

Publics and Counterpublics

Introduction

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Publics are queer creatures. You cannot point to them, count them, or look them in the eye. You also cannot easily avoid them. They have become an almost natural feature of the social landscape, like pavement. In the media-saturated forms of life that now dominate the world, how many activities are *not* in some way oriented to publics? Texts cross one's path in their endless search for a public of one kind or another: the morning paper, the radio, the television, movies, billboards, books, official postings. Beyond these obvious forms of address lie others, like fashion trends or brand names, that do not begin "Dear Reader" but are intrinsically oriented to publics nonetheless. (There is no such thing as a pop song, for example, unless you hear it as addressing itself to the audience that can make it "pop.") Your attention is everywhere solicited by artifacts that say, before they say anything else, *Hello, public!*

Much of the texture of modern social life lies in the invisible presence of these publics that flit around us like large, corporate ghosts. Most of the people around us belong to our world not directly, as kin or comrades or in any other relation to which we could give a name, but as strangers. How is it that we nevertheless recognize them as members of our world? We are related to them

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in the conversation. Obviously, Lauren Berlant has been a collaborator of a special kind; even where she is not named as coauthor (as in *The Trouble with Normal*) she has been a tacit partner. Ben Lee and Dilip Gaonkar have been the organizers and catalysts for the center's discussions; to them I owe an unpayable debt. It is my hope that this book, insofar as it contributes to anything, will direct attention to the distinctive intellectual project of the center, now finding rich realization in the work of so many of my colleagues there: Arjun Appadurai, Craig Calhoun, Vincent Crapanzano, Dilip Gaonkar, Nilüfer Göle, Ben Lee, Tom McCarthy, Mary Poovey, Beth Povinelli, Charles Taylor, Greg Urban, and many others.

Styles of Intellectual Publics

In the opening scene of George Orwell's *1984*, the horror of totalitarianism is driven home to the reader by — of all things — the experience of writer's block. The main character, Winston Smith, has just sat down under the glare of the all-seeing telescreen, intending to begin a diary. He falters. A tremor goes "through his bowels." He feels helpless. "For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing this diary?"

Winston's choice of genre, the diary, is perversely apt to illustrate the problem of audience. Perversely, because the addressee of a diary is that unique individual about whom most is known and whose sympathetic response can be taken for granted: oneself. How could anyone, even in the most ruthlessly totalitarian regime, lack an audience for a diary? But even in a diary, one never writes simply to oneself in the present. At the very least, one addresses one's retrospective reading at some point in the future. One therefore addresses oneself as a partial stranger, one who will have forgotten or will have been caught up in a different phase of life and will have become, by consequence, different. And thus oneself comes to stand for posterity, and for a posterity partly brought into being by this act of writing.

It might be that a diary is addressed to others entirely, to an

unborn posterity, and this in fact is how Winston mentally answers his question: "For the future, for the unborn." But this, too, he finds unsatisfying:

For the first time the magnitude of what he had undertaken came home to him. How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the present in which case it would not listen to him, or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless.

For some time he sat gazing stupidly at the paper. The telescreen had changed over to strident military music. It was curious that he seemed not merely to have lost the power of expressing himself, but even to have forgotten what it was that he had originally intended to say.¹

Writing in this scene comes to seem impossible because the diary can have no concretely imagined public, present or future. The totalitarian state, with its godlike control of media, has eliminated the civil-society context without which neither public nor private life can have its modern meaning. The diarist's blockage illustrates the lack of both. Winston has no privacy because he is visible to the watching telescreen, and when he puts his notebook away in a drawer, he knows it is useless to hide it. But he is also deprived of publicness. That means not only an audience to write for in the present but, more telling, the sense of a future that might be capable of comprehension, but different. "Either the future would resemble the present in which case it would not listen to him, or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless." What he requires is a near future, linked to him by a chain of continuous transformation. Even a diary, the most private of all forms, requires this hope as its condition of possibility. Finally, at the end of the scene, Winston arrives at a resolution:

He was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. But so long as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken. It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage. He went back to the table, dipped his pen, and wrote:

*To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone.*²

The public sphere here becomes purely imaginary; or, we might say, internalized as humanity. In order to write even a diary, Winston must imagine the ability to address partial strangers — men who are different and do not live alone. When he turns this ability into an internal freedom, able to dispense with the need to be heard, he begins to speak directly to humanity — in an effect that could aptly be called lyric, since Winston addresses humanity only in the absence of any actual context of address.

Isn't the imaginary character of such a general address necessarily its weakness? The diary has no place to go except into the hands of the police. Its address can only be internal projection. It has no readers, no scene of circulation. It stands for the pure wish that such a scene exist, that it might be oriented — as in fact it cannot be — to a horizon of difference. Its rhetorical addressee is only a placeholder for others and merely marking the idea of a sanity that could be confirmed through the exchange of perspectives.

That this image of writing should be the ghost of freedom makes it a striking image of a frustration that I think is widely felt. Orwell presents it only as a dystopia of totalitarianism. The extreme conditions of the novel would be hard to realize outside the most frozen gulag; *1984* is therefore easier to read as the negative image against which liberal society defines itself than as a plausible critique of existing alternatives. Orwell's dystopia stirs readers because the frustration it asks them to imagine is common

enough not just behind the old Iron Curtain but here in the land of freedom, under civil-society conditions, whenever the available genres and publics of possible address do not readily lend themselves to a world-making project. Anyone who wants to transform the conditions of publicness, or through publicness transform the possible orientations to life, is in a position resembling Orwell's diarist.

For whom does one write or speak? Where is one's public? These questions can never be answered in advance, since language addressed to a public must circulate among strangers; neither can they be dismissed, though the answers necessarily remain mostly implicit. One does not stand nakedly to address humanity. Every entry assumes an already recognizable form, a discussion already under way, a discourse already in circulation, a medium, a genre, a style, and, for what counts as politics in modernity, a public to be addressed. People often say, when they are dissatisfied with extant publics, that they write only for themselves; at best, this can be only a lazy, shorthand expression, even for diarists. Every sentence is populated with the voices of others, living and dead, and is carried to whatever destination it has not by the force of intention or address but by the channels laid down in discourse. These requirements often have a politics of their own, and it may well be that their limitations are not to be easily overcome by strong will, broad mind, earnest heart, or ironic reflection. To speak in a certain way is to be typed as a speaker. To publish in a certain venue is to orient oneself to its circulation, as a fate.

It might very well be that extant forms and venues will accommodate many political aims. But what if they do not? What if one hopes to transform the possible contexts of speech? Since such a hope is likely, by its very nature, to be less than fully articulate, I suspect it is more common than anyone imagines. One cannot conjure a public into being by force of will. The desire to have

a different public, a more accommodating addressee, therefore confronts one with the circularity inherent in all publics: public language addresses a public as a social entity, but that entity exists only by virtue of being addressed. It seems inevitable that the world to which one belongs, the scene of one's activity, will be determined at least in part by the way one addresses it. In modernity, therefore, an extraordinary burden of world making comes to be borne above all by style.

Recent interest in the idea of the public intellectual suggests, I think, just such a blocked wish, a desire to transform the available contexts of speech and indeed of publicness. So does the ongoing preoccupation, voiced by journalists and academics, with the style of left academic theory. When people complain, as many do, that intellectuals are not writing clearly enough, their yardstick of good style often turns out to be not just grammatical or aesthetic but political. After all, they do not want elegance of just any variety. They do not wish that academics should write beautifully in the mode of, say, Ronald Firbank or Friedrich Nietzsche. The incomparable prose style of Michel Foucault — densely suggestive, both technical and poetic — far from being their ideal of rigorous style, is more likely to serve as an example of writing that is too difficult to be effective. They want language that will bring a certain public into being, and they have an idea of what style will work. The question of style, at any rate, entails a worry about the nature and duties of the intellectual.

The connection is made explicit by many critics of left academics in the humanities, including Pollitt, Martha Nussbaum, Russell Jacoby, and James Miller. Opaque writing is said by these writers to indicate contempt for those whom one might persuade and thus to result in a hollow substitute for political engagement, no matter how radical the claims of the writing. Pollitt, for one, has argued that when intellectuals write for themselves, the result

is “a pseudo-politics, in which everything is claimed in the name of revolution and democracy and equality and anti-authoritarianism, and nothing is risked, nothing, except maybe a bit of harmless cross-dressing, is even expected to happen outside the classroom.” Pollitt’s principal target here is Judith Butler; hence the reference to cross-dressing – though anyone who takes cross-dressing as a metaphor for harmless and risk-free entertainment has never done much drag in public. For the record, I think there is a significant element of truth in Pollitt’s argument, and I’ll come back to it; for the moment, I am concerned to show how the issue is distorted when it is taken to be one of clarity.

The possibility I would like to raise here is that those who write opaque left theory might very well feel that they are in a position analogous to Orwell’s diarist’s: writing to a public that does not yet exist, and finding that their language can circulate only in channels hostile to it, they write in a manner designed to be a placeholder for a future public. At stake here is the question of how, by what rhetoric, one might bring a public into being when extant modes of address and intelligibility seem themselves to be a problem.

A small irony of the recent polemics is that Orwell himself has often been cited as the example of writing that is, as all writing should be in the view of some critics, oriented to the largest possible audience. In a recent essay in *Lingua Franca*, James Miller approvingly echoes Pollitt’s attack and points out that it has become common among critics who share this view to cite Orwell as a model. Orwell, as they understand him, represents the idea that the writer is obliged to write with the greatest possible transparency, coming as close as possible to an address to all persons. Style, in this argument, is seen as determining the size of the audience, which in turn is seen as determining the potential political result. Orwell illustrates not only the principle of a clear style but

the entire chain of reasoning that leads from style to political engagement. “That he was staggeringly successful in reaching the largest possible public, in a way that very few twentieth-century writers have been,” Miller writes, is indicated by the “simple” fact that he “has sold, between *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, more than 40 million books in sixty languages which is, according to John Rodden, ‘more than any pair of books by a serious or popular postwar author.’”³ (You can almost hear the Berlin Wall being brought down, like the walls of Jericho, by the chirping of the cash registers at Barnes & Noble.)

Does Orwell really stand for the idea that accessible style leads to mass markets and therefore to effective politics? He himself emphasizes, in “Politics and the English Language,” that his ideal of clarity in thought “is not concerned with fake simplicity and the attempt to make written English colloquial.” I have my doubts about his definition of precision: “What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about.” It is possible to describe the phenomenon that gives force to this idea without the intentionalist semantics to which Orwell here falls prey. Yet he is making a point about the difficulty of precision and not, as is generally implied in current polemic, about the need for a populist idiom in search of a numerically extensive audience.⁴

The image of forty million copies of Orwell’s books lighting up the UPC scanners of the free world certainly contrasts oddly with Orwell’s own image of Winston’s diary, hidden in a drawer, with a speck of dust carefully placed on top so that it will be possible to tell when the police have read it. “It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage.” Somehow Orwell has come to stand for the opposite of this sentiment – that carrying on the human heritage requires that one be heard by as many people as possible.

We might also read the diary scene, and its intense melancholy, as an unrecognized allegory of the displacement of the writer by the technologies of the mass. There is something unmistakably nostalgic in Winston's fetishization of the cream laid paper, the nib of the pen, writing by hand – a fetishism echoed in that placement of the piece of dust on the cover and by the materiality of every piece of writing described for the remainder of the novel. This is not the image of writing that Orwell's current advocates have in mind; its desperate fetishism suggests that Orwell himself worries about the estrangement of mass publics, which appear in the novel in drag as totalitarianism.

In response to the polemic against the style of left academic theory, Judith Butler has frequently invoked Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia* – a much more explicit commentary on the estrangement of mass publics. Her appeal to Adorno is the basis for the conceit of Miller's *Lingua Franca* essay, which discusses the debate over clarity in left academic theory by comparing Orwell and Adorno, contemporaries who, in Miller's view, represent antithetical understandings of the politics of style. Adorno, however, fares no better in this exchange of polemics than does Orwell.

Butler cites Adorno to the effect that common sense is an unreliable standard for intellectual writing. The apparent clarity of common sense is corrupt with ideology and can only be countered by defamiliarization in thought and language. The task of the intellectual is to disclose all the forms of distortion, error, and domination that have been embedded in the current version of common sense. As she points out, views that now strike us as grotesque have often been graced with such immediate comprehension that they hardly needed to be stated at all. The rightness of slavery and the subordination of women are only the most politically salient among many other gruesome examples. Common sense is often enough unjust. Language that takes us outside

the usual frame of reference, teaching us to see or think in new ways, can be a necessary means to a more just world. And to the degree that our commonsense perceptions contain distortion, just so far will the effort of reimagining seem difficult, even (to many) unclear.

This is a forceful argument, though one might object that the need for unfamiliar thought is not the same as the need for unfamiliar language. There is a long tradition of argument for both. Dissent from the pressure of unexamined common sense is a cardinal principle of the Enlightenment. For most Enlightenment intellectuals, the idea was to create a new, more reflective – and therefore more just – common sense. And at least since Romanticism, there has also been a long history of skepticism about the possibility of pure and universal clarity, given the arduousness of the vision called for, or about the idea that reflection alone will produce insight.

Indeed, Butler did not need to appeal to so suspiciously foreign an authority as the Frankfurt School on this point; a very similar argument lies at the core of American Transcendentalism. Henry David Thoreau, who is taken in some quarters to be nearly a byword for epigrammatic clarity, had nothing but scorn for common sense and the journalistic demand that one write for it. "It is a ridiculous demand which England and America make, that you shall speak so that they can understand you," he writes at the end of *Walden*. "Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense? The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring."⁵ Thoreau had his own reasons for distrusting common sense and its clarity. The commonsensical legitimacy of slavery was one. He also thought that true perceptions must be poetic, transformative, even transgressive; any true thought must wake you out of common sense. This he took to be a demand on style as well as thought.

Thinkers who aspire to expand the realm of the thinkable can hardly be expected to avoid experiments of usage. His call for defamiliarizing language contains both a classic Enlightenment wish (since “men asleep” need to be awakened from the sleep of common sense) and a more Romantic conviction that the result could never look like simple clear reasoning, which would address the rational faculties only. Hence the need for literary language.

Adorno distrusts common canons of clarity for reasons that encompass Thoreau’s but go further on the strength of a different kind of argument. “A writer will find that the more precisely, conscientiously, appropriately he expresses himself,” writes Adorno, “the more obscure the literary result is thought, whereas a loose and irresponsible formulation is at once rewarded with certain understanding.” Adorno did not think this was necessarily or always true; it is true under the conditions of mass culture and an idealization of common sense that is based in commodity culture. “Shoddiness that drifts with the flow of familiar speech is taken as a sign of relevance and contact: people know what they want because they know what other people want.”⁶ In other words, they embrace the idiom that in its social currency promises them the widest possible belonging. Commodity culture intensifies this desire and distorts it. The producers of mass culture, for obvious reasons of self-interest, take care to make their commodities intelligible to as wide a market as they can. This is one side of the picture, but not what concerns Adorno most. He does not just criticize mass culture as cynical manipulation. He sees the way the expansiveness of mass circulation affects and distorts a desire for social membership on the part of readers; and he thinks this is the root of the problem of style. The wide circulation of language in mass culture is perceived and treasured as a quality of style by those who misrecognize it as clarity and sense.

Adorno is describing the manifestation, in matters of style, of

one of the most pervasive and troubling effects in mass society: the phenomenon of normalization. Ideas of the good — and, in this case, the beautiful as well — are distorted in ways that escape nearly everyone’s attention, because they have been silently adjusted to conform to an image of the mass. A good style is a normal style. Evaluation depends on distribution; the wider it circulates, the better it must be. The false aesthetic of transparency, in other words, has a powerful social effect. One result is that it will naturally privilege the majority over less familiar views. Equally important to Adorno is that it will distort the judgment of the majority itself, precisely *qua* majority. The tastes and ideas that become those of the majority do so because people need to believe that their tastes and ideas will be widely shared. The result is a kind of invisible power for dominant norms, even though the people who make these normalizing judgments of taste do so not to exercise power (they are not, in other words, simply wielding the tyranny of the majority) but simply to fit in. Adorno implies, with pathos, that people rely on expressions that are precertified for them as common currency out of a kind of defensiveness; they are alienated from the labor of judgment. “Only what they do not need first to understand, they consider understandable; only the word coined by commerce, and really alienated, touches them as familiar.”⁷

Now, it does not follow that writing, in order to be valid, must be incomprehensible. Butler, in her op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, comes close to this implication because she stresses the need for defamiliarization.⁸ And Miller embraces it outright: “Q.E.D.: The most radical critic of alienation will be the most exquisitely aloof thinker, incomprehensible and unpopular by design, as if enraptured by his unswerving address to an ideal audience of one: a God who may not exist.”⁹ The picture of an Adorno addressing “an ideal audience of one: a God who may not exist” bears a strong resemblance to the predicament of Orwell’s diarist.

Yet here Miller shows himself hasty to score points against Adorno. This position is incoherent except as caricature. You cannot be incomprehensible by design, especially if your audience is yourself. You also cannot be cynically strategic and yet also “enraptured” by an unswerving address.

Adorno does not prescribe incomprehensibility or unpopularity. He prescribes careful, rigorous, precise expression, whether the result is a popular idiom or not — as, for that matter, Orwell does in “Politics and the English Language.” In order to present willful incomprehensibility as anyone’s considered program, Miller has to present that person as nearly insane. He describes Adorno as “the most exquisitely aloof thinker”; elsewhere, “indistinguishable from a Prussian autocrat,” expressing “nothing but contempt,” a mandarin, a foreign and inscrutable nerd.¹⁰ Miller does not scruple to produce a personal pathology as the not-so-hidden meaning of Adorno’s thought: “*Minima Moralia*,” he writes, in an attempt to sound sympathetic, is “the effort of a sensitive introvert.”¹¹

One of the most amusing moments in Adorno’s writing, by the way, is an episode in his autobiographical essay about the years he spent in a research project on the medium of radio in Newark, New Jersey, just after he fled Nazi Germany. One day he was met by a young American researcher who asked him, in what Adorno calls “a completely charming way,” “Dr. Adorno, are you an introvert or an extrovert?” He does not tell us his response. Perhaps he was too dumbfounded to make one. When he told this story later, however, it was to illustrate the spread of reified thinking.¹²

Miller, no doubt unaware of this ironic echo, needs to render Adorno an irrational introvert in order to arrive at the question announced by the title of his essay: “Is Bad Writing Necessary?” The question is a false one, an example of polemic rather than real deliberation. To answer the question in the affirmative — bad writing is necessary — entails a contradiction in terms. Any way of

writing that could be said to fit necessity cannot be called simply bad. Having posed the issue this way, Miller is able to ensnare the victim in a paradox: “Does this mean that Adorno’s and Butler’s most challenging ideas, precisely because of their relative popularity among a not-insignificant number of left-leaning intellectuals, have lost their antithetical use value and, by the infernal logic of exchange, been alienated and perhaps even dialectically transformed — turned into something hackneyed and predictable? If one accepts Adorno’s position in *Minima Moralia*, there is no escaping the conclusion.”¹³

Actually, this conclusion is very easy to escape. Adorno does not infer alienation directly from the number of comprehending readers. He equates alienation with an imitative style of mass comprehension that defensively resists the unpredictability of thought. Numbers of readers are not the issue. The manner of reading is — though Adorno believes that the problem with the currently dominant manner of reading is that its imagination of value is controlled by people’s tacit calculations about the numbers of readers with whom they will be in alignment. So no matter how many people read and comprehend his writing, that in itself tells us nothing about its social meaning. Only when the extensiveness of the reading audience is taken into normative consideration in advance by that very reading audience do we have the phenomenon he describes.

I have taken a detour through this episode in Anglo-American polemics partly because it shows how primitive our thinking about publics is. The assumption seems to be that a clear style results in a popular audience and that political engagement requires having the most extensive audience possible. This view is assumed rather than reasoned, which is why anyone who dissents from it can only be heard as proposing inanities: that bad writing is necessary; that incomprehensibility should be cultivated; that

speech in order to be politically radical must have no audience. In Miller's summary, Orwell and Adorno are made to share the assumption that clarity of style produces large numbers of readers: Miller's Orwell thinks this is a good thing; Miller's Adorno thinks it is a bad thing.

We begin to normalize intellectual work whenever we suppose a direct equation between value and numbers — imagining that a clear style results in a popular audience and therefore in effective political engagement. So deeply cherished is this way of thinking that to challenge it is to court derision, especially in journalistic contexts. Adorno tried to identify a connection between the mass circulation of discourse and the mode of reading oriented to that circulation.¹⁴ He is heard, instead, as arguing against readability in principle.

Given such confusion, it is perhaps better to return to very basic questions. What kind of clarity is necessary in writing? Clarity for whom?

For some, the answers to these questions are too obvious to need stating. Writing that is unclear to nonspecialists is just “bad writing.” This general moral position is implied by Miller's title, as it is by the Bad Writing Award cooked up by the journal *Philosophy and Literature*. People who share this view will be generally reluctant to concede that different kinds of writing suit different purposes, that what is clear in one reading community will be unclear in another, that clarity depends on shared conventions and common references, that one man's jargon is another's clarity, that perceptions of jargon or unclarity change over time. (My students have trouble reading eighteenth-century prose that was a model of clarity in its time, but they take as self-evidently clear such terms as “objective” and “subjective” — denounced as hideous neologistic jargon when Coleridge used them.) People who think the charge of bad writing is self-evident or universally ob-

vious therefore tend to be naive at best and quite often can be shown to be hypocritical. As Butler rightly notes, for example, the charge is almost always reserved for thinkers in the humanities who share certain unpalatable views. Even conservative academics in the humanities who write opaquely are seldom attacked; the hostility of journalists seems reserved not only for certain disciplines but for left thinkers within those disciplines.

Should writing intended for academics in the humanities be readable for everyone when we don't expect the same from writing in physics? Isn't such an expectation tantamount to a demand that there be no such thing as intellectuals in the humanities, that the whole history of the humanistic disciplines make no difference, and that someone starting from scratch into a discussion — of, say, the theory of sexuality — be at no disadvantage compared with someone who has read widely in previous discussions of the issue? When the charge of bad writing comes from journalists, it is hard to avoid the feeling that some hostility to the very idea of scholarly humanistic disciplines is involved.

It is, of course, possible to challenge academic writing on other grounds. It could be argued that the imperative to write clearly is not the same as the need to write accessibly, that even difficult styles can have the clarity of precision. The project of an academic discipline requires a rigor of definition, argument, and debate. One could argue on this basis for clarity, where what would count as clarity might remain highly specialized and inaccessible to lay audiences or journalists. Indeed, to the extent that clarity might require conceptual precision of very unfamiliar kinds, it might compete with accessibility. People adhering to this ideal might feel that clarity is endangered not by the isolation or specialization of the academy but by the failure of humanists to take their own disciplines seriously — either because of the humbug of genteel humanistic piety, or because of the fascination with

journalistic authority that besets such professions as history, or because specialized environments like the cultural studies circuit have led academics to think that rigorous argument counts less than a gestural politics of righteousness. An appeal for clarity in this sense would not be an argument about public intellectuals, nor would it apply to left academics more than anyone else.

A third line of thinking is that a special standard of clarity should be applied to just those academics who claim political consequences for their work — which would include almost everyone working in cultural criticism these days. On this view, there might be no need for accessibility in academic disciplines in general, and “bad writing” awards could be dismissed as grandstanding. Yet when academics claim to be furthering justice through their work, this argument goes, they take on obligations that go beyond their own profession. (This is the way the argument has been advanced by Nussbaum and Pollitt, among others.) Even on these terms, it does not immediately follow that *accessibility* is the issue. Nussbaum’s critique of Butler’s prose style, for example, does not assume that Butler’s work should be written for non-specialists; her more serious charge is that Butler’s work is not written for canons of argument among specialists, either in philosophy or in law, and that only the star system of cultural studies accounts for its form of address.¹⁵ Some of the stylistic tics Nussbaum targets, like the tendency to introduce premises in conditional “if . . . then” clauses and then to treat those premises as givens, have to do with logical argumentation but not necessarily with exposition for nonspecialists such as the presumed readers of the *New Republic*, where Nussbaum was writing.

So a further assumption seems to be required to produce the charge that inaccessible writing is irresponsible, or that good writing must be easy to read. One must hold not only that clarity is a special burden on writers with political aspirations but that

the kind of clarity they need is the kind found in journalistic or political publics. This demand seems to me wholly unjustified, for reasons I hope to make clear. In all the attacks on the style of left academic theory, I have not seen a cogent defense of this extra requirement. It tends to be taken for granted, especially by journalists. There is a reason for the silence; those who believe most ardently in the power of journalistic publics tend to believe that those publics are like the air — everywhere, invisible, and permeable to light. It hardly occurs to them to wonder whether a public might be a cultural form predisposed to some ends over others.

Notice, too, that the charge of bad writing carries a corollary assumption: that if only left academics would write accessibly for journalistic publics, they would be more politically effective. This does not obviously follow, and experience suggests it is a mistake. Accessible prose alone gets you nothing, if the ideas are unpalatable for other reasons, or if the public is structured in such a way as to be substantively prejudicial. There are many arguments that will never find their way to the pages of the *New York Times* no matter how clearly expressed. Just as it is a mistake to equate good writing with accessibility, so also is it a mistake to equate an easy style with effectiveness.

We are drawn into these assumptions so insidiously that they can distort the defense of difficult writing as well. It is all very well to argue that some kinds of difficult writing might be good, even politically necessary. But is difficulty a virtue in itself, or an effective strategy for defamiliarizing common sense? To defend academic writing on such grounds is to assume that defamiliarization works all by itself. One falls into the same mistake as those who believe in the effectiveness of transparency, saying nothing about context, audience, ways of reading, or mediation by form. How does writing defamiliarize common sense? If it does so only when read by the protocols of academic discourse — where, for

example, it is axiomatic that complexity is to be valued over simplicity – then the arguments of Pollitt and others have some force: the political benefits that flow from this strategy of resistance do so only within the restricted zone of academic culture. Defamiliarization for whom?

Might it not be the case that what might have been defamiliarizing has become, for many in the academy, all too familiar? Many people outside the academy are defensive about using their judgment in the face of difficulty; might it not also be true that many inside it are defensive about giving up the display of difficulty in the surface of writing? There would be nothing surprising in this. Style performs membership. Academics belong to a functionally segregated social sphere, and in the humanities especially that sphere is increasingly marginal, often jeopardized. People use style to distinguish themselves from the mass and its normalized version of clarity. Often, those who do so – especially graduate students, whose role is not institutionally secured – are also trying to mark their own somewhat tenuous membership in a fragile but desperately needed subculture. These social dimensions of style are probably more important to the making of any public than either clarity or defamiliarization considered in the abstract.

At stake in the dispute is not just a difference of views about style but different contexts for writing, different ways of imagining a public. The issues are obscured rather than clarified whenever we assume that a public intellectual is one who writes for large numbers, that an untroubling and familiar idiom is essential to political engagement, that meaningful political work is necessarily performed within the headline temporality of what currently counts as politics, or that political position taking is the only way of being creatively related to a public. What disappears in this view of the politics of prose is the mediation of publics; genres; modes of address; the circulation of cultural forms; ways

of reading, including affect; and the social imaginaries that are the background of literate practice.

So we are back where we began: How could one bring a different public into being, transforming the conditions of speech?

The question is blunted by the very ideology that drives much of the talk about public intellectuals in the first place: the dominant ideology of the public sphere, dating at least from the early eighteenth century, according to which the public sphere is simply people making public use of their reason. Citizens, in this commonsense view, form opinions in dialogue with each other, and that is where public opinion comes from. Any address to a public tends to be understood as imitating face-to-face argumentative dialogue or, rather, an idealized version of such dialogue. Public opinion is thought to arise out of a continuum of contexts ranging from common conversation to PTA meetings to parliamentary forensics, op-ed pieces, or critical essays, and at each step the rules of discourse are the same. One proceeds by airing different views in the interest of understanding, making assumptions explicit, and then reaching some decision. The public sphere is critical discussion writ large. A vibrant scene of public-spirited discussion is the motor of democratic culture.

One of the basic points of this book is that publics do not in fact work that way. But if you believe that they do, that there is a continuum from rational dialogue upward to the realm of public opinion, then it might seem obvious that intellectuals are uniquely positioned to address publics publicly. Critical argument is the intellectuals' *métier*. If public discourse is to be reasonable, who should be better fitted to lead it than intellectuals? If they fail to do so, the thinking goes, then the failure must lie at their own door.

For many people, "public intellectual" has come to mean a quasi-journalistic pundit with a mass following. Older conceptions

— such as that of the intellectual as the conscience of the age, adhering to conviction or historical memory whether anyone listens or not, keeping alive an alternative that may be reanimated in some distant future — have faded into the background. Contemporary culture regards any thought of a distant future as archaic. Given the contracted span of futurity in the headline temporality of politics, which increasingly dominates all thought, we think in horizontal terms: public intellectuals are those who seek socially expansive audiences.

Under the sway of such thinking, one could easily ignore the difference between intellectuals as a class and citizens as a general category. Both use critical reason and articulate considered arguments. Intellectuals are simply those equipped to do this in the greatest degree. John Guillory aptly writes that the idea of an engaged intellectual can be seen as “nostalgia for the very public sphere that functioned historically in the *absence* of a socially identified group of ‘intellectuals.’¹⁶ The wish for public intellectuals leads people to speak as though there were a moral imperative to clarity, and a moral imperative to political position taking as well. To the extent that these are moral requirements, they can hardly be expected to result in such a specialized status as the public intellectual. If one were really to argue that everyone should write clearly and that everyone should take political positions publicly, one would be arguing in effect *against* the idea of a public intellectual as a special role.

More to the point, this ideology misrecognizes the fundamental innovation of the public as a cultural form. The public sphere never required a widespread culture of rational discussion. It required the category of a public — an essentially imaginary function that allows temporally indexed circulation among strangers to be captured as a social entity and addressed impersonally. Success in this game is not a matter of having better arguments or

more complex positions. It is a matter of uptake, citation, and recharacterization. It takes place not in closely argued essays but in an informal, intertextual, and multigeneric field. There is no reason why intellectuals should be specially positioned for public address in this sense, except where they are packaged as experts. And expert knowledge is in an important way nonpublic: its authority is external to the discussion. It can be challenged only by other experts, not within the discourse of the public itself.

The sociologist Nina Eliasoph has recently published a disturbing study of contexts of discussion that should challenge any idea of the public sphere as a continuum of critical opinion making. Eliasoph examined a wide range of public discussions in local community groups and found that public-minded discussion is systematically inhibited in almost every context. As conversations get closer to public topics, where opinions would have a general relevance and others’ views would have to be taken into account, people tend to shut up, deflecting currents of conversation. Even active volunteers in civic groups construct their volunteering so as to avoid risky discussion. They choose topics that allow them to avoid dissent. They frame their motives as prepolitical. Journalists and officials actively conspire to limit public discussion, diverting it into testimony that can be viewed as private passion rather than opinion or argument. They solicit people to regard their public spirit as good feeling, compassion, volunteerism, or anything else that can be divorced from the conflict of views. Journalists report on citizens’ feelings or interests rather than on their arguments, keeping for themselves the role of the uncontested mediators of publicness. They profile those who speak as Moms, acting on behalf of their children, rather than as citizens with general views. Officials who respond to citizen involvement tend to invoke expertise or steer discussion into bureaucratic speech protocols in which their own authority can be performed.¹⁷

Interestingly, Eliasoph herself does not question the assumption that the continuum of public-minded critical discussion is what the public sphere has been or should be about. Her book is driven by a sense of outrage that actual conversations fail to accord with the ideal. But the ideal of critical discussion was itself never sufficient to bring the public sphere into being. The endlessly repeated discovery that public politics does not in fact conform to the idealized self-understanding that makes it work — a discovery made by the Romantics, by Marx, by Lippmann, by Adorno, by Habermas, by Foucault, and *de novo* by Eliasoph — can never generate enough moral passion to force politics into conformity. The image of discussion writ large is necessary to the public sphere as a self-understanding but not as an empirical reality.

That same image, I suspect, fuels the fantasy of the public intellectual as a necessary function for political change, where the intellectual is seen as one especially adept at framing issues for critical discussions and where change results when discussion encompasses the most extensive possible public in its deliberative agency. This conception of the intellectual's relation to politics relies on a language ideology in which ideas and expressions are infinitely fungible, translatable, repeatable, summarizable, and restatable. To the extent that this is what public language is supposed to be about, attention must be deflected away from the poetics of style, as well as from the pragmatic work of texts in fashioning interactive relations. Publics are conjured into being by characterizing as a social entity (that is, as a public) the world in which discourse circulates; but in the language ideology that enables the public sphere, this poetic or creative function of public address disappears from view. Rather than help to constitute scenes of circulation through style, intellectuals are supposed to launch transparently framed ideas into the circulation of an indef-

inite public. Of course, if intellectuals thought of themselves as involved in world-making projects, it is not clear that intellection would be more effective than, say, corporeally expressive performances. It is not clear that intellectuals would have a naturally leading role in the process at all. And hence it is perhaps not surprising that the professional class of intellectuals should seem reluctant to abandon the conception of public discourse whose inadequacy they continue to discover.

The wish for popularly read intellectuals responds in part to the extreme segregation of journalistic and intellectual publics in the United States. They are segregated not just by attitude and style but by the material conditions of circulation. Publics do not exist simply along a continuum from narrow to wide or from specialist to general, elite to popular. They differ in the social conditions that make them possible and to which they are oriented. The United States is an extreme case. The American strain of anti-intellectualism has made intellectuals feel like exiles for the past two centuries; small wonder that many should dream of vindicating themselves through fame, the only currency of respect that really spends in America. The intense capitalization of mass culture here means that the media that matter are those whose scale and scarcity of access are most forbidding. Meanwhile, the saturation of universities by commercial and state interests makes academic work in some ways less than public, insofar as intellectuals there come to be either marginalized or functionally incorporated into the management culture of expertise. And for the past thirty years or so, trade and academic publishing have been institutionalized as distinct fields of production to a much greater degree than in any other country, while the decentralization of the American university system prevents it from providing the coherent platform of authority that is to be found in more frankly elite systems such as that of France.

University presses and journals are mulish compromises, half professional and half public. Their products are widely available to any stranger who can buy or borrow copies, and in that sense they address publics. But they also take care to maintain a close fit between their circulatory ambit and the private realm of the professions. They select authors from professions; they vet manuscripts (less and less, it is true) with expert readers within fields; they promote works within professional organizations and academic markets. (This is true even of presses like Routledge that have no formal ties to universities.)

The world of strangers to whom this discourse circulates is a world in which strangers are either directly certified in advance by institutions and networks or indirectly limited by the distributional practices of the publisher. Readers share reference points, career trajectories, and subclass interests. They share protocols of discourse, including things like an axiomatic preference for complexity. ("Actually, I believe it's more complicated than that" is, within the academic world, an unanswerable shibboleth; it articulates a professional mode for producing more discourse and for giving it an archivally cumulative character. The same gesture falls hopelessly flat in journalistic settings, where the extensive uptake of audience attention is at a premium.) Writers in this world are inevitably involved in a different language game from journalists.

The private circulation of academic discourse could be all to the good in the routine functioning of a discipline. But when disciplines decline or go into crisis, or when members for their own reasons seek to use the academic platform to address a different public, the existing routes of circulation prove unsatisfactory. Circulation is then controlled by conflicting laws. Journalists, who as a class have an interest in mass circulation and the forms of authority based on it, are only too happy to point out the conflict.

These conditions structure the available publics for thought

and writing in the United States. They are not to be overcome by a mere change of attitude, any more than Orwell's diarist could have been expected to generate, out of style alone, "*a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone.*" Left academic theory, mostly from within the jeopardized disciplines of the humanities, has been attempting to reconstitute itself as a public, sometimes with the explicit intention of ceasing to be organized by disciplines. Often enough it seems willing to postulate its own world through style or through idiomatic and topical allusions to mass culture. The result frustrates nearly everyone. Between the academy and the mass, between the disciplines and journalism, the conditions for public circulation do not for the most part now exist.

There are, of course, many ways in which the effort to bring a public into being, to do world-making work in the public sphere, can go wrong. When Pollitt complains that academic intellectuals postulate their own radicalness in a way that entails no risk and reduces to pseudo politics, the strong version of her point is that the public of academic work is being misrecognized. Like most academic expertise, it circulates only in a well-defined path mediated almost entirely by the university system; but it no longer understands itself this way. It seeks to overcome the separation of academic, trade, and political publics by means of its topical content rather than its public circulation. Of course, this perfectly valid point can also be turned around. As Adorno points out, the journalistic public itself can fail to be a scene of risk or world making. When journalists denounce academics for speaking in a way that is not already familiar, they, too, are trying to avoid the risk of truly public circulation.

There are many academics, especially in cultural studies, who distrust the claim of journalists and mass media to represent the only relevant public and who seek public relevance in a different

way. Rather than seeking fame or publicity in journalistic publics, they seek to regard all intellectuals as public intellectuals. They aspire to see their own work as politics, either in the general sense of contested culture or in the narrower sense of having a bearing on common action and state policy. Recognizing that academic disciplines, for better or worse, create a functional gap between themselves and political publics, they wish to eschew their disciplines (many of which are in an exhausted state anyway) as the context for their writing and thinking. Yet they do so not by leaving the disciplines entirely, writing for publics and lifeworlds outside the academy, but by adapting work and career within an academic context as much as possible to a political self-understanding.

This experiment has its own dangers. Among them is a loss entailed by imitating the temporality of politics without recognizing the difference of temporality available in these two contexts for circulating discourse. Politicizing thought tends to mean adjusting it to headline temporality. Some kinds of thought, essential to politics but not captured within its terms, might require a different space of circulation. Cultural studies has sometimes attempted a methodical elimination of the apparatus of futurity associated with disciplinarity: cumulative knowledge and field-specific archives, research understood as corrigible inquiry, apprenticeship and expertise, self-reproducing professionalism, and so on. Yet so long as such work continues to circulate only within a metadisciplinary academic framework, its aspirations to political time remain blocked. This contradiction gives force to the objections of journalists.

Any public includes strangers, present or future. The quality of *risk* that Pollitt finds missing in left academic theory is just this orientation to strangers and the submission of discourse to estranging paths of circulation. But that risk can happen over

longer as well as shorter durations; it's just that the shorter ones are easier to recognize as politics. Orwell's diarist longs for this risk among strangers when he writes to a time when people "*are different from one another and do not live alone.*" The future scholars of a traditional discipline are also, in this limited sense, semipublic; even quite traditional scholarship is oriented to corrigibility over time by strangers. Neither address to the journalistic public nor the immediate politicization of academic publics, in other words, is the only way to take the necessary risk of publicness. World-making projects require not just intentions, or the moralized postures that are called "having politics," but a set of forms that can articulate the temporality and social space of their circulation.

It is my sense that Foucault was thinking along similar lines toward the end of his career. Foucault must seem an ambiguous figure from the point of view of this essay. His influence has been felt far outside the academy, though he famously refused the role of public intellectual as it had been embodied by Jean-Paul Sartre. His style, notoriously difficult, nevertheless seldom fails to be interesting. Foucault represents as well as any other intellectual the possibility not only of arguing a critical theory but of mobilizing others into a critical stance through the appeal of his writing. In the last ten years of his life, he was conspicuously involved in both local activist projects and a large-scale effort to rethink the nature of politics. What shall we say, then, about his relation to a public?

Foucault once arranged, in effect, to interview himself by having Paul Rabinow ask him questions on which he wanted to set the record aright.¹⁸ The first question was "Why is it that you don't engage in polemics?"¹⁹ I quote Foucault's reply at length because it may strike many as unexpected:

It's true that I don't like to get involved in polemics. If I open a book and see that the author is accusing an adversary of "infantile leftism,"

I shut it again right away. That's not my way of doing things; I don't belong to the world of people who do things that way. I insist on this difference as something essential: a whole morality is at stake, the morality that concerns the search for the truth and the relation to the other.

In the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion. They depend only on the dialogue situation. The person asking the questions is merely exercising the right that has been given him: to remain unconvinced, to perceive a contradiction, to require more information, to emphasize different postulates, to point out faulty reasoning, and so on. As for the person answering the questions, he too exercises a right that does not go beyond the discussion itself; by the logic of his own discourse, he is tied to what he has said earlier, and by the acceptance of dialogue he is tied to the questioning of the other. Questions and answers depend on a game — a game that is at once pleasant and difficult — in which each of the two partners takes pains to use only the rights given him by the other and by the accepted form of the dialogue.

The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in the search for truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat. For him, then, the game consists not of recognizing this person as a subject having the right to speak but of abolishing him, as interlocutor, from any possible dialogue.²⁰

It is somewhat surprising to see Foucault describing his career in print and in publicity as though it were a dialogue. His remarks might seem to be oddly Habermasian: he insists that the orien-

tation to dialogue is a moral issue and that “in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion. They depend only on the dialogue situation.”

Yet I think Didier Eribon is right to suggest that the passage represents the closest thing in Foucault's work to a response to Habermas — we might almost say, a wryly veiled polemic against Habermas.²¹ The question “Why is it that you don't engage in polemics?” is an opportunity for Foucault to explain why he had not responded to the frontal assault that Habermas mounted against him in the lectures that were to be published, a year after Foucault's death, as *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and that had been delivered in March 1983 at the Collège de France — one year before the Rabinow interview. In using this language to explain his refusal to take up a challenge he disdained, Foucault out-Habermases Habermas, so to speak. The real substance of his response comes in the remarks that immediately follow. Here Foucault offers his view that the morality of the dialogue is to be grounded not in the transcendental conditions of speech situations as ideally oriented to understanding and therefore implying norms of rational morality in general but in the history of polemics and other modes of discourse. Dialogue and polemic are both genres, with different ethical projects and social relations immanent to them. “Very schematically,” Foucault suggests, one could analyze the language game of polemic through its religious, judiciary, and political antecedents.

In posing the issue this way, Foucault is also trying to explain why it is difficult to chart the kind of clear path between intellectual work and politics that is currently condensed into the image of the public intellectual. In a long and eloquent passage dominated by metaphors of war and other forms of violent aggression, Foucault claims that polemic finds its most powerful model in

politics – even when politics might seem to be about agreement rather than polemic, as when it consists of defining alliances, recruiting partisans, and uniting interests or opinions. So the question “Why is it that you don’t engage in polemics?” turns out to be a question about the distinction between Foucault’s intellectual project and politics proper.

Foucault says in this context that he prefers to stand back from questions posed within the language of politics in order to pursue problems that cannot entirely be framed as political questions. He cites as examples his work on madness and on sexuality. Sexuality, for example, “doesn’t exist apart from a relationship to political structures, requirements, laws, and regulations that have a primary importance for it; and yet one can’t expect politics to provide the forms in which sexuality would cease to be a problem.”²² The alternative to polemic, an intellectual program more in keeping with the ethics of dialogue, Foucault calls “problematization.” He traces the term to a realization that the Marxist vocabulary was found unsatisfying in 1968 as a way of thinking about the politicization of personal life; that project called for another way of framing what would count as politics.

The term “problematization,” awkward enough under the best of circumstances, has become rather confused by its use among post-Foucauldian academics, for whom it often means nothing more than taking something to be problematic. To problematize, in this usage, means to complicate. For Foucault it has a much richer meaning, connected with the argument in volumes 2 and 3 of *History of Sexuality*. There, he treats a problematic not just as an intellectual tangle, but as the practical horizon of intelligibility within which problems come to matter for people. It stands for both the conditions that make thinking possible and for the way thinking, under certain circumstances, can reflect back on its own conditions. Problematization is more than arguing; it is a practical

context for thinking. As such, it lies largely beyond conscious strategy.

The “Problematizations” interview can be read in part as Foucault’s account of his relation to the gay movement. Despite repeated solicitations from gay journalists and activists, Foucault refused to be set up as the gay intellectual. Of course, he scarcely needed the outlet. But social movements have often been arenas in which professional intellectuals – journalists, lawyers, or academics – have found publics in which their intellectual role could be put to use. Foucault was happy enough to do so on occasion. But when confronted by the rise of a gay movement in his adult life, Foucault, for what were doubtless overdetermined reasons, chose to write a book that corroded the conceptual underpinnings of the gay movement as it was then in formation. *The History of Sexuality* has an extremely vexed and vexing relation to that movement public. There are moments in his interviews, too, in which he anticipates the dead end of identitarian politics of sexual orientation with a lucidity that remains unsurpassed.

More generally, the “Problematizations” interview revises Foucault’s earlier account of the public intellectual in “Intellectuals and Politics” (1972). There he argued against the kind of general intellectual embodied by Sartre, in favor of a new “specific” intellectual with expertise relevant to a topical arena. The later account of problematization – as work on the framing of politics – makes it now opposed to any political policy public, whether general or specific. Given such a conception, the relation between problematization and activism must necessarily be unclear, even disturbingly so. Foucault’s point applies to style as well as content; he stands athwart both politics and the discourse game of polemic, no matter what the topic. In one sense, his argument returns to a traditional relation between intellectual and political work: because problematization considers the framing of politics

rather than issues already framed as politics, it has the reflexive structure that has traditionally been the role of theory or philosophy. But the path back to a new politics is one on which the intellectual is no privileged guide.

Interestingly, Foucault's arguments for a practice of problematization over polemic turn out to be ethical rather than political. He does not say that problematization is more radical or more effective. He says it is morally essential, as well as harder and more fun ("a game that is at once pleasant and difficult"). He sees it as a resource of humor and equanimity. If this is one of the reasons why he sometimes avoided polemic, he was wise. But one doesn't always have that luxury. Eribon, an unusually sympathetic interpreter, writes that Foucault's remarks stem in part from the habitually aristocratic manner of prominent French intellectuals. Problematization's relation to polemic, and to politics, in his case partly expresses prestige and security. It seems to require something like the university system to mediate both the social space of its "domain" and the reflexive relation of thought to politics. Foucault's remarks go far to reimagining the relation between professional intellectuals and politics. Yet he had little to say about mediations and publics. Fame had made that question moot for him.

Foucault's relation to the public/private distinction still awaits systematic treatment as far as I can tell. With *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*, he had already begun developing an account of power designed to show the inadequacy of liberal norms. This project, continued in *The History of Sexuality*, is the most thorough assault yet mounted against the idea of private life as a realm of freedom distinct from state power. Foucault did not pretend, of course, that the distinction between public and private was without consequence in modern society; but he showed that neither public/private nor state/civil society corre-

sponded to a difference between power and freedom, authority and liberty. *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* especially demonstrate that new ways of imagining publicity (regulatory or therapeutic) also fashioned a new kind of private person in the image of its regulatory model. In the domains of reason, justice, and personal life, Foucault's three major treatises show that the modern order requires relations of power that saturate civil society and the most intimate dimensions of personhood. The very private life thought to be the locus of freedom and rights was instead the laboratory of a regulatory order, one that could by no means be equated with the state or even with a class that ruled indirectly through the state (as in Marxism). What would it mean to challenge this framework of governance? Foucault relocated the possible frontiers of politics so radically that nothing is in principle off-limits. As his late studies of "governmentality" were designed to show, the result was a rethinking of "politics," and with it all the implications of public and private.²³

The project Foucault calls problematization does remain oriented to a public; Foucault speaks not of questioning in the abstract of theory but of "the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics." In this sense, it is consistent with Foucault's project of displacing the self-understanding of philosophy outward to the world, a project he identified with Adorno and the Frankfurt School and against which he thought Habermas was fighting a reaction. Problematization, in order to be the development of a domain of acts and practices, must have a public scene, not just a reflexive relation to one. This public scene, however, must also have a different temporality from the public of polemic, because it is defined by its ability to "pose problems for politics" and is therefore not to be subordinated to the urgencies and action schemes of the political system.

Foucault seems to be on the verge of describing intellectual work as a kind of counterpublic. He does not do so, of course, because he sets aside all questions of circulation and medium. It might be that the idealization of dialogue prevented him from seeing how little that genre corresponded to his own practice. Or it might be that he wanted to stand outside the language game of the public sphere conceived as circulation. In any case, he imagines thought as more than fungible argument. He describes it as oriented to strangeness, risk, and world making in a scene of concretely mediated but open-ended exchange. This is a useful picture of how intellectual work could be important, one that does not reduce importance to numerical extensiveness and contemporaneity. Because it identifies a multi-leveled temporality that is often forgotten in the romance of the public intellectual, it may be a way of recovering the orientation to futurity in academic work. This is not to say that the address of journalistic style or even polemic might not also be necessary to the risk of public intellectual work. The publics in which problematizing work circulates cannot remain forever functionally segregated from all other publics if they are to transform politics. Certainly a public practice oriented to redefining public practice is a paradoxical task, not finally dissimilar to the problem of Orwell's diarist. It is a way of imaging a speech for which there is yet no scene, and a scene for which there is no speech.