

intervention and the limited liberal state, the social and the political, welfare and citizenship, I trace those boundaries through the minute practices of self-government in the history of democratic and social reform. I analyze each of these boundaries more in terms of its details than as philosophical questions of difference in nature or meaning. Instead of saying what democracy — or any of the boundaries just listed — should be, I attempt to explain how it is done, how it is thought and practiced.

Again, rather than envisioning democracy differently, my goal is to undermine the self-evidence of the notion that democracy is a good thing, pure and simple, the best form of government; the assumption that we all know what it is; the conviction that democratic forms of government are more free than any other form. Democratic relations are still relations of power and as such are continually recreated, which requires that democratic theory never presuppose its subject but persistently inquire into the constitution of that subject.

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## Democratic Subjects

However, if you take power and independence from a municipality, you may have docile subjects but you will not have citizens.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

**A**t least since Tocqueville drew his famous contrast between citizens and subjects in the 1830s, it has served as a critical measuring stick, albeit a contested one, for distinguishing the activities and qualities of democratic citizenship from other modes of political action.<sup>1</sup> To be subject to the power or authority of another is taken to be the antithesis of democratic citizenship. Tocqueville held that self-governing citizens have the capacity and the power to participate in politics, to act on their collective interests, desires, and goals. Whereas subjects behave themselves because an external force exerts power over them, citizens have the power to act for themselves; they are their own masters.

After a brief caveat on the title, “democratic subjects,” this chapter explains why it is misleading to separate the terms of subjectivity, agency, and citizenship from those of subjection, domination, and powerlessness in

democratic theory. Against the grain of democratic theory, I argue that the democratic citizen is not a species apart from the subject, from the welfare recipient, the bureaucratic client, the exploited worker, or the therapeutic patient. Being “just another number,” “dependent,” or “in need of help” is not the antithesis of being an active citizen. Rather, it is to be in a tangled field of power and knowledge that both enables and constrains the possibilities of citizenship.

My argument that citizens and subjects are not opposites, that citizens are made and therefore subject to power even as they become citizens, is not intended to undermine democratic theory. I understand democratic theory as a constitutive discourse that helps to solidify what it is possible to think, do, say, be, and feel as a citizen. Recognizing that democratic theory is a constitutive discourse means also attending to the ways in which it is constitutive of any attempt to change it. The contrast between citizens and subjects will continue to shape democratic discourses, even those such as my own that are critical of the contrast. For instance, I do not read against Tocqueville. I am reading *Democracy in America* as it is usually read, as an exemplary text of democratic theory.

First, I examine several of the subjects that drive contemporary democratic theory: citizenship, political apathy, and powerlessness; another, the social, is examined in the next chapter. I find that radical democrats and pluralists alike reproduce the citizen/subject dichotomy and so continue to obscure the ways in which citizens are made. As a case in point, I show how that dichotomy works to undermine the radically democratic objectives of small “d” democrats such as Sheldon Wolin. Second, I rehearse the “three faces of power” debate in political science and situate the problems that shaped normative democratic theory into a positive science of citizenship, giving concrete expression to the will to empower. The operationalization of democratic theories of power are linked here and in Chapter 3 to technologies of citizenship. Third, I link the operationalization of social scientific knowledge to what Theresa Funicello calls “the professionalization of being human” or what Foucault called “bio-power.” Using welfare reform, I illustrate what I mean by the claim that citizens are made.

## Subjects

A caveat: I will not, for the sake of consistency, fix the meanings of the terms “subject” and “subjectivity” in advance for the reader. Analytical precision is neither possible nor desirable at the moment; I have

neither the desire nor the ability to bring an end to what has been an enormously productive, if seriously destabilizing, case of what Ludwig Wittgenstein called “conceptual puzzlement.”<sup>2</sup> In this predicament, one cannot say what a word means apart from how it is used, or what it is used to say.<sup>3</sup>

Such uses might productively confound meaning, for example, when a single word is uttered to say two things at once. Foucault used the word “subject” in a double sense, not to confuse things with doubletalk but to articulate a form of power that simultaneously “subjugates and makes subject to.”<sup>4</sup> That is, he means to say that modern forms of power tie the subjectivity (conscience, identity, self-knowledge) of the individual to that individual’s subjection (control by another). The subject is one who is both under the authority of another and the author of her or his own actions. Foucault means to undermine the perspective from which power can be perceived only as the antithesis of freedom, a perspective from which it would be possible to recognize Foucault’s claim only as a contradiction or a paradox. In other words, he uses the term to change what it is possible to say.

According to Wittgenstein, to change what it is possible to say is also to change what it is possible to do, to think, or to be. From that perspective, the varied uses of “subject” and “subjectivity” are expressions of the struggle to define ourselves. For example, “subject” and “subjectivity” have undergone a rigorous interrogation in feminist theory. At stake is the possibility of living life differently as a woman, or for women perhaps to live not as “women” but as subjects capable of constituting their own gender. By and in the large, debates over the subject in feminist and poststructural theory are over questions of strategy and the possibilities for resistance. Like poststructural feminists, Foucault hoped to “promote new forms of subjectivity” in part by changing what it is possible to say. To insist on a definition of “subject” or “woman” at this juncture would be to close down the possibility of becoming a new kind of subject.

To avoid confusion, then, insofar as that is possible concerning a word with many and varied usages, I offer the following list of the senses to which I put the word “subject”—though no entry is entirely exclusive of any other.

First, in the terms laid out by Tocqueville, a subject is “one who is subject to the power and authority of another,” usually a sovereign power such as a king, a majority, or the law. To be subject, in other words, is to be subjugated, to be powerless, passive, the opposite of a democratic citizen. This meaning of “subject” survives in social scientific uses of “power” as

the possession of one party over and above another. On this view, the world can be divided into citizens and subjects, those who have power and those who do not. These senses of both “subject” and “power” are endemic to the “three faces of power” debate in democratic theory, which is treated further on. For the moment, it is enough to emphasize that here the “subject” is defined against the “citizen.”

Second, in the title of this chapter, “democratic subjects” is meant to indicate the subject matter of democratic theory, all that is deemed appropriate to the field of inquiry traversed by democratic theorists and all that is deemed relevant to the study of democracy. This sense of “subject” is confounded by the fact that we also refer to the subject matter of any discipline as “objects of inquiry,” or things that are perceptible. “Democratic subjects” is also meant to signify that democracy is a form of government that requires a new kind of subject rather than a form of government that liberates the subject from under the sovereign.

The third sense of “subject,” related to the second, also contravenes “object.” Today we might refer to Tocqueville’s subject as an “object” of power.<sup>5</sup> A subject, after Kant, has possession of him- or herself and is no longer the object of another’s will or knowledge but now the subject of consciousness and self-motivation. In this modern sense, the subject is one in possession of the power to command oneself, a “subject of power” rather than a mere “object of power.” The “subject” in this sense is often used as a synonym for “individual,” “knower,” “agent,” or “actor.”

Fourth, I use “citizen-subject” to hold together the first and the third usages but not to conflate them. “Citizen-subject” is not used here to indicate a contradiction or a dichotomy but to indicate that although democratic citizens are formally free, their freedom is a condition of the operationalization of power. In the third sense as developed by Marx, the subject is the source of desire and is a subject only so long as that desire is a product of his or her own consciousness. To say that any persons are no longer subjects is to say that their consciousness, and so their desire, has been altered or fabricated in some way. For Marx, the first sense of “subject” is the antithesis of the third.

Finally, I use the hyphenated “citizen-subject” to indicate that neither the first nor the third sense of “subject” is the antithesis of the other. Neither can stand for an ontological being. My concern is to focus attention on the mutually constitutive relations between these two senses of “subject.” To see the citizen-subject in this way is potentially to recon-

figure ways of being and thinking about citizens, of acting politically and governing ourselves.

Again, it is my hope that if I critically articulate the structure of democratic discourse, citizens and subjects will no longer appear to be the only political creatures inhabiting the world of democracy. The normative definitions of citizen/subject are, variously and in deeply contested ways, insinuated within the critical vocabularies of postwar political struggles: participation versus exclusion, equality versus difference, ideology versus reality, the political versus the social, freedom versus domination, power versus powerlessness, autonomy versus dependency, public versus private, among others. Each of these binaries separates the terms of agency and freedom from the terms of repression and domination, the terms of subjectivity from the terms of subjection.

Of course, the binary citizen/subject is not set in stone. It is unstable, contested, and inseparable from what Eve Sedgwick describes as “the context of an entire cultural network of normative definitions, definitions themselves equally unstable but responding to different sets of contingencies and often at a different rate.”<sup>6</sup> I am most interested in how “citizen/subject” is embedded within the terms of welfare and social reform.

In Tocqueville’s understanding, the citizen has the autonomy and the power to act; the subject does not. Although power is available for use by the citizen, Tocqueville does not understand it to be a property of the citizen *per se*. If the possession and use of power is what determines the difference between citizens and subjects, however, then power is not external to but constitutive of their difference.

In short, I am suggesting that if power is not external to the state of being citizen or subject, if to be self-governing is to be both citizen and subject, both subject to and the subject of government, then a welfare recipient, for example, is not the antithesis of an active citizen. She will undoubtedly be the subject of bureaucratic control but will also have plenty of opportunities to resist — individually and collectively — the definitions and regulations imposed upon her. It is significant that welfare and most social programs are voluntary. Even when they are overtly coercive, they work by getting the recipient to see her own interests in those control strategies. Discourse structures a field of possible actions rather than determined outcomes. She is, then, both the subject of and subject to welfare discourses, not merely their object.

It is to indicate that citizens are both subjected to power and subjects in

their own right that I replace the dichotomizing slash in citizen/subject with a hyphen: citizen-subject. Of course, it would be in vain to suggest that replacing a slash with a hyphen actually confers upon subjects a place in the politics of citizenship. Discourse works by telling us in advance of any perception what it is we can see and what is or is not important.<sup>7</sup> Discourse continues its work even after its structure is recognized (for example, even after it is recognized that heterosexuals are a recent invention of scientific and popular discourses, the difference between hetero- and homosexuals does not disappear).<sup>8</sup> Still, by incorporating citizen-subjects into democratic discourse, I hope to promote a political awareness of how citizen-subjects are made.

### **Citizens and Subjects**

When citizenship is measured in this way, citizen against subject, it is almost impossible for the mass of citizens not to fall short. Paradoxically, the demos cannot measure up to the standard of autonomous citizenship and self-definition if the very definition of being citizens is set in advance of their engagement in politics. As a critical measure, citizen/subject separates the state of subjection from that of autonomous agency. But it does so only by presuming in advance of any analysis that the categories of measurement are self-evident, that there are in fact two distinct kinds of individuals: the citizen and the subject.<sup>9</sup>

The ways that citizens are rendered as subjects of democratic discourse has critical implications for democratic politics. When we say today that someone is subject, acquiescent, dependent, or apathetic, we are measuring that person against a normative ideal of citizenship.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the discourses of democratic citizenship tend to foreclose the ways in which it is possible to be a citizen rather than seeking to place the question of citizenship within the reach of ordinary citizens.<sup>11</sup>

What is most important, undergirding the contests about what citizenship means, is that the self-evidence of critical categories such as citizen/subject makes it unnecessary to inquire into *how* power works to make subjects out of citizens and citizens out of subjects. If we fail to scrutinize the ways that citizens are made, we may completely overlook the constitutive discourses of citizenship that are characteristic of liberal democracies.

For example, in "What Revolutionary Action Means Today," an essay first published in 1982, Sheldon Wolin objects to the silence he hears on the subject of citizenship: "While there are many voices, with varying degrees

of good faith, ready to testify for democracy . . . there is virtually no one who is given to reflecting about the democratic citizen, to asking what it is to be one, or why, if each of us is one and there are so many of us, the society seems to have so many anti-democratic tendencies."<sup>12</sup> The "significant silence" that Wolin hears is to my ears a veritable roar. As I document throughout this book, it seems that everybody has a scheme, a social program, an organizing strategy, or an issue campaign for turning political subjects into democratic citizens, for transforming the apathetic into the politically active, the indolent into the productive, and the dependent into the self-sufficient (recall Colonel Waring's scheme from the introduction).

There are, in fact, innumerable programs and strategies devised by social reformers, feminists, neighborhood activists, policymakers and legislators, entrepreneurs and social scientists, all in a state of seemingly perpetual reform. Sometimes such fabrications are obvious, such as when the Freedmen's Bureau sought to make citizens out of former slaves, "enterprise zones" to make entrepreneurs who would improve the economies and reduce crime in poor neighborhoods, and the Community Action Programs (studied in Chapter 3) to promote "maximum feasible participation." Even when such programs fail, the strategies they invent are re-formed and continue to shape efforts to make citizens. More often, strategies for making citizens are subtle or not expressly "political," such as the accounting methods in large welfare bureaucracies (examined in Chapter 5) and the self-esteem movement (Chapter 4).

In order to hear the abundance of discourse on citizenship, however, Wolin would have to alter several of the presumptions that drive his radically democratic criticism of the liberal order. I focus on Wolin's arguments here in part because his influence on the radical democratic tradition is so profound.<sup>13</sup> Understanding itself as an antiliberal alternative to state socialism, one strand of radical democracy has taken a pluralist turn away from the kinds of presumptions that I am interrogating in Wolin's work.<sup>14</sup> His presumptions about citizenship, however, are representative of those that continue to shape democratic discourse in general; in particular, they shape the rationalities of neoliberal and neoconservative reform efforts, from empowerment zones and workfare to volunteerism.

First, according to Wolin, a citizen who is recognizably constructed is by definition no longer an authentically democratic citizen but a bureaucratic subject or merely a bearer of a prepolitical interests or identity: "Interest group politics dissolves the idea of the citizen as one for whom it is natural to join together with other citizens to act for purposes related to a

general community and substitutes the idea of individuals who are grouped according to conflicting interests. . . . He or she is instead [of a citizen] a business executive, a teamster, a feminist, office worker, farmer, or homosexual whose immediate identity naturally divides him or her from others.”<sup>15</sup>

Wolin uses the citizen/subject antithesis as a critical wedge into the antidemocratic forces of modernity, including the modes of resistance adopted by social movements. For Wolin, if we choose to differentiate ourselves as particular kinds of citizens — feminist, union member, Chicano, black, welfare recipient, or queer — rather than as citizens of the polity, we are no longer bearers of a properly political identity. He takes human differences of race, gender, and class to be prepolitical, yet social movements since the 1960s were organized on the principle of politicizing those categories. If human differences were not natural but constructed, social movements argued, it was possible to change them through political means.

Against the politicizations of power in sexual, familial, educational, racial, and economic relations which characterized new social movements, Wolin argues that those who were politically engaged in resistance in the 1960s and 1970s were acting in the capacity of “depoliticized” subjects.<sup>16</sup> Wolin calls those who engaged in new social movements “groupies”: “The citizen, unlike the groupie, has to acquire a perspective of commonality, to think integrally and comprehensively rather than exclusively. The groupie never gets beyond ‘politics,’ the stage of unreflective self interest.”<sup>17</sup> Caught up in politics, then, the groupie cannot join citizens in collective efforts confined in the “the political.” Perhaps another way to say this is that Wolin’s proper citizens do not choose their own conceptions of themselves as citizens or act to transform the boundaries of the political.<sup>18</sup> Both those boundaries and the standard of democratic citizenship are fixed prior to the political action of citizens.<sup>19</sup>

Why does a committed democratic theorist so sharply chastise those who demand to participate in setting the terms of their own citizenship? Wolin insists that any political action that does not conform to a communal standard of democratic citizenship is “depoliticized.” For example, he holds that the grassroots movements flourishing in the Reagan years were “politically incomplete. There are major problems in our society that are general in nature and necessitate modes of vision and action that are comprehensive rather than parochial.”<sup>20</sup> Social movements and grassroots politics were merely prerequisites to real and authentic democratic action aimed at the state. “These developments are suggestive because they represent the first steps ever toward systematic popular intervention in the sacrosanct

domain of state secrets and national security. This [the state] is new terrain for democratic politics and it is genuinely political.”<sup>21</sup> Somehow, both the actions and the inactions of citizens provide Wolin with evidence for the claim that we are “depoliticized.”

Wolin revised his argument somewhat in the mid-1980s, suggesting that through grassroots activism “the political can become incorporated in the everyday lives of countless people.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, by referring back to a premodern standard of the political in order to comprehend the present, he rules out the possibilities for a democratic politics in the present: “It is clearly impossible to impose a democratic conception of the citizen upon the political realities of the megastate. . . . The democratic conception of the citizen must be preserved as an ideal form, the measuring rod of what it means to be a citizen.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, to measure citizens against that standard is to negate the possibility of being or becoming democratic citizens in the present, a conclusion confirming his initial claim that there is silence on the subject of citizenship.

In Wolin’s lexicon, both the ideal of democracy and “the political” are critical standards against which he measures all eventualities.<sup>24</sup> But they are one and the same standard, since he uses the two ideal concepts synonymously: “Democracy stands for an alternative conception of politics, even a standing criticism of and a living opposition to the megastate and media politics.”<sup>25</sup> If politics, conflict, and action are not “genuinely democratic” — that is, communal — they are by definition depoliticized, antipolitical, or prepolitical. It is not possible that the borders of the political might be set democratically because they define that which is democratic or not, political or not. By reducing “the political” to a particular form of democracy that we do not practice, Wolin abandons us to the megastate.

If political action cannot aim at differentiating citizens from one another or at reconstituting the political, then there is no reason to inquire into how democratic government works. In its ideal form, Wolin argues, the relationship between citizen and democratic polity is entirely transparent. In a truly democratic polity there is no need to fashion democratic modes of governance. All that is necessary is for democratic theory to sweepingly dismiss the megastate and hold out for an ideal alternative. (Wolin defies his own conclusions in his later examination of governmental practices in welfare states.)<sup>26</sup>

In the sweep of Wolin’s critical definitions, most of the forms of modern government that are constitutive of citizenship gather under the headings of “the social” and “the depoliticized.” He writes, for example, “there

are, of course, many reasons for the political passivity of the unemployed and the permanently poor, but one of the most important is the depoliticization to which they have been subjected.”<sup>27</sup> Wolin is arguing that depoliticization is both a cause and an effect of political passivity. When we do not act politically, we are subject to a kind of power that operates to mask its own exercise. According to Wolin, if citizens do not participate in politics, the task of a critical democratic theory is to investigate how their natures have been tampered with, to uncover the powers that have “depoliticized” the naturally political citizen. The critical standard of “the genuinely political” effectively reduces the subject matter appropriate to democratic theory to the judgment of this or that according to the critical standards of citizenship and the political.

To back up his claim that citizenship is “depoliticized,” Wolin follows Hannah Arendt in suggesting that the premodern political is replaced in modernity by the social. “Depoliticization is more extreme among the poor and racial minorities because they are the most helpless of all groups in the political economy, the new social form that is replacing the older form of the political order.”<sup>28</sup> Under these same circumstances, social movements contested what was to count as politics (as in “the personal is political”). In contrast, Wolin’s presumption is that the “genuinely political” is timeless. The politics of feminists and others, including “politics” in the sense of conflict of interest, the exercise of rights, the struggle for power, social movements, and protest, are not properly political. The question Wolin asks — what is “genuinely” political and what is not? — is as misguided as Robert Dahl’s question: “Who governs?” (treated below).

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

### **Homo Politicus and Homo Civicus: Democracy and Power**

The juxtaposition of citizen and subject is consistent with a way of thinking about power that was common to theories of pluralist democracy in the

post-World War II period.<sup>29</sup> The political problematic driving those debates concerned the rise of the civil rights and other social movements and the mounting sociological evidence that liberal democratic regimes produced economic, social, racial, and political inequality. Does the presence of inequality signify that capitalist liberal democracies (measured against socialism during the Cold War) are not the best possible system of government? If we are formally equal in the eyes of the law, at the ballot box, and as parties to a contract, why does inequality persist? If the people do not have the power, who does? These questions shaped a debate over power that was never resolved, despite which, I discover in them the constitutive aspects of democratic discourse.

Democratic theorists sought to make the persistence of inequality intelligible by problematizing democracy in terms of the lack of political participation and powerlessness. In the process, as I argue in Chapter 3, the ideological debates over power rendered the lack of power and participation amenable to governmental intervention. The ideological debates between liberal and Marxist social scientists were transformed into a positive science of politics for knowing and intervening in reality, for operationalizing the various theories of power. What emerged out of those debates was not any agreement on the truth about power but a positive discourse of power, a method for contesting power in the shape of what was not there, a method for ordering and intervening in what had no prior existence.

For the moment, let me rehearse the debates over power in order to show that they exhibit a will to empower, a will to represent and speak for the interests of others. The most influential pluralist in the immediate postwar era was Robert Dahl. He posed the question, “Who governs?” (As I point out below, much the same question guided critics of pluralism, C. Wright Mills in particular, to answer, “The power elite.”)

Pluralism — or as it was also called, “empirical democratic theory” and “democratic elitism” — claimed that the relative absence of political conflict in the United States, despite blatant and visible inequalities, signaled the deliberate if inarticulate consent of people who *chose* not to act politically. Pluralists claimed that direct political participation was not an essential or desirable feature of democracy. Consider Dahl’s famous dismissal of the “classical” view: “It would clear the air of a good deal of cant if instead of assuming that politics is a normal and natural concern of human beings, one were to make the contrary assumption that whatever lip service citizens pay to conventional attitudes, politics is a remote, alien, and unrewarding activity.”<sup>30</sup> The logic of pluralism indicated that if the mass of

people did not participate directly in democratic political life it was because, as rational actors, citizens could achieve what they wanted through economic and private activity and had little time for or interest in politics.

In *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, a study of New Haven, Dahl distinguished between the natures of *homo politicus*, the citizen actively engaged in governmental processes, and *homo civicus*, whose identities and interests are shaped and met in the ungoverned and nonpolitical realm of civil society.<sup>31</sup> *Homo civicus* designated the vast majority of potential voters, who rarely pursued their interests by engaging in politics. *Homo politicus*—the elected representative, interest-group advocate, and policy activist—actively participated in the process of government (narrowing the definition of political action to the electoral arena). At the same time Dahl argued that the political process is a completely open one. Since in his line of vision there were no persons or groups clamoring to engage at the level of government, he concluded that no citizens in New Haven were being excluded from participating. Significantly, less than six years after *Who Governs?* was published in 1961, clashes between the police force and black residents of New Haven made state violence daily news.<sup>32</sup>

Radical democrats such as Sheldon Wolin and the New Left generally despised the pluralist assumption that “man is by nature an a-political animal.” To them, American pluralism seemed a thinly veiled apology for the inequality and elitism that characterized American politics. Critics of pluralism sought to disclose the invisible operation of power that excluded the masses from participation (for example, the media manipulation of mass interpretations; the bureaucratic domination that pervaded and depoliticized political and economic inequality; control of the state by economic elites). Democratic critics generally took political participation to be an essential feature of democracy; nonparticipation revealed that power was in the hands of elites and that the political participation of the masses was repressed or controlled. If people did not rebel against their oppression and political exclusion, then there must be some invisible coercion or threat hidden behind their acquiescence. That was, of course, power. What lurked in the shadow of *homo civicus* was power, not consent. Radical democrats believed that to reveal the truth of power, to assign it a face, would be to transform quiescence into a confrontation.

For example, in *Regulating the Poor*, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward explained that welfare provision in the modern state was a response to the political rebellion of the destitute during periods of contraction in the capitalist economy and a mode of regulating labor in times of

political quietude. During periods of mass unrest the expansion of welfare provision aimed at restoring political order not by “buying off” the poor but by bolstering the social control mechanisms of the market. “The trigger that sets off disorder is not economic distress itself, but the deterioration of social control. To restore order, the society must create the means to reassert its authority. Because the market is unable to control men’s behavior, at least for a time, a surrogate system of social control must be evolved, at least for a time.”<sup>33</sup> For Piven and Cloward, welfare was a system of social control for maintaining political and economic order.<sup>34</sup> Once such social control mechanisms succeeded in restoring order, the function of welfare turned to regulating labor by enforcing low-wage work.

Welfare, then, was an expression of capitalist class interests. The exclusion of the masses from participation was one effect of the organization of those interests in the state. Against the pluralist thesis that the political process is an open one, Piven and Cloward argued that even those modes of participation available to the masses—the vote and protest—were “delimited by the social structure.” That is, the class structure of capitalism ensured that poor people’s political organizations could not effectively challenge that structure.<sup>35</sup> Following Marx, Piven and Cloward argued that formal political equality was little more than a liberal myth that masked the real workings of power.<sup>36</sup> They challenged the pluralist thesis that the inarticulate consent of the masses accounted for their lack of participation. What appeared to be consent, they argued, was in fact a festering discontent held back only by the invisible operation of power. The race riots of the 1960s and scattered throughout the 1970s marked those moments when social control was weak.

The social control thesis is that power works coercively and secretly to prevent resistance and rebellion. The pluralist thesis is that consent is the secret behind the failure of the mass of citizens to rebel. Despite their ideological differences, theorists of democracy on the left and the right shared a basic conceptualization of power. As Steven Lukes wrote, summarizing the debates among proponents of the elitist, reformist, and radical theories of power: “The three views we have been considering can be seen as alternative interpretations and applications of one and the same underlying concept of power, according to which A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s interests.”<sup>37</sup> Their common object of analysis was to locate power by identifying instances in which A’s interests were served and B’s were not—or to prove that there were no such instances. The expectation behind the formulaic hypotheses of each “face” of power

was the possibility of proving or disproving the truth of power: either some people were excluded from power and from the pursuit of happiness (according to the first and second faces), or they were quite happy and therefore apathetic about being unequal, (according to the third).

Each “face” assumed that power can be rationally and intentionally used by someone to affect (influence) other people. In other words, power is exercised unitarily, not as a struggle or in the relations between two or more parties, but in the causal effect of one upon another. Radical theorists sought to locate power after the fact, when B failed to protest against the power of A over conditions of inequality. Reformists asked whether agendas were set in advance in such a way that conflicts were diverted from erupting by the “mobilization of bias.” Why look before and after the fact? Because the concern was with the lack of political participation: the problem was to explain what was not there. “Latent” dissent, “nondecisions,” and “nonparticipation” on the part of the powerless were taken on the left as (invisible) signs of the domination that led to the “decision” not to participate.<sup>38</sup> Another way to say this is that citizens may or may not take a certain action: if they do so as a matter of their own interest, no power is involved; if they do so against their interest, then power is present and they act not as citizens but as the subjects of another.

In any case, there was general agreement that power could not be voluntary and coercive at the same time.<sup>39</sup> An action taken could not be an effect (caused by or taken under the influence) of power if it was voluntary. Lukes ruled out the possibility that B’s real interests or desires could be shaped by power and still belong to B. If B voluntarily acts one way rather than another then no power is present, since power is considered only as an external and repressive force before or after the fact with no constitutive role in action. The possibility that power might be a positive force revealed in action is ruled out.

Lukes came very close to admitting that an action could be voluntary and coerced at the same time when he suggested that desire could be a product of power: “The radical, however, maintains that men’s wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests, and, in such cases, relates the latter to what they would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice.”<sup>40</sup> Lukes’s neo-Marxist or Gramscian view of power depends upon the a priori counterfactual of “real” or “objective” interests to explain what does not happen, conflicts that do not erupt, and the possibility that people can be wrong about their own interests. To be “objective,” however, desires must have their origin in the actor, never in

power. Desires that are the products of power, Lukes held, should be seen not as material consequences of the exercise of power or a part of reality but as ideological falsehoods superimposed upon reality.

By ruling out the possibility that power relations could be simultaneously voluntary and coercive, that one’s desire could be both one’s own and a product of power, Lukes implied that the only authentically democratic polity would be one in which there are no relations of rule — one could be only self-ruling but never ruled in turn. Like Wolin, Lukes argued that the condition of freedom is the complete transparency of power relations. The critical evaluation of power relationships and inequality rested on the imagination of a democratic politics without power and a political subjectivity untouched by it. In addition to ruling out the possibility that real desires and interests may be shaped by power, Lukes dismissed the possibility that one could take real pleasure or have something to gain in submitting to power. His strategy was to give power a “face,” to give B a face to replace the anonymous A, in order to hold the powerful accountable. (Recall the failure of my own attempt to do the same in the case of the dumpster lockup).

Holding B responsible for inaction was beside the point. B, in his or her innocence of power, was purely its object. The point was to transform B into a participatory, democratic actor.<sup>41</sup> The lack of political resistance was posed as a problem to be solved by producing the truth of power. Presumably, armed with the truth, the apathetic would realize the need for action to depose the powerful. For example, we ask why a battered woman does not leave the batterer, or why relatively few recipients, during the dismantling of the welfare state, organized any resistance? Faith in the truth of power — that is, that if only people knew the facts and ignored the newspapers, they would act — also shaped our expectations of democratic and feminist scholarship (which the debates over poststructuralism have amply illustrated).<sup>42</sup> The truth of power was never revealed in the “three faces” debate. Why does this way of posing the question of power persist, given how long the answer has been deferred and how long the face-to-face confrontation with power has been deferred? What can account for the persistent questioning of power in terms of the truth or falsity of domination and political exclusion?

Though I cannot answer these questions in full, I want to point out that both pluralists and radical theorists of democracy sought to represent those who did not speak out on their own behalf. In both cases, the truth of power was intended to speak in the voice of those who did not represent



themselves. The will to speak the truth of power was in effect the will to speak on behalf of those whose silence placed a strain upon the legitimacy of liberal democratic government. (Of course, it is impossible to speak in the voice of the voiceless without first constituting their inability to speak for themselves.)

Further, both sides accepted that the measure of democratic freedom is the transparency of power and the openness of political processes.<sup>43</sup> If pluralists argued that power was transparent in the present despite inequality, then the left argued that invisible powers prevented the promise of openness from being realized. On all sides, “power” admitted into political analysis was seen to operate through the repression of the essential subjectivity of citizens and to result in their exclusion. So long as the transparency of power was accepted as the measure of democratic freedom, the question of how power actually works was displaced.

If we are to understand how democratic modes of government work, it is essential to ask not who has power and who does not, but how does power operate? If power relationships cannot be made wholly transparent, how can they be made democratic?

### **Producing the Poor, or Making Subjects**

To understand how welfare provision contributes to the making of citizens, one must first refute the (currently) common wisdom that the welfare state is a system of social control, that the state *literally* produces the poor. Two recent books, one from the left and one from the right, suggest that a welfare system produces dependents (subjects) rather than citizens. Both books advance arguments that tie the subordination of welfare recipients to the powers and interests of elites. Each proposes the dismantling of the welfare state as a solution to poverty and the subjugation of poor people. A brief review of these proposals will show how commonplace understandings about the social construction of welfare recipients have become. Whereas both books, from opposed ideological perspectives, advance the thesis that the powers and interests of elites cause the subjection of poor people, I argue that neither explains why so many welfare recipients comply with a system that works against their own interests because the authors of the books mistake the production of subjectivity for its repression.

In *Losing Ground*, a book famously held to account for the welfare cuts made during the Reagan administration, Charles Murray argues that the Great Society programs “produced more poor.”<sup>44</sup> Murray asserts that social

policies in the 1960s actually brought about the dependence of the poor and solidified the impoverished into a permanent class of dependents. Those results were inadvertent, he believes, and the Great Society’s attempt to eradicate poverty was noble, if tragically wrongheaded and elitist. When policy-making elites responded to the civil rights movement with an expanded welfare system, according to Murray, their interests were not in improving the lives of blacks but in remedying their own white guilt. Through aiming to end poverty, social policy in fact developed a paternalistic system governed by liberal whites that encouraged the dependence of blacks. In short, the newly expanded welfare system did not end poverty but produced more poor people: “Theoretically, any program that mounts an intervention with sufficient rewards to sustain participation and an effective result will generate so much of the unwanted behavior (in order to become eligible for the program’s rewards) that the net effect will be to increase the incidence of the unwanted behavior.”<sup>45</sup>

In Murray’s argument the problem boils down to the fact that liberal democratic programs are voluntary and so cannot demand or force their clients to make the sacrifices necessary to better their condition. So long as the success of programmatic aims is dependent upon people’s voluntary participation, the program will be unable to demand that recipients do whatever is necessary to become self-sufficient. Following from his computation of the carrots and sticks delivered by the system of welfare, Murray advocates the complete dismantling of the welfare system in order to allow the market to determine and coerce the desired behavior.

Democratic government cannot force people to become self-sufficient, but, according to Murray, the market can. For example, “the technology of changing human behavior depends heavily on the use of negative reinforcement in conjunction with positive reinforcement.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, motivations are always the same (self-interest), but behavior in pursuit of those interests is changeable. Behavior, then, can be determined by the organization of the social and structural order of incentives and disincentives. But only a free market structure can actually promote self-sufficiency. Murray’s conception of social construction is remarkable for its determinism.

Despite its influence, Murray’s book did not inaugurate the complete dismantling of welfare. Although AFDC is now all but dismantled, recipients have not been turned directly out into the cold of the market but turned over to a new system of perpetual job training. Still, Murray does not really answer why recipients complied with a system that produced their poverty. If all behavior is self-interested, why wouldn’t rational people

choose to subject themselves to the dictates of the market? His attempted answer is that welfare produced irrational behavior by overriding market incentives, especially among young black males. The labor market did not disappear, however, and if human beings are rationally self-interested, as Murray maintains, then they would choose to discipline themselves in the market rather than in the system of welfare. (Of course, Murray followed up *Losing Ground* with a book that undermined his own claim that all behavior is rational; in *The Bell Curve*, he argued that black male poverty is related to low IQ!)<sup>47</sup>

From the left, in *The Tyranny of Kindness*, Theresa Funicello makes a different argument for dismantling the welfare system, but one that has the same basic structure as Murray's. According to her detailed and carefully documented indictment of the poverty industry, welfare works to create punitive, discretionary, and stigmatizing bureaucratic structures. More important, welfare works to enrich middle-class social service providers, corporations, and nonprofit foundations. Funicello identifies the causes of poverty and the political exclusion of poor women, first, in the economic interests of the rich and of service providers and, second, in their ability to mask their prejudices and their economic interests in the ideology of helping. The bulk of most welfare budgets, she argues — including philanthropic, for-profit, state, county, and federal expenditures — goes into the pockets of the middle-class service providers, leaving poor women poor.

Funicello claims that the emphasis on service over direct income redistribution to the poor masks the massive redistribution of wealth to middle-class poverty pimps. The poverty industry expanded so much during the 1980s that social service agencies and programs actually had to compete for clients. But that was not the only reason that clients were scarce. According to Funicello, service providers and recipients were engaged in a struggle over the right to represent the interests of the poor:

The toughest adversaries of welfare mothers who organized for their rights were often those in the “not for profit” charity organizations. These functioned in a kind of vulturine relation to poor people. Their very survival depended upon the existence of poor people. In theory, they were “allies.” In fact, as agents of the status quo, they couldn't sell poor women out fast enough. (Or buy some, advertise them in their promotional literature, and parade them around like tamed savages, living testimony to the power of social work.) Sometimes they were even well-intentioned. Class and cultural barriers combined with their paychecks made it all but impossible for them

to understand poor women at all, much less represent their interests. Active [activist] welfare mothers who tried to hold on to their own agendas without getting walloped by “helping hands” were universally skeptical of the do-good agencies. They had been all been “helped” at least once too often.<sup>48</sup>

Contra Murray, Funicello argues that recipients are well aware that welfare does not serve their interests. In fact, her book is filled with anecdotes about women who did not act as the system expected them to. *The Tyranny of Kindness* opens with the story of Fatima Ali, who threw her children out the window rather than face a life of impoverished single-motherhood. From the morbid to the heroic, the devious to the courageous, the range of resistance that Funicello documents inadvertently demonstrates that the powers of the powerful depend not so much on the exclusion of the poor as on recruiting and retaining the voluntary compliance of their clients in punitive and coercive programs.

But Funicello does not account for why so many seek and continue to receive “help” that in all actuality, as she herself argues, is no help at all. Although she writes from the perspective of those who suffer the consequences of the poverty industry, the combined causes of ruling-class interests and ideology fail to account for the possibility that a recipient might either refuse or demand “help.” Nevertheless, in arguing that power works to serve the interests of the rich by producing the acquiescence and exclusion of the poor, as well as their condition of poverty, she gives evidence in countless examples that refute the social control thesis. When she argues that welfare recipients are excluded, intimidated, and impoverished by the system of welfare and social services, Funicello fails to recognize the political significance of the fact that welfare programs operate to *promote* autonomy, self-sufficiency, and participation. In her eyes, those objectives are merely an ideological justification for enriching the middle-class poverty pimps, not a rationale for governing the poor.

For example, poverty pimps cannot force a pregnant woman into a prenatal health-care program. Attempts in the 1980s to incarcerate drug addicts during the term of their pregnancy proved unpopular and unsuccessful.<sup>49</sup> Methods to induce women to enter programs voluntarily included gifts of diapers, toys, and cosmetics, all donated by local businesses and offered as inducements to participate in prenatal care. Another was the “Tupperware” model of home parties, where one invites friends to participate in plans to earn free goods.<sup>50</sup> But because such programs operated under intense supervision and control, recruitment was a constant problem.

Funiciello fails to look beyond the (hypothetical) clash of economic interests between recipients and service providers to the political effects of “help.” Just the fact that there are poverty pimps does not explain how poor people are governed. Moreover, in her single-minded focus on following the money trail, Funiciello fails to investigate the links between the agencies, the professionals who staff them, and knowledge: in other words, the links between representing the poor, helping the poor, and knowing the poor.

While it is true that those who benefit most from welfare are middle-class service providers, they do so by instrumentalizing the needs of others. I mean to say not that their actions are instrumental in securing their own interests but that they instrumentalize the voice of “the poor.” Any claim to know what is best for poor people, to know what it takes to get out of poverty and what needs must be met in order to be fully human, is also a claim to power. Even the silence of the poor can be instrumentalized to represent the poor, as Funiciello herself documents; silence can be heard as a call for new programs to ensure that the voice of “the poor” is heard.

In other words, service providers and caseworkers not only wield power in their own interest; they also act upon the interests of those they “help.” In Funiciello’s account of the poverty industry, programs are designed in the name of “the poor” without ever so much as consulting poor people about their needs — yet her own evidence suggests that every conceivable effort is made to document poor women’s desires and needs in order to turn those desires into an instrument for recruiting. Funiciello aptly uses the vocabulary of market research: “the creation and marketing of homeless people,” for example.<sup>51</sup> Recipients do have to be created, however, their social construction is founded not on the abnegation of their real interests but on the production of their interest in helping themselves.

### **Making Citizens: Bio-Power**

By neglecting the question of how power works and focusing solely on the question of who has the “real” power, Murray and Funiciello miss what I take to be the political significance of welfare: it is a form of government that is both voluntary and coercive. Much more than a way of organizing interests, it is also a way of organizing power, a way of acting on people’s actions rather than procuring their apathy. Welfare, bureaucracy, and administration are not modes of governance that cancel out

citizenship by producing subjects, dependence, and quiescence. They are modes of government that work upon the capacities of citizens to act on their own behalf.<sup>52</sup>

Democratic governance cannot force its interests but must enlist the willing participation of individuals in the pursuit of its objects. Intervention aims, for example, at transforming the aspirations of drug addicts to those of being good mothers and maintaining custody of their children — for their own good and for the good of all of society. Intervention and prevention work as a kind of recruitment. Even when an economic rationality is brought to bear on a social problem (drug addicts must be made over into self-governing agents in order to spare the state the expense of foster care and treating drug-addicted infants), its method is to govern people by getting them to govern themselves.

To be sure, legislation in several locales would charge those who give birth to addicted babies with criminal neglect. The strategy to prevent harm, however, has so far won out over the strategy of punishment. Despite the fact that many people caught between a drug conviction and a rehab program for pregnant mothers are coerced into participating, the program is still one option of more than one. If they were not voluntary, programs could not claim to represent the interests of those they serve.

A program might attempt to invest a young mother in “parenting.” She is encouraged to understand herself as a parent, to prioritize her relationship with her child, and to understand that relationship as a field of action in which she and her child can become empowered. In social programs, coercion can, by definition, never be in anyone’s interest.<sup>53</sup> The interests to be served are the autonomy, the well-being, the very life of mother and child.

I am describing here a mode of exercising power, a mode of government, that only rarely resorts to violence. Foucault called the exercise of such power in liberal democratic regimes “bio-power.” Bio-power, he wrote, “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life.”<sup>54</sup> The political rationality of bio-power turns human needs, welfare, and desires into the terrain of governance. Bio-power renders life itself governable, making it possible to act not only upon the body, by force, but also upon the subjectivity (soul) of human being.<sup>55</sup>

“The professionalization of being human,” as Funiciello put it, does not pit the interests of the experts against the interests and self-knowledge of the people. Rather, bio-power, through the administration and regulation

of life and its needs, enacts the good of all society upon the antisocial bodies of the poor, deviant, and unhealthy. It seeks to unite the interests of the individual with the interests of society as a whole (a strategy I described in the introduction).

The health, education, and welfare of the people constitute a territory upon which it is possible to act. Solutions to the problems of poverty and need can be tried out only after the problem of poverty is transformed into a set of possible actions. For example, to declare a war on poverty, drugs, or garbage is to say that these fields are open to action, places upon which it is possible to act, and where government might intervene. To wage a war on human need is to extend the reach of bio-power, to mobilize knowledge and power on the terrain of poverty, hunger, violence, or drugs.

As I have noted, Foucault defined government broadly as “the conduct of conduct,” an “ensemble formed by the institutions, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power.”<sup>56</sup> All those experts and agencies that are authorized to intervene in the life of a pregnant crack addict, for example — doctors, police, therapists, judges, child protection officials — are involved in making up the ensemble.<sup>57</sup> The ways poor people are governed very often have little to do with state power except when, for example, the national guard is brought in. More often, poor people are governed at the level of the social through case management, empowerment programs, parenting classes, and work training. Again, constituting the needs and interests of others to fulfill their human potential is a mode of governing people.<sup>58</sup>

For social problems to be territorialized, they must be known. For government to solve the “social problems” of poverty, delinquency, dependency, crime, self-esteem, and so on, it must have a certain kind of knowledge that is measurable, specific, and calculable, knowledge that can be organized into governmental solutions. Social scientific knowledge is central to the government of the poor, to the very formation of the poor as an identifiable group (see Chapter 3), and to the formation of the domain of social government. Foucault suggests that the beginning of modern forms of government is marked by “new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus.”<sup>59</sup>

Following Foucault, I argue that the subjectivity of the citizen is the object and the outcome of government. That is not to say that no subjectiv-

ity exists prior to government, for that would be to say that government produces subjects, not citizens. I am concerned here with a form of power that promotes rather than represses subjectivity, power that produces and relies upon active subjects rather than absolute subjugation. Instead of excluding participation or repressing subjectivity, bio-power operates to invest the citizen with a set of goals and self-understandings, and gives the citizen-subject an investment in participating voluntarily in programs, projects, and institutions set up to “help” them.

Acquiescence and rebellion are not antithetical but can take place in the same breath. I originally began writing in a vein similar to Funicello’s, declaring that poor women on welfare are excluded from meaningful participation and explaining how undemocratic, racist, and punitive welfare is, particularly AFDC. It took me many years of activism to realize that the blatant injustice of welfare is just that — blatant, obvious. There is no contradiction, no set of facts to marshal against the pervasive myths, no underlying and liberating truths to expose. My vantage point has changed: welfare recipients are not excluded or controlled by power so much as constituted and put into action by power.

Murray and Funicello, although they hope to transform welfare recipients from subjects into citizens, simply repeat the “truth” that they are subjects — socially constructed, controlled, and manipulated. Yet revealing the “true” causes of their subordination cannot help to treat recipients as citizens. I am arguing that welfare does not cause citizens to behave in one way or another. Rather, as Foucault puts it, welfare “structures the possible field of action by others.”<sup>60</sup> Which is to say that welfare recipients are already citizens, fully capable of action.

This is a messy argument to make. No one says this better than John Marr, the fictional narrator of Samuel Delany’s novel *The Mad Man*, in his account of the life of Timothy Hasler, a fictional philosopher:

But what is inchoate in Hasler’s work, from beginning to end — what he best represents — is the realization that large-scale, messy, informal systems are necessary in order to develop, on top of them, precise, hard-edged, tractable systems; more accurately, structures that are so informal it’s questionable whether they can be called systematic at all are prerequisites for those structures that can, indeed, be recognized as systems in the first place. . . . For Hasler, the messy is what provides the energy which holds any system within it coherent and stable.<sup>61</sup>

Hasler, then, subverts the causal order found in Funicello and Murray's arguments for the abolition of welfare. He also suggests to me that welfare is not the cause of dependence and poverty but the effect of messy, non-generalizable, and contingent practices, institutions, and discourses — not whole systems. Social construction is just not that simple or straightforward. The system and its makers do not create order from above; rather, the messiness of small things makes possible a large system like welfare.

## 2

### The Liberal Arts of Governance

The social is an enigmatic and worrying figure of which no one wants to take stock for fear of losing one's way or one's Lenin.

JACQUES DONZELOT

But society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual.

HANNAH ARENDT

It is along the same line that the points of authoritarianism, the points of reform, the points of resistance and revolution, come face to face around this new stake, "the social."

GILLES DELEUZE

In the associations between the political liberty of all (citizenship) and the subjection of some (the "unfit," "residuum," "dependent," "underclass"), between the self-acting and those who fail to act, and in their solutions to "social problems," nineteenth-century reform societies devised the practical arts of liberal government. The principles guiding the liberal arts of government, as shown in the example of J. A. Hobson, were laid out against utilitarian and rights-based political doctrines. They were derived from political and social theory as much as from the political problems facing liberal states, as the example of T. H. Green (below) illustrates. The practical arts of liberal government, however, were not invented in their totality or centrally administered by the state. It was the invention of "society as a whole" that gave scope to a multitude of particular and localized social programs, to the development of the social sciences and professional