yang; it’s time to reclaim the yin. We have the intelligence; it’s time to retrieve our souls. We have political democracy still; it’s time to reclaim our commitment to keeping it, and to live up to the historical challenge to make it even better for our children and theirs Democracy is profoundly relevant to the evolution of humanity, and as such it carries the psychological momentum to create miracles in the strangest places.⁹⁵

As Hanegraaff has defined it, the disparate strands of the New Age are united in their belief that there is a crisis in world affairs that can be remedied only by establishing a new dominant, a “third option” which rejects dogmatically dualistic or reductionist tendencies within “old religion” on the one hand, and “old science” on the other. In the tradition of New Age classics such as Marilyn Ferguson’s *Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980), *Healing* suggests that what is needed is a period of balance, which transcends the struggle between the rational and the spiritual. Ferguson predicted that, in the 1980s, the New Age movement would give rise to a similar historical convergence between two kinds of

⁹³ Williamson, *Healing*, 16.

⁹⁴ Williamson, *Healing*, 23.

⁹⁵ Williamson, *Healing*, 29.

politics – the social activism of the sixties and the “consciousness revolution” of the 1970s. Thus the Age of Aquarius was not just an astrological periodisation, it would be an evolutionary step into a “millennium of love and light,” achieved through a social transformation that in the first place, would be personal: a “change from the inside out.”⁹⁶ Williamson’s “holistic politics” (“inner activism meets outer activism”) revives Ferguson’s model of social change while touching on well-established themes of the New Age more generally.⁹⁷ Williamson’s quote above, for instance, fulfils all five of Hanegraaff’s “five basic elements” of New Age spirituality including all those curiously Victorian preoccupations that have come to stand for our contemporary New Age: comparative religion, the psychologisation of religion and evolutionary thinking.⁹⁸ If Williamson’s synthesis of Hegel, the Tao, and psychologically-induced “miracles” is somewhat disjointed, it nevertheless backs Hanegraaff’s contention that the New Age may constitute a criticism of western culture but that criticism “is expressed to a considerable extent on the premises of that same culture.”⁹⁹ Contemporary New Age literature has certainly incorporated some of the “new science” into its fold, popularising theories such as the holographic or self-organising universe, adapted from the likes of physicist David Bohm, neurologist Karl Pribram, and biochemist Ilya Prigogine. Befitting their preference for non-hierarchical forms of organisation, seekers have also been some of the earliest explorers of the possibilities of networked computing.¹⁰⁰ The notion of the “holographic universe” does appear in Williamson, but exotic references to wave-particle duality notwithstanding, the culture in which Williamson’s criticism is immersed returns us to the more mundane and familiar dilemma of the responsibility of the individual within liberalism.¹⁰¹

The goal of Williamson’s “spiritually-based social activism” is in fact the same task of civic renewal that the Third Way claims for itself: “the establishment of the

⁹⁶ Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1980), 18-19.

⁹⁷ Williamson, *Healing*, 57, 228.

⁹⁸ The five basic elements Hanegraaff lists are: (1) This-worldliness, particularly of the weak variety; (2) Holism; (3) Evolutionism; (4) Psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology; (5) Expectations of a coming New Age. See Hanegraaff, 514.

⁹⁹ Hanegraaff, 521.

¹⁰⁰ Marilyn Ferguson interprets both these developments as signs of the New Age. In the first instance, she weaves together Bohm’s theory of a holographic universe and Pribram’s theory of a kind of holographic brain or consciousness. In the second instance, the reality of the information revolution in the 1980s is seen as evidence of an emerging collective “one-world” consciousness as well as a new mode of non-hierarchical social organisation. See Hanegraaff, 113-151.

¹⁰¹ Williamson, *Healing*, 155.

beloved community.”¹⁰² For the state, community not society would be the target for a new, reciprocal arrangement of rights and responsibilities; a way to minimise the age-old conflict between self and society by organising around “shared values, norms and meaning” rather than around the cold bureaucracy of the state or the creative destruction of the market.¹⁰³ The value of this consensus-seeking centrism took on a therapeutic hue in Bill Clinton’s presidential campaign, where he told audiences that it was “time to heal America.”¹⁰⁴ Utilising vaguely mystical expressions like “[t]here is no them; there’s only us”,¹⁰⁵ Clinton conveyed what Velasco calls the politics of transcendence, a message of “clarity, oneness and political harmony.”¹⁰⁶ However, after heavy mid-term losses in 1994 – the so-called Republican Revolution – the prospects for such harmony appeared dim indeed. However, according to Velasco, however, the absence of actual bipartisanship in the present merely confirmed the need for a return to the centre: “(the) ‘center’ could always pose ... as a solution to the very problems ... that had supposedly initiated the search for ‘the center’ in the first place.”¹⁰⁷ It was after 1994, that a new language of social capital arose, both as a description of declining social attachments and an imperative to strengthen community ties in order to prevent the evils of “incivility, civic apathy, cultural separation.”¹⁰⁸ According to the sociologist Irene Taviss Thomson, the occasion for this new language was not recent political events but the vast wave of globalisation that had “further liberated individuals” from traditional ties. Indeed, for Thomson, this narrative of decline is almost synonymous with the history of sociology itself, but most strongly articulated at mid-century with the mass society thesis and, again, at the end of the century.¹⁰⁹

The most prominent among the commentators that Thomson identifies with this new communitarian theme is Robert Putnam. “Bowling Alone,” a thirteen-page scholarly article published in 1995 by the then little-known political scientist, became the catalyst

¹⁰² Martin Luther King cited in Williamson, *Healing*, 18.

¹⁰³ Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (London: Profile, 1997), 127.

¹⁰⁴ William J. Clinton, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York,” July 16, 1992. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25958>. This speech is also referred to as “A Place Called Hope” or “I Still Believe in a Place Called Hope.”

¹⁰⁵ Clinton, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination.”

¹⁰⁶ Velasco, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Velasco, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Velasco, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Irene Taviss Thomson, “The Theory That Won’t Die: From Mass Society to the Decline of Social Capital,” *Sociological Forum* 20, no. 3 (September 2005): 443.

for a vigorous national discussion around the already-dominant narrative of civic decline.¹¹⁰ According to Putnam:

The closing decades of the twentieth century found Americans growing ever less connected with one another and with collective life. We voted less, joined less, gave less, trusted less, invested less time in public affairs, and engaged less with our friends, our neighbors, and even our families. Our “we” steadily shriveled.¹¹¹

Though it was short and catchily-titled, there appeared no other easy explanation for the article’s unusual popularity, which thrust Putnam into the spotlight of the national media, bringing him to the attention of both Bill Clinton and Tony Blair.¹¹² Velasco speculates that Putnam’s confident use of empirical data, in the form of historical survey data, helped establish civic decline as a social “fact.”¹¹³ Similarly, by re-tooling James Coleman’s concept of social capital within a “social capital index,” Putnam claimed to be able to predict all manner of beneficial outcomes in terms of reduced crime and tax evasion and improved public health (famously, Putnam put the the risk factors for social isolation on a par with smoking).¹¹⁴ Though his data and methodological assumptions have since been qualified in many ways, what truly convinced the public was Putnam’s rhetoric, which Velasco describes as expressing an “evangelical fervor” for the “healing effects” of social capital.¹¹⁵ For critics like Thomson, the theory of social capital “lacks adequate empirical support,”¹¹⁶ but this is to miss the point that, for Putnam, the “strange disappearance of civic America” constitutes a “mystery” that he would really prefer not to solve, and certainly not in a way that would implicate one political ideology over another.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* 6 no. 1 (1995): 65-78.

¹¹¹ Robert Putnam, “Bowling Together” in *United We Stand: National Service and the Future of Citizenship*, ed. E.J. Dionne, Kayla Meltzer Drogosz and Robert E. Litan (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003), 136.

¹¹² According to *The New York Times*, Putnam was “profiled in *People*, interviewed relentlessly about his own habits of civic virtue and invited to Camp David to confer with President Clinton.” See Margaret Talbot, “Who Wants to Be a Legionnaire?” *New York Times*, June 25, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/06/25/reviews/000625.25talbot.html>.

The *Daily Telegraph* calls Robert Putnam, “Tony Blair’s new favourite guru” and describes him “getting the full red carpet treatment from the Government.” Rachel Sylvester, “Inside Politics,” *Daily Telegraph*, March 29, 2001. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/4260767/Inside-politics.html>>

¹¹³ Velasco, 78-79.

¹¹⁴ Putnam expanded upon these ideas in a full-length book published in 2000. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 331.

¹¹⁵ Velasco, 18-19.

¹¹⁶ Thomson, 421.

¹¹⁷ According to Velasco, “The equation “civic decline = a mystery” is central to most of Putnam’s work on social capital, appearing first in his 1995 *Political Science and Politics* article, “Timing In, Tuning Out: The

As Velasco notes, like many communitarian thinkers, Putnam not only projects a normative sociality but a normative subject – an “ideal citizen” whose objective must be to invest in the bonds which keep a community together but, at the same time, to transcend the political implications of collective action:

S/he is one who holds strongly to no particular side, save the side beyond all sides, a concern for an ultimate “setting of settings” that is said to contain and mediate politics in the U.S.¹¹⁸

The practical consequence of the elevation of this kind of “ideal citizen” was to enshrine what Nikolas Rose calls “an economics without enemies.”¹¹⁹ This is not necessarily an economic agenda favourable to the white, middle-class voters in the middle of the political spectrum – the traditional centre of American politics. Rather, this new centrism worked to abstract conflicts of interest in the economic arena (between employer and employee, for example), turning them instead towards questions of morality, such as the ever-present exhortations to reward hard work and honour families. However, there is a slippage between the supposedly liberating elimination of economic hierarchies and the moral imperative to eliminate “dissonance, resistance, conflict or struggle” from the community.¹²⁰ This moral imperative could not help but be prejudicial to the prospects of striking workers, welfare recipients, political dissenters, racial minorities and “non-traditional” households.

I began this section by suggesting that the enchanted subject, projected by Marianne Williamson and others New Age authors, found favour within a context in which anxieties about the decline of civic participation become a central object of governmental thought. Reading Williamson and Putnam together, what is apparent is the pure, loving subject of the former and the idyllic sense of community proposed by the latter are complementary: both are mythic in the sense that they remain conditions which can never be fulfilled, both sustain themselves through a longed-for sense of innocence that transcends the din of controversy, necessarily stripped of all markers of social and political difference which might threaten disunity. In fact, Putnam is perhaps the more conservative

Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America,” and then again in his 1996 *American Spectator* article, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America.” See Velasco, 82.

¹¹⁸ Velasco, 20.

¹¹⁹ Nikolas Rose, “Inventiveness in Politics,” *Economy and Society*, 28, no. 3 (1999): 467-493, 483.

¹²⁰ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 2. Honig’s argument about the “displacement of politics” is influential for Velasco who uses it in the more specific context of Clinton’s centrism.

figure since he is willing to recognise the first part of the Third Way refrain, “traditional values,” but not its corollary, the “changing world.” Putnam urges us to turn off the TV and return to a nostalgic time, prior to the turbulence of the sixties, where men joined Moose or Lions clubs, women made picnics for the family and friends were made through bowling leagues rather than a trip to the bowling being an occasion for friends to get together.¹²¹ For Williamson, values are not traditional, they are eternal since they “stand outside of time,” but she offers similarly inoffensive solutions to the “crisis in American democracy”: read good books, avoid bad television, vote, serve the underprivileged. For Putnam, the sixties was the beginning of the end for community; for Williamson, the counter-culture of the sixties remains a stalled project that she is confident will be reborn in the nineties, now that the baby-boomers she represents are ready to “awaken.”¹²² This metaphor of community, as that potential that always-already exists just below the surface – requiring nothing so much as our awareness to be realised – is something that appears consistently across communitarian and liberal thought; in Putnam, in Michael Sandel, in Todd Gitlin, and in the “dream country” of Richard Rorty.¹²³ In Williamson, it serves much the same function, as a way to contrast the “new, spiritually based social activism” with the more confrontational activism (“hating what is wrong and trying to fight it”) of the past.¹²⁴ But it also serves to make the analogy between the presocial utopia of *Return to Love* and the prepolitical utopia of American democracy’s “first principles.” According to Williamson, we must return to those principles which “protect the dream and stave off the nightmares.” Politics is no longer a “fight between competing opinions” but a process of transcendence, in which we work towards a “higher realization of principles on which we already agree.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Robert Putnam, “Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences,” *ISUMA: Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 41-51.

¹²² Williamson, *Healing*, 71, 72, 128.

¹²³ It is perhaps telling that there is a slippage in centrist rhetoric between metaphors of dreaming and awakening. One visionary, one sobering; they are both used to indicate a state of awareness that is the necessary presupposition for action. See Velasco’s chapter on the myth of civic renewal, 31-103. Further reading: Michael Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, M.A.: Belknap Press, 1996), Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), and Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th Century America* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹²⁴ Williamson, *Healing*, 18.

¹²⁵ Williamson, *Healing*, 70, 71.

5.4 Tony Robbins

He [Tony Robbins] has not only the gift to inspire but he, really, from my point of view, teaches the most important lesson that every individual has to learn about living day-to-day which is, that you have choices in every circumstance and you have to make up your mind how you will respond to whatever it is that happens as well as how you will try to make new things happen.¹²⁶

– Bill Clinton

As its title suggests, Thomas Frank's critique of nineties' market fundamentalism, *One Market Under God*, leans heavily on the idea that the faith placed in the New Economy was just that – an article of faith rather than something based in sober economic analysis. Frank catalogues the many evangelists of this faith from “bull market ideologues,” to a “dreadlocked libertarian,” to the “weird, mystical, almost crazy slogans” of management gurus.¹²⁷ Of the latter, Frank makes the point that no matter how absurd or self-contradictory the pronouncements of management theory, it was able to perpetuate itself within a corporate culture dedicated to establishing its own legitimacy. Whether or not the New Economy represented a genuine economic transformation, the rhetoric of *revolution* and *liberation* that accompanied it succeeded in attaining political, if not popular, consent for a wave of corporate-friendly reforms. For Frank then, the goal of management theory was “not efficiency or excellence or even empowerment” but sustaining this legitimacy in the face of corporate practices that were anything but empowering for ordinary workers.¹²⁸ Much of this context is relevant to a discussion of Tony Robbins; a tall, charismatic showman whose relentless self-promotion made him amongst the highest earning self-helpers of the eighties and nineties (*Personal Power II*, which was sold on tape and CD rather than as a book, has sold an incredible 35 million copies).¹²⁹ Whilst firmly situated in the category of success literature, Robbins' niche lies somewhere between sports coach, evangelical preacher, and management guru. Like much of the breathless management-speak that arose in the nineties, Robbins' advice is often uncredited, untested, and easily debunked. But at the same time, Robbins' advice speaks of a world that is actually more ordered and rational than management contemporaries like Tom Peters, who speaks of

¹²⁶ Bill Clinton cited in Taylor Kellogg, “Clinton's Opinion of Tony Robbins,” YouTube video, September 5, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qljYKplv_s.

¹²⁷ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* (London: Vintage, 2002 [2000]), 290, 292, 171.

¹²⁸ Frank, 178.

¹²⁹ Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc. Makeover Culture in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 62.

Thriving on Chaos or Charles Handy who celebrates *The Age of Unreason*. In truth, Robbins was able to navigate the transition between Reagan and Clinton eras by developing a philosophy that emphasised both the rational *and* the authentic, the choice-making self *and* the enchanted self, the language of technology, science and management *and* the language of inspiration.

Perhaps one reason why Robbins' message has continued to appeal is that its essence – the power of positive thinking – is unchanged. From *Unlimited Power*, published in 1986, to *Awaken the Giant Within*, five years later, superficial changes were made to create the impression that these books were geared, first, to the hard, macho ethos of Reaganism, then to the softer centrism of the Third Way. In fact, Robbins' New Age credentials are well-established because he has, from the beginning, promoted "mind power" techniques adapted from nineteenth-century New Thought writers. Quotes from New Thinkers such as Orison Swett Marden and Emmet Fox as well as their transcendentalist forefathers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau abound in Robbins' work. This debt to New Thought puts Robbins in the same company as many other New Age authors. His particular twist on "mind power," however, can be found in the way he combines this with an update of the business-as-philosophy-of-life sub-genre of success literature, synonymous with Dale Carnegie's 1936 classic, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Where Carnegie wrote for the glad-handing "organization man" of the large corporate or state bureaucracy, Robbins speaks to the exigencies of the contemporary labour market, especially what Douglas Holt, in the previous chapter, refers to as the free-agent frontier.¹³⁰ As Holt describes it, the supposed freedom of the free-agent frontier was in fact largely out of reach for most white-collar workers, who found their jobs increasingly routinised even as the media celebrated the autonomy and creativity of the knowledge worker. For Robbins, however, it is almost a truism that *everyone* is an entrepreneur, in charge of the self if not a leader of others. This mode of address, where the reader is constantly invited to be what Tom Peters calls the "CEO of Me, Inc.," is perhaps the most powerful way in which Robbins legitimates the free-agent frontier in the same way as Frank's market evangelists.¹³¹ From the complex

¹³⁰ The phrase "organization man" comes from William H. Whyte's classic critique of conformity within post-war America bureaucracy. See William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957 [1956]).

¹³¹ See Tom Peters, "The Brand Called You," *Fast Company*, August 1997, 83: "We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You."

realities of the labour market, Robbins abstracts and universalises an entrepreneurial subject which can then be a model for relations of power more generally.

Arguably, for Robbins, the entrepreneurial self is, at one and the same time, the enchanted self; a way of arriving at a perfectly conflict-free model of human relationships. As long as one has an authentic relation to the self, he seems to say, it follows that managing others becomes merely an exercise in effectively communicating one's vision. This hollowing out of power is comparable to what I have called, in relation to Oprah Winfrey, the politics of transcendence. In Robbins, religiosity is rarely explicit and never prescribed. Instead one's absolute commitment to the present – the instant, the moment of breakthrough, the “power of decision” – is always meant to be simultaneously read as an allegory of economic prosperity *and* cosmic alignment.¹³² For sociologists like Micki McGee, the concern here is that ideas from business are blithely translated into the whole of life – thus Robbins blurs the distinction between the private and public sphere, “asserting that the former is wholly constitutive of the latter.”¹³³ But of course it has always been the case that labour relations have been constitutive of subjectivity. The question is what kind of relationship is being produced here? As McGee herself points out, Robbins and fellow self-helper Stephen Covey (of *Seven Habits* fame) inhabit a consensual universe in which resources are limitless, change is always for the best, and every negotiation ends in a “win-win solution.”¹³⁴ This is not the zero-sum game that we associate with Reaganism. Rather, Robbins' continued success throughout the mid-eighties and nineties suggests that choice, or the “power of decision” as Robbins puts it, is at the centre of both the Reagan and Clinton eras. While we might intuitively think of choice as one of the central tenets of the competitive marketplace, we can make a division between the kind of calculated, rational choice-making associated with the neoliberalism of the Reagan era and what we might call *authentic* choice-making, which I associate with the Third Way. For Robbins, the subject should pursue innate talents and values – the “sleeping giant within” – but at the same time, the self labours to creatively reinvent itself, as a work of art always open to the future.¹³⁵

In reading Tony Robbins, one comes to appreciate a certain slipperiness that is perhaps representative of the eclecticism of New Age writing in general. Alongside hyperbolic claims for the superiority of his own system sits a grab-bag of references to

¹³² Anthony Robbins, *Awaken the Giant Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 33.

¹³³ McGee, 64.

¹³⁴ McGee, 69.

¹³⁵ Robbins, *Giant*, 22.

everyone from Jean-Paul Satre to Bob Dylan to Charles M. Schultz' *Peanuts* comic-strips. Similarly, the way his books are presented to the public and the substance of his argument are not necessarily in agreement. For instance, the most obviously Reaganite aspect of *Unlimited Power* is its title, which implies an aggressive approach to conquest. It is an implication that Robbins immediately begins to walk back a few pages into the first chapter:

I don't think of power in terms of conquering people. I don't think of it as something to be imposed Real power is shared, not imposed. It's the ability to define human needs and to fulfill them – both your needs and the needs of the people you care about. It's the ability to direct your own personal kingdom – your own thought processes, your own behaviour – so you produce the precise results you desire.¹³⁶

In this passage we see that “unlimited power” should be interpreted not as evidence of winner-take-all survivalism but rather as a reference to the Human Potential Movement (HPM) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As Wouter Hanegraaff has noted, “human potential,” initially coined by Maslow within the bounds of psychological research, has taken on an increasingly spiritual connotation within New Age circles. Maslow himself is credited with shifting from his own “third force” or humanistic psychology into a “fourth force” or transpersonal psychology.¹³⁷ In his attempts to bring intense religious experiences – which he termed “peak experiences” – into the field of psychology, Maslow in fact opened up the transcendence of the self as a domain *sui generis*, which he called in a 1967 lecture “The Farther Reaches of Human Potential.” Of course, in Robbins, as with his peers in popular management literature, the notion of human potential is reconstituted towards more instrumental ends. Nevertheless, whether imagined in psychic, economic or technological realms, the idea that one can always *transcend* the “old” limits remains a consistent theme linking the New Age to the gurus of the New Economy.

In fact, Robbins' own writings are probably closest to “first force” or behaviourist psychology. Robbins speaks not of “peak experiences” but of “peak performance,” attained through a system known as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).¹³⁸ However, Robbins does not see his system as a purely Pavlovian model in which all subjects respond

¹³⁶ Anthony Robbins, *Unlimited Power* (New York: Free Press, 2003 [1986]), 20.

¹³⁷ Hanegraaff, 50.

¹³⁸ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 484. According to Robbins, NLP was developed by the linguist John Grinder and the Gestalt therapist and computer programmer Richard Bandler, See *Unlimited Power*, 45-46.

to the same stimulus, automatically and in the same way.¹³⁹ Rather, he makes choice and authenticity central to his system. In this way, Robbins' work is comparable to the success literature of Helen Gurley Brown (see Chapter Three) in which the sense of liberation and autonomy unleashed by the HPM in the seventies is translated into the context of Reaganism. In this type of success literature, one's individual choices determine one's *own* chances in life but are benign with respect to the chances of others. For Robbins, however, individual choice must be understood at the meta-level of the unconscious; the metaphors and beliefs that determine how we react to circumstance:

The birth of excellence begins with our awareness that our beliefs are a choice ... It is our belief that determines how much of our potential we'll be able to tap. Beliefs can turn on or shut off the flow of ideas.¹⁴⁰

Robbins' framing of his ideas here and in many chapter headings as a theory of "excellence" is clearly indebted to Tom Peters and the entire Total Quality Management (TQM) movement of the early eighties which Robbins seems to place himself within, only to surpass:

The bestseller list is full of prescriptions for personal excellence: *The One Minute Manager*, *In Search of Excellence*, *Megatrends*, *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*, *Bridge Across Forever* ... The list goes on and on. The information is there. So why do some people generate fabulous results, while others just scrape by? ... The truth is that even in the information age, information is not enough.¹⁴¹

For Robbins, excellence is grounded not in information but communication:

Communication is power. Those who have mastered its effective use can change their own experience of the world and the world's experience of them. All behaviour and feelings find their original roots in some form of communication.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 119-120.

¹⁴⁰ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 79-80.

¹⁴¹ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 22. The books cited by Robbins are as follows: Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager*, New York: Berkley Books, 1981; Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, New York: Harper and Row, 1982; John Naisbitt, *Megatrends*, New York: Warner Books, 1982; Mark H. McCormack, *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*, Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1984. Richard Bach, *The Bridge Across Forever: A Love-Story*, New York: W. Morrow, 1984.

¹⁴² Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 23.

Robbins emphasises both cognitive psychology (“internal communications”) and impression management (“external communications”).¹⁴³ What is interesting here is the troubled attempt to meld a system of behaviour modification to some notion of authenticity. Thus a rational, not to say masculinist, system – where control, mastery and power are the keywords – is wedded to the New Age tendency to naively regard power struggles in terms of simple problems of communication or perception. Unlike the survivalists, for Robbins, effective communication is not a question of fakery, status, or gaining the upper hand against an opponent. For instance, when Robbins devotes a whole chapter to “eliciting strategies,” he means motivating others to achieve rather than establishing a competitive advantage. Indeed, the idea that people might be motivated by self-interest seems not to have occurred to Robbins, who has instead devised an elaborate neurological schema for communicating with friends, co-workers or lovers according to whether they are primarily visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic learners.¹⁴⁴ As neurology, so beliefs: elsewhere Robbins, citing Maslow, speaks of motivating people according to those values which are most authentic or “congruent” to them.¹⁴⁵ The strange way in which Robbins conflates individual cognition with widely-held social values (both can apparently be intentionally learned and un-learned) is indicative of someone who finds “society,” as a construct, incomprehensible. Robbins prefers biological reductionism: values are morally-neutral categories which are simply “programmed” into children through environmental stimuli, via a “punishment-reward” system.¹⁴⁶ But what would happen if two equally authentic values were to collide? While respecting cultural differences on their own, when brought together Robbins seems to regard them as a problem (“a vicious circle of difference creating conflict”), but thankfully a problem that is easily resolved through a shift of perspective: “The way to go from discord to harmony is to go from concentrating on differences to concentrating on similarities.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, Robbins can place complex histories, such as the history of racism in America or the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, alongside a discussion of the effective use of body language as instances where the “magic of rapport” would equally apply.¹⁴⁸

As McGee notes, the rational dimension of Robbins’ NLP system is balanced by expressive metaphors. For instance, while Robbins’ compares the brain to a computer

¹⁴³ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 156-157.

¹⁴⁵ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 391.

¹⁴⁶ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 393.

¹⁴⁷ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 273.

¹⁴⁸ Robbins discusses “The Magic of Rapport” in a chapter of the same name. He describes this as “the underpinning of all successful human interaction.” See *Unlimited Power*, 269, 270-273.

(“Our brain processes information much the way a computer does”),¹⁴⁹ he later employs a musical metaphor (“I see our neurological activity as more like a jukebox”).¹⁵⁰ Similarly, she finds in Robbins’ promotional material, a fascination with the “power and wonder” of nature as much as with its governing laws (“volcanoes, tidal waves, lightning strikes, and other images of natural power that suggest potency and flows.”)¹⁵¹ Most significant, however, is McGee’s insight that the NLP system and its behaviourist premises are themselves simply a convenience, used to dress the old New Thought ideas about abundance and omnipotence in new rational clothes. Thus McGee surmises that the real inspiration for Robbins is not NLP but a hugely successful self-help book from 1960, Maxwell Maltz’ *Psycho-Cybernetics*.¹⁵² Whatever Maltz’ interest in the cybernetics (he was in fact a plastic surgeon by trade), it has been clear to subsequent commentators that *Psycho-Cybernetics* was little more than a pseudoscientific update of mind-power principles.¹⁵³ Lacking any substantial evidential base, NLP is also best seen as an attempt to technologise ideas that would otherwise be regarded as little more than wish fulfilment. For instance, in *Unlimited Power*, Robbins compares NLP to the ability to alter reality: “NLP is like the nuclear physics of the mind. Physics deals with the structure of reality, the nature of the world. NLP does the same thing for your mind.”¹⁵⁴ Five years later, in *Awaken the Giant Within*, Robbins was promoting his own trademarked but mostly unchanged version of NLP, Neuro-Associative Conditioning (NAC). Robbins remarks that he amended the hard terminology of “programming” to the ostensibly softer “conditioning” after realising that the former put too much responsibility on the programmer – Robbins – and very little on the client: “They had no personal responsibility, and therefore, no pain if they didn’t follow through on the new behaviour.”¹⁵⁵ As in other examples of centrist New Age literature, choice and responsibility are if anything strengthened in *Giant*, as compared to the literature of the Reagan era.

Though its message is continuous with *Unlimited Power*, the scope of *Giant* is even more all-encompassing, covering “your mental, emotional, physical & financial destiny!”

¹⁴⁹ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 296.

¹⁵⁰ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 109.

¹⁵¹ McGee, 63.

¹⁵² McGee, 60.

¹⁵³ According to Steven Starker, “If the references to cybernetics were put aside, after all, the concepts and techniques offered by Maltz were strikingly similar to those of Peale and the early New Thought authors.” See, *Oracle at the Supermarket: the American Preoccupation with Self-Help Books* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 115.

¹⁵⁴ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 182.

¹⁵⁵ Robbins, *Giant*, 134. 116.

While more prominence is given to topics outside the sphere of business, they are still couched in the familiar language of mastery and control. Similarly, Robbins ramps up the extravagant language. Where *Unlimited Power* promised “precise results,” *Giant* promises “explosive results.”¹⁵⁶ In addition to “what you’ve already learned” from *Unlimited Power*, *Giant* promises new techniques that “if you make one small change, will literally transform every aspect of your life.”¹⁵⁷ One such technique is Robbins’ adoption of the Japanese concept of *kaizen*, a philosophy of quality management which Robbins has again cribbed from authors of “excellence” such as Tom Peters. In Robbins’ hands, *kaizen* becomes the CANI! System (Constant And Never-Ending Improvement), the essence of which is growth:

One of the most important global beliefs that you and I can adopt is a belief that in order to succeed and be happy, we’ve got to be constantly improving the quality of our lives, constantly growing and expanding I believe we have to focus on CANI! in our business, CANI! in our personal relationships, CANI! in our spiritual connection, CANI! in our health, and CANI! in our finances.¹⁵⁸

Even as the title of his book seems to trade off of the then-fashionable psychoanalytical category of the inner child; for Robbins, the past, including childhood, is no longer relevant (“**Forget your past. Who are you now?**”).¹⁵⁹ In Recovery literature, the innocence of the inner child is a symbol of an imaginary pre-socialised utopia. The *Giant*, on the other hand, is Robbins’ version of a future utopia which is achieved “*in an instant*,” because, like the inner child, it is not embedded in the social – or more precisely, that part of the social which is experienced as an imposition rather than a choice.¹⁶⁰ In his enthusiasm for creating a “compelling future,” Robbins links the CANI! system to a typical instance of economic-spiritual cross-articulation:

A commitment to CANI! is truly the universal insurance policy for life-long happiness. Remember that a **compelling future is the food on which our souls thrive** ... a compelling future creates a dynamic sense of growth.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Robbins, *Unlimited Power*, 20, *Giant*, 336.

¹⁵⁷ Robbins, *Giant*, 30.

¹⁵⁸ Robbins, *Giant*, 101.

¹⁵⁹ Robbins, *Giant*, 449. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁰ Robbins, *Giant*, 22. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶¹ Robbins, *Giant*, 319-320. Emphasis in original.

Why then do we hold on to what Robbins calls, quoting Emerson, a “foolish consistency”?¹⁶² As we learn in Chapter Eighteen (the last chapter before the reader embarks on “The Seven Days To Shape Your Life”), identity is the “key to expansion.”¹⁶³ However, we must shock ourselves out of some of our most cherished self-beliefs and “societal label[s].” in order to create a new, liberated and “expanded identity,” which is not beholden to limiting beliefs.¹⁶⁴ In yet another bizarre analogy, Robbins compares the presumably voluntary process of identity expansion to the brainwashing techniques administered by the Chinese Communists upon American Prisoners of War during the North Korean war.¹⁶⁵ His point is simply that change is painful but our “inflexibility” about who we are and what our values are “may cost us in the future.”¹⁶⁶ In the context of the Third Way, it is difficult not to read into Robbins’ rhetoric the ideas of other “change-worshipping” management gurus and their determination to reform every aspect of the “old” economy.¹⁶⁷ But this same chapter is also Robbins at his most spiritual, where the process of self-transformation is closest to that of a religious conversion:

We are not our bodies Neither are we our past, nor our behaviours in the moment I believe that our true identity is something that’s indefinable and greater than anything that’s describable. We are soul, we are spirit Once we act with the knowledge that we’re spiritual beings, we won’t get caught in all the little games that separate us from one another. We’ll know with deep conviction that we are truly connected with all of creation.¹⁶⁸

As McGee points out, in *Unlimited Power*, authenticity was a troubled term because it relied on “modeling,” on imitating successful people chosen because their values were “congruent” with their actions. For McGee, this was evidence that Robbins’ “atomized” self was impossible to reconcile with caring for family and the community.¹⁶⁹ In *Giant*, “congruence” is replaced by “consistency,” not the “foolish consistency” of the

¹⁶² Ralph Waldo Emerson cited in Robbins, *Giant*, 431: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds.”

¹⁶³ Robbins, *Giant*, 428.

¹⁶⁴ Robbins, *Giant*, 438, 437.

¹⁶⁵ Robbins, *Giant*, 428-435. According to Thomas Frank, the identification here with communist revolutionaries and insurgents is not unique among management theorists who were “drawn to the combination of ass-kicking and essentialized otherness” offered by the Viet Cong, the Khmer Rouge and guerrilla leaders such as Che Guevara. See Frank, 185.

¹⁶⁶ Robbins, *Giant*, 431.

¹⁶⁷ Frank, 197.

¹⁶⁸ Robbins, *Giant*, 448. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁹ McGee, 169-170.

past but a pattern of consistent behaviour, which reinforces one's newly-chosen "expanded" identity. In *Giant*, our truly authentic selves exist on an undifferentiated, spiritual plane. Efforts to transcend the "little games" imposed on us by society should be rewarded as heroic. Thus, Robbins ends *Giant* by suggesting how individuals can contribute to the community and to the health of the environment, not by imposing "big government" solutions but through voluntary organisations and, of course, individual choice. Thus, Lech Walesa was successful as the leader of the Solidarity union because "he *decided* to take a stand against the Communist hold" or a man living on the street overcomes his affliction because he *decides* to change his identity from "homeless person" to "societal contributor."¹⁷⁰ *Giant* founders not because it favours the individual hero over the community but because, in its impoverished understanding of history, power or conflict, it fails to distinguish between reinventing the self and reinventing government.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter is the last of three chapters that have focused upon the claims made within popular self-help literature across the eighties, the late eighties to mid-nineties, and in this chapter, the mid-to-late nineties. The specific analogy that I have made in this chapter is between the political rationality of New Liberalism and the particular subjectivity that is privileged in New Age literature. For example, I argue that Velasco's notion of a politics of transcendence, which he proposes as a model for understanding Clinton era centrism, also forms a model for the understanding of New Age literature. The same notions regarding the transcendence of "old" ideological conflicts that we can read into Third Way politics can be read into New Age discourse. Unlike Recovery which sought to come to a rational understanding of an individual's past history (especially those competing interests associated with the dysfunctional family), New Age spirituality seeks to surmount the past and its worldly discontents. Rather than the pathological identification of Recovery, the New Age seeks to re-enchant the relationship between the self and the world. The universe becomes an abundant spiritual resource and the self is invested with a sense of cognitive mastery over it.

However, following Velasco, I argue in my analysis of Oprah's Book Club, that the optimistic, affective spirituality of the New Age obscures the way in which traditional

¹⁷⁰ Robbins, *Giant*, 31, 509. Emphasis in original.

leftist concerns are pushed to the margins. A centre-margin dynamic is constructed in two ways, both in the electoral strategy of Clinton's New Democrats and in the Book Club. First, a "mainstream" audience is constructed, which is in fact strongly coded as white and middle-class. Secondly, majoritarian values are reinforced through a process of abstracting or erasing differences. Thus, the defence of the centre from "special interests" is maintained by erasing those issues of diversity and social justice that are said to threaten cohesion. In my analysis of different Book Club titles and their interpretation by Winfrey and her guests, I show how an alien or pathological "them" is welcomed into a majoritarian "us." But I also show that the New Age desire to reach a mystical form of unity flattens out those conflicts of interest which make inequality within society intelligible. I have suggested that the Book Club offers its audience its own version of community, although one which is self-selecting, based on consumption and formed under a hierarchical and religiously-inspired form of leadership.

The other two examples presented here may at first appear to be a study in contrasts. On the one hand, Marianne Williamson represents the contemporary New Age at its most spiritual. As a commentary upon the New Age classic, *A Course in Miracles*, Williamson's *Return to Love* also forms a bridge to the older, more esoteric variants of harmonial religion. On the other hand, Tony Robbins made his name as literally a salesperson, the face of a thousand informercials. Robbins' style, a bombastic mixture of sports coach, evangelical preacher, and management guru, would appear to be far removed from that of Williamson. However, Williamson and Robbins both combine the rational and the spiritual in a way that is characteristic of the New Age. Both Williamson and Robbins also place individual choice and responsibility at the heart of their cosmology. Williamson extols the virtues of social capital in her description of a community of choice. Robbins, similarly, imagines the process of building human capital as a series of entrepreneurial decisions that originate with and are authentic to the self, decisions that can surmount the limiting beliefs of others just as long as they are sincerely held and effectively communicated. In the next chapter, I move the discussion from the *self*, as defined in New Age literature, to *society*, as defined in the arenas of politics, history and economics and mediated through television, film and the press.

6 Cultural Citizenship: Hollywood and the Third Way

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I look at three moments of Bill Clinton's presidency in terms of the larger themes of centrist or Third Way politics. I cover firstly, the 1992 presidential campaign, then the 1994 mid-term elections and, finally, the economic vision that would come to dominate Clinton's second term, the so-called New Economy. In the previous chapter, I looked at cultural technologies such as literacy in the light of centrist politics, or more precisely, the new "affective and ethical field" of social relations, which Nikolas Rose calls *community*.¹ My interest here is again in cultural technologies but in the way that technologies of consumption, including technologies of *media* consumption, can also function as technologies of citizenship; the way in which the mass media works towards the continuous regulation of citizen-subjects. To this end, I consider Bill Clinton less as a biographical personage than as a discursive figure among many within the media universe. Clinton forms a kind of absent presence in my three chosen films, each of which corresponds to one of the three moments described above. In *Startup.com*, Clinton appears only very briefly, in *Primary Colors* he appears only as a fictional character, and in *Forrest Gump* politics itself is conspicuous by its absence but re-asserts itself into the film after the fact.

The approach I utilise is fitting from the point of view of a project that has tried to undermine the notion of a unique and privileged space of the political. More specifically, we could say that this follows *neoinstitutional* theories of presidential power. According to David Michael Ryfe, theories of presidential power have, until recently, focused solely on the instrumental character of presidential communication, the way the President chooses to speak through a specific medium of communication in order to "leverage their bargaining power with other political actors." These older kinds of theories make a number of assumptions: that the President is in control of his speech and that he speaks with strategic purpose, that individual Presidents are "good" at some media and not others, that the mass media are for most purposes synonymous with the news media and that popular media such as film and television can be largely discounted. More consistent with Foucauldian notions of discourse, neoinstitutional theories focus on how the President's speech is constrained as well as enabled by existing institutional and cultural forms, how these forms

¹ Nikolas Rose, "Inventiveness in Politics," *Economy and Society* 28 (2009): 476.

migrate across different media, and how a piece of fiction may guide the expectations that citizens have of the President as much as any factual news report.² Firstly, this approach allows us to see Clinton and Third Way politics as the product of an audience as well as a purely self-fashioned, institutional creation. In the case studies that follow, I look at Clinton filtered through a series of proxies that reflect upon the kind of white, middle-class men and women that constitute the audience for centrist politics in the 1990s. Secondly, the media channels through which Clinton reached his audience were also subject to rapid pluralisation over the course of the nineties. A neoinstitutional approach allows us to see Clinton not as one thing but as a disputed figure, built up from competing interpretations across a fragmented mediascape. Finally, as I said before, there can be no unique space of the political. In Chapter One, I outlined how citizenship can be theorised as a set of cultural rights, meaning that it can no longer be considered exclusively a property of the individual nor necessarily bounded to the nation-state. The other implication of a Foucaultian approach to cultural citizenship is that citizenship is subject to sense-making procedures that derive from popular culture including therapeutic culture. I call attention here to the way that the “serious” institutional rules that govern the political truth – a truth sometimes thought of as being produced solely by institutional elites – cannot be divorced from other “popular logics for establishing fact.”³ This should not be considered a purely contemporary or postmodern development. Though it is tempting to view the soap-operatic twists and turns of the Clinton presidency as representative of an ongoing erosion in the public’s respect for institutional authority (of political leaders, of journalists and of the corporate influence on both), we should also be attentive to how changes, which may be detrimental to one model of uniform, rational citizenship, might at the same time produce another kind of civic culture, bringing forth other kinds of authorities, truths, ethics and pleasures.

² David Michael Ryfe, “Presidential Communication as Cultural Form: The Town Hall Meeting,” in *Politics, Discourse, and American Society: New Agendas*, ed. Roderick P. Hart and Bartholomew H. Sparrow (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 173, 176, 177-180.

³ Toby Miller, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia, P.A.: Temple University Press, 2007), 5.

6.2 Primary Colors

Political cynicism is a cynicism of the reporter's intellect; infotainment is a cynicism of corporate structures. Both conspire to promote in the public a cynical understanding of politics and an increasingly reckless disregard of the line that responsible journalists have tried to uphold between fact and fiction. In sum, the media have developed a character and style that appear to have negative consequences for our civic culture.⁴

– Historian of journalism, Michael Schudson

The media giveth ... and go fuck yourself.

– Richard Jemmons from *Primary Colors*

Primary Colors is a fictionalised narrative mirroring the events of Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. The film version of *Primary Colors* is directed by Mike Nichols and written for the screen by Elaine May, based on the 1996 book of the same name. It was released in 1998, providing a fictional commentary on what would become the year of "the Bill and Monica show."⁵ As the spectacle of the *Starr Report* and the impeachment proceedings unfolded, the surreal, soap-operatic quality of having the President's dirty laundry aired in public was widely commented on. Highlighting this elision between fact and fiction, *Primary Colors* is populated by thinly-veiled caricatures of people from the real-life Clinton campaign, starring John Travolta as Jack Stanton ("Stand-in"), a Clintonesque Southern governor. Cleverly, the film also mixes its doppelgangers with celebrities playing themselves – Geraldo Rivera, Charlie Rose, Larry King, and Bill Maher are all featured. Placing these celebrity hosts alongside political operatives, the film captures something of the new nineties mediascape in which late-night comedians and daytime talk-show hosts compete with the mainstream press in terms of public influence.

Firstly, a brief overview. I usually defer to the film version of *Primary Colors*. However, with minor tweaks, Elaine May's screenplay follows the book's narrative closely. In turn, the fictional narrative of *Primary Colors* closely follows the numerous scandals that hit the real-life Clinton campaign during the succession of state races leading up to his eventual nomination. The title *Primary Colors* refers to these primary races. Of course, the film's title has a double meaning – it implies that the film will expose the "true

⁴ Michael Schudson, "Social Origins of Press Cynicism in Portraying Politics," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 6 (March 1999): 1001.

⁵ Mark Reinhardt, "The Song Remains the Same: Communitarianism's Cultural Politics," in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 96.

colours” of modern-day electioneering; the sordid, behind-closed-doors reality of presidential campaigns and the real lives of the political professionals who run them.

Our entry into this world is Henry Burton (Adrian Lester), a wise-beyond-his-years political staffer, recruited by the Stanton campaign. Henry’s character stands out somewhat among the cast of *Primary Colors* because although he fits the job description of the real-life Clinton advisor George Stephanopoulos, he is given entirely different attributes: Henry is dark-skinned (described as mixed-race in the book) and he said to be the grandson of a prominent African-American civil rights leader. Meanwhile, the likeness of other characters to Clinton associates is easy to spot: Susan Stanton (Emma Thompson) is Hillary Rodham Clinton, the exasperated but fiercely-pragmatic power-behind-the-throne, Richard Jemmons (Billy Bob Thornton) is James Carville, the outrageous but brilliant political strategist and the meddling figure of Lucille Kaufman (Caroline Aaron) is thought to be modelled on Hillary’s friend Susan Thomases. We can imagine that another long-time friend of both Clintons, Betsy Wright is recognisable in the character Libby Holden, played by Kathy Bates. However, Libby, the loud-mouth lesbian with a history of mental illness, is another example of a hybrid character, placed there to be sure, not to mimic reality but to comment upon it. As Stanton’s star rises and other staffers fall by the wayside, it is Libby’s character that takes a prominent role in the latter half of the film. Instead of conducting opposition research, Libby becomes a self-described “dustbuster” for the campaign. Together with Henry, she seeks to combat negative attacks on Stanton by pre-emptively discovering what kind of stories might emerge. Desperate to find a suitable attack line against his new and apparently faultless opponent, Governor Fred Picker (Larry Hagman), the Stantons order Henry and Libby on one final mission. Convinced that Picker is not as clean as he appears, they reason that whatever dirt on Picker materialises, the Democratic Party as a whole must be forewarned or risk handing the nomination to a candidate in a state of precarious vulnerability.

Reviewing *Primary Colors* in *Variety*, Todd McCarthy praised the film, calling it a “rare example of a *film à clef*,” arguing that “audiences will more or less accept it as the truth, even if cosmetic details have been altered.” However, McCarthy warned that the film may not go on to recoup its considerate budget because the up-to-the-minute scandals engulfing the President “may have outstripped everything on view here.”⁶ In other words, those who wanted to mix their politics and entertainment, probably already had their fill

⁶ Todd McCarthy, “Review: *Primary Colors*,” *Variety*, March 12, 1998, <http://variety.com/1998/film/reviews/primary-colors-1200453139/>.

from the nightly news. Jeffrey Jones notes that the evidence for this postmodern *mélange* of fact and fiction was everywhere: politicians made celebrity-style appearances on talk-shows, former politicians *became* talk-show hosts, former talk-show hosts were now running for office and, with the emergence of new television formats, the role of the talk-show host was in some instances overtaking that of the newscaster.⁷ Indeed, there was something novel afoot in the nineties: a tabloid newspaper that also ran stories about how aliens bestrode the earth could now have a political story “go national,” legitimated through the mainstream press (*The Star’s* Gennifer Flowers story) or a television station with global reach could devote hours to a live, uninterrupted broadcast of a high-speed police chase (CNN’s coverage of O.J. Simpson). Tabloidisation is the preferred term for the new intersection of news and entertainment, though we should use the term advisedly. Tabloidisation carries a negative connotation, it implies there is a *decline* of old journalistic standards (or indeed moral standards), without seeking to explicate the new relations of authority that give license to taboo-busting content, on the one hand, and tightened commercial discipline, on the other. Similarly, to Toby Miller’s point, even in the context of liberalisation, truth is still authorised by certain rules, procedures, and gatekeepers. Though *Primary Colors* is a work of fiction, if as McCarthy claims, audiences accept it as true, it is because of the success of the fictional strategies adopted.

In his excellent, detailed analysis of the film, Antonio Raul de Velasco makes the point that *Primary Colors* should not be considered apart from factual narratives. He does this by pairing it with *The War Room*, a documentary feature about the “real” political operatives running the Clinton. Velasco considers both as examples of what he calls political “insider’s tales.”⁸ An insider’s tale is a privileged truth because it is the private version of a public set of events, the story of “what really happened” by one “who really was there.” Although it is ostensibly a satire, in other words, a *heightened* reality, Velasco does not consider the “reality effect” (to use Roland Barthes’ term) of *Primary Colors* apart from that of the *The War Room*. More precisely, what Barthes would call “the category of the real” is not merely the accumulation of realistic detail such as we would find in a documentary, it is the presentation of a world that is coherently ordered, that on some level *makes sense*.⁹ This combination of material embodiment and logical (and

⁷ Jeffrey P. Jones, “Forums for Citizenship in Popular Culture,” in *Politics, Discourse, and American Society* (see note 2), 193-194.

⁸ Antonio Raul de Velasco, “Claiming ‘the Center’: The Rhetoric of Political Transcendence in the Clinton Era,” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2005), 188.

⁹ Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect” in *The Rustle of Language*, trans Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 148.

ideological) procedures could be considered equivalent to what Miller refers to as the technologies of truth.

One of the most important strategies authorising *Primary Colors* as an insider's tale was its original publication under the *roman à clef* of "Anonymous." Significantly, although it was revealed far ahead of the movie's release that the story had actually been written by the journalist Joe Klein, the movie credits retain the pretence of the author's anonymity. Prior to this revelation, however, a huge buzz was generated by the mystery and a hunt began to find the "insider" who had somehow penetrated the inner sanctum of the Clintons. For the interpretation of the book, anonymity carried not only the assumption of credibility but the assumption of guilt. The warts-and-all portrayal of the Clintons and their cadres helped to reinforce the perception that the secret author was not holding back and the more gossipy the particulars, the more likely that the secret author had an ulterior motive. Why else write such a book if not to damage the Presidency?

In fact, although there is some evidence that Joe Klein had access to a few tidbits that were not on public record,¹⁰ *Primary Colors*, for the most part, simply reproduces the Clinton scandals that were already well-known: marijuana use, anti-war protests, and extra-marital affairs. Thus Klein is probably no more an "insider" than the press core of whom he was a part. As for the claim that *Primary Colors* was malicious, we need go no further than Joe Klein's own record. For much of his journalistic career, Klein has actually been as one of Clinton's chief chroniclers and defenders. Both Klein and Mike Nichols have admitted that at the heart of both the book and the film is a well-intentioned but flawed man, theorising that Clinton's powers of political persuasion and his hubris are part of a package, to take one away the latter would be to take away the former – and to do that would, to paraphrase the film, deprive America of a great man. More than this, Klein shared Clinton's New Democratic centrism. For Velasco, the critic of the New Democrats' "politics of transcendence," *Primary Colors* is nevertheless a powerful demonstration of how the reality effect can magically transmute dirt into something transcendent: he interprets the piling up of salacious details as a means of humanising the protagonists, and, finally, to identify with their more noble aspirations over their cynicism. For all the book's supposed frankness, its covert message was therefore one of redemption, not only for Clinton but for the wider democratic process.

¹⁰ Douglas Stanglin, "A Page Turner in the White House," *US News and World Report*, January 22, 1996, 20.

Given that critics of the film have characterised it as a “Clinton apologia” (albeit a “sneaky” one)¹¹ and given that even the director of the movie has called it a “love letter” to the Clintons, one wonders if Velasco’s line pits itself against a straw man.¹² Much of Velasco’s analysis is dedicated to the path trod by the narrator and campaign manager, Henry Burton, as he weighs up the various ethical obstacles placed in his way, each making it harder and harder to continue with the Stanton campaign in good conscience. According to Velasco, these obstacles are “staged” in order that the audience

can be properly inoculated against the possible harm that comes from seeing the ugly “inside” of the political process, and so that they may – however grudgingly – accept “the real” that Stanton stands for.¹³

For Velasco, it is problematic that Henry’s struggles with Stanton are “staged,” because in contrast to the supposed reality of the film, the reassuring political message of *Primary Colors* rests on a narrative that is in some sense falsified. My feeling, however, is that the reality effect of the film is neither as strong as Velasco implies nor is the strategy of inoculation as effective as Velasco suggests. In any case, I dispute Velasco’s claim that this is a tactic which is depoliticising. Rather, the “real” of the film naturalises a certain truth about American politics that is, in fact, profoundly political.

My argument here is that the narrative of *Primary Colors* opens up a space that is more dialogical and disunified than is suggested by Velasco. For Velasco, the insider’s tale is depoliticising because it simplifies and miniaturises the field of politics; it reduces the political “real” down to “a very tiny circle of people and thus gives politics a certain ‘soap operatic’ form.”¹⁴ Without stating it as such, Velasco seems to latch on to a tendency commonly associated with tabloidisation; the way in which the space for “serious” discussions of policy is given over to a fascination with the personalities and private lives of politicians; a classic conflict between the political and the popular (or therapeutic). Velasco raises some important points but we have to disentangle his most important claim, that *Primary Colors* lives within the logic of centrist politics, from the more problematic implication that merely by segmenting reality for the purposes of entertainment, Klein and Nichols present something that transcends complex material realities and therefore

¹¹ Mick LaSalle, “Shades of Clinton’s Colors: Film Comes Across as Good-Natured,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 11, 1998.

¹² Mike Nichols cited in Lynda Gorov, “Is Colors About Clinton?” *Houston Chronicle*, May 18, 1998.

¹³ Velasco, 199.

¹⁴ Velasco, 194.

disenfranchises the audience from “true” political participation. As I have said, Velasco’s insistence on the credibility of the insider’s tale is overstated. This leads him to make a sharp division between the cynical “truth” of modern-day campaigning and a counter-narrative which seeks to surmount the public’s cynicism towards politics by showing that the Democrats really *do* care about the people they represent (or, more precisely, reducing the totality of politics, so that it *depends* on whether political elites can be trusted). But the supposed falsity of this counter-narrative is only because it has been crafted to create a satisfying plot and to conform to the author’s intentions which, as we have already established, are to defend Clinton. I should say that Velasco is perhaps too nuanced to fall into the trap of making explicit the kinds of broad distinctions I am ascribing to his work – the dirty, bare-knuckle politics of the insider’s tale is never “real,” only a “reality effect,” the purity of political transcendence is not exactly “false,” it is merely “staged.” Nor is he guilty of taking easy swipes using the well-worn complaint that personality dominates policy. Nevertheless, taking his cues from Guy Debord, Velasco habitually associates the colonisation of politics by popular culture (politics as spectacle, theatre, or soap opera) with a depoliticising form of abstraction which serves the interests of elites and excludes the possibility of a more radical, participatory form of democracy.

Offering a different variation on this elite-laity dynamic, Jeffrey Jones conducts an analysis which compares the traditional, buttoned-up media forums of elite speech to those “new sites of citizenship” he hinted at above, the pop-political talk-show hybrids. Jones also takes his sample from 1998, during two periods of intense discussion related to the Lewinsky affair. Jones compares one of the “serious” Sunday morning pundit shows, *This Week with Sam Donaldson and Cokie Roberts* with the anarchic roundtable discussion and comedy show, *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*. Jones notes that while the guests on *This Week* were almost exclusively composed of Washington insiders, the panellists on *Politically Incorrect*, ranged from media stars (musicians, actors, authors and similar) to journalists, activists and concerned citizens. The former’s unity of representation was mirrored in their opinion on the Lewinsky affair. Jones relates that there was a “high level of agreement” that the real scandal was Clinton’s lying, that his lying was a threat to “constitutional order,” and that “the American people would do the ‘right’ thing (that is, stop supporting Clinton) once they realized the ‘truth.’” The lying was seen as an aberration, a cancer within the system that needed to be removed. Thus Democrats and Republicans could both confidently pronounce that even if he did not resign, Clinton had

lost his moral authority and would find it impossible to move forward with his agenda. The contrast with the panels on *Politically Incorrect* was stark – Bill Maher’s show seemed much better attuned “the contradictory and disjointed dimensions of common sense thinking” that, for Jones, is typical of popular culture. Because it was a relatable scandal, the Lewinsky affair was able to engage the people’s common sense, mobilising universalising claims such as: “Everyone does this, All politicians lie, Never trust a liar, All families have problems, All men are this way” and so on. Jones demonstrates that the scandal produced a collision of common sense and political sense. While everyday experience provides the raw material for common sense, the default setting of political sense is the defence of the status quo, naturalised via legalistic procedure. Jones concludes that while political sense favours consensus, this consensus was upended in the case of the Lewinsky scandal, which made the affair doubly threatening: not only was Clinton’s lying considered aberrant, the interest in the affair generated “questions affecting citizen’s relationships with their government, matters rarely considered on the pundit program.”¹⁵

A number of points might be raised in relation to Jones’ analysis. Compared to Velasco, Jones’ conclusion gives far more agency to the cultural citizen, suggesting that the new forms of talk-show-inspired “democratainment” (to use John Hartley’s coinage) have the power to puncture the elitist bubble.¹⁶ While that may be true, it is hard to see how the incommensurable claims authorised by common sense could coalesce into some kind of coherent political sense. Nevertheless, I think, important to hold on to this sense of debate as disruption and to read it against the grain of the consensus-building ethos embedded in centrism. It has always been the case that high-minded statements of principle are simply more politically expedient than declarations of naked self-interest. However, in the nineties even simple political disagreements tended to be couched as an effort to transcend what Clinton called, in one speech, “division,” “discrimination” and “rancor,” whilst moving towards a mystical, neutral sense of unity (“one nation” or “one America”).¹⁷ Jones seems to take it on faith that when elites unite in their opposition to threats to the political system, their appeals to non-partisanship are genuine. I would argue (as I did in Chapter Two) that principle and partisanship can in fact operate simultaneously. When Clinton decried division, he could mount a subtle attack on

¹⁵ Jones, 208, 198, 205, 207.

¹⁶ John Hartley, “Democratainment,” in *The Television Studies Reader*, ed. Robert C Allen and Annette Hill (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁷ Bill Clinton, “State of the Union Address,” January 23, 1996, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. This and all subsequent official Presidential addresses can be found here: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>

Republicans while at the same time appearing to transcend politics.¹⁸ More than this, the ostensibly impartial attempts to restore constitutional order in the wake of the Lewinsky affair were suffused with tropes taken from popular culture. The best example here is the *Starr Report*, which was initiated in order to preserve the integrity of the system by routing out executive abuses of power. Inevitably, it was politically contentious, interpreted by many (including Clinton himself) as constituting a “moral crusade”¹⁹ or a partisan “witch hunt.”²⁰ But, according to Maria St. John, the *Starr Report* also references and spills over into many popular genres including the detective novel, courtroom drama, bodice-ripping romance, and ironically, given Starr’s own sanctifying impulses, pornography.²¹ Given the apparent susceptibility of political and legal discourse to popular logics, perhaps the lesson we should take from Jones’ analysis is not that the popular and the political are ruled by logics that are exclusive – or that one domain is more heterogeneous than the other – but rather, that attempts to humanise and redeem politics, like *Primary Colors*, are never entirely successful. I argue that these attempts always exceed their own logic, leaving a residue of suspicion that politics is exactly as cynical and exclusionary as it appears. The virtue of Velasco’s analysis is that rather than thinking of the popular and the political as functioning according to separate (and largely ahistorical) moral codes, they are folded into each other, held together, in the nineties, by the dominant political rationality of community. Finally, I argue that the best analytic here is not Jones’ elite-laity dynamic but rather an analysis which makes the contrast between the centre and the margin.

It would make little sense to interpret *Primary Colors* in terms of a conflict between professionals and the public, given that all the major conflicts depicted in the film occur *inside* the world of political and media elites. On the other hand, the centre-margin perspective works well, giving us a way of defining the characteristic heroes and villains of the piece. In fact, the film distributes some of the best and worst personality traits evenly among its cast of characters in a way that makes its judgement more ambiguous. Nevertheless, the narrative arc of *Primary Colors* makes it clear enough where the film’s sympathies lie and which qualities are privileged within the cultural logic of centrism.

¹⁸ Bill Clinton, “State of the Union Address,” January 23, 1996, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. This and all subsequent official Presidential addresses can be found here: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>

¹⁹ Bob Woodward and Peter Baker, “President Hides Private Rage Over Starr,” *Washington Post*, March 1, 1988, A01.

²⁰ Guy Gugliotta and Juliet Eilperin, “Judiciary Committee In Impeachment Light,” *Washington Post*, March 30, 1988, A23.

²¹ Maria St. John, “How to Do Things with the Starr Report: Pornography, Performance, and the President’s Penis,” in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 36-37.

Consider first the character of Libby. Arguably, the film does *not* condemn Libby's use of offensive language or the fact that she is in a relationship with a fellow staffer or even her aggressive tactics, like threatening violence to extract information or concessions. Some of this behaviour is excused as belonging to the socially-liberal worldview that left-leaning elites inhabit. More importantly, as the plot unfolds, it is actually Libby who emerges as the strongest moral voice of the film, a characterisation which serves to position some of her more extreme behaviour as principled rather than cynically partisan. For instance, while she is hostile to those that would seek to exploit Stanton's personal weaknesses for money, she also holds Freddy Picker, the Governor's rival, to the same standard, concluding that his "dirt" is evidence of "weakness, not evil." In the end, Libby uses a dossier compiled on Stanton in order to prevent a similar dossier on Picker from ever being leaked. In this she succeeds, but at the cost of her own life. Libby is driven to despair that the Stantons cast aside their last vestige of idealism, deciding to try to win, not on the strength of their ideas, but by using the media to destroy their opponent. In killing off Libby's character by means of suicide, the film not only sides with the Stanton's centrist pragmatism over her "extreme" morality, it casts doubt on the film's commitment to what I have referred to as progressive multiculturalism. In essence, the film loads up Libby with signifiers of otherness (she is queer, overweight, mentally unstable) only to make a symbolic sacrifice of her character. In the previous chapter, we saw how Oprah Winfrey's later career depended on dissociating herself from controversy. Libby's sad finale in *Primary Colors* makes a similar point: unencumbered expression is conflated with a kind of amoral and unhealthy subjectivity.

Libby's death is an example of an unhealthy righteousness that threatens the campaign from within. According to Velasco, she must be excised from the narrative because she refuses to "accept the real." Fred Picker's campaign, on the other hand, threatens Jack Stanton's ascendancy from without, and on different grounds: his reasoned critiques of popularism are too authentic, *too real*. In other words, Picker's brilliant anti-campaign (the campaign that appears not to be one) must be stopped because it threatens to expose the phoniness of the entire political edifice. Picker emerges as the consummate anti-politician, unencumbered by any actual policy positions or any of the baggage associated with negative campaigning. He promises not to hire any researchers, pollsters, or strategists at all; instead situating himself above the noise of the campaign, urging everyone "to calm down some." The film suggests that the emptiness of the anti-political

gesture is usually exposed in the course of the time. Nevertheless, *Primary Colors* entertains the idea long enough for Picker to gain a groundswell of support and a platform from which to launch his missives against “the system,” the insidious pact between politicians and the media:

Politicians have to explain things to you in simpler terms so that they can get their little oversimplified explanations on the evening news and eventually, instead of even trying to explain they give up and start slinging mud at each other. And it's all to keep you excited, keep you watching – like you watch a car wreck or a wrestling match. That's just what it's like – professional wrestling. It's staged and it's fake and it doesn't mean anything.

Picker's promise to initiate a substantive national conversation on the issues; to speak to the complexity of a “world [that] is getting more and more complicated,” mark him as a very different figure from his likely real-life analogue, Ross Perot. But *Primary Colors* does not set out to accurately depict centrism in terms of particular positions. Rather, centrism emerges as a form of anti-politics, an attempt to *transcend* the public's perception that politics is nothing more than demagoguery and deception. This is precisely the meaning of Picker's warning. Unfortunately the rapid subsequent descent of the Picker campaign demonstrates that anti-politics takes many forms, often cleaved between a kind of “responsible” political rhetoric that seeks to rise above, and the “irresponsible” logic of the simplified sound-bite, the car wreck image and the conflict of the wrestling match.

The Picker campaign is quintessentially centrist in its abstraction – perhaps even more than Stanton, he is what Velasco calls a centrist hero, “an authentic presence,” the “embodiment of a civic spirit or ethos that otherwise appears absent in modern mass-mediated politics.”²² However, it soon becomes clear why Picker refuses to go on the offensive – he is hoping that his own private life will not become public. When Stanton and Picker appear on what is billed as a televised grudge-match on Geraldo Rivera's talk-show, Picker not only pulls his punches but undercuts his message; the long-hoped-for national conversation is literally reduced to the rules of professional wrestling (“No eye-gouging, no chair-tossing. Three knock-downs, I stop the bout.”). At the end of the film, Picker quickly folds when Stanton presents him with the dossier of “dirt.” Still, Picker's rhetoric up till that point suggests his discomfort with the bluster of contemporary politics,

²² Velasco, 195.

and especially with the new sites of “democrataintment,” marking him as a candidate who is at a remove from the people.

By contrast, Joe Klein, in his biography of Clinton, called him “the Natural.” Similarly, he says that “a larger-than-life leader was preferable to one who was smaller than life.”²³ This is an admission that to succeed, a leader should not only be likeable, as Picker undoubtedly is, but that they should be able to perform using a popular idiom. Clinton demonstrated that he was no elitist: he grew up poor, enjoyed his junk food, and loved to play the saxophone. And in cultural terms, he “display[ed] almost every trope of blackness,” leading the author Toni Morrison to declare Bill Clinton “our first black President.”²⁴ Rather than interpreting these performances as fakery, I would argue that it represents another kind of truth or authenticity – the ability to empathise with people. It seems to me that Jack Stanton’s outsized talent in this area represents another kind of centrist hero that, unlike Picker, is not defined in opposition to “modern mass-mediated politics” but rather one who makes no distinctions between inner-city libraries, barbecue restaurants, local talk-radio shows and “serious” nationally-televised current affairs shows like *60 Minutes*. All these different spaces are opportunities to meet, connect with and learn from the citizenry. As Velasco says, “The ‘larger-than-life’ politician, in this formula, does not simply *like* other people; he is enthralled and sustained by them.”²⁵ Yet, perhaps the phrase “larger-than-life” is misleading, as Klein’s own story makes clear, the success of a Clinton-esque figure like Stanton is dependent on a series of intensely intimate, affective gestures. Where Stanton succeeds and others fail is in investing both his personal appearances and his mass-media appearances with this same therapeutic sense of connection.

We first meet the Southern Governor as he conducts a tour of an inner-city adult literacy programme in the north. Henry has come to discuss the prospect of him joining the campaign. Advisor Howard Ferguson (Paul Guilfoyle) describes to Henry, in great detail, the “genius” of the Stanton handshake:

You know, I've seen him do it a million times now, but I can't tell you how he does it, Henry. The right-handed part. I can tell you a whole lot about what he does with his left hand, though. He's a *genius* with it. He might put that hand on your elbow or up on your bicep, like he's doing now. Very basic move: He's interested in you.

²³ Joe Klein, *The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 27.

²⁴ Toni Morrison, “The Talk of the Town,” *New Yorker*, October 5, 1998, 32.

²⁵ Velasco, 204.

He's honoured to meet you. If he gets any higher, if he gets on your shoulder like that it's not as intimate. It means he'll share a laugh with you, or a secret And if he doesn't know you, but wants to share something emotional with you, he'll lock you in a two-hander. You'll see when he shakes hands with you, Henry.

Having established Stanton as a man of genuine warmth, the next scene consolidates this image. Dewayne Smith (Mykelti Williamson), a short-order chef and attendee of the literacy programme explains how his life has been affected by dyslexia, bringing tears to many in the group, including both Stanton and Henry. Like Clinton, Stanton hopes to make education a central part of his policy platform. Stanton is in the inner-city to generate support for his candidacy from the teacher unions. Thus we already know that Stanton is playing a double-game with appearances like this. Nevertheless, his performance is pitch-perfect: Stanton uses a story about his Uncle Charlie's bravery during the war in order to elevate Dewayne's story into a profile in courage. Then, rather than head straight for the exit, Stanton stays. Henry is impressed by the fact that Stanton is not drained but rejuvenated by the presence of the people, just in the way that Velasco describes. Almost straight away, however, Stanton's duplicity is revealed: the story about Uncle Charlie is a complete fabrication, the literacy teacher is being given the governor's sexual attentions in order to swing her union vote and adult literacy comes to seem like just another of Stanton's short-lived enthusiasms.

Unlike the more uncompromising characters of Libby and Picker, Jack Stanton bends in the wind. He is neither morally steadfast, like Libby, nor does he eschew style for substance, like Picker. Rather, because his talent lies in his capacity for empathy, *Primary Colors* suggests that Stanton makes for an ideal president since he would live among the people; taking pleasure in the things they enjoy and sharing their same faults. At the same time, the recognition which Stanton accords "the people," psychologises them in a way that abstracts and unifies them *as people* rather than as products of a complex and antagonistic social milieu. Like the New Age cast given to Oprah's Book Club, this form of affective anti-politics marginalises difference and naturalises the status quo so much more efficiently for hiding the techniques of its own construction. This construction asks us not to see the poor wages and working conditions of the adult literacy group as determined by their geography (the inner-city), their ethnicity (black and latino) or by a lack of investment in education, but rather by some tragic condition like dyslexia. The

centre-margin dynamic that I have argued for here is appropriate because such therapeutic rhetoric does little to address inequality in a way that would threaten elite power or the white, mainstream voters of the centre. Like Stanton's handshake or the tears shared in the classroom, unity within Clinton's New Liberalism takes the form of symbolic gestures of solidarity rather than structural change.

Writing in 1994, W. T. J. Mitchell observed a contemporary "nostalgia for a lost authenticity understood as responsible representation."²⁶ I have tried to signal here, through the analysis of *Primary Colors*, the way in which the political "real" attaches itself to different and competing senses of responsibility. There are a number of explanations for why nostalgia for the real appears as an especially prominent theme in the nineties, mostly falling within the kind of postmodern formulations I explored in the Introduction. But all these cultural critiques reflect the widespread scepticism towards the political real that Michael Schudson stated at the beginning of this section – cynicism that is simply baked-in to an understanding of what it is to be a contemporary political journalist or a political professional. At the time of *Primary Colors*' release, this cynicism is reflected in the tendency to view the consolidation of the political centre not as an innovation within politics but as the *absence* of politics (the "evanescence of ideological commitment" as Paul Apostolidis calls it).²⁷ Politics withers and culture fills the void. The problem with this argument is that politics and culture emerge as ideal, bifurcated types not as a particular historical alignment of the personal and the political that I have stressed. As Ryfe argued, Bill Clinton's ease with a therapeutic presidential style emerges from the New Left, from the explosion of the unique space of the political, but it is also tempered by an older cultural form, the form of larger-than-life celebrity that was invented by the early Hollywood studios and perfected before the post-war period.²⁸ In the next section, I turn to *Forrest Gump*, Hollywood's attempt to reflect and deflect the historical sixties through the lens of the 1990s. Rather than viewing *Gump* as an artefact of postmodern decline, I argue that Forrest is instead an affirmation of centrist heroism.

²⁶ W.T.J. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 423.

²⁷ Paul Apostolidis, "Action or Distraction? Cultural Studies in the United States," in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* (see note 5), 147.

²⁸ Ryfe, 181-182.

6.3 Forrest Gump

[*Forrest Gump*] is a morality play where decency, honor and fidelity triumph over the values of Hollywood.²⁹

– Pat Buchanan

Winston Groom has created the ideal citizen for the modern world – a perfect idiot.³⁰

– P. J. O'Rourke

Robert Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump*, the film version of Winston Groom's 1986 novel, was released in 1994 and quickly became the surprise hit of the summer. By 1995, it was in fact "the most successful dramatic film of all time," garnering \$300 million at the US box-office.³¹ While this tale was certainly told by an idiot (the titular protagonist and narrator has an IQ of 75), most of the sound and fury came from liberal critics who fumed at the film's treatment of American history and, in particular, the 1960s. If the film was a satire – and it is by no means clear that it is – it took aim not at figures of authority but rather at members of counterculture who are variously depicted as deluded, sick or villainous. According to one particularly strident contemporary reviewer, the *Chicago Reader's* Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Forrest Gump* was "the most pernicious film of the year":

[*Forrest Gump* is] an orgy of forgetfulness and media glibness where obliviousness parading as purity, stupidity parading as honesty, and xenophobia and narcissism parading as patriotism triumph over gross misrepresentations of the countercultural values of the Sixties and Seventies.³²

Most academic reactions to the film have been similarly negative to the degree that the film is regarded as conservative revisionism or, at the very least, makes itself available for conservative appropriation. There are, however, some counter-arguments that could be made here. Why, for example, was the film initially panned by the conservative press and only recruited to their cause at the point it became a runaway success?³³ Is it plausible that many of the stars and producers would risk solid liberal credentials to participate in a

²⁹ Patrick J. Buchanan, "Hollywood Surprise: Hello, I'm Forrest Gump and I'm a Conservative," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 8, 1994, B3 +.

³⁰ P. J. O'Rourke cover quote. Winston Groom, *Forrest Gump* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

³¹ Dave Kehr, "Who Framed Forrest Gump," *Film Comment* 31, no. 2 (1995): 45.

³² Jonathan Rosenbaum cited in Kehr, 45.

³³ James Amos Burton, "Film, History and Cultural Memory: Cinematic Representations of Vietnam-Era America during the Culture Wars, 1987-1995" (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2007), 229-230.

project which was a straight-forward indictment of the counterculture? Were there really such large audiences for a piece of conservative propaganda or, as seems more likely, were audiences reacting more selectively to the material? While it would be perverse to argue that *Gump* is a liberal narrative, I would argue that *Forrest Gump* exhibits those strategies that I have, using Velasco's notion of a "politics of transcendence," defined as characteristic of centrist politics in the 1990s. While Hollywood filmmakers are typically loathe to describe their work in partisan terms, and thereby excluded large swathes of their potential audience, the suggestion by the creators of *Forrest Gump* that the film is apolitical is a useful provocation from which to begin.³⁴

Director Zemeckis, novelist Groom and producer Steve Tisch have all said or implied that *Forrest Gump* does not carry any particular political agenda. Tisch, for example, has said "I don't think this film is about conservative or liberal values, or even American values. The film is about human values."³⁵ This contention makes most sense in relation to the simpleton at the heart of the film, played by Tom Hanks. The character of Forrest is indeed apolitical but then again he seems to have no concept of self-interest at all. For the most part, Forrest lives his life out of a sense of duty to others. He is capable of going against the grain, not because he is an outlaw but because he is a fool, living in a state of perfect ignorance. This is a departure from the tradition of picaresque storytelling, in which the *picaro* is literally a rogue. The roguish aspect of the picaresque is captured in Groom's original novel, where Forrest is foul-mouthed, suffers constant flatulence and exhibits casual racism. The original Forrest is vulgar *and* dumb, but he is aware of the difference between wrong and right and, in certain instances where he perceives an advantage to himself, he does wrong anyway. However, Forrest as imagined by Zemeckis and screenwriter Eric Roth is completely without guile, succeeding in spite of his incomprehension. Thus Forrest does not side with the counterculture in challenging societal conventions but is positioned outside of both the culture and the counterculture in a way that exposes them as equally false. I would argue that as a result of this false equivalence, the film loses its satiric edge. Instead, the film's attempt at even-handedness moves it toward a tortured logic where the members of the counterculture are always the equivalent of those they oppose. The most egregious example of this tendency is the film's attempt to show that violence and oppression are as endemic within the anti-war

³⁴ For example, Zemeckis says that his intention was "to present [the Babyboomer] generation without commenting on it." Robert Zemeckis cited in Martin Walker, "Making Saccharine Taste Sour," *Sight and Sound* 4, no. 10 (1994): 17.

³⁵ Steve Tisch cited in Jeff Gordinier, "Mr. Gump Goes to Washington," *Entertainment Weekly*, February 10, 1995, 29.

movement as within the military itself.³⁶ Thus, *Gump* “substantially reorders the signs and meanings” of the past in way that is fundamentally dishonest.³⁷

With everyman Hanks in the lead role, the careful structuring of opposites within the film is not simply designed to show that the two sides of the sixties culture war are equally false but that they are false because they engage in a historical struggle that is seemingly irresolvable. Forrest is a centrist hero in the same mould as the hard-bitten political operatives of *Primary Colors*. Like Picker, Stanton and Henry, Forrest is not “endowed with superhuman strength,” nor with the ability to “vanquish any great evils” and certainly not with “wisdom.” Yet, Forrest fits Velasco’s definition of the centrist hero inasmuch as he, like the flawed heroes of *Primary Colors*, possesses an authentic relation to an incorruptible notion of the American people, a form of citizenship that is not rooted in history but rather transcends it. In *Primary Colors*, this transcendent “civic spirit” is contrasted with the techniques of “modern mass-mediated politics.” Similarly, in *Forrest Gump*, even as the character of Forrest plays dumb, the film itself exploits sophisticated techniques of re-mediation in order to invoke this notion of citizenship as “authentic presence.”³⁸ In *Primary Colors*, it is the inauthentic world of politics that must be transcended. In *Gump*, it is the textbook version of History (with a capital “H”) that is posited as inauthentic. Rather than learning more about the remote historical conflicts of the past, *Gump* attempts to make contact with a kind of primordial and “prepolitical national substance” that transcends the past – an invisible glue, that according to Velasco, also holds the assumptions of nineties’ centrist politics together.

Of course, politics and history go hand-in-hand. The anti-political mood of the time swung back against Clinton in the mid-nineties and the Republicans capitalised effectively, taking a historic victory in both the House and Senate in the 1994 mid-term elections. I return to the mid-terms at the end of this section. However, I would first of all like to demonstrate how the fictional strategy described above represents a particular way of organising American history that is at the same time authorised by a logic very similar to that found in New Age literature. While Republican and Democratic proposals to repair the moral fabric of the country were not exactly equivalent to the kind of spiritual transcendence endorsed by New Age authors, the basic desire to move beyond division to what Rose calls “a kind of natural, extra-political zone of human relations” is very much at

³⁶ Thomas B. Byers, “History Re-Membered: *Forrest Gump*, Postfeminist Masculinity, and the Burial of the Counterculture,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 42 (1996): 435.

³⁷ Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 115.

³⁸ Velasco, 195.

the heart of his definition of Third Way as government through community: “building networks, enhancing trust relations, developing mutuality and co-operation.”³⁹ Specifically, the narrative of nation presented in *Forrest Gump* is mapped on to the therapeutic figure of the inner child and the story of redemption that accompanies the child’s acceptance of the past. While this particularly therapeutic understanding of cultural citizenship may seem unusual, we shall see that *Gump* is part of a cycle of films traversing the crossover between the Recovery movement and emergence of the New Age as a mainstream, centrist phenomenon in the mid-nineties.

The character of Forrest is the surely one of the most literal on-screen representations of the *inner child* – an idea which, as I have previously noted, was being liberally applied to the political sphere around the time of the film’s release, especially in connection to Bill Clinton. This was the inner child depicted not as a victim but as one possessed of a special, even mystical, gift. Forrest’s innocence, his inability to become socialised into a turbulent and sometimes vicious world is therefore not a handicap but rather what Marianne Williamson might have called an everyday miracle. In *Gump*, the white, middle-class audience of self-help is given shape and a dramatic arc upon the screen, embodied in the figure of a slow-witted, Southern manchild. The inadvertent way in which Forrest heals the historical and social rifts torn open during the sixties – by forgetting rather than remembering – seems not incidental but essential here. What Robert Burgoyne calls “the most significant memory” of the sixties, “the memory of historical agency,” is therefore denied in *Forrest Gump*, where, according to its narrator, things routinely happen “for no particular reason.”⁴⁰ Thus, as well as constructing a point of identification for a “spectral mainstream,”⁴¹ the film also engages in what I have described as a process of wilful abstraction that sustains the illusion of widespread consensus, either by erasing the antagonistic voices of the past or painting them as threats to present-day civility.

I would first of all like to concentrate on the theme of redemption within *Forrest Gump*. As Peter Chumo notes in a largely sympathetic reading of the film, Forrest’s innocence allows him to adopt the role of a redeemer.⁴² In the context of a film which is very much about nationhood as viewed through the eyes of the baby-boomer generation, this redemptive function doubles as a form of national reconciliation. According to

³⁹ Rose, “Inventiveness in Politics,” 475.

⁴⁰ Burgoyne, 119.

⁴¹ Velasco, 181.

⁴² Peter N. Chumo, “‘You’ve Got to Put the Past Behind You Before You Can Move On’: *Forrest Gump* and National Reconciliation,” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 23, no. 1 (1995).

mainstream reviewers of *Gump*, the film was variously “magical,” “sublime,” and “an almost religious experience” – the film communicated hope in an age of cynicism, the possibility of healing after “thirty years of pain.”⁴³ In his analysis, Chumo hints at the co-existence of Christian and non-Christian religious traditions typical of what call “centrist” New Age thought. Generally speaking, Forrest is a good, dutiful boy who loves God, family, and nation. As Chumo points out, up until the end of the sixties, Forrest has primarily been associated with the dominant culture – he goes straight from a college scholarship in football to the military. Thereafter, Forrest takes up a diplomatic role as a kind of Ping Pong ambassador to China. This also marks Forrest’s first contact with the world of business since he is able to earn an income through commercial endorsements. While the Ping Pong episode symbolically mends some of the East-West divisions created during the Vietnam War, Forrest finds himself unable to create a home and family of his own. This precipitates a crisis which forms a pivot between the two halves of the narrative.

Incapable of self-reflection, Forrest resolves his crisis through a curiously active form of therapy: a marathon coast-to-coast run. This marathon, which he in fact repeats several times, is also perhaps a symbolic act of solidarity with the entire country. Stopping only to sleep and to relief himself, Chumo notes that Forrest takes on the appearance of a bearded, long-haired “Old Testament prophet” or perhaps Jesus Christ himself. But this is also Forrest at his most countercultural. In fact, he inadvertently becomes a modern-day guru, inspiring a trail of followers, all intent to hear what insights this lonely run has given rise to. Forrest though, is mostly ensconced in Zen-like silence. The only way he is able to rationalise his running is to recall some words his mother had once said, “You’ve got to put the past behind you before you can move on.” Quite obviously, this sentiment doubles as a statement of intent for the movie as a whole. For Chumo, *Gump* suggests that America must move past its traumas via a “true mediator of American opposites,” someone like Forrest who bridges the gap between mainstream culture and the fractured remains of the counterculture.⁴⁴ In *Gump*’s alternative version of history, Forrest brings together and influences “disparate cultural icons” from the young Elvis Presley to late-period John Lennon.⁴⁵ In the alternative history, it is Forrest’s long run which kicks off the jogging craze of the seventies. But from the perspective of the nineties, Forrest’s long run and his desire to transcend history also seem to reference the kind of “spiritual journey” that would

⁴³ Richard Corliss, “The World According to Gump,” *Time*, August 1, 1994, 53. Roger Ebert, review of *Forrest Gump*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 7, 1994, B33. Gene Siskel cited in *Siskel and Ebert*, “Why Gump? Why Now?” directed by Don Dupree, aired September 17, 1994, on KRON, San Francisco (NBC).

⁴⁴ Chumo, 6.

⁴⁵ Burgoyne, 116.

have been very familiar to readers of nineties' New Age literature. Like Marianne Williamson and other New Age authors, Forrest's spiritual journey combines a Christian sense of redemption with what Chumo calls an "almost pagan-like appreciation of the land."⁴⁶ Running through the vast expanse of Monument Valley, Forrest is suddenly prompted to stop cold, declaring "I'm pretty tired. Think I'll go home now." Having gone as "far out" as he can go, this marks the moment in which Forrest will return "home" to the values of the dominant culture. Arguably, by the late seventies, the country as a whole had also begun this shift back to social conservatism, confirmed by milestones such as the election of Reagan in 1980.

The location of Monument Valley has some resonance for viewers beyond its elemental beauty and symbolic distance from "culture." In terms of film culture, Monument Valley is actually rather rich in symbolism, particularly for its associations with the Westerns of John Ford. Robert Zemeckis had only recently used it as the backdrop to his own time-travelling Western, *Back to the Future III* (1990). In his influential essay on genre and "genericity" in nineties' Hollywood, Jim Collins points out the way in which Zemeckis consciously mimics a scene from John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) in order to highlight the "dissonance" of genre "elements that very obviously don't belong together." A kind of knowing inauthenticity, which Collins calls "ironic hybridization," is exuded by this type of hyper-mediated, technophilic genericity.⁴⁷ In many ways, *Forrest Gump* also indulges in "ironic hybridization." Using recreated newsreel footage, the movie subtly alters the meaning of History by inserting a series of goofy jokes into Forrest's interactions with historical figures. Vivien Sobchack has praised the way in which the film undercuts the authoritative version of public history with the sights and sounds of popular cultural memory, depicting the way in which history is actually experienced by the figure of the bystander, who after all, is part of history too.⁴⁸

But beneath this postmodern playfulness, *Gump* also rehearses some anxieties about America's place within the post-Cold War world that bring it closer to Collins' other category of genericity, the "new sincerity" film. Where the former category is dissonant, the new sincerity "is obsessed with recovering some sort of missing harmony." Where the former is ironic, the new sincerity "rejects any form of irony in its sanctimonious pursuit

⁴⁶ Chumo, 6.

⁴⁷ Jim Collins, "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 242-243.

⁴⁸ Vivian Sobchack, ed., "History Happens," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

of lost purity.”⁴⁹ Contemporary examples that Collins discusses include *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *Field of Dreams* (1989) and *Hook* (1991). I would argue that *Forrest Gump* simultaneously engages in aspects of both ironic hybridization and new sincerity. This possibility is left open by Collins himself when he argues that both are contrary responses to the same context – “the media-saturated landscape of contemporary American culture.”⁵⁰ However, I would suggest that the new sincerity films in particular, are grounded as much in the kind of cultural imperatives that gave us the inner child and the men’s movement than they are the result of technological and demographic changes in the media industries. Teasing out some of the differences between *Gump* and the earlier new sincerity films can also further our understanding of how the therapeutic movement had moved on since the late eighties. In these differences, there is I believe, a parallel to the transition between second-wave Recovery literature, which I associate most strongly with John Bradshaw (Bradshaw was actually an on-set consultant during the making of *Hook*)⁵¹ and the kind of New Age books typified by Marianne Williamson.

There are two main differences which distance *Gump* from other new sincerity films. In the other films I have been discussing, technology (and by extension modernity) is the thing which corrupts an unmediated relationship to oneself and to the world. In *Gump*, however, the technologies of re-mediation are given a positive value. New ways of presenting the past are used to symbolise passive contemplation but rather a more affective and therefore more *authentic* relationship with memory. These technologies are therefore the corollary of the way in which Forrest bumps up against History, not simply as a bystander but as a participant. An appreciation of pop culture as the historical fabric of ordinary people’s lives marks this shift from a cold rendering of History (defined by Burgoyne as “public events and political conflicts”)⁵² towards the warmth and vividness of social memory. Secondly, all the new sincerity films locate their “lost purity” in the past – less the past of history than a nostalgic, mythical past. *Gump* makes redemption not a place (a baseball diamond) or a time (pre-modern America) but a state of mind. In *Gump*, the Monument Valley scene might be regarded as exceptional. For the most part, there is no “never-never land,” no imaginary well of inspiration in which to escape – there is only the relentless, chaotic march of history. The way in which the film solves this dilemma is to make cognition itself, the selective act of forgetting or remembering, central to the

⁴⁹ Collins, 242-243.

⁵⁰ Jim Collins, 243.

⁵¹ Woody Register, *The Kid of Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 317.

⁵² Burgoyne, 107.

presumed goal of overcoming collective national trauma. These two differences are related. Writing around the time of *Gump*'s release, Thomas Elsaesser argued that History "has become the very signifier of the inauthentic" and that the new authentic mode of historical sense-making was closer to a "therapeutic practice" than to story-telling: "acts of re-telling, remembering, and repeating all pointing in the direction of obsession, fantasy, trauma."⁵³ And though there may be no specific site of redemption in *Gump*, the film is clear that the traumatic object of history which it must retell, remember and repeat is the 1960s.

James Burton describes *Gump* as a "meta-sixties film," a term which is meant to invoke the ways in which the film recycles the collective memory of the sixties as it has already been mediated, especially through film.⁵⁴ For Burgoyne, *Gump* repeats the sixties because the nation has still not adequately integrated the "traumatic social experiences" associated with the period. However, through a therapeutic form of re-membering, the film performs an act of redemption, reordering the past in such a way as to produce "an image of social consensus built around memory."⁵⁵ Two broad rhetorical strategies ("modes of abstraction"), which Velasco identifies in the context of electoral politics, are important to this historical reordering. The first of these abstractions is an imagined "we", a "spectral, 'mainstream' public in the U.S. that was said to be 'beyond left and right.'" The second strategy suggests that the centre was also *beyond history*, something that was both new but somehow eternal. The New Democrats would institute the centre as a solution to the problems of today by returning to a centre that had always been there but was "somehow lost long ago."⁵⁶ In *Forrest Gump*, we see evidence of this centre-margin dynamic on both fronts. In the first instance, it is apparent in the assimilation of otherness into what Burgoyne calls an "an emergent narrative of white male regeneration."⁵⁷ Secondly, this otherness is conflated with the trauma of the historical conflict of the sixties, a trauma which must be overcome in order to achieve national reconciliation.

A number of commentators have observed these strategies in *Forrest Gump*. Thomas Byers, for example, has noted the ways in which "the attributes of otherness (Blackness, femininity) are assigned to Forrest himself, while the subjects in the real

⁵³ Thomas Elsaesser, "Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From Holocaust and Heimat to Shoah and Schindler's List," in *The Persistence of History* (see note 53), 146.

⁵⁴ Burton, 48.

⁵⁵ Burgoyne, 106, 108.

⁵⁶ Velasco, 104, 106.

⁵⁷ Burgoyne, 117.

position of such otherness (Bubba, Jenny) must die.”⁵⁸ In her analysis, Jennifer Hyland Wang compares *Gump* to Dan Quayle’s attack on the fictional character Murphy Brown in the wake of the L.A. riots (see Chapter Two). Specifically, she reads *Gump* as another example of a conservative agenda which links together “unruly blacks and unruly women” together as joint threats to traditional family values.⁵⁹ However, to read otherness solely in terms of race and gender misses the symmetry between the culture and the counterculture which I have so far emphasised. The crucial character here is the disaffected, alcoholic Lieutenant Dan. Beginning as a die-hard patriot, Lt. Dan’s “fall” from the mainstream to extreme, also makes him “unruly,” a threat to the continuity of the dominant culture. According to Burgoyne, what happens to Lt. Dan, also “invert[s] the meaning” of the most contentious conflict of the 1960s, the Vietnam War. By saving Lt. Dan, Forrest “provides what may be the sole example of successful heroic action in the entire corpus of Vietnam films.” This rescue establishes Dan on one side of the cultural divide that Forrest must transcend. On the other side of this divide – and also perpetually in need of rescue – is Jenny, the object of Gump’s affections. If Lt. Dan’s rage and cynicism represents one extreme, Jenny’s friends in the Black Panthers and the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) represent the other. Indeed, the protestors and promoters of the Vietnam war as painted as mirror images of each other, each just as angry, misogynistic and violent as the other. This equivalence only goes so far, however. While Dan survives and is healed, the film ultimately punishes Jenny for her waywardness. Yet, a more centrist reading of the film would suggest that the *whole* of America went off the rails in the sixties and not just parts of it. Forrest, the centrist hero, succeeds without really trying because he transcends the extremes of the period, exemplifying the kind of authentic, “human values” that the film’s producers ascribed to him – “respect, tolerance and unconditional love.”⁶⁰

The notion that America’s political centre should be renewed on the basis of what centrists claim is the very opposite of politics – unassailable virtue – is a strange but accurate assessment of the situation when *Forrest Gump* was released in 1994. In one article of the time, *Newsweek*’s Howard Fineman described the “fraying of America’s moral fabric” as “a national obsession.” Fineman dedicated the same article to the leaders of this “new kind of politics,” a varied group of rhetoricians across the political spectrum,

⁵⁸ Byers, 422.

⁵⁹ Wang, 94.

⁶⁰ Steve Tisch speaking after receiving the 1995 Academy Award for Best Picture. Cited in a banner headline in the op-ed page: *Courier-Journal* [Louisville, K.Y.], March 29, 1995, A7.

who Fineman grouped together as The Virtuecrats.⁶¹ According to Wang, the fact that *Gump* became a political football during the congressional elections of that year showed that the effort to renew or redefine the United States was “defined not by consensus but by conflict.” However, the Virtuecrats’ campaign against moral and spiritual decline was part of the same search for the centre that had defined the New Democratic philosophy. Having ceded much of their economic arguments to the right, Clinton and the New Democrats were now struggling to find ground on which to differentiate themselves from congressional Republicans. The fact that the interpretation of *Gump* – a piece of cinematic fiction albeit an extremely popular one – had sparked a national discussion ahead of the November vote is perhaps indicative of how small the field of political differences had become. On the other hand, the way in which that debate turned around the political legacy of the 1960s showed that there were still some major philosophical differences at stake. As Wang points out, if there was some of kind of void at the heart of post-Cold War America, the task was to find “the historical moment, at which the course of U.S. history went awry.”⁶²

For conservatives, the relevance of *Gump* was its supposed indictment of the sixties’ counterculture and, by extension, the entire liberal project. A former history professor, Newt Gingrich, the GOP leader who was soon to become Speaker of the House, had actually precisely dated the Fall of America. According to Gingrich, “America fell apart in 1967.” Thereafter, public policy was no longer devoted to “creating character.”⁶³ This was a tacit admission that despite the conservatives’ anti-government rhetoric, they believed in using the power of government to “remoralize” society. In order to align this idea with a programme of reducing government spending and tax cuts, many of the proposals outlined in the Republican’s “Contract With America” involved withdrawing federal support from those they considered to be at odds with Biblical theology. But as Fineman notes, Virtuecrats in both parties came to support harsh measures targeting the young, the poor and minority populations:

Heavy spending on new prisons, “three strikes and you’re out” sentencing laws, “deadbeat dad” statutes, “boot camps” for youthful offenders, “two years and

⁶¹ Howard Fineman, “The Virtuecrats,” *Newsweek*, June 13, 1994, <http://www.newsweek.com/virtuecrats-188890>.

⁶² Jennifer Hyland Wang paraphrasing Lance Morrow. Wang, “‘A Struggle of Contending Stories’: Race, Gender, and Political Memory in *Forrest Gump*,” *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 3 (2000): 92. Lance Morrow, “Folklore in a Box,” *Time*, September 21, 1992, 50.

⁶³ Eric Alterman, “Newt vs. the ‘60s,” *Rolling Stone*, December 29, 1994-January 12, 1995, 86.

you're out" welfare reform, denying welfare benefits to unwed mothers, police sweeps through housing projects, even local caning and curfew ordinances – all are ideas being supported by ... Democrats.⁶⁴

Even so few Democrats supported the Republicans' contention that the solution was to turn back the clock to what would be, to use Collins' phrase, an "impossible temporality:" a time in which uninhibited consumer desire would somehow happily co-exist with a uniformly-adopted moral rectitude. Nevertheless, Gingrich harked back to a time before the Fall and pursued the idea that America could return back to this time, again selecting a precise date as evidence. In his book, *To Renew America*, Gingrich asked readers to "go and look at *Reader's Digest* and *The Saturday Evening Post*" from 1955 as this would supply them with "a clear sense of what it meant to be an American."⁶⁵

Forrest Gump and especially the character of Forrest seemed to echo this "clear sense" of normative citizenship. Forrest's preppy 50s look – crew-cut hair and gingham shirt – made plain his association with supposed innocence of that decade. This image of the 1950s as an Edenic moment of suburban bliss has been hard to dislodge in the public's mind, despite the occasional attempts of Hollywood to offer an alternative version of the Fifties, one that peers beyond the white-picket fences (Robert Redford's *Quiz Show* and Tim Burton's *Ed Wood*, also from 1994, are good examples of this trend). *Gump*, too, is hardly an endorsement of the post-War period. At Forrest's home in rural Alabama, we meet a cast of characters including a corrupt school official, a group of redneck bullies and Jenny's abusive father. As liberal defenders of *Gump* have also noted, the film features an atypical but sympathetic portrayal of a 1950s family headed by a single mother. Conversely, *Gump*'s presentation of the sixties as a time of extremism and conflict does *not* go against the grain, although the film deliberately skirts an understanding of *why* it was a contentious time. As I have said, *Gump* is unlike the new sincerity films in that it does not privilege a specific time or place as more ideal than another. However, the film is conservative in the sense that the *idea* of home is strongly privileged as a source of providence to which Forrest, in the second half of the film, returns. Similarly, the essential *idea* of America insofar as it can be detached from the actual history of the nation survives, like Forrest, untouched. Forrest is a particularly nineties' hero not because he transcends the sixties *per se* but because he transcends the outward conflict of which the sixties is the

⁶⁴ Howard Fineman, "The Virtuecrats," n.p.

⁶⁵ Newt Gingrich, *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 7, 78.

most visible index. Forrest embodies the desire to move forward in history through a change of mindset but without the messy materialism of “social unrest and political violence.”⁶⁶

Of course when conservatives attacked the sixties using *Forrest Gump*, they conveniently looked past its contrary reading of the 1950s and focused only on transcendence. This was what the *National Review* called Gump’s “innocence,” its promotion of “eternal verities ... over the counterculture.”⁶⁷ However, the film’s uncontroversial if partial interpretation of the sixties as a time of noise and incivility became, in conservative hands, the notion that the sixties was a historical turning point when things starting to go astray for America. Pat Buchanan applauded the way the film bashed effete academics and “squalid” hippies alike:

Forrest Gump celebrates the values of conservatism, of the old America, of fidelity and family, faith and goodness. And the way of life this film holds up to be squalid and ruinous is the way of Woodstock. In *Forrest Gump*, the white trash are in Berkeley and the peace movement.⁶⁸

As Wang points out, Newt Gingrich’s particular take on the film should be understood in the light of previous comments he had made about the counterculture, linking liberalism, past and present, to a “discourse of disease and social abnormality.”⁶⁹ A week ahead of the election, this was also an opportunity to make an ad hominem attack on Clinton by suggesting that he was part of this post-sixties’ disease:

In every scene of the movie in which the counterculture occurs, they’re either dirty, nasty, abusive, vindictive, beating a woman, or doing something grotesque ... it is important to remember that in the period, Bill Clinton was on the side of the counterculture.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Burgoyne, 118.

⁶⁷ Spencer Warren, “The 100 Best Conservative Movies,” *National Review*, October 24, 1994, 54.

⁶⁸ Buchanan, B3 +.

⁶⁹ Wang, 104.

⁷⁰ Newt Gingrich cited in *Providence Journal*, October 30, 1994, C8.

But if liberals were “the enemy of normal Americans”⁷¹ what about those baby-boomer voters who had participated in the various protest movements of the sixties (would, rather hypocritically, would include Gingrich himself)? Republicans were apparently unconcerned about the extremity of some of their own rhetoric because they were appealing to “born-again conservatives”: voters, mainly white men, who had in the past supported Democratic candidates and principles but who had now shifted to the centre. This message could succeed, because, according to *Newsweek*, “Politically, it doesn’t matter anymore what you did in the ‘60s. It matters what you say about them now.”⁷² Like *Gump* itself, this was a message of redemption and renewal albeit an ironic one considering that it was being used against Clinton and the New Democrats who had up until that point taken this message as their own.

It seems that the Democrats’ failure to capitalise on the success of *Forrest Gump* was symptomatic of a more general failure to mount a defence of the counterculture instead of leaving it to the right to cast the sixties as an aberration in American history. Liberal columnists and film critics did rather weakly suggest that both Clinton and *Gump* “gave people hope.”⁷³ But as Philip Abbott notes, the status conferred upon Clinton as a “poster child” of the 1960s belied Clinton’s own “studied ambivalence.”⁷⁴ Abbott notes that the autobiographical recollections from former sixties radicals tended towards either ascent or descent narratives – either an affirmative of a stalled project of liberation or something akin to the disease narrative proposed by Newt Gingrich. However, what the public learnt about Clinton did not fit into existing ascent or descent narratives: he smoked marijuana but did not inhale, he (legally) avoided the draft then committed to it once it became clear he was unlikely to serve, he opposed the war but for the most part expressed this opposition within the system rather than from without. Despite Republican attempts to claim that, “It’s still 1968 and Clinton is the guy with shaggy hair and a peace sign,”⁷⁵ Clinton himself was careful to associate himself with a time before the Fall: politically with JFK not LBJ, culturally with “the early Elvis” not late period Beatles.⁷⁶ In fact,

⁷¹ Howard Fineman, “How ‘Normal’ Is Newt?” *Newsweek*, June 11, 1994, <http://www.newsweek.com/how-normal-newt-186536>.

⁷² Howard Fineman, “Clinton’s Values Blowout,” *Newsweek*, December 19, 1994, <http://www.newsweek.com/clintons-values-blowout-185592>.

⁷³ Jay Carr, “Life is Like a Box of Nominations,” *The Boston Globe*, February 12, 1995, 53. See also Frank Rich, “The Gump From Hope,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1994, A23.

⁷⁴ Philip Abbott, “A ‘Long and Winding Road’: Bill Clinton and the 1960s,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 2.

⁷⁵ A Republican aide paraphrasing Oliver North’s views of the president. Cited in Howard Fineman, “Rolling Thunder,” *Newsweek*, November 7, 1994, 29, <http://www.newsweek.com/rolling-thunder-186672>.

⁷⁶ Clinton cited in Abbott, 6.

Abbott compares Clinton's experience of the sixties to none other than Forrest Gump – Clinton is everywhere where history is happening and yet he is not a part of it. Clinton transcends, he is on the side beyond all sides. But as Velasco explains, the modes of abstraction that create the “higher realm” of political transcendence are always tied to the “lower realms” – pragmatic, strategic and electoral concerns.⁷⁷ For Clinton to align himself with the radicalism of the sixties would be to again make the Democratic Party unelectable. By continuing to paint himself as a moderate against the perceived extremism of Gingrich's Republican Revolution, Clinton survived the 1994 defeat and was returned to office with an increased majority in 1996.

6.4 Startup.com

In today's global economy, a nation's greatest resource – indeed, the ultimate source of its wealth– is its people.⁷⁸

– Bill Clinton

The Administration has bought into a ‘Gee whiz, by golly, there's a global economy out there’ view of the world that sounds smart but doesn't hold up.⁷⁹

– Paul Krugman

Startup.com (2001), directed by Chris Hegedus and Jehane Noujaim, is a remarkable *cinéma vérité* document of a 28-month period in the life of an internet company. Officially begun in May 1999, the company and website GovWorks is built from scratch, raising and expending tens of millions of dollars of capital. Then, as quickly as it is constructed, the company collapses and is acquired by a multinational. GovWorks is the brainchild of Kaleil Isaza Tuzman and Tom Herman, two educated, talented and motivated young men. Kaleil and Tom's story has been compared to a modern-day rags-to-riches narrative but perhaps Kaleil and Tom can also be considered centrist heroes in the same vein as James Carville and George Stephanopoulos from Hegedus' previous documentary *The War Room*. Whereas Carville and Stephanopoulos were characters whose function it was to humanise and redeem the political world, the “characters” of Kaleil and Tom perform a similar function within the world of the New Economy. The dramatic irony of the work is

⁷⁷ Velasco, 105.

⁷⁸ Bill Clinton, “Statement on Signing the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994,” May 4, 1994.

⁷⁹ Paul Krugman cited in Mark Pitsch, “Human Capital' Touted in Clinton Economic Agenda,” *Education Week*

June 22, 1994, www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1994/06/22/39human.h13.html.

that the viewer holds a crucial piece of knowledge that is withheld from two protagonists. Even as they are feted by industry, the media and even the President of the United States, the viewer knows that the speculative bubble around tech companies will soon burst. Therefore, despite Kaleil and Tom's success in securing major contracts and financial backers, there are larger forces at work that will wipe millions of dollars of value from the company, leaving them with nothing. But the film allows the viewer to imagine a scenario where Kaleil and Tom *could* have won big. If only their virtues and vices were better managed, if only their product was better designed, if only a crucial decision had gone one way and not another. The documentary therefore weaves together the story of economic transformation with a more personal story of two friends torn asunder by a mix of human frailty and hard-edged economic realities. As the finger of blame falls on Tom, Kaleil must justify the betrayal by reference to these market forces as a kind of neutral arbiter over which he has no control.

Though I consider *Startup.com* mainly from the perspective of economic citizenship, one of the interesting aspects of the New Economy is the conflation of economic rights with other kinds of rights. The film dramatises the debate between two approaches to government, between the Clinton's administration's accommodation with the market and a libertarian stance that sees the market as a superior not just in terms of resource allocation but in terms of democracy. The first approach can be characterised by the phrase "reinventing government," one of the favoured ideas of the administration and Al Gore in particular. The basic idea, which became the basis for an interagency task force, was to make government more efficient and responsive to the needs of citizens *through* the New Economy: through new technology, through partnerships with the private sector, and through the application of a more customer-friendly approach to services. However, among the denizens of Silicon Valley, there was a strain of cyber-libertarianism which argued that a combination of market forces and new technologies could fulfil the conditions for truly democratic decision-making *without* the aid of a centralised authority.

This debate between the re-inventers and the replacers takes place early in *Startup.com*, at the point that Kaleil and his team are deciding on a name for their new venture. In a rare moment of consultation with the *vox populi*, the team take the opportunity of stopping at a fast-food chain to ask strangers if they would prefer "Nexttown" or "GovWorks." One member of the team puts forward his pitch for GovWorks: "I work for GovWorks We're an internet portal. We help facilitate

transactions between local government and their constituents. We help government work.” We do not have to guess what Kaleil’s attitude is since he responds: “I don’t like government. I don’t like being a company that’s called Gov.” As the conversation continues later at their apartment, Kaleil is stuck on a third alternative: “UntoCaesar.com.” “I love it,” he enthuses, offering no particular reason for his preference. But, as the team points out, it would be a bizarre piece of branding for an interface with municipal government to use a name synonymous with autocratic rule and corruption. In some ways, the point is moot since we need not attribute any principled stance to the GovWorks business model. Kaleil and Tom had identified a huge untapped market in the area of e-commerce transactions with local government (an estimated \$500 billion dollars). Even to get what Kaleil calls the “crumbs off the table” would still make GovWorks an incredibly profitable enterprise.

Nevertheless, by virtue of GovWorks obtaining first or near-first-mover advantage within this market, Kaleil is later called upon to be a spokesperson on the topic of the intersection of technology and government. Seated at the table alongside President Clinton at one such televised discussion, Kaleil chooses his words more carefully: “When it comes to democratic representation there’s nothing that can fulfil really atomic-level representative democracy like the internet.” This sentiment does not actually contradict any libertarian leanings Kaleil might have. Indeed, if we were to really parse his statement, an “atomic-level” democracy would have no need for representation since each citizen could represent him or herself directly via the “electronic agora.”⁸⁰ But the GovWorks website had no such facility; it was simply a means of processing online payments for existing government services. Like many exemplars of the New Economy, GovWorks co-opts the rhetoric and imagery of the revolutionary left in service of individual liberation (for example, the GovWorks logo depicts a red flag held aloft by a solitary stick person rather than by a crowd). However, its actual position is better described as a pragmatic accommodation with power as it is in the present, whilst dreaming of a radically transformative future. While the citizenry might resent being compelled to pay parking tickets, they would surely prefer a more convenient way to do so. This is the essence of the pitch put together by the filmmakers at the beginning of the documentary. Riffing on the Declaration of Independence, the film states that “We are all endowed with certain

⁸⁰ Barbrook and Cameron identify the electronic agora as an electronic form of direct democracy, a utopian dream of decentralised power which they associate with Marshall McLuhan and the West Coast radicals he inspired, many of whom would go on to be pioneers in information technology. Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, “The Californian Ideology,” *Science as Culture* 6, no. 26, pt. 1 (1996): 4.

inalienable rights” but, more modestly, goes on to say that these rights include the right “not to miss an entire workday just to renew a driver's license.” As Owen Gleiberman of *Entertainment Weekly* noted, the “mystical cachet of dotcom” was being attached to the otherwise “banal” business of processing fines.⁸¹

The discourse of rights invoked by the New Economy often outstripped the more prosaic reality. Yet, as Thomas Frank has documented, the propensity to exploit “the righteousness of genuine social movements,” is nevertheless a defining feature of the late nineties business culture.⁸² Perhaps more than any actual technological or economic transformation, the New Economy is defined by this optimistic blend of economic, social and even spiritual principles. The New Economy was therefore not just a description of change; it was an *affirmation* of change. As media references to this transformation dramatically increased over the course of the late nineties, the New Economy was received in glowing terms not just as a new phase of capitalism but one that was, in a sense, morally superior because it would uproot the old centres of power, handing democracy back to the ordinary citizens.⁸³

The argument was not simply that the new information and communications technologies were faster, lighter and cheaper but that these technologies would lead to new modes of organising capital which, in turn, would unleash the potential bound up in individuals. For example, in a series of best-selling management literature books of the time, authors such as Tom Peters, Michael Hammer, and James Champy directed their indignation at those managers who failed to appreciate that organisational hierarchies were a thing of the past. Rather, the contemporary workplace would be governed by the metaphor of the network: “freeflowing, dynamic, nonhierarchical, and boundaryless.”⁸⁴

In a more spiritual or prophetic vein, Kevin Kelly wrote in 1998 that the New Economy “is changing everything.” Kelly argued that “Plenitude, not scarcity, governs the network economy.” What he meant was that knowledge work was about intangible

⁸¹ Owen Gleiberman, “Startup.com,” *Entertainment Weekly*, May 9, 2001, <http://www.ew.com/article/2001/05/09/startupcom>.

⁸² Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* (London: Vintage, 2002 [2000]), 19.

⁸³ Jeff Madrick’s keyword search for “new economy” reveals an exponential increase in the usage of the term, within both business media and general interest journalism, after about 1996. Jeff Madrick, *The Business Media and the New Economy* (The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy: John F. Kennedy School of Government: Harvard University, 2001), 2.

⁸⁴ Gideon Kunda and Galit Ailon-Souday, “Managers, Markets, and Ideologies: Design and Devotion Revisited,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Organization*, ed. Stephen Ackroyd, Rosemary Batt, Paul Thompson, Pamela S. Tolbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 204.

resources (“ideas, information, and relationships”) that were, in theory, inexhaustible.⁸⁵ At the time, Kelly was the editor of the influential futurist magazine *Wired*. Earlier, in the 1980s, while Kelly made pioneering contributions to the Californian tech community, he also contributed to publications like *New Age Journal* and the *Whole Earth Catalog*. This cross-pollination between business literature and the counter-culture was not at all unusual.⁸⁶ Indeed, especially in California, the discourse of the New Economy ran parallel to the discourse of the New Age and developed from common roots. Like the New Age, the New Economy would not only transcend physical limitations, it would transcend those limitations that the current social arrangement imposed upon the innate freedom, goodness and creativity of human beings.

Like *Forrest Gump*, the New Economy would also seek to transcend the “old” historical conflicts. In the absence of traditional leftist concerns, the socially liberal rhetoricians of the New Economy elevated business success into a kind of moral or revolutionary imperative, whilst implying that the “old” injustices and inequalities were no longer a concern. For the young protagonists of *Startup.com*, this attitude was perhaps forgivable since they were surrounded, in their milieu, by people of diverse backgrounds who had all worked hard to achieve. Kaleil and Tom first meet at high school. Kaleil was brought up by a Colombian father and a Jewish-American mother. With the advantage of his father’s academic pedigree (he was a sociologist), a scholarship and by supplementing his income with his own small business, Kaleil was able to gain a Harvard education and go on to get his first job with the investment bank Goldman Sachs. Brought up by two typical New England liberals, Tom also has a multi-racial family including an African-American daughter, of whom he is the solo father. With Kaleil as CEO and Tom as CTO, the two friends found their company are set up base in Silicon Alley, the New York equivalent of Silicon Valley. *Startup.com* shows that within GovWorks, there is a good deal of ethnic and cultural diversity within the management, board and workforce (though comparatively less gender diversity). Therefore, at least in Kaleil and Tom’s experience, the market allocates not just wisely but blindly, irrespective of background.

The film also shows a tolerance of therapeutic or spiritual practices within the New Economy. For example, we see Kaleil using meditation to guide important decisions. As the company grows, a corporate retreat to the summer camp owned by Tom’s family

⁸⁵ Kevin Kelly, *New Rules for the New Economy: 10 Ways the Network Economy is Changing Everything* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), 39.

⁸⁶ See Barbrook and Cameron for an extended discussion of the links between Silicon Valley and the counter-culture.

highlights the most conspicuous New Age elements of the story. The film reviewer Kevin Hagopian was quick to place the camping episode within he considers a more pervasive bubble of “surreal self-therapy” surrounding the GovWorks leadership. As Hagopian describes it, “Tom organizes a weird New Age retreat, complete with banjo singalong, character testimony from his loving parents, and silent attention to wind rustling in the pines.”⁸⁷ However, as I stressed in the previous chapter, it is misleading to necessarily characterise New Age practices as self-absorbed and therefore deleterious to the building of social capital. In fact, the retreat seems like a genuine effort to inject some community spirit into GovWorks at a time when the company was rapidly expanding. The irony here was the unforeseen fact that many of the people just hired would soon be laid off again, as larger market forces exerted their pressure on the company. As is often the case in *Startup.com*, the effort made by Kaleil and Tom to do business in an ethical manner is thwarted. As I will discuss later, the twin values of friendship and hard work seem hard to maintain when human capital appears to be not complementary with but destructive of social capital.

I noted in Chapter Five that social capital, in the hands of theorists such as Robert Putnam, tended to be given a nostalgic gloss. Putnam harks back to a by-gone age, where community participation was perhaps more visible but that the communities in question were also more culturally uniform and openly discriminatory. According to Aihwa Ong, a theorist of cultural citizenship, the contemporary discourse of rights is now subject to an “economic logic” which Ong characterises as neoliberal. For Ong, the “new alignments of citizenship elements” operate within global division of labour that cares less about social capital (at least in terms of maintaining community cohesion and stability) than it is does about *human capital*. Ong describes a process where, as the notion of shared cultural citizenship *across* national borders gains traction, economic citizenship *within* the nation-state is steadily shifting from a concept of access to the welfare state as of right, to something which must be earned and for which the individual is responsible. Therefore, at the same time as the entitlements of workers and beneficiaries are retrenched in the name of globally competition, a new kind of global citizen, distinguished by certain “marketable talents,” is given preference.⁸⁸ In the same way as enhancing social capital could actually enhance intolerance just as effectively as a more tolerant community, the emphasis upon

⁸⁷ Kevin Hagopian, “Startup.com,” Kevin’s Film Notes (New York State Writers Institute), <http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/webpages4/filmnotes/fns03n8.html>.

⁸⁸ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 15-16.

the “economic logic” of human capital can hide more disreputable forms of discrimination behind seemingly neutral criteria: “defining, evaluating, and protecting certain categories of subjects and not others.” However, Ong may overstate the economic discourse of rights at the expense of the moral discourse of responsibility. The new global division of labour not only pits the skilled against the unskilled, it also creates the conditions by which national governments and multi-national corporations can discipline their workforces in the value of self-empowerment. Like Kaleil in *Startup.com*, these institutions can plausibly claim that they have no control over larger market forces. While fluctuations in the price of a currency, a stock or a commodity may ultimately determine where, when and under what conditions a person may be employed, the properly entrepreneurial subject is, paradoxically, supposed to create their own destinies.

The moment which best exemplifies this paradox occurs not in *Startup.com* but in *Primary Colors*, where Jack Stanton gives an oddly inspirational speech to a group of New Hampshire union workers at the site of their recently-closed shipyard. The speech is odd because Stanton more or less promises that the shipyard will *not* re-open and their jobs will *not* come back. In the only substantive policy speech given by Stanton’s character, this fictionalised version of Clinton explains the New Liberal philosophy of human capital. American workers would trade the “old” economy of manual brawn for a New Economy based on a highly-educated, highly-mobile workforce of “brain” or “knowledge” work:

Here's the truth. No politician can re-open this factory or bring back the shipyard jobs or make your union strong again. No politician can make it the way it was. Because we now live in a world without economic borders. Push a button in New York and a billion dollars moves to Tokyo. In that world, muscle jobs go where muscle labour is cheap, and that is not here. So to compete, you have to exercise a different muscle, the one between your ears. The whole country must go back to school we have get smarter, learn skills. And I promise this: I will work hard for you. I will think about you. I will fight to make education a lifetime thing in this country to give you the support you need to move up. But you have to do the heavy lifting your own selves.

Like the fictional Clinton, the real Bill Clinton promised, as part of his campaign slogan “Putting People First,” a massive investment in education across all levels and

especially a programme of “lifetime” or “lifelong learning” that would be made available to all those training or re-training for the “jobs of tomorrow.”⁸⁹ Rather than giving away tax breaks to companies who might simply use the money to re-locate overseas in search of cheaper labour, architects of the Clinton plan like Robert Reich argued that the government should be “investing in people directly” through skills training.⁹⁰ In books like *The Work of Nations* (1991), Reich argues that given the mobility of global capital and goods, the reality of what we think of as the national economy is increasingly fragile. In this new globalised economy, the role of government should be to create a work-force of highly-adaptable and creative problem-solvers (“symbolic analysts”) appropriate to the production of high-value, knowledge-based goods and services rather than high-volume, mass-produced goods. Clinton’s education programme, pared with a National Economic Strategy, targeting transportation infrastructure and research in “emerging technologies” promised to deliver “the most dramatic economic growth program since World War II.”⁹¹ In fact, these promises amounted to nothing. According to the economist John Miller, the budget proposal put forward by Clinton in March 1996 would “actually spend less money relative to GDP on training, education, and industrial policy programs than did Reagan and Bush.”⁹² Swamped initially by concerns about deficit reduction and problems with healthcare reform, Clinton seems to have simply lost interest in these types of large federal programmes by the end of his first term. Instead, he used his State of the Nation speech, in January of 1996, to declare that “the era of big government is over.”⁹³

Though ideas about human capital had undergirded a good deal of economic scholarship since the 1950s, as Nikolas Rose points out, the context for the introduction of these ideas into Third Way politics was dramatically different. As implied by Reich, economic citizenship no longer took place within a singular, bounded space of sovereignty but rather an “internationalized flow of resources, finance, information, jobs, and goods.”⁹⁴ There are debates about whether Clinton merely followed down the path laid down for him by his predecessors or whether, by actively pushing for both the WTO (World Trade

⁸⁹ Bill Clinton, “Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for the Supplemental Agreements to the North American Free Trade Agreement,” September 14, 1993.

⁹⁰ Robert B. Reich, “Boost Productivity by Investing in People’s Minds and Skills: Reagan’s tax breaks went into wealthy pockets. Clinton’s plan gives priority to human capital,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1992, <http://articles.latimes.com/1992-07-13/local/me-3649underscore1underscorehuman-capital>.

⁹¹ Bill Clinton for President 1992 Campaign, *Fighting For the Forgotten Middle Class*, <http://www.4president.org/brochures/billclinton1992brochure.htm>.

⁹² John Miller, “Putting People First? Clintonomics and Post-Prosperity Capitalism,” *Dollars & Sense*, Sept-Oct. 1996, <http://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/1996/0996miller.html>.

⁹³ Bill Clinton, “State of the Union Address,” January 23, 1996.

⁹⁴ Rose, “Inventiveness in Politics,” 481.

Organisation) and the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), Clinton could be said to be, in Manuel Castells' words, the "true political globalizer."⁹⁵ In any case, for Rose, the real "distinctiveness" of the Third Way is not in the level of relative control exercised by the state but in "the economic etho-politics that underpins this strategy." Here Rose refers "to the "capitalization of citizenship" itself."⁹⁶

A kind of 'capitalization' of aspects of human existence previously thought of as inappropriate for thinking of in terms of capital – that is to say, of human knowledge, skills and life chances (human capital) and of the social networks and relations that promote economic and personal well-being (social capital).⁹⁷

As Rose says, the Third Way sometimes looks little different to the neoclassical approach of the Chicago School in its enthusiasm to "reconceptualize all aspects of *social* behaviour along economic lines."⁹⁸ For evidence of this approach, see Clinton's 1992 nomination speech where he argued that, "The most important family policy, urban policy, labor policy, minority policy, and foreign policy America can have is an expanding entrepreneurial economy of high-wage, high-skilled jobs."⁹⁹ Yet, if the theory of human capital seeks to quantify conduct such as the work ethic, turning what was considered a matter of private morality into a private good, maximised through "investments" in skills and education, the theory of social capital works in the other direction, *moralising* business transfers of labour, money and ownership that were previously considered in terms of property rights. The former and the latter work together. Human capital licenses social opprobrium against those who shirk their responsibilities because their evasion can be said to have larger social consequences. Similarly, social capital, in giving economic form to the intangible bonds of community – friendship, honour, trust – can be said to establish a private reputational benefit to a good community. In sum, the theories of human and social capital bring etho-politics and economics into alignment "through the capitalisation of morality."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. 1: The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 140.

⁹⁶ Rose, "Inventiveness in Politics," 484.

⁹⁷ Rose, "Inventiveness in Politics," 481.

⁹⁸ Rose, "Inventiveness in Politics," 483.

⁹⁹ Bill Clinton, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York," July 16, 1992.

¹⁰⁰ Rose, "Inventiveness in Politics," 484.

As Rose suggests, New Liberal or Third Way politicians did not just focus their rhetoric and energy upon the prospect of a New Economy of high-skill entrepreneurs, they sought to change the entire relationship of labour to citizenship. Wage labour no longer seemed to be a mechanism for re-attaching people to the national economy and the project of nation-building but rather a means of installing in people what Nikolas Rose calls “pedagogies of citizenship competences.”¹⁰¹ This had a therapeutic inflection since the aberration was no longer in the ebb and flow of the economic cycle but in the psychological disposition of the unemployed themselves. Rather than advocate for large injections of economic capital in deprived areas, Third Way theorists such as Anthony Giddens called for programmes focused on “support networks, self-help, and the cultivation of social capital.”¹⁰² Indeed, Rose notes that when viewed through the matrix of community, the “problem of poverty” is transformed from a problem of “material or cultural resources” to one of “a lack of belongingness and of the responsibility and duty to others.”¹⁰³ In the US, the practical effect of New Liberal themes like opportunity, responsibility, and community was not to incentivise the building of human capital (which, as I have noted, was an idea that was essentially abandoned) but to *disincentivise* the traditional Democratic approach to welfare. Clinton made good on his promise to “end welfare as we know it” with the 1996 welfare reform bill that stripped major aid programmes of entitlement status, placed caps on welfare spending, and introduced new time limits and work requirements for welfare recipients, moves that would particularly affect single mothers.¹⁰⁴ Even as he called the bill “far from perfect,” Clinton defended measures such as increased provisions for child care, which he hoped would help parents “end their dependency on welfare and go to work.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, Clinton apparently now accepted those theories of the underclass born of right-wing scholars during the 1980s (see Chapter Two). Furthermore, the symbolism of welfare reform was that work was its own reward, that the cultivation of the work ethic (or what Giddens calls “inner confidence”) was somehow more important than the actual wages and conditions associated with work.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Rose, “Inventiveness in Politics,” 489.

¹⁰² Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 1998), 110.

¹⁰³ Rose, “Inventiveness in Politics,” 487.

¹⁰⁴ Bill Clinton, “State of the Union Address,” February 17, 1993.

¹⁰⁵ Bill Clinton, “Statement on Signing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,” August 22, 1996.

¹⁰⁶ Giddens, 192.

The story of *Startup.com* seems, however, to offer a counter-argument to that of Third Way theorists such as Giddens. In the documentary, no matter how much energy or expertise the team expends, external and somewhat arbitrary events threaten to take it all away. Furthermore, human capital is shown to have a corrosive effect on what we might call the social capital of GovWorks, that is, the network of relationships between Kaleil, Tom, their teammates, girlfriends, rivals and the wider public. According to the filmmakers Hegedus & Noujaim, the initial idea for *Startup.com* was that it would capture the emergence of a social scene around a group of high-flying New Economy entrepreneurs in New York. This scene did exist for a short time but the parties soon dissipated as the time commitments for each start-up suddenly ramped up at the tail-end of the decade. From then on, Kaleil and Tom begin working to the exclusion of almost everything in their lives. One team member makes the comment that members of the team have been working 20-hour days for over a year (although how this is even possible one can only speculate). While Tom excuses himself over weekends in order to spend time with his daughter, Kaleil has no such boundaries. He goes through at least two relationships during this period, no longer capable or willing to even keep in phone contact with girlfriends. The inability of the participants to step outside of their bubble carries a certain irony in that they professed to be revolutionising public service on behalf of a public they had no real contact with. Indeed, the only time GovWorks receives a visitor it is the head of the rival firm, EasyGov (the uneasiness of the GovWorks team is in stark contrast to their rival's conspicuously relaxed posture). GovWorks was merely following the industry formula of the time – grow fast now, chase profits (and service debt) later. However, this crazy expenditure of capital – and the expenditure of human capital in the form of crazy hours – would slowly, inevitably come at the cost of social capital as paranoia and recrimination take over. As one reviewer put it “a world of group hugs and high fives transforms into night sweats and icy stares.”¹⁰⁷ Even the summer camp retreat, during which blank office walls are replaced with the wilds of nature, only seems to substitute one form of social isolation with another.

In April 2000, the stock-market crashed, leading to a dramatic revaluation of tech companies. Predictably, many reviewers of *Startup.com* have focused their attention on the question of “what went wrong?” Contemporary reviewers direct a striking level of

¹⁰⁷ Harry Guerin, “Startup.com,” *RTE Interactive*, April 16, 2003, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/startupcom>.

animosity at Kaleil (“windbag,” “slimeball,” “con artist”)¹⁰⁸ and Tom (“needy,” “pathetic,” “masturbatory”)¹⁰⁹ as if they were somehow personally responsible for this crash. Some reviews imply that the bursting of the dot-com bubble could have all been avoided if Kaleil and Tom had just stuck to the serious, proper and *rational* conduct of business. My impression of the film’s denouement is quite different. No one seems accountable for what has happened and in fact there is palpable bewilderment as both Kaleil and Tom struggle to respect each other’s right to self-determination, confused even as to where their own self-interest lies.

The situation is best summed up by Rose’s evocative phrase, “an economics without enemies.” As Rose notes, even as the Third Way smooths over the kinds of conflicts of interests foundational to the analysis of the Old Left, it targets those outside the mainstream values of the community as *moral* enemies. Of course, by this standard Kaleil and Tom are, as I said earlier, veritable heroes of the centre: having sought throughout their lives to maximise their own potential, they are now making their own contribution both to national competitiveness and civic culture (“helping government to help itself” one might say). However, within weeks of the crash, investors are calling for their heads. Sensing that he might be the first to go, Tom seems to waver: first denying that there is a problem, then looking for an honourable exit, then staying as an act of defiance and, finally, being fired by Kaleil as he scrambles to protect their mutual investment amidst “a bunch of bullshit personal stuff.” Later, Kaleil implores Tom: “Be rational! ... It’s about growing and learning and building a business and [the investors] don’t care whether we grow and learn.” Although the company is in free-fall, Tom seems to expect a generous payout for his trouble. At the same time it is clear that he has come to identify with his creation, even though the company is organised in such a way that he actually has no legal right to any of it. Kaleil, for his part, is able to go back to leading the company cheer, eulogising Tom’s contribution as he talks up the value of togetherness to a large gathering of people, most of whom he would also soon be firing. Kaleil drifts into the passive voice to explain Tom’s absence but by the end of the film, even Tom has forgiven Kaleil, perhaps accepting some fatalistic version of events. Like the “heroes” of *Primary Colors*, the protagonists of *Startup.com* emerge perhaps wiser but also diminished figures. Finding no evil to vanquish, no face of power to confront, they believe that because their world reflects their own values, it must all ultimately make sense.

¹⁰⁸ Amy Taubin, “Death of a Sales Ploy,” *Village Voice*, May 8, 2001, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2001-05-08/film/death-of-a-sales-ploy/>.

¹⁰⁹ Hagopian, np.

6.5 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I have addressed two relationships. The first is what we might call the relationship between the personal and the popular, between self-help literature and other cultural forms. This is relatively straightforward, extending the analysis of the previous three chapters on self-help literature into other areas of pop culture, especially film. The history of self-help over the last century shows us that self-help discourse has been legitimised by various forms of authority – especially the scientific truths of psychology but also religious and even legal authorities. In this chapter I have argued, following Miller, that popular culture also constitutes its own forms of knowledge of which the various truths of self-help form an important part. Indeed, it would be counter-intuitive if the prescriptions of self-help were *not* to find their way into the plots and characters of Hollywood cinema. This is not to say that there are not differences of articulation. As we saw in the previous chapter's analysis of Oprah Winfrey, the introduction of print culture into the television talk-show was used quite deliberately as a means of reforming the tabloid image of the talk-show – at the same time as Winfrey was to guide her viewers from assumptions based in the Recovery movement to the more optimistic precepts of the New Age movement. It is not that there is anything inherently “classy” or “trashy” about these respective media or cultural forms. Rather, my argument has been that certain exemplary texts are indicative of a broad historical shift in subjectivity between the Reagan and Clinton eras.

In my fourth chapter, I argued that the figure of the inner-child bridges the gap between the early medicalised discourse of Recovery and the magical discourse of the New Age, where the inner child loses its association with victimhood and becomes more a redeeming figure than the harbinger of an inherently sick society. I have continued this line of argument here in the analysis of the movie *Forrest Gump*. *Forrest Gump*, a sharply satiric novel written in the mid-eighties, becomes in the mid-nineties, part of a cycle of cinematic representations of the inner child. As in many of these adaptations, the Hollywood version of *Forrest Gump* depicts a white, male middle-class hero who symbolically redeems certain unpleasant aspects of American history. In my analysis, I have made an analogy between New Age literature's retreat from the material world to a kind of pre-socialised paradise and the centrist politics of Clinton's New Liberalism, which Velasco describes as the politics of transcendence. Both mark a retreat from the

antagonistic world of the social towards a bucolic notion of community, in which tensions, particularly around race, are transcended – not necessarily by changing material conditions but by appealing to the rhetoric of national healing, unity and re-moralisation. I address an important instance of this push to re-moralisation in the last section on the New Economy. While the Clinton administration’s rhetoric of human and social capital was initially promoted as an alternative to the “trickle-down” economics of Reagan and Bush, as time went on, they were revealed to be less a set of transformative education and economic policies than a set of moral prescriptions which signalled to the poor that work should be thought of as an end in itself and, perhaps more importantly, signalled to middle-class voters that the Democrats had changed how *they* had thought about their allegiance to “special interests” such as welfare recipients.

This analogy between the New Age and New Liberalism brings us already into the second, more complex set of relationships – more complex, because the relationship between the personal and the political, between subjectivity and government, is not necessarily aligned with the third term in this arrangement, the popular. Indeed, I have argued that the ethical imperatives of the Clinton era can be understood as a moral campaign against the very forces that were inevitably unleashed by programmes of deregulation and privatisation, programmes that were begun under Reagan and continued under Clinton. Recent scholarship, grouped under the rubric of cultural citizenship, has been spurred by this uneasy combination of globalisation, corporate liberalisation and social conservatism. In the first section of this chapter, I use the analysis of the film *Primary Colors* as a vehicle to explore some of these tensions between tabloid culture, talk-show culture, and centrist politics. The dividing line between electoral politics, entertainment and therapeutics became a subject of intense anxiety around at this time. For many observers, the success of Bill Clinton was evidence that firm distinctions between these terms were no longer able to be drawn with any degree of certainty. From this kind of observation, two opposing perspectives have typically followed: one that lapses into despair that traditional institutions are dying (what I have called the sociological narrative of decline) and another that celebrates the collision of the personal, the popular and the political as a victory for the forces of progressivism (certain forms of postmodernism). Here, I have instead argued that the contradictory forces of economic liberalism, social liberalism and social conservatism sustain each other; each freedom sparking more calls for responsibility. In order to manage some of the contradictions thrown up by cultural

citizenship, I have proposed a centre-margin dynamic where the centre is also reflected in the dominant political rationality which Nikolas Rose describes not as community, a category which I would include politicians of both the left and the right.

In each of the three sections of this chapter, I have considered a different aspect of the centre-margin dynamic *vis-a-vis* citizenship. In the analysis of *Primary Colors*, for instance, I consider how the flawed heroes of the piece engage in the very tactics of media manipulation they claim to decry. Yet because they embody some authentic notion of civic good, they are, in the end, redeemed. From this we can consider the possibility that the moral centre can somehow be separated out from the populist tastes of mainstream America; that one's belief in the incorruptible truth of American democracy transcends the everyday. Similarly, the eponymous protagonist of *Forrest Gump* can also said to be a centrist hero, strangely unaffected by the buffeting winds of American history yet deeply touched by the eternal verities of friendship and family. Forrest is not just a follower of fashion; the film credits him with inventing everything from Elvis' hip-shaking dance to the jogging craze of the seventies. Yet in the contest to claim ownership over *Gump*, it was not the populists but the conservatives whose interpretation won out with a narrow vision of citizenship that erases the sense of historical agency associated with the 1960s. In the last section on the New Economy, I look at another kind of erasure. In the excitement surrounding the transformative potential of globalisation and the Internet, the concerns of American who had been downsized, outsourced and off-shored were substantially ignored by mainstream politicians and media. Rather than addressing structural changes in the labour market, the ethical standard of personal responsibility was instead applied to those "marginal" persons in need of welfare assistance. Incentives were put in place to ensure such people would "invest" in their own futures, obtaining the necessary experience and attitudes that would serve them in the new global labour market. *Startup.com* was of course supposed to document the flipside of the welfare reforms: two talented, determined and progressive-minded individuals succeeding beyond all measure, striding the world of technology, finance and government. Despite that fact that it all goes horribly wrong, I would suggest that the failure of GovWorks carries few ethical lessons for Kaleil and Tom. Nothing that occurs in the film particularly challenges their own sense of self-worth or their outward status as the kind of ideal citizens the world should in theory reward. They are comfortable with the contingencies of the market and the vaguely mystical rationalisations that must accompany its periods of collective madness. Indeed, in their

ability to transcend the contingencies of politics, of history and of economics; Stanton, Forrest, Kaleil, and Tom, resemble each other.

7 Conclusion

One of the goals of this thesis has been to re-politicise discourse especially where it appears most natural or disinterested. While therapy would appear at first glance to be an especially de-politicised domain, I have demonstrated in the course of this thesis that therapeutic discourse is not the opposite of social or political engagement. Rather, it is deeply political in that it constitutes an important means by which we make sense of our relationship to others and to ourselves. Therapeutic culture, as I have stressed, is not just political in the superficial sense that it provides a linguistic or conceptual resource for politicians to dress up old ideas and policies in more fashionable clothing. Nor is therapeutic culture secondary to the political in the sense that it simply responds to a more fundamental political context. Rather, following Foucault, I have demonstrated that the technologies of the self which constitute therapeutic practice are absolutely aligned with the goals of liberal democratic government, empowering individuals (and by extension whole populations) in the direction of increased health, wealth and happiness.

By illustrating how the alignment of subjectivity and political rationality changes incrementally over time, I have set myself in opposition to those styles of thought which, in effect, essentialise therapy by making it a function of a social structure that remains static over long periods: industrial capitalism or post-industrial capitalism, modernity or post-modernity, welfare state or neoliberal state. In the Introduction, I argued against both the sociological critique and the postmodern critique on the grounds that they consider the history of psychologisation or mediatisation in terms of a narrative of detraditionalisation. These critiques are not unfounded. Our experience of the world *is* deeply penetrated by psychological discourses. We *are* surrounded by a vast array of media resources. Yet, these perspectives actually foreclose the possibility of new traditions, new ethics and a new kind of politics within this context. The narrative of therapeutic legitimization, on the one hand, or the “culturalization of politics,”¹ on the other, is not about affirming the transformation from one strategy of government to another, it is, rather, about documenting the slow decline of tradition, morality and ideological commitment. Furthermore, both the sociological and postmodern perspectives are wedded to evidence of changes in degree, rather than changes in kind. Inevitably then, the world is interpreted in terms of *more* therapy or *more* media, rather than posing the question in terms of

¹ Paul Apostolidis, “Action or Distraction ? Cultural Studies in the United States,” *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 147.

qualitative changes in therapeutic or media practices which might then be significant for the interpretation of politics or culture. In the preceding chapters I have done as much: analysing and drawing conclusions from the historical transition between Recovery literature to New Age literature which in turn reflect upon the case studies of moral panics, political scandals and presidential campaigns.

I will not recapitulate this analysis in any detail here. Rather I would like to use the space below to outline three methodological findings with broad applicability. These findings therefore constitute my main contribution to the fields of governmentality, cultural studies and media studies. The discussion focuses on how the introduction of ideas of culture, identity and difference into governmentality can address some of the limitations of Foucault and Rose, thereby opening up some methodological possibilities for future research. I finish with one further case study which uses contemporary example ripped straight from the headlines of the current US election cycle. In this example, I compare the rise of Donald Trump to the survivalist literature of the seventies (see Chapter Three). I argue that Trump (and Trumpism) is not only anti-political but anti-therapeutic, inciting rather than inspiring the electorate. And while Trump's vulgarity is obviously the polar opposite of nineties' centrism with its "discourse about virtue" or its "politics of meaning," Trump's current battle with Hillary Clinton also forms a fascinating (and perhaps frightening) rejoinder to the Clinton era. While Trumpism represents a comprehensive rejection of globalisation, Trump himself has made a strategic use of media that would have been impossible in an era prior to deregulation and tabloidisation. While Trumpism would represent a limit case (both in terms of liberal democratic values and just in terms of practical governance) in terms of governmentality, I argue that there is a clear articulation between survivalist self-help and Trump's social Darwinist worldview.

7.1 Key Findings

My first key finding is that the history of subjectification such as that given by Nikolas Rose is not incompatible with a cultural history of the self. I retain Rose's critique of sociological approaches to therapy as well as his account of political rationalities but I also flesh out this history out in terms of the dynamics of race, class and gender. Political rationalities work well in terms of *defining* normative subjectivity and *dividing* this from a negative stereotype, a marginalised subject whose conduct fails to live up the ideal. In

Chapter Two I used concepts like Philip Cushman's cultural illnesses and Sally Falk Moore's diagnostic events to show how cultural imperatives drive the supposedly disinterested domains of medical and social science. This is a classic Foucauldian example whereby science, the objectification of human beings in power-knowledge (technologies of domination), is linked to therapeutic or moral conceptions of humanity (technologies of the self). Rather than simply dividing truth from error, these technologies divide the sick from the healthy and the heroic from the villainous. Thus a positive, healthy image of neoliberalism in the Reagan era – a rational, economising and autonomous subject – is divided from the cultural illness of dependence or addiction (I use the examples of drug addiction, welfare dependency and co-dependent relationships between partners). In other words, a medical and scientific discourse is cross-articulated with a moral discourse. The broad definition of the ideal neoliberal subject would work equally well for the survivalist literature of the late seventies, the success literature of the early eighties and the recovery literature of the mid-to-late eighties. However, it does little to explain how each of these genres of self-help differ in kind, how they respond to a more specific context and audience. Similarly, a strictly Foucauldian analysis cannot account for why certain groups are defined as marginalised *ahead* of any actual conduct. (The best example here is the unborn black baby of the crack baby, already condemned to dependency). To repeat Stuart Hall's question to Foucault from Chapter One: why is it "that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others"? The obvious answer is that structural inequalities are to some degree determined by cultural prejudices not by conduct.

Secondly, politics is also cultural. Political rationalities work alongside but should be distinguished from political culture. In Chapter Two, I make a distinction between political rationality and what I call political formations. For example, neoliberalism would be distinguished from the political formation of Reaganism. I make the point that Reaganism includes within its coalition a conservative approach to the family, which is supportive of tradition, and a radical approach to economics which is, in some ways, destructive of traditional institutions including the nuclear family. I also make the point elsewhere that centrist politicians of the nineties decried aspects of popular culture as irresponsible or trashy, yet there was broad support from a (de)regulatory environment which created the conditions for that "trash." In other words, while political rationalities are relatively stable and coherent, political culture is in some ways just as fluid and contradictory as popular culture. This distinction is also a way of reasserting that is to

naïve to assume that politicians are always acting upon sincerely-held principles. Political culture is often partisan and engaged in the kind of manipulation that plays group of interests off against another. The point of governmentality, however, is to say that politics is not confined to parliamentary, congressional or presidential politics but lives in the everyday.

This brings me to my final point: the popular – that is, popular culture – should be considered alongside the personal and the political as a key third term, belonging properly to neither. Specifically, the effect of introducing the popular into a model of governmentality is to complicate the alignment between the first two terms. This is not to say that the popular *necessarily* reinforces or resists the dominant form of political reason. In Chapter Two, I highlighted two examples of moral panics which were at the same time media panics. In these examples, the media followed the path already laid down by both the Reagan and Clinton administrations as well as by medical and social science. Chapter Six takes its examples mainly from Hollywood cinema but connects these examples to a more general shift in the political and media economy of the 1990s. Here, the alignment between each of our three terms is more ambiguous. Arguably, in these cases, the lens of the popular brings more visibility to the slippages or dis-articulations between the ideal of ethical citizenship and the ability of citizens to live up to that ideal. Hence, we can find areas in which political, economic or cultural incentives actually run counter to ethical citizenship and it is in those areas where the mechanism of political change might be perceptible. The discussion in the last chapter also recognises that in the contemporary world political citizenship is inseparable from media citizenship and that both are constituted within the context of a global, deregulated mediascape.

7.2 Trumpism: Anti-Politics Meets Anti-Therapeutics

I believe in the power of negative thinking.² – Donald Trump

Prior to June 2015 when Donald Trump announced his entry into electoral politics, he was best known as the star of the hit reality-TV show *The Apprentice*. Probably more than any other, it is this conceit – that Trump has been running a reality-TV candidacy – that has become the dominant lens through which political and media pundits have interpreted the

² Donald J. Trump with Tony Schwartz, *The Art of the Deal*. Reprint. (London: Century, 1988, [1987]), 34.

novelty of his campaign. Such comparisons are not without their value, although they are hardly definitive. For instance, how would such a frame differ from the notion of tabloidisation that I have explored in the context of the Clinton era? Surely the reality-TV metaphor conjures up a very similar narrative, whereby politics is colonised by celebrity, spectacle and soap-opera. Furthermore, reality television is not the only media metaphor taken up by commentators. Journalists have alternatively praised “the surprising genius” of Trump’s Twitter account³ or condemned the acquiescence of cable news channels in handing Trump an enormous windfall of earned or “free” media⁴ (Trump’s media dominance apparently extends to old as well as new media). Fellow billionaire Mark Cuban memorably compared the Trump campaign to one TV programme in particular: *Seinfeld*. Cuban’s comment was meant to suggest that Trump’s candidacy was “about nothing,” with no clear policy positions.⁵ And while it is true that Trump has few stated policies (and even fewer that he seems genuinely wedded to), this media comparison, like the others I have mentioned, tends to deflect from the political content of those that Trump has stated. Divorcing the politics from the entertainment value forces us to directly contemplate the ugliness of the Trump campaign; its authoritarianism, its nationalism, and its racism. While the reality-TV trope *hints* at this ugliness by comparing Trump to the kind of prefabricated nastiness of many unscripted dramas, ultimately it pulls its punches. I want to suggest here that there is a way of thinking about the reality-TV trope that is more specific to Trump himself and may also form a useful critical reflection on his campaign. Though I begin with *The Apprentice*, I trace this back to conservative radio, Trump’s autobiography, *The Art of Deal*, and from there to the kind of survivalism-themed self-help books that emerged in the mid-to-late seventies.

TV critic Virginia Heffernan has compared *The Apprentice* to *Survivor*, another hit show that was created by *Apprentice* producer, Mark Burnett. According to Heffernan, both shows have a strong orientation towards social Darwinism. However, understanding the different rules of each show reveals a crucial difference. Each series of *Survivor* was set in a literal jungle where “the fittest” physically competed against the elements. But contestants also strategised against each other, building up or surreptitiously undermining

³ Amber Phillips, “The surprising genius of Donald Trump’s Twitter account,” December 10, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/10/reading-6000-of-his-tweets-has-convinced-us-donald-trump-is-a-social-media-master/>.

⁴ Campbell Brown, “Why I Blame TV for Trump,” *Politico Magazine*, May/ June, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/04/2016-donald-trump-blame-tv-cable-news-media-campbell-brown-campaign-cnn-fox-msnbc-213839>.

⁵ Mark Cuban cited in Nolan D. McCaskill, “Mark Cuban slams Trump,” *Politico*, May16, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/donald-trump-mark-cuban-223237>.

a series of alliances. Finally, the audience could intervene against “bad actors” within the game by voting them off the island. In the introduction to *The Apprentice*, Trump claims that New York is “the real jungle,” and “if you are not careful, it can chew you up and spit you out.” But while *The Apprentice* shares the basic worldview of *Survivor*, all the decisions affecting the eventual outcome are made by Trump himself. In theory, teams are still rewarded for competing and winning against other teams but simply being the leader of a successful team will not protect a contestant from elimination. Trump’s ire (and his famous catchphrase “You’re Fired”) can be directed at anyone, for any reason. This leads Heffernan to describe Trump’s leadership style as both capricious and tyrannical. Occasionally the show’s producers reward contestants who exhibit the backbone to stand up to Trump by giving them a chance to re-appear on the show. This is the case with the women who became known as Trump’s nemesis, Omarosa. But even though Omarosa embodied the kind of maniacal drive to succeed which Trump claims to admire, she too was “tamed,” eventually becoming Trump’s subordinate – and later his surrogate on the campaign trail.⁶ For Heffernan, Trump’s wealth confers upon him the same luxury of autonomy that Helen Gurley Brown privileged in her take on eighties’ “winner’s literature” (see Chapter Three). In an age perceived to be ridden with political correctness, the sight of Trump dispatching contestants for the mildest irritation and without explanation was apparently exhilarating for audiences; a vulgar display of power but certainly one which made for dramatic television.

The reality-TV genre has given audiences a steady stream of moral outlaws to love and to hate in equal measure. But until the rise of Trump the idea that one of these “characters” could realise presidential ambitions seemed far-fetched. It may be that Trump was able to combine his untamed opinions with actual policy content by turning to another medium: talk radio. According to Jerry Cave, Trump is stylistically closest to the talk radio “shock jock” Howard Stern. While politically liberal, Stern’s brand has been built on the presentation of political incorrectness and vulgarity as a form of “telling-it-like-it-is” authenticity. On the other hand, Cave argues that Trump’s policy agenda is closest to that of the right-wing populist Pat Buchanan.⁷ In Trump’s proposals we see a refusal to be outflanked on the right in terms of taxes, immigration and military hawkishness as well as

⁶ Virginia Heffernan cited in Jacob Weisberg, “A Theater of Cruelty,” May 24, 2016. Part of the Trumpcast series of podcasts, produced by *Slate*.
http://www.slate.com/articles/podcasts/trumpcast/2016/05/virginia_heffernan_talks_the_apprentice_and_donald_trump.html.

⁷ Jerry Cave, “The Shock-Jock Candidate,” *The Atlantic*, May 12, 2016,
<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/the-making-of-trump/482508/>

positions on trade or entitlements that are often to the left of where the Democratic Party has been under Clinton or Obama. The common element between Stern, Buchanan and Trump is a determination to offend the sensibilities of elites. Conservative talkers like Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Michael Savage tend to be more orthodox in their defence of Republicans and their attacks on Democratic positions. However, there is a sense that Trump has also absorbed aspects of *their* style while remaining heretical to both the conservative principle of limited government and the leftist notion of class solidarity which has animated Bernie Sanders' insurgent campaign on the Democratic side. Limbaugh, Hannity and Savage are incendiary in their tone and simplistic in their argumentation. From complicated policy prescriptions, they create a Manichean drama, a clash of personalities. Similarly, Trump's campaign has been rhetorically characterised by personal insults and a Manichean divide between "great deals" and poor deals, "the best people" instead of the worst, "winning" as opposed to losing. In this worldview, the health of the country depends on policies which are self-evidently "terrible" or "tremendous." Or rather, these terrible policies would be tremendous but for the weakness of the leaders responsible (a view which is, interestingly, the mirror opposite of Bernie Sanders' message).⁸ Through sheer force of will, Trump has shown how he single-handedly intends to surmount the inertia of Washington politicians ("all talk and no action") and "make America great again."

Trump expands upon his might-is-right philosophy in his autobiography, published in 1987. According to the author of *The Art of the Deal*, success is capricious so to be a capricious businessperson is no bad thing. Trump recalls an oil deal that he backed out of at the last minute citing no other reason than "it just didn't feel right." The deal, sold to him as a "no-lose proposition," fell apart in spectacular fashion, retrospectively proving that his instincts were right. Such examples reinforce the main takeaway of the book which is "to listen to your gut." However, this only applied if you are born with some innate talent since "some people have a sense of the market and some people don't." *The Art of the Deal* is quite emphatic on this point:

More than anything else, I think deal-making is an ability you're born with. It's in the genes. I don't say that egotistically. It's not about being brilliant. It does take a certain intelligence, but mostly it's about instincts. You can take the smartest kid at

⁸ A mainstay of Bernie Sanders' stump speech has been the idea that the President alone cannot break the power of vested interests without the majority support of the electorate.

Wharton, the one who gets straight A's and has a 170 IQ, and if he doesn't have the instincts, he'll never be a successful entrepreneur.⁹

Though Trump considers *The Art of the Deal* to be a book that one can learn from, it is not really a self-help book since its social Darwinist message leaves readers to simply exalt Trump's deal-making achievements – which he compares to great art – without aspiring to such heights themselves. For Trump, great artists or business people are born not made. Therefore, the main strategic problem to be solved is acquiring “the best talent, wherever I can find it.” He offers little in the way of practical business advice and instead counsels the reader to treat professional expertise with scepticism: “I don't hire a lot of number-crunchers, and I don't trust fancy marketing surveys.” A true populist, Trump places the opinions of cabdrivers over “consulting firms,” and prefers popular consent to the pretensions of critics. While Trump does not dismiss the value of hard work as a perquisite for success, *The Art of the Deal* underlines imagination over structure and spontaneity over planning. As Trump reminds us, “if it can't be fun, what's the point?”¹⁰

The Art of the Deal helps to explain something of Trump's current presidential run. Trump has relied to an unusual degree upon a tiny circle of trusted but inexperienced advisors. His antipathy towards expertise is reflected in the way he has spurned professional pollsters, focus groups, ad buys and on-the-ground infrastructure in favour of events and media appearances featuring Trump himself. Like few candidates before him, Trump seems to actively *invite* critique, strategically generating controversy as a way of dominating the headlines. As he says in *The Art of the Deal*, the press is “always hungry for a good story, and the more sensational the better.”¹¹ By attacking opponents, the media, or members of the “establishment,” Trump has also demonstrated his strength, his ability to survive an onslaught of criticism. Befitting his social Darwinist beliefs, he has also successfully shifted the discussion away from his obvious weaknesses in the area of policy and towards a discussion of personnel as either supremely competent (“the best people”) or completely incompetent, thereby reducing complex problems of governance to a question of hiring and firing. Finally, though they are frequently derided as rambling, Trump's interviews and rallies have foregrounded his ability to improvise, to entertain, to communicate a sense of fun as well as strength.

⁹ Trump, 32.

¹⁰ Trump, 21, 36, 4.

¹¹ Trump, 39.

Trump's unconventional and "fun" approach forms an interesting contrast to the survivalist writers of the seventies. Like Trump, Robert Ringer, the author of *Winning Through Intimidation* and *Looking Out For Number One*, began his career in real estate, as a broker. Like Trump, he argues that successful negotiations tend to proceed from a position of strength (Trump calls this "leverage," Ringer refers to this as "posture"). And like Trump, Ringer argues that it is *strength* not knowledge or hard work that creates the basis of a favourable deal. Distinct from previous generations of self-help authors, survivalists like Ringer contend that merely holding a positive, friendly outlook was inadequate when it came to the challenges of the modern market, which he describes as the "business world jungle."¹² Ringer is also distinct from Trump in a number of important respects. The most obvious is that Ringer is a libertarian, whereas Trump's positions on trade and immigration place him on the far left and the far right respectively, interventionist at the least and authoritarian at worst. In terms of a personal philosophy, Ringer is a follower of Ayn Rand's objectivism. It follows then that the "key word" in his philosophy is "rational."¹³ Though he insists that the ultimate goal of life is happiness, Ringer's advice unfolds like a series of logical propositions, all following a theory of human nature which, as the titles of his books suggest, place self-interest above all. Ringer describes how he educated himself about the "true" reality of the world, a reality where even the most altruistic impulses mask an unconscious Darwinian motivation. Following Ringer's example, the reader also learns the laws of the business jungle and how these can be applied to all the other areas of life. By contrast, *The Art of the Deal* has, as I have said, little pedagogical value. Rather than reflect upon the substantial material and institutional advantages that he inherited from his father (who was also a wealthy developer), Trump prefers to believe that his winning attitude stands in contrast to "life's losers," people who are simply "afraid of success ... afraid of winning." Like Ringer, Trump sees himself as competing amongst "the sharpest, toughest, and most vicious people in the world" but this is not a game of survival, for him it is simply "how I get my kicks."¹⁴

The second aspect of Trumpism that bears comparison with survivalism is its situational or transactional nature. In his short political career, Trump has gained a reputation as someone who is consistently inconsistent, taking up both sides of many major

¹² Robert J. Ringer, *Winning Through Intimidation*. 2nd ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1974 [1973]), 4.

¹³ Robert J. Ringer, *Looking Out for Number One* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1977), 1.

¹⁴ Trump, 33, 41, 34, 3.

issues (as well as a long list of issues of no consequence).¹⁵ Up until some years ago, Trump's public record was that of a man who supported liberal candidates and positions. But even in recent months, Trump has flip-flopped on tax cuts, the minimum wage, and even his most notorious policy, a ban on foreign Muslims entering the United States. Trump has wagered that his voters are willing to forgive the absence of detailed or committed positions in return for a candidate who represents genuine disruption to the status quo. Trump's candidacy is therefore *dispositional* as much as it is positional. Furthermore, having no bedrock principles to which he can be tied is valuable as a negotiating tactic; it creates *leverage* (which, as I noted above, is a key term in *The Art of the Deal*). For Trump – in politics as well as in business – it is best to “never get too attached to one deal or one approach” since “anything can happen.”¹⁶

Flexibility in terms of one's desires, loyalties and even one's values is also central to the kind of survivalism expressed in books like Michael Korda's *Power!* (1975) or *Success!* (1977). As I argued in Chapter Three, survivalism is not really therapeutic in the sense that therapy is a secular form of soul-searching or truth-telling. As with Ringer, the truth of the self outlined by Korda, is not a personal truth which comes from a moment of realisation or a journey of self-discovery but a universal truth. Power and success are what *everyone* wants and his job is to convince the reader “*that what you want is O.K.*,”¹⁷ even if this involves the “manipulation of people and situations to your advantage.” Korda does say the “trick is to develop a style of power based on one's character and desires”¹⁸ but, on the other hand, if your existing values do not allow you to climb the ladder of success, you should “start changing them – fast.”¹⁹ In fact, what Korda calls “character” amounts to two basic strategies in the “game of power.”²⁰

Those who were bullies at school often develop a very sophisticated repertoire of bullying techniques in adult life ... those who learned as children to deal with bullies by means of flattery, cunning and a display of weakness, usually go on

¹⁵ Jane C. Timm, “A Full List of Donald Trump's Rapidly Changing Policy Positions,” *NBC News*, March 30, 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/full-list-donald-trump-s-rapidly-changing-policy-positions-n547801>.

¹⁶ Trump, 35.

¹⁷ Michael Korda, *Success!* (London : Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 4. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Michael Korda, *Power!: How to Get It, How to Use It* (New York: Random House, 1975), 4, 6.

¹⁹ Korda, *Success!*, 13.

²⁰ Korda, *Power!*, 3.

using these defences against adult bullies with the same success. The most successful players of the power game can do both...²¹

Writing in 1975, Korda asserts that the “contemporary American style of power is to pretend that one has none.” The enclaves of white middle-class privilege slink away from the inner city, no longer “walking tall”, preferring the pretence that they too were “victims of the system” rather than taking on the responsibility of improving the lives of the urban black population.²² As I wrote in Chapter Three, ghettoisation was among a number of indices that pointed to a deep sense of crisis in the seventies: Vietnam, Watergate, the oil shocks, double-digit inflation and so on. I also argued that survivalist self-help was, in a sense, a micro-political response to these macro-political crises. By making an analogy between survivalism and Trumpism, could we also argue that Trump represents a new form of governmentality emerging from a similar sense of impending doom?

To put it in Korda’s terms, Trump, like the “most successful players of power,” is someone who can both play the bully and victim. On the one hand, Trumpism symbolises the possibility that America can once again bully the world; eliminating enemies through brute force, extorting allies in return for military protection, abandoning long-standing international agreements which do not put “America first.” On the other hand, Trumpism represents a sense of victimhood, felt particularly strongly by white, working-class men. He complains that, due to the incompetence of elites and the unfairness of the rest of the world, American supremacy is threatened. Though Trump has vastly exaggerated the extent of the nation’s problems in terms of trade deficits, the decline of manufacturing and unemployment (which Trump has stated is “probably twenty per cent”²³), he has tapped into a widely-felt resentment of globalisation. This resentment is not itself new; it has previously been addressed by Buchanan and Ross Perot before him, but up until this electoral cycle, not by the major party nominees. However, Trumpism’s particular combination of anti-politics and anti-therapeutics seems destined to burn out, being neither externally nor internally consistent. Survivalist literature reflected a genuine social reality but it faded along with the immediate and severe crises of the seventies. In 2016, there is no comparable crisis, only the perception that politicians are ineffective, out-of-touch, or stuck in partisan gridlock. Survivalism’s argument in favour of self-interest was perhaps

²¹ Korda, *Power!*, 6.

²² Korda, *Power!*, 6, 7.

²³ Zachary Karabell, “When Rhetoric Distorts Statistics,” *The New Yorker*, May 8, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/when-rhetoric-distorts-statistics>.

amoral but it was universally applicable. By contrast, Trump openly brags that he has always worked for his own self-interest but somehow this time is different: we should now trust that his allegiances are with the American people. However, Trump's willingness to introduce draconian laws targeting particular populations – precisely the element which distinguishes him from previous survivalists and right-wing populists – is also likely the element which will see him falter in the November elections. Without the White House, Trump's doomsday rhetoric itself seems doomed as a political force.

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