Introduction
Small Things

> A meticulous observation of detail, and at the same time a political awareness of these small things, for the control and use of man, emerge through the classical age bearing with them a whole set of techniques, a whole corpus of methods and knowledge, descriptions, plans, and data. And from such trifles, no doubt, the man of modern humanism was born.
>
> MICHEL FOUCAULT

> The popular mind in fact doubles the deed: it posits the same event as cause and then a second time as its effect.
>
> FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

> For my part, I should be inclined to think that liberty is less necessary in great matters than in tiny ones if I imagined that one could ever be safe in the enjoyment of one sort of freedom without the other.
>
> ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

In reformist and democratic discourses, citizenship and self-government are tirelessly put forward as solutions to poverty, political apathy, powerlessness, crime, and innumerable other problems. But that stance obscures any political awareness of how citizens are brought into being; it obscures the will to empower embedded in posing democracy as a solution. I argue that democratic citizenship is less a solution to political problems than a strategy of government.

Individual subjects are transformed into citizens by what I call technologies of citizenship: discourses, programs, and other tactics aimed at making individuals politically active and capable of self-government. Examples might include a neighborhood organizing campaign, an empower-

ment program, safe-sex education, a shelter for battered women, social service programs promoting self-help, self-sufficiency, or self-esteem, or a radically democratic social movement.

I see these technologies of citizenship, however well intentioned, as modes of constituting and regulating citizens: that is, strategies for governing the very subjects whose problems they seek to redress — the powerless, the apathetic, or those at risk. Although I am deeply sympathetic to the project of radical or participatory democracy, I am skeptical that such a project presents an answer to questions of power, inequality, and political participation. Like any mode of government, democracy both enables and constrains the possibilities for political action. Democratic modes of governance are not *necessarily* more or less dangerous, free, or idealistic than any other. Even democratic self-government is still a mode of exercising power — in this case, over oneself. Like government more generally, self-government can swing between the poles of tyranny and absolute liberty. One can govern one's own *or* others' lives well or badly.

The only sure thing, in my somewhat Machiavellian view, is that solutions to the problems of politics will not be found in a particular form of government, in a theory, in human reason, or in some truth; they will be found, for better or worse, in more politics. If poststructural political theory has a hidden foundation, it is that power and political conflict are as ubiquitous, as commonplace, as dangerous *and* as productive behind the bedroom door as they are in the legislature. Conflict and struggle are a permanent historical condition. Or, as Michel Foucault so famously put it, "everything is dangerous," even democracy.[1]

I investigate the familiar problematics of democratic theory — inequalities of power, participation, resistance, knowledge, and citizenship — through the insights of feminist and poststructural political theory. Two notions, that power relations are ubiquitous and that subjectivity is both enabled and constrained by relations of power, help to make these problematics thinkable in new ways attuned to the contingencies of politics. Democratic theories, I argue, are best understood as constitutive discourses that contribute to solidifying what it is possible to think, say, do, and be democratically.

I want neither to overstate nor to neglect the dangers of democracy. I do not seek to disclose some evil hidden away in democratic discourses; they are both enabling and constraining. The will to empower others and oneself is neither a bad nor a good thing. It is political; the will to empower contains the twin possibilities of domination and freedom. In Chapter 2 I

trace the origins of the will to empower to the shift from Christian charity to social work as a guiding principle of philanthropy in the nineteenth century; in Chapters 2 and 3 I explain that the will to empower is expressed in peculiar kinds of governing relationships which by definition erase the traces of the philanthropist's will, especially the will to self-help and self-empowerment. My goal, however, is not to indict the will to empower but to show that even the most democratic modes of government entail power relationships that are both voluntary and coercive.

Two questions drive the discussion that follows. The first is, what are the problems to which democratic participation is posed as the solution? Most consistently, what I have found is that democratic participation and self-government are regarded as solutions to the lack of something: for example, a lack of power, of self-esteem, of coherent self-interest, or of political consciousness. Along with social service programs, philanthropy, and some kinds of political associations, participatory democratic discourse is preoccupied with the subjects who do not rebel against their own exploitation and inequality, who fail to act in their own interests, and who do not participate politically even though free to do so. Indeed, the analytical and normative vocabularies of democratic theory are replete with formulations expressing what is not there: "powerlessness," "non-participation," "non-decision," and "counterfactuals."

The second question is, by what means is the capacity, power, consciousness, or subjectivity proper to democratic participation and self-government infused into citizens? How does the will to empower work; how are individuals empowered, transformed from apathetic and powerless subjects into active, participatory citizens? How is subjugation transformed into subjectivity? Are the means by which citizens are constituted themselves democratic?

The first of my two main arguments is that democratic modes of governance and social scientific ways of knowing (re)produce citizens who are capable of governing themselves, of acting in their own interests and in solidarity with others. Citizens are not born; they are made. I explain the political significance of the ways social scientific knowledge is operationalized in techniques, programs, and strategies for governing, shaping, and guiding those who are held to exhibit some specified lack. Throughout the book I use examples of the practical role played by social science in applying the liberal arts of government.

To be clear, I do not mean that citizens are socially constructed by *the* government. My argument turns on distinguishing between the state and

governance. By "the state" I mean the liberal, representative, electoral, administrative, legislative, and judicial institutions and practices articulated within the confines of a liberal constitutional framework. By "governance," I mean what Michel Foucault called "the conduct of conduct" or "governmentality," forms of action and relations of power that aim to guide and shape (rather than force, control, or dominate) the actions of others. In this broad sense, governance includes any program, discourse, or strategy that attempts to alter or shape the actions of others or oneself. It includes but is not limited to programs conducted by the liberal state, for governance can also involve internal and voluntary relations of rule, the ways we act upon ourselves.

Liberal democratic governance is premised not so much upon the autonomy or the rights of individuals as upon their social fabrication as citizens, a fact that is obscured when citizenship is regarded as a solution. The two normative trajectories of liberal democratic thought diverge on the question of whether or not the citizen is inherently rational and self-interested or self-realizing. In either case, however, the liberty of the citizens is understood to be the limit of liberal governance. It is in those cases where individuals do not act in their own self-interest or appear indifferent to their own development as full-fledged citizens that the limit of the liberal state at the threshold of individual rights, liberty, and pursuits must be crossed.

I find that participatory and democratic schemes — what I am calling technologies of citizenship — for correcting the deficiencies of citizens are endemic within liberal democratic societies. Technologies of citizenship operate according to a political rationality for governing people in ways that promote their autonomy, self-sufficiency, and political engagement; in the classic phrase of early philanthropists, they are intended to "help people to help themselves." This is a manner of governing that relies not on institutions, organized violence or state power but on securing the voluntary compliance of citizens. I argue, however, that the autonomy, interests, and wills of citizens are shaped as well as enlisted. Technologies of citizenship do not cancel out the autonomy and independence of citizens but are modes of governance that work upon and through the capacities of citizens to act on their own. Technologies of citizenship are voluntary and coercive at the same time; the actions of citizens are regulated, but only after the capacity to act as a certain kind of citizen with certain aims is instilled. Democratic citizens, in short, are both the effects and the instruments of liberal governance.

Three relatively recent technologies of citizenship are fully treated here in Chapters 3, 4, and 5: Community Action Programs under the Johnson administration; the self-esteem movement; and the reorganization of welfare accounting practices under President Carter which resulted in the emergence of a new kind of citizen — the welfare queen. Below and in Chapter 2, garbage reform and nineteenth-century self-help schemes illustrate the extent to which social reform movements aim at accomplishing through volunteerism and gentle coercion what the liberal state cannot do without using force or violating its limits. Although the scope and impact of a given social reform movement may be short-lived, its techniques for making citizens do not disappear but are reformed or carried over into new programs.

My second overarching argument is that the political itself is continually transformed and reconstituted at the micro-levels of everyday life where citizens are constituted. If power is ubiquitous, as I assert throughout, then it makes no sense to speak of "the political," "the social," "the private," and "the public" as separate domains. The political cannot be clearly demarcated from other domains without excluding some relations of power.[2] Instead of reconceptualizing the political per se, I try to understand how the social transformation of the political opens new possibilities for political action.

I resist the temptation to locate the political only where there is contestation or overt relationships of power. First, I want to avoid the presumption that there is an inside and an outside to politics. Second, in Chapters 1 and 5, I argue that to say something is political only once it is contested is a strategical move that masks the will to empower. For example, in Chapter 5 I find it troubling to say with Nancy Fraser that where there is no overt political resistance, relations of power and inequality have been "depoliticized." To say that welfare and bureaucratic modes of government "depoliticize" the political exclusion of welfare recipients is to mistake the absence of resistance for an absence of politics.

It is not enough to say that recipients are excluded from politics, because, as Judith Butler put a related argument, that "misses the point that the subject is an accomplishment regulated and produced in advance. And as such is fully political; indeed, perhaps most political at the point in which it is claimed to be prior to politics itself."[3] The citizen is an effect and an instrument of political power rather than simply a participant in politics. The measure of democracy is not the extent to which citizens participate in politics rather than stand back in fear or apathy. That is to mistake power

for what it excludes rather than what it produces. The critical question for democratic theory is how citizens are constituted by politics and power. To answer that question, one must recognize the contingency of the political itself.

For example, in Chapter 4 on the self-esteem movement, I explain how the self is made into a terrain of political action, a terrain that carries new political possibilities for self-government. In that case, acting upon the self is also a manner of acting politically which self-esteem advocates believe can transform society as a whole. One might be tempted to say that the self-esteem movement "politicizes" the self. To "politicize" self-esteem, however, to bring it into the domain of politics, is to leave politics as it was and simply add something new to it.

I understand social reform movements to do something more profound than carry new issues into the political domain. Social movements transform the political itself; that is, they transform the terrain of political action. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe make a similar claim about the unprecedented politicization of the social by new social movements since the 1960s: "What has been exploded is the idea and the reality itself of a unique space of the political. What we are witnessing is a politicization far more radical than any we have known in the past, because it tends to dissolve the distinction between the public and the private."[4] I trace their insight to reform movements in the nineteenth century and so call into question the "newness" of new social movements.

There are two points of departure for this book. The first is democratic theory. The second is the idea of the social—"society as a whole" and "social government"—that developed over the course of the nineteenth century. The social emerged as (1) an object of scientific knowledge (statistics, surveys, the census, and political economy), (2) a set of techniques for indirectly intervening in the lives of the dispossessed (social work, social service, social welfare, economy), and (3) the object of reform movements. A brief account of the historical emergence of the social is given in Chapter 2. What is most important for my purposes is not the history of the social itself but the unique modes of reform and government it made possible.

Once more, to be clear, "the social" is not the space traversed between citizens and the state; it is neither the space of uncoerced association (as in "civil society") nor the space of conformity and domination (as in "social control"). Rather, the social confuses and reconstitutes the boundaries between the personal and the political, the economy and the state, the voluntary and the coercive.

For example, "social problems," given their first systematic treatments at the turn of the twentieth century, define an abstract field of intervention. As Gilles Deleuze put it, the social is a "hybrid domain" made consistent not by its institutions but by its techniques.[5] The novelty of social techniques of government was that they made it possible to target individuals and society as a whole in a single aim. Social government had a new object, to govern what J. A. Hobson in *The Social Problem* (1901) described as "man in society."[6]

The key to understanding the political possibilities that emerged with the social in the nineteenth century is that the term was used both to designate "the whole of society" and to distinguish the poor from the body of society. Mary Poovey suggests that this double usage "allowed social analysts to treat one segment of the population as a special problem at the same time that they could gesture toward the mutual interests that (theoretically) united all parts of the social whole."[7] As Hobson put it in, the "social problem may be set in terms of wealth or terms of want."[8] In either case, any impediment to harmony and progress, including class conflict, needed to be calculated, known, and acted upon. The welfare and progress of society as a whole were linked to solving the poverty of some of its members. Any solution had to be "applied alike to the individual and the social organism, so as to yield a scientific harmony of the claims of Socialism and Individualism."[9]

To extend the reach of power to both at the same time, the political itself had to be reconstituted at the social level, where the individual's liberty was brought into harmony with social progress. That is to say, once the social became the object of reform, agitation, and science, the political lost its spatial association with sovereign power and the state. What mattered most was that "the form of the solution," in Hobson's phrase, be resolved so that it might provide the principles needed by social reformers of all kinds. The form of Hobson's solution to the social problem was "the art of social conduct":

> A satisfactory answer cannot consist in the theoretical solution of a problem; it must lie in the region of social conduct. Not merely saying what should be done, but the doing, is the solution. The reins of Science and Practice are drawn together; a theory of social conduct which shall take cognizance of all the factors will be likewise the art of social conduct.[10]

The theory and the art of social conduct provided reformers with a rationality of government that they carefully distinguished from the state.

The art of social conduct, wrote Hobson, required "marking clearly the operation of those industrial and social forces which make for the larger and more various activities of the state in politics and industry, and those which, on the other hand, directly tend to enlarge the bounds of individual liberty and enterprise."[11] Applying the art of social conduct at the level on which the individual was constituted and regulated meant that power had to find a way into the minute and mundane reaches of the habits, desires, interests, and daily lives of individuals. The art of social conduct was applied to secure the "social cooperation" necessary to keep state intervention to a minimum; in the same step, the sphere of individual liberty was enlarged.

With the advent of the social as the principle of governing individual conduct, power was articulated through the constitution and regulation of individual liberty. Even, or most especially, the smallest details of life came under the terrain of social intervention. Although Hobson argued for the unity of the "Social Question," he also recognized its practical components: "The practical reformer has narrowed the phrase to connote Drink, Sex, Relations, Population, or even Money";[12] he added labor, class conflict, education, and consumption to the list. The unity of the social question, however, was provided by the laws of progress. "'The history of progress is the record of a gradual diminution of Waste.' From this standpoint the Social Question will find its essential unity in the problem of how to deal with human waste."[13]

Waste, taken perhaps more literally than Hobson intended, provides the perfect illustration of how citizens are constituted and regulated and how the political is reconstituted by the arts of social conduct.

George Edwin Waring, a Civil War colonel who became the street-cleaning commissioner of New York City, created the Juvenile Street Cleaning League in the 1890s in order to encourage the public to feel responsible for the disposal of waste. The league — a voluntary association of working class-children that was formed despite the initial suspicion that the children were being used as an informal army of garbage police — was a great success and spread from New York to other cities shortly after the turn of the century. The children, Waring claimed, "are being taught that *government* does not mean merely a policeman to be run away from, but *an influence that touches the life of the people at every point.*"[14] Another way to say the same thing is that government is not merely the activity of the state officials and institutions. For Waring, governance was a way of

exercising power that touched people as individuals and as "the people" in a single reach.

The goal was to create civic pride, Colonel Waring argued, and if "nothing is gained to the city except in a negative way, at least the neutrality of thousands of children has been purchased and the streets are cleaner from the fact that so many are kept from making them dirty."[15] In other words, Waring sought to link each volunteer to the resolution of collective social problems (including the lack of municipal power to enforce the sanitary code). The league encouraged the people to carry out the purpose of government. For sanitation reform to succeed, according to a report in *Engineering News*, "every citizen would be an inspector."[16]

The league employed what I am calling a technology of citizenship: it sought to make good citizens out of poor and recent immigrants, to expand the limits and maximize the powers of city government by making the people self-governing. It was voluntary, but it practiced an art of coercion that made children at once subject to government and subjects of self-government. "This profession [sanitary engineering] is neither that of physician, nor engineer, nor educator, but smacks of all three. It levies autocratic powers, kin to those of ancient tyrants, but at the same time depends upon the sheerest democracy of information and co-operation to give its work effect."[17] To be sure, this social government took place largely outside *the* government in voluntary associations and special commissions, but it was expressly political.

For progressives such as Colonel Waring and J. A. Hobson, the object of "the new social profession" was life, its conditions and health, and its civic or political engagement. (Readers will recognize in the Juvenile Street Cleaning League the contours of Foucault's concept of "bio-power," which is elaborated in Chapters 1 and 2.) Colonel Waring saw political as well as commodity value in garbage: "Dickens' 'Golden Dustman' and the accounts of the rag-pickers of Paris have made us familiar with the fact that there is an available value in the ordinary *rejectanenta* of human life. We learn by the work of the dock Italian of New York that to regain this value is a matter of minute detail; it calls for the recovery of unconsidered trifles from a mass of valueless wastes, and the conversion of these into a saleable commodity."[18] Waring learned from scavengers and immigrants that recycling is profitable, but he sought to render that commodity value of political use to the municipal government of New York City. Government, to be effective, must concern itself and its citizens with "minute detail," "trifles,"

and "valueless waste," for the smallest things were the means of transforming waste into political capital. Waring devised a classically liberal and democratic technology to get the people to police themselves so that the street-cleaning commissioner did not have to. The city was cleaner and the citizens more active and civically minded; all this without the government being directly involved. Today garbage is still linked to government, but the link is evermore indirect and minute.

Around 1989 the garbage bins in my neighborhood were locked. A minor and local reform, it shaped my own understanding of how power works and how the political is constituted. The story — a set of anecdotes loosely based on my memories and some research on the history of garbage reform — goes something like this:

Walking to the bus stop, I noticed that Dumpsters in my Minneapolis neighborhood had new locks. Among the many consequences of the lockup, the most significant, it seemed to me, was that people who survived on Dumpster-diving — recyclers and homeless people — were now much less free to live on their own terms. Those struggling to stay out of the arms of the poverty industry now had no recourse but to steal their subsistence or submit to case management in one or another shelter or social service program. It seemed obvious to me that the space of freedom was shrinking, that the very means of subsistence were being enclosed behind the bars of criminal justice and "helping."

I began to search for the authority, official, reason, or interest behind the Dumpster lockup. I intended to protest, to badger that authority, to try to reverse the decision. In a manner of speaking, I took up the cause. Much later, I figured out that the effect rather than the cause was, if not the whole story, the more important part.

First, I asked the cashier at a local convenience store why the Dumpster in the parking lot was locked. He said that the store was liable if anyone getting into the bin was injured or made sick from ingesting its contents. I doubted that it was a question of that particular store's liability, because many stores had locked up their bins at about the same time. Certainly people do get sick and injured from the contents of garbage containers. In his memoir about living homeless, Lars Eighner reports that Dumpster-diving has serious drawbacks as a way of life, "including dysentery about once a month."[19] For a store to be sued by the sick and injured, though, is extremely unlikely. When I inquired why the other stores locked their Dumpsters as well, the cashier shrugged; the conversation was over.

Later on, I asked a neighborhood activist about the lockup. She said that residents living near the parking lot where one Dumpster sat complained about the drunks who congregated there on weekends. The noise, the nuisance, and the occasional fights spilled over from the parking lot into nearby yards. (She assumed, and I accepted at the time, that it was the trash bin that attracted the drinkers, even though the store sold no alcohol. Later I found out that because residents are obliged to arrange with the city in advance — and pay for — the collection of large objects such as furniture and appliances, some would covertly drop off such items near commercial Dumpsters. Drinkers congregated in those spots, then, because there were accommodations, couches and chairs.) She also mentioned that residents were concerned about children's safety because they were attracted to Dumpsters for treasure hunts and sometimes used them as a hideaways.

Still, I couldn't believe that the neighborhood association had that kind of clout with local businesses. Even after a protracted fight, the association had failed to prevent a garbage incinerator from going up on the edge of that inner-city neighborhood. Lest it begin to sound as if I am inventing this remarkable confluence of events having to do with garbage (which I have only begun to list), all these things happened during the three years I lived on the south side of Minneapolis while attending graduate school. Only the chain of events is hypothesized from my memory.

Around this time I heard about a homeless man who was killed while sleeping in a downtown Dumpster; a garbage truck emptied him into its crusher. Also, I learned that Dumpster-diving college students were making maps of local bins with timetables for the freshest spoils. In response to the fad, a bagel shop and a pizza place near campus stopped putting out their trash at night before eventually locking their bins.[20]

Somewhat confounded by this time, I still had faith that I could find and confront the real cause of the lockup. I went back to the convenience store and asked for the owner who was not in. I spoke to a manager, who claimed that people were dumping their household garbage, as well as washing machines and old couches, in or near the Dumpster. Since the store paid for garbage pickup by weight, he explained, the lockup was a cost-saving measure. Although there were fines for illegal dumping, the manager claimed that no one enforced the rules.[21] Grocers' associations as well as neighborhood associations do attempt to police the system themselves in more or less organized ways.[22]

Thus, the manager's explanation was plausible, based as it was on the bottom line, and it fit within the broader context of garbage reform. Throughout many states garbage disposal became more expensive in the 1980's be-

cause of environmental concerns and privatization. Landfills were closed or restricted from accepting lawn waste and large objects. Municipal garbage contracts for residences and the imposition of fees for disposing of motor oil, tires, refrigerators, and the like made the efforts to regulate garbage more vigilant. Illegal dumping, privatization, health, safety and environmental concerns, liability—all these were plausible reasons for locking garbage containers in the 1980s. Yet I still wanted to know who was responsible for devising and enacting the solution.

For a number of reasons I doubted that the manager's explanation was the whole story. First, the local stores were not associated; moreover, it was not only convenience or grocery stores that locked their Dumpsters but also nonprofits, clinics, and schools. Second, the reason he gave was exclusively based upon his private interest, but the context in which his interests were defined was not of his own making. His self-interest was an effect, then, rather than a cause of the changes. Third, despite the privatization of garbage contracts and the changes in environmental laws, lots of different people articulated their interest in the lock up; they often gave answers that coincided with other broad changes in the 1980s, such as the rise in the number of homeless people and the imperative to take personal responsibility for recycling. So many people I spoke with had perfectly good reasons for the lock up, and so many claimed responsibility, that I began to doubt that there was any one cause, one doer behind the deed. Was there more to the story?

I continued looking. Officials of the company that owned and emptied the Dumpsters could (or would) not tell me who instituted the lockup or whether there was a law they were complying with. Calls to their insurance company and to the city got the run-around but never an answer to my question. I was none too persistent in this aspect of my search because bureaucrats and company officials were less than forthcoming over the phone and I had no appeal: I could not claim to represent a large group or hire an attorney to represent me; I didn't want to pose as a journalist. Approaching individuals in person was a more successful tactic.

At a nearby grocery chain store, I asked a manager about the lockup. He thought I was asking him about salvageable food and assured me that the chain did not throw away anything edible, but passed items beyond their prime to local food shelves and soup kitchens (and, someone told me later, to school lunch programs).[23] His store's garbage and recycling facilities were behind a fence, he assured me, not to keep people out but to keep the

garbage in and prevent its littering the parking lot and surrounding neighborhood.

I asked several people who worked in or around food banks and soup kitchens about the lockup. Each of them assured me that there was no need for anyone to eat out of garbage bins because free food was available—if not all the time, at least often enough to get by. Kent Beittel, executive director of the Open Shelter in Ohio, claimed that Dumpster-diving for food was unnecessary. According to the *Columbus Dispatch*, he said that "because of the city's generous donations to food pantries and soup kitchens, 'it is impossible to starve in this town.'" He added, however, that the "real question is what is happening with our social-service agencies that causes people to run these kinds of health risks instead of using resources available through the system."[24] A very good question, which I take up in Chapter 1.

No one I spoke to in the helping industries was particularly concerned about the lockup, tending to see it as a public health matter rather than a question of freedom. One food bank administrator did express disgust at the locked bins and at corporate food retailers. She acknowledged that recycling and scavenging could be marginally profitable, but she could not answer why people might avoid soup kitchens and charities if they could. "They're afraid, schizophrenic, paranoid, abused," she offered, but not because of anything in particular that the charities were doing. She suggested that Ronald Reagan was the real culprit because he was responsible for deinstitutionalizing so many mentally ill people, leaving them to fend for themselves.

As a welfare rights activist at the time, working in coalition with other groups involved in antipoverty movements, I mistrusted most social service workers and "helping" professionals myself. I asked homeless and formerly homeless people I organized with, mainly but not exclusively from a group called Up & Out of Poverty Now, about the Dumpsters. The overwhelming response was that the lockup was a way for "them" or "the system" to control people. When asked to be more specific, most said, "capitalists," "Reagan," "rich people," or "the city," indicating that, like me, other activists tended to believe that the powers-that-be made things happen and that their power insulated them from being held accountable for their power. Power did double duty for us as a "real" or "actual" cause and as that which rendered itself invisible or unaccountable; power was, tautologically, both cause and effect.

When I asked these same people if they would like to take up the cause,

they said that the Dumpster matter was small potatoes and not the "real" issue for homeless people or the impoverished. Again, there was a tautology at work. The "real" object of resistance was against those who had power, but because their power insulated them, it was the principal of power — rather than the powerful themselves or their specific actions — that was to be the object of resistance. In other words, acts of power and powerful actors are caused by power. (I discuss the tautological conception of power and the question of resistance at length in Chapters 1, 3, and 5.)

My confusion with all this competing and seemingly trivial information about Dumpsters turned to utter stupefaction when a short time later the city instituted a set of "incentives" for encouraging residential recycling. Households were to pay by the pound for garbage hauling, whereas recycling was to be free and curbside. Was there no end to reform, to new plans, fads and events, interests, and purposes surrounding the disposal of garbage? Was my own concern about freedom merely idiosyncratic? Was there no one in charge of or accountable for these reforms? No one voted on them; there was no general public discussion. So who was responsible?

I finally resolved to go with what I had. I sorted over all the different reasons that were given for the lockup which I had initially discounted because they were contradictory and seemed irrelevant to my goal of finding the doer of the deed. Strangely, all these interests-at-odds never clashed. Insurance companies, the city, garbage contractors, neighborhood activists, store owners, all found that their (different) interests were served by the lockup. Either most were seriously deluded, and only one or two coinciding interests were in fact served, or I was deluded in thinking that a particular set of interests had to be served for an act of power like the lockup to occur. No common interest was articulated, only particular and local interests, yet collective action was taken. Was some invisible hand at work? A happy coincidence for all but the excluded Dumpster-divers?

In short, I found that I had no cause. Compared with the search for Roger in Michael Moore's documentary film, *Roger and Me*, my search had no clear object but ended in similar frustration.[25] Whereas Roger was *somewhere* behind closed doors, waiting to be exposed like Oz for the coward that he was, perhaps the object of my search wasn't hidden away, but simply didn't exist apart from local folklore and the innumerable new plans, schemes, local and national trends affecting garbage. No law, no decree, no contracting parties had determined the outcome of locked Dumpsters. Worse yet, I realized I had no strategy for contesting an act of power if I could not find, let alone confront, the powerful.

The task for democratic theory, faced with the facelessness of power, could be understood as the effort to give power a face or a name, to make it visible and accountable. During the postwar period democratic theorists on the left did attempt to reveal the hidden countenance of power even, or especially, when the powerful did not visibly act on their interest. Invisible acts such as "nondecisions," "nonparticipation" or political apathy, and invisible truths such as "objective interests" (as opposed to manifest interests) were conceptualized to reveal the interests and powers that operated precisely by making themselves invisible and thereby subverting the otherwise inevitable conflict with those upon whom they acted. On the right, in that school of democratic theory named by the apparent oxymoron "democratic elitism," or "democratic pluralism," political scientists such as Robert Dahl pursued the assumption that where there was no overt conflict, no power could have been exercised. Without visible conflict, he argued, there was no act of power, no exclusion, no oppression. What was invisible was not an act of power or the interest of the powerful but the silent consent of unequal parties to their inequality and to the system of government more broadly.

In either case, democratic theory was driven by what was not there. Each party to what came to be known as the "three faces of power debate" explained that what was not visible was *really* there, either objective interests and latent resistance or an implicit consensus. Though not visible or intelligible, a face was surely lurking behind the shadow appearance of political apathy and inaction. Both sides assumed that a face-to-face confrontation with power was both a possibility and a measure of democratic freedom. This had been my assumption, too, until I took up the cause of Dumpster-diving.

Once I realized that my desire to act on the level of the macro-political — to confront the sovereign decision-makers — was thwarted by the micro-political, then the profusion of those small and confusing events, interests, and acts became the real story to tell. New questions arose. What makes it possible for so many contradictory interests to be served without clashing with one another? If acts of power are anonymous, how can we say they are still democratic? Why did so many different people articulate their responsibility and interests in such small things as locking up garbage? Why did I? In what sense are reforms — whether small changes with no grand structural impact or large changes of whole systems — with no clear causality, no clear line of authority, democratic? Absent an actual cause, in what sense can reforms be resisted?

Oddly enough, the League of Women Voters promised to answer my questions with the publication of a pamphlet, *The Garbage Primer*, in 1993.[26] In the name of citizen education and active participation, the primer sets out to educate citizens like me on the forms and tactics of participation for everyone with a stake in garbage reform (according to the primer, that includes just about everyone). The primer is limited, however, to concerns of the environment, disposal methods, hazardous waste, and cost. It does not answer the questions listed above or my concern for freedom but repeats Colonel Waring's faith that the citizen is sovereign and the most effective politically because each one carries the responsibility for how garbage is handled. To get the average citizen to act, the primer insists, all that is necessary is to provide information about the technical aspects of disposal, a list of alternative methods of disposal, and tips for getting involved in decision-making processes. Of course, the Socratic assumption that citizens fail to act only out of ignorance assumes that all those I talked to knew the same thing. In fact, they each knew what the real problem was, but in no sense could they have come to agree.

But the people I spoke to, with the possible exception of the neighborhood activist, *did* take responsibility for the garbage lockup without ever having involved themselves in public or political decision-making. In fact, the terrain I traveled in search of a cause was not "the political" in any traditional sense, nor were the interests involved necessarily those of organized interest groups. Yet everyone seemed to have an interest. I came to suspect that all the individuals who took responsibility for the lockup, though not engaged in a conspiracy, were the points of articulation for a kind of power I didn't understand and a form of politics I could see no way into.

The impetus for this book was a blindness that seeing clearly could not cure. Rather than another theory or an alternative vision of democracy and citizenship, I needed to understand the mode of government by which individuals take responsibility for small things.

That same impetus only grew stronger when I found myself in an activist's version of the welfare trap. For several years I was steeped in the inadequacies, petty humiliations, and crushing poverty of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). As a welfare rights activist I was deeply opposed to AFDC because the sums of money meted out were so small that no one could live decently, let alone well, on welfare. As a system of power, welfare seemed designed to hold single mothers down. Then again, it was

impossible to be *against* welfare because it was the only stable source of income and health benefits for so many women and children.

Proponents and critics of welfare have changed sides over the last ten years, but the possible positions on welfare have not changed.[27] It is a political trap: I cannot be for or against welfare; there is no way to win. I hope to draw others into the same trap in order that we may think anew about welfare and social services and the ways they are tied to freedom, power, justice, and politics: that is, the ways in which small and contingent things connect up to the grand scheme of things.

The practices of welfare do not lend themselves to analytical precision. If a juvenile court official orders a mother to graduate from a self-esteem program because she failed to protect or to discipline her child (a program operated, say, by an explicitly feminist organization combatting domestic violence), is that act political, judicial, or administrative? If Wisconsin docks a family's welfare check for a child's truancy, a program called "learnfare," what kind of punishment or justice is it? Social, civil, familial? If a private, nonprofit organization incarcerates an allegedly drug-addicted pregnant woman, is it usurping the jurisdiction of the courts, or is it creating a new political jurisdiction?

To take up any of these questions as a cause, whether the garbage lockup or the protection of poor women from overly zealous "help," means an endless search for a sovereign power that is not there. To take up these questions as effects of the changing configuration of the political, however, would be to refigure the territory of politics itself rather than to wrestle the causes.

At first, I sought to politicize the Dumpster lockup by holding whoever caused it politically accountable. That is, I sought to bring the issue into the political realm of contestation, thus leaving the structure of the political as it was, yet adding to it. Even if every small thing is political, they cannot *all* be drawn into the political. As William Connolly points out, words and things are not essentially contested but contingently contested.[28] Nor is it the case that if every little thing is political, politics is everywhere — even if power may be. What is required of democratic theory is less a solution to the conundrum of the political than a way to articulate the contingency of the political that neither exhausts nor determines any efforts to reconstitute political order and the space of politics.

Although my themes are large and include an examination of the boundaries between subjectivity and subjection, democracy and despotism, social