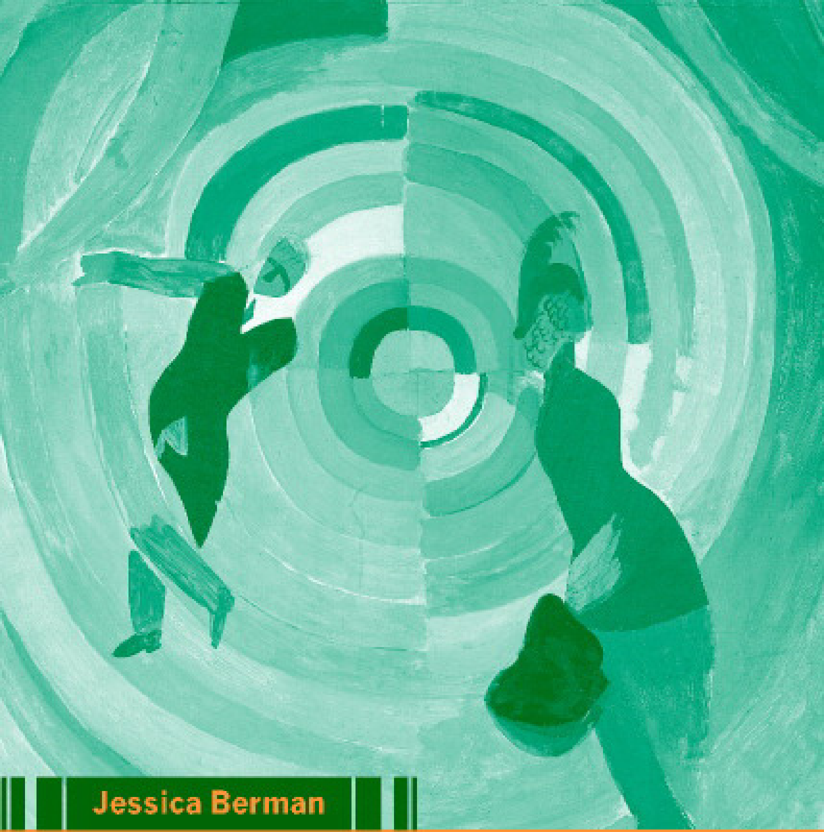

Jessica Berman

Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community

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MODERNIST FICTION, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITY

In *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community*, Jessica Berman argues that the fiction of Henry James, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein engages directly with early twentieth-century transformations of community and cosmopolitanism. Although these modernist writers develop radically different models for social organization, their writings return again and again to issues of commonality, shared voice, and exchange of experience, particularly in relation to dominant discourses of gender and nationality. The writings of James, Proust, Woolf, and Stein not only inscribe early-twentieth century anxieties about race, ethnicity, nationality and gender, but confront them with demands for modern, cosmopolitan versions of community. This study seeks to revise theories of community and cosmopolitanism in light of their construction in narrative, and in particular it seeks to reveal the ways that modernist fiction can provide meaningful alternative models of community.

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MODERNIST FICTION, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND THE POLITICS OF COMMUNITY

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University of Maryland, Baltimore County

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For Michael, Emma, and Aaron, of course

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CHAPTER I

Cosmopolitan Communities

Most novels are in some sense knowable communities.
Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 165

Is there a poetics of the "interstitial" community?
Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 231

The political is the place where community as such is brought into play.
Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, xxxviii[1]

Walter Benjamin tells us in his celebrated essay, "The Storyteller," that, in the period after the First World War, "a process that had been going on for a long time" began to become apparent. "It is as if something inalienable to us ... were taken from us," he writes, "the ability to exchange experiences." This ability to exchange experiences is the storyteller's art. It is, for Benjamin, an art that is based not only on the possibility of imagining a community of listeners but also on the relevance of experiences of the past. In the First World War, "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds."[2] None of the past experiences of that generation prepared them to stand in that changed countryside; none helped them translate it into a story they could tell.

Speaking of a much earlier stage in this same process, Raymond Williams writes: "The growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing division and complexity of labour; the altered and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community – a whole community, wholly knowable – became harder and harder to sustain." The question of the knowable community here, for Williams, is not simply a question of the object of scrutiny, of the complexity of the community-present as compared with the seemingly simpler community of the past.

Rather, it is a matter of shared perspective, "of what is desired and what needs to be known."[3] In the nineteenth century, for Williams, it is "a matter of consciousness" and of "continuing as well as day-to-day experience."[4] In the twentieth century, however, the connection of these two realms is seen to disappear. Social experience becomes fragmentary; the only community available seems to be the "community of speech."[5]

Both Benjamin and Williams imagine community as the crucial link between speaker and listener and thus as the underlying condition of storytelling. Both Benjamin and Williams also imagine community as the realm in which narrative and history coincide, the realm in which past experiences in common make possible a shared linguistic meaning. And both see, in twentieth-century Europe, the problem of the loss of this realm of the knowable, a loss which becomes for them a key experience of the narratives of modernism.

Fragmentation seems inevitable and intrinsic to modernist narrative. We recognize fragmented voices and fragmented identities as hallmarks of what has been called "high modernist" writing, whether we speak of their resolution into alternate patterns of meaning or dissolution in the crisis of the subject.[6] The transition from social to narrative form is often made to hinge upon this very issue. As Michael Levenson sees it, for example, "The dislocation of the self within society is recapitulated within modernist forms" which nonetheless present "the nostalgic longing for a whole self." In this model the community is either fully absent, or significantly present as a looming, oppressive force. The effort of modernist fiction then becomes the "effort to wrest an image of an autonomous subjectivity from intractable communal norms."[7]

In Williams's late essay, "When Was Modernism?" modernist fiction becomes associated with the institutionalization and restriction of its texts, a hurdle to be overcome on the way to a future community. Once again community as a possible subject of concern within the canon of European modernist fiction disappears. It becomes for Williams a problem of the post-modern and its potential, a problem of finding a new way back to the question of community: "We must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a tradition which may address itself . . . to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again."[8]

On the other hand, this book begins with the premise that in much high modernist fiction we can already see community being imagined over and over again. The demise of the knowable community, the explosion of shared experiences of the past, the disruption of the meaning of old stories and of the possibility of new communicable experience, become not only reflected but contested in the works of writers such as Henry James, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Gertrude Stein. These writers engage directly with early twentieth-century historical and political transformations of community, transformations that occasioned on the one hand an almost desperate effort to recoup community in the form of nationalism and fascism, and on the other hand an insistence on deepening cosmopolitanism. Although James, Proust, Woolf, and Stein develop radically different models for social organization, their narratives consistently place the notion of community at their core. Their writings return again and again to issues of commonality, shared voice, and exchange of experience, especially in relation to dominant discourses of gender and nationality.

Yet the threat of totalitarian models of national community, whether in the form of nativism, anti-Semitism, immigration restriction, protofascism, or unmodified patriarchal dominance, looms large in the first three decades of the century. It is in response to this threat that, I will claim, community becomes linked to a cosmopolitan perspective in a manner that revises and enriches both terms. The often-remarked cosmopolitanism of these writers, then, seems less and less like personal pique and more and more like creative opposition that leaves an instructive social legacy in its wake. While these writers were not all radical or even progressive, especially in their real-world politics, the writings of James, Proust, Woolf, and Stein not only inscribe early twentieth-century anxieties about race, ethnicity, and gender, but confront them with demands for modern, cosmopolitan versions of community.

This book thus takes on a dual project: first, to revise the theory of community in order to insist that it respond to the narrative construction of that term, and in particular to the ways that modernist fiction can provide meaningful alternative models of community. Homi Bhabha and others have claimed that nationality must be seen as a narrative process. So then, I argue, must community. Communities come into being to a large extent in the kinds of stories of connection we have been told or are able to tell about ourselves, the stories that Benjamin insists are transformed by modernity. Before beginning the adjudication of rights and responsibilities, or the espousal of shared public values, we move in a realm of being-in-common that rests upon the border between "I" and "we," a border that may not necessarily coincide with the political boundaries that surround us. In imagining this liminal zone as something other than simple statehood, the story of community comes into being. It is precisely this connection between narrative and the reconstruction of community that has not been addressed by either theoreticians of community or literary critics, and which I see as forcefully emerging within the modernist fiction in question.

Second, this book seeks to revise our reading of modernist fiction in order to expand our understanding of what is still too often derogatively termed "international modernism," and to demonstrate modernism's historical and political engagement with the dual question of community and cosmopolitanism.[9] This revisionary work has already been well begun on writers like Joyce, who lend themselves especially well to the concerns of post-colonial critics, but it has yet to be sufficiently undertaken with regard to writers who are less obviously enmeshed in the problems of empire – those in question here.[10] To that end, after this introduction each chapter begins with a section devoted to an historical field where questions of nationality and affiliation emerge. Rather than attempt to demonstrate the historical "cause" of the texts in question, this material highlights the broader discursive terrain in which they arise, and serves as a vehicle for what Susan Stanford Friedman has recently termed "cultural parataxis," the use of key juxtapositions in order to highlight the cultural ramifications of modernist texts.[11]

Chapter 2 first explores the development of the notion of the cosmopolitan within the American popular press at the end of the nineteenth century, especially as it comes to be connected to ideas about femininity in such magazines as *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazar*. From this vantage point, Henry James's late international fiction and his late commentaries on feminine voice and manners come to exemplify the paradoxical relationship among cosmopolitanism, nativism, and notions of the ideal woman within modernist discourse about America.

Chapter 3 begins by examining Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* in light of the radical French Zionist thought of Bernard Lazare, which has been so crucial to the political theory of Hannah Arendt. Lazare's category of "conscious pariahdom" speaks not only to political questions of Jewish identity but also to narrative questions about identity and community. By reading *A la recherche du temps perdu* against Lazare's thought, this chapter demonstrates how Proust's seemingly idiosyncratic fascinations with both parvenu and pariah, with hidden perversion and open voyeurism, may be seen as key terms in a coherent politics of marginality.

Chapter 4 first examines the connection between the model of community embodied in the British Women's Co-operative Guild and that found in Virginia Woolf's writing. This sense of relation she calls a "mosaic," implying by her use of that term not only a version of the psychologically decentered self as we commonly read it in modernist fiction, but also a model of a fractured yet coherent political life, one directly engaged with many of the same concerns as the Guild women. By reading *Orlando* and *The Waves* within the terms of this model and within the context of the British political crisis of 1929–31, Chapter 4 further demonstrates the anti-fascist, feminist model of community that arises in those novels. *The Waves* ultimately presents us with an alternative model of both community and action, one which serves as a countercurrent, marking and resisting the gathering of political force.

Finally, Chapter 5 begins by reading Gertrude Stein's narratives *The Making of Americans* and *Ida* within the context of American cultural geography at the turn of the twentieth century. It argues that Stein's writings ask us to read her focus on wandering literally, as expressions of the importance of geography, (dis)placement, and movement within the construction of subjectivity. The second half of this chapter connects this topographical model of identity to the grammatical reworkings of subjectivity in Stein's later prose. Stein's radical narratives may be seen not only to reconstruct the subject as nomadic and polyvocal, but also to challenge the dichotomy between community and cosmopolitanism implied by nationalism. It is in this sense that Stein's narratives become important to the contemporary discussion of social affiliation, especially in their constant return to the question of America. It is also in this sense that they raise the question of feminist nomadism as Rosi Braidotti describes it, and of feminist ethics as elaborated in the writings of Luce Irigaray and Tina Chanter.

This book is an interdisciplinary effort that seeks to bring politics, history, and geography to bear on the narrative construction of community. It seeks to further the discussion of the social contexts of modernist fiction in such books as Michael Tratner's *Modernism and Mass Politics* and James English's *Comic Transactions* not only through its attention to extra-literary discourse, but also through its emphasis on gender politics.[12] Far too frequently the issue of gender seems to slip out of sight, disappearing in an attempt to reach a more universal model of community. On the contrary, this book claims, the question of gender often becomes the pole around which spheres of community spin and collide, governing both their possibility and their politics.

Current political theory on community seems caught between the effort to argue universally and the recognition that real-world communities emerge primarily through local and specific commonalities. While aware of the difficulty of legislating for any particular common good, such as the golden rule, current new communitarian writings still promote specific liberal maxims (such as "strong rights presume strong responsibilities" and "the pursuit of self-interest can be balanced by a commitment to the community") and place them within the context of contemporary (usually North American) politics.[13] Meant to be an intervention in the multicultural drift away from the common values of a liberal democracy, communitarian thought clings to the political notion of the autonomous self that engages in communicative action and consensus-building as a second-order function of its consent to live in society.[14] Communitarians thus often consider gender and ethnic differences as part of a social experience appended to a core identity and privilege the public realm as the locus of political community. There is no recognition that community might grow even within the private sphere, as a part of identity-building itself, emerging from an imagined set of contingent relations between subjects who always already exist both in common and separately. Nor does communitarian theory fully account for the fluctuation of community belonging, where one day a community of women may command allegiance while the next day the conflicting demands of an ethnic or neighborhood group may be most compelling.

In much the same way, discourse-based theories of community, like Habermas's, present a utopian version of affiliation in the public sphere, where moments of communication serve to represent a clear set of shared values, rather than acting as crucial but contingent performances of the community itself.[15] It is in this sense, as this book will argue, that the modernist narratives in question here become instructive, highlighting not only the variety of responses that may be described as "community" but also the range of discursive versions of those communities that are distinctly not predicated on direct communicative speech or the transparency of the intention of the speaker. In fact, the common presumption within the modernist fiction in question here, that discourse is fraught not only with difficulty but also with the constant making and un-making of human inter-connections, provides the means by which these narratives will construct radically modern versions of community. It is in their transposition of this question of community from the domain of public citizenship and the state to a liminal zone where community is both intimate and political, both local and worldly, that these narratives will prompt a reassessment of the relationship between community and cosmopolitanism. As Edward Said suggests, "the formal dislocations and displacements of modernist culture" as well as its encyclopedic forms, its juxtapositions, and its ironic modes, emerge in part as a consequence of empire and thus from the pressure of the world on previously self-enclosed communities.[16] The response, I would argue, will be neither a simple retreat, nor an attempt to shore up the traditional community (or its presumptive heir, the imperial nation-state), but a re-engagement with the very relationship between community and world.

The relationship between community and world, however, enters very little into the current discussion about community, particularly in North America, which turns on the possibility of constructing public versions of affiliation within a specific rights-based social system. The liberal thought of John Rawls[17] remains the focus of debate for a wide group of thinkers such as Michael Sandel, Amy Gutmann, and Iris Marion Young, and thus limits their ability to see community as a challenge to the punctual self at the center of Rawls's system and to the nation state at its periphery.[18] Those more focused on sociological critique, such as Amitai Etzioni, founder of the Communitarian Network and editor of the journal *Responsive Community*, confine themselves instead to American current affairs.[19] But current affairs in Etzioni's version seem to have no relation to either a concrete past or an intellectual history. Community for Etzioni seems to exist primarily in the realm of the debate about the so-called "welfare state" of the 1960s, and has little to say about its conceptual underpinnings.

But community as a term of debate within sociological and political theory has a history far longer than the welfare state. Community has often been seen as the mediating link between the subject and its possibility for socially significant action as well as, for theoreticians from J. S. Mill and Ernst Renan to Benedict Anderson, the key precursor to national identity. Yet, in the nineteenth century, community was not easily equated with the state; rather, *Gemeinschaft* was often seen to be in conflict with *Gesellschaft* politics, its forms of affiliation an antidote to alienating social organizations. For Marx, in *The German Ideology* and *The Grundrisse*, ancient and medieval communities represent the historical locus of the conflict between co-operative and antagonistic social forms, already tainted by the family, its division of labor, and its claims of ownership.[20] The emerging disjunction between civil society and the state is already present in his early analysis of these forms of community, as is the estrangement of the people from the social power that ought to inhere in their affiliation. Still, in rescuing the possibility of community from the family or from the debilitating conditions of the division of labor, Marx will remain able to see community as the means by which the worker becomes world-historical, outside of the bounds of the state. As he puts it in *The Civil War in France*, the "commune, which breaks the modern State power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the mediaeval Communes," but is instead a "new historical creation," one which is itself both the new realm of social relations and its first act.[21]

This transformative power is absent from much of the social scientific writing on community at the end of the nineteenth century. Writing in the 1880s Ferdinand Tönnies draws a nostalgic distinction between the small, rural community of the past, as characterized by inherent solidarity and unity of purpose, and contemporary society, which lacks all potential to create true bonds among its members. Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* draws from a model of the family where bonds are indissoluble and relationships natural, and is firmly based in what we might call a "community of proximity," one which grows out of shared territory, blood ties, and constant interaction among its members, rather than shared values or interests. Even friendship, which for Tönnies is independent of kinship and neighborhood, relies on the face-to-face. "Spiritual friendship," he writes, "forms a kind of invisible scene or meeting which has to be kept alive by artistic intuition and creative will."[22] However, according to Tönnies, in the modern period of *Gesellschaft*, when no face-to-face community exists, even art becomes incapable of creating community.

On the other hand, Durkheim rejects this assumption that there can be no real solidarity or *Gemeinschaft* in modern industrial society. In the preface to the second (1902) edition of *The Division of Labor in Society*, he describes the secondary groups or corporations that will replace the communities of proximity as still to come, waiting in the wings much like Marx's commune of the future. For Durkheim they will constitute "the well-spring of all moral activity."[23] This is, however, still to come – Durkheim considers his contemporary world to be without "a whole system of organs necessary to social life (la vie commune)."[24] And, in *Le Suicide*,[25] Durkheim further retreats from his optimism about modern, "organic" society, calling for new communal relationships to counteract its tendency towards debilitating *anomie*.

For most twentieth-century social scientists, community remains the term for pre-industrial and not modern forms of affiliation, and thus for them is only obliquely relevant to twentieth-century social life or the modern nation-state. From Max Weber to Robert Redfield, whose influential study, *The Little Community*, appropriates the term for anthropological use, the same kind of nostalgia that pervades Tönnies's work is distinctly evident. Redfield, for example, defines the kind of "small community" he studies among the Mayan Indians of the Yucatán, as characterized by four qualities: "distinctiveness, smallness, homogeneity, and all-providing self-sufficiency." Although new versions of small communities may still be found within the modern city, Redfield argues that these qualities diminish as societies move towards urbanization. He describes urban societies in a distinctly negative light, calling them not only heterogeneous but also based in "impersonal institutions [and] what has been called atomization of the external world."[26] For Redfield, community is certainly not recuperated by the modern nation-state.

Thus it is somewhat anomalous for Benedict Anderson to depict the nation-as-imagined-community in terms of a continuous rise in the period from the beginnings of "print-capitalism" to the twentieth century.[27] Or, what becomes clear is that Anderson relies on a political tradition in many ways distinct from theoretical elaborations of community *per se*. While community may be necessary to late nineteenth- and twentieth-century European ideas of nationality, nationality is not necessary to ideas of community and it is a failure of Anderson's work to see it as such.[28] However, what Anderson makes clear is the historical conjunction of these terms within European discourse of nationality from Mill and Renan on, and the degree to which modern notions of the nation-state depend upon these conjunctions. Thus in the late nineteenth century the idea of community becomes appropriated by the need to imagine the nation as "the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life" rather than some more concrete combination of language, race, and history.[29]

Yet, within the American pragmatic thought of George Herbert Mead and John Dewey we find a means of imagining community and its relationship to public structures of belonging as both potentially modern and transformative, one which Anderson notably avoids. For both Mead and Dewey, community is reconceived as a central category of experience, one which cannot be relegated to a pre-industrial past, completely distinguished from any conception of the (social) self, or appropriated by the national idea. Their pragmatic thought thus imagines the self as always implicated within circles of affiliation while those circles are conceived as contingent and overlapping. In this manner, Mead and Dewey may be said to present, in the early to mid years of the twentieth century, what is often mis-understood to be a post-modern condition, that of incomplete and relational selves seen in fluctuating political association. In fact, it will be the argument of this book that, in much the same manner and in response to many of the same historical pressures, modernist fiction will also often pre-figure this dimension of what we too easily term "post-modern thought." Thus, in this sense, both the pragmatic inscription of a relational self and the modernist narration of community serve to challenge the absolute division between modern and post-modern culture, especially as it concerns models of social organization and political life.

Writing in 1913, Mead argues that the self cannot exist in consciousness as a subject but only as an object of memory and observation – a claim that resonates deeply with the narrative construction of self in Proust and Woolf, among others. The individual only comes to perceive his/her existence in a social context, as that "me" who is acted upon by others and is remembered to have interacted with the social world: "The self which consciously stands over against other selves thus becomes an object, an other to himself, through the very fact that he hears himself talk, and replies."[30] For Mead, the subject is constituted by its experience within society, and is inconceivable, both metaphysically and politically speaking, without it. The most glaring error, he claims, in liberal political theory is the idea of the individual in a state of nature, or "the common assumption . . . that we can conceive of the individual citizen existing before the community."[31]

Dewey makes this paradox of a socially constituted self more political, conceiving of the public realm as a "Great Community," itself comprised of an infinity of overlapping smaller communities or associations.[32] For Dewey, there can be no meaningful discussion of individuals and their relation to society, because neither term exists without the other. When we say "I think" we "accept and affirm a responsibility" that is always already social and political. We make clear that "the self as a centered organization of energy identifies itself . . . with a belief or sentiment of independent and external origination."[33] When in later political writings Dewey emphasizes the development of the individual within community as a focus of education, therefore, he in no way conceives of the former as taking priority over the latter.

But in Dewey's critique of American democracy, national structures ultimately command more attention than the "domestic, economic, religious, ... artistic or educational" associations which he claims structure the moral life of citizens.[34] The private sphere of association never fully emerges as political and the Great Community comes to resemble national models of imagined community. It is in its indebtedness to this pragmatic tradition that the current communitarian thought of Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor, for example, derives both its assumptions about the social embeddedness of the liberal citizen and its focus on the national public sphere.[35] Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* addresses the question of group membership by referring constantly to the national community as "the community," as though there can be no other with significant claims on citizenship or the construction of justice.[36] The possibility of inscribing differences, or of accounting for citizens' overlapping loyalties or contingent affiliations, recedes. Equally inaccessible is the means by which we might begin to instantiate any recognition of group identities or rights within this system, if the community that is the basis for justice is always already the national community.

On the other hand, Charles Taylor's "politics of recognition" is grounded in a dialogic notion of identity whereby self-understanding is constructed and perpetuated in common with others. It thus incorporates the private community into its attempt at the universal. "My discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others... My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others."[37] Yet, despite his insistence that this dialogical construction of identity is ongoing throughout life (and therefore provides both the basis and the need for a politics of recognition of and by others), Taylor seems to want to limit our community identities to those that may be expressed as externally coherent and stable wholes. This is apparent in his discussion of our embedded identities: "Consider what we mean by *identity*. It is who we are, 'where we're coming from.' As such it is the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense."[38] Of course some aspects of this background will shift over time – yet, for Taylor background is static enough to be given a name, to be assumed worthy and accorded respect as an entity in its own right. In this sense when Taylor writes of the politics of recognition it is mainly for established cultural groups already active within the public sphere and seemingly unified in perspective, needs, and "worth," such as the French speakers in Quebec.

It might be said that Taylor's cultural groups are as much a myth as the notion of the monologic, "punctual" self of the Enlightenment that he himself debunks.[39] His "politics of recognition," while admirable, thus falls short of reimagining community as a mediating link between the dialogic self and the nation, or as the entrance into politics within both public and private spheres.[40] Surely the model of the politics of recognition falters when it does not account for differences *within* publicly recognized groupings or for the provisional quality of those groupings, whether in terms of their relationship to self-identity or simply as social entities in their own right. Because of this mode of identifying groups in need of public recognition, Taylor also seems unable to account for the myriad of differences within the so-called dominant culture.[41] Instead, Taylor's focus on cultural groupings as coherent political players in the public sphere demonstrates that he conceives of the state as a "social union of social unions,"[42] as Rawls puts it, only one where recognition of this fact is conceived of as a good rather than just a means.

This restriction of the political community to the question of the public sphere, and to a potential consensus among competing group claims, rests upon what we might call a utopian bent within pragmatic thought. For Dewey, for Walzer, even for Richard Rorty, the consensus of opinion will expand with the expansion of the democratic conversation; the liberal community can hope, through reform, to mediate its differences and internal contradictions. As Chantal Mouffe puts it, "like his hero John Dewey, Rorty's understanding of social conflict is limited because he is unable to come to terms with the implications of value pluralism and accept that the conflict between fundamental values can never be resolved."[43] Thus Rorty's faith in the American national project rests on his assumption of a public conversation good enough to extend social justice to all, without needing to raise questions about the metaphysics of the self, the nature of difference, the possibility of communication or the inter-relation of the public and private spheres. In this last sense particularly he shares Habermas's utopian view of the capaciousness of public conversation and the autonomy of an idealized public sphere. This idealized public sphere, both for Habermas and for Rorty, must presume, as its starting point, the possibility of a shared conception of "we," yet neither thinker accounts for the metaphysics that makes that "we" possible.[44]

On the other hand, feminist thought, like other marginalized discourse, cannot afford to idealize the public sphere or its construction of belonging, even when it still wants to posit its possibility. The internal fissures within a seemingly stable political "we," the hazards of the universal, and the importance of politics outside of the public sphere are all key assumptions across a wide range of contemporary feminist theory. When, for example, Iris Marion Young or Seyla Benhabib attempt a re-working of the problem of community along feminist lines, the self and its wealth of connections is seen not only to limit social consensus but also to do so in a positive fashion. Thus Young critiques the "ideal of community" as represented within universalized communitarian theory as expressing a "desire for the fusion of subjects with one another which in practice operates to exclude those with whom the group does not identify . . . [while it] denies and represses . . . the fact that the polity cannot be thought of as a unity in which all participants share a common experience and common values."[45] Fusion is precisely what is refused by Young's model of the city as social paradigm or Benhabib's version of a narratively constructed, embedded democratic citizen.[46] Even when these feminist theorists aspire to universalizable paradigms of justice, therefore, they predicate them on the assumption of an infinite variety of private sphere affiliations that are themselves always political.

Benhabib revises the Habermasian notion of the communicative function of the public sphere in order to distinguish between the search for substantive consensus and the process of demonstrating willingness to seek understanding with the other. In other words, for Benhabib, the public sphere is the place where we demonstrate our cultivation of what Hannah Arendt terms "enlarged thinking" – our ability to reverse perspectives and reason from the other's point of view. This is a processual morality. As she puts it, "it is less significant that 'we' discover 'the' general interest, but more significant that collective decisions be reached through procedures which are radically open and fair to all."[47] In fact it is in the everyday "ethical relationships in which we are always already immersed" that Benhabib finds the source for public ethics.[48] Yet she insists nonetheless on public conversation as the crucial component in what she considers a revised "interactive universalism." She thus recapitulates the failing of the Habermasian model to account for a self as not only narratively constructed but always already social, even prior to entrance into conversation. She therefore also ignores the extent to which the narratives of self are implicated in the conversations of community – in other words to which the "web of stories" (to borrow an Arendtian phrase which Benhabib employs) that makes up our shared world always overlaps, borrows from, and revises the web of stories we call our selves.

It is in this arena that Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of community has much to offer, both to the contemporary political discussion of justice and to our understanding of the variety of possible modes of construing community in the early years of the twentieth century during the height of what we call "high modernism." Drawing from the Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world, Nancy describes community as an essential condition of being, one which engages radically separate subjects in what he calls the process of "compearance." There is no doubt, in Nancy's work, about the possibility of being-together – but the blind faith that distinctly separate citizens will "somehow" discover their interactive potential that we see in both liberal consensus theory, and even the most revised of Habermasian models, is gone. At the same time by positing what he calls an "inoperative community" ("la communauté désoeuvrée"), Nancy also avoids the problem of substantive consensus about particular political ends that pervades so much new communitarian writing. He claims that "thinking of community as essence – is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common* being, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance."[49] Community thus becomes not only processual in Benhabib's sense but integral to the experience of being itself. In the recognition of oneself as both embedded in a realm of association and bodily finite at the same time one comes to know both community and its limit.

Of course, as we have seen, this sense of an embedded or relational self was also present in pragmatic thought in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet what is different here is that Nancy positions community within a realm of play that not only supplants the categories of self and other, but never resolves into an entity that has an identity or performs tasks.[50] Community for Nancy is precisely the opposite, that which resists, that which undoes these kinds of groups because they falsely present community as an entity secondary to existence which is predicated on the free joining of separate subjects. The nation can never qualify as a community in this model; Dewey's notion of the "Great Community" is seen to be limited precisely because it consolidates into a separate entity what is by definition a condition of being.

It is for this reason that Nancy Fraser and others have taken Nancy's theory to be a retreat from the practical domain of politics.[51] Yet by refusing the community as such – whether in the form of the nation or the party – Nancy also extends its range far beyond the consensual