

To Speak in One's Own Voice is to Speak in Clichés: Rousseau and Flaubert on the Ideal and Reality of Democratic Opinion-presentation

Nobutaka Otobe

Ph.D. Candidate, Johns Hopkins University
Postgraduate Fellow, Yale University

nobutaka.otobe@jhu.edu

1. Introduction

Democracy celebrates the presentation of individual opinion in his/her own voice. Although there are divergences on the way in which democratic theories are theorized in contemporary political thought, one could argue that there is a convergence on this point with regards to the value of individual opinion in democracy. Rousseau's classical formula promises that the social contract frees citizens from their subjugation to the voice of others: although the sovereign power does not allow for diversity of opinions, it would not mean a departure from that ideal as far as the sovereign will reflects the proper interest of its constituency. Emerson lamented that we do no longer speak in our proper individual voices, thus do not live up with our ideal.¹ Charles Taylor presents the ethics of authenticity, under which each individual cultivates his/her inner, unique voice. Such ideal of presenting one's proper voice is shared not only by these thinkers who connect their respective visions of self with democracy, but also by those who offer more procedure- or institution-focused theories of democracy. Deliberative democracy, for example, embraces a similar ideal when it criticizes distorted and controlled communications as obstacles to desirable democracy: to express and find one's proper opinion is essential for collective deliberation. Furthermore, poststructuralists' criticism of disciplined subject does not stop them from embracing the ideal of one's owning proper voice. In a dialogue with Foucault, Deleuze describes a purpose of the Group for Information of Prisons—the group Foucault organized—as “to promote the conditions in which prisoners themselves could speak” (Deleuze 2004, 207). Even if our subjectivity is an effect of disciplining power, we could still hold the ideal of speaking in our voices.

¹ Stanley Cavell articulates the opening paragraph of Emerson's “Self-Reliance” as describing the sense of “being humbled by the words of someone else” (Cavell 2004, 19).

And the same ideal echoes in Foucault's interest in the ancient practice of *parrhesia*. Despite nuances among them, these diverse theories all embrace our speaking in our own voices as a democratic ideal.

Rarely discussed, however, is the feasibility of this ideal. Can we truly speak in our own voices? What if, to the contrary, we are speaking in inauthentic voices of others, that is, as clichés? If authentic individual voices constitute the basis for democratic theory what becomes of it when we pose this problem of clichés in our ordinary lives?

In questioning the feasibility of the democratic ideal of speaking in one's proper voice, I do not ignore the long line of concerns expressed by democratic thinkers over our conscious and unconscious conformism to the opinion of others. In fact, Rousseau developed his proto-democratic political vision against the proliferation of opinions that subjugates people under the tutelage of others' reputation. Later in the 19th century, J. S. Mill and Tocqueville attacked the "tyranny of opinion," that is, conformism widely-spread in democratic society. Given the tradition of these criticisms, it would be possible to say that the history of modern democratic thought is that of solutions attempted to dissolve conformism and secure our capacity to speak our own opinions. Nevertheless, these solutions, it seems to me, presuppose too quickly the distinction between our own voices and those of others, our proper voices and imitative clichés. Do we not speak in the voice of others while assuming that we speak in our own voices? Or, to put it more crudely, can we distinguish our unique opinions apart from imitative clichés?

If our proper, unique, authentic opinions are indistinguishable from clichés, this indistinguishability would lead us to question the conventional way democratic theories have pursued the democratic ideal of presenting one's proper opinion. The conventional defense of the democratic ideal rests upon the assumption that the democratic theory should offer solutions to problems it identifies as a hindrance to the realization of the ideal. In the current context of our exploration, the ideal is our ability to speak in our own voices; the problem is conformism; and the solution is to eradicate conformism with appropriate measures, of which contents vary according to kinds of theory they offer (agonistic, deliberative, etc.). If such solutions are unavailable, what will be the role of theory and the status of the ideal? Should we forfeit the democratic ideal, searching for other democracies or give up democracy altogether? Or can we modify the role of

democratic theory so that it accommodates the indiscernibility between one's own voice and that of others, the problem of cliché?

In this paper, I argue the latter path: while the democratic ideal can keep us inspired to move toward democratic politics, we can grapple with the problem of democracy with a different mode of political theorizing that could affirm both its ideal and problem—that is, the ideal of authentic voices and the problem of difficulty in distinguishing one's own opinion apart from others. In pursuing such a mode of theorizing, I question the assumption held among democratic theories—or political theory in general—that theory can eradicate problems by appropriate solutions. I hold that, in assuming the availability of solutions, we become blind to the possibility that the problem may not have a solution but rather require us to cultivate a different attitude towards a problem which cannot be solved away. Solution presumes the possibility of eradicating the problem—yet, if the problem is rather endogenous, it may require different modes of thought. As I will examine later in this paper, Mill and Tocqueville represent such strategies of solution. Although they acknowledge the problem of cliché under democracy, they regard it as an exogenous problem. Against them, I maintain that the problem of cliché is endogenous to the ideal of democracy, and that democratic theory can still affirm the democratic ideal while acknowledging its insoluble problem of cliché.²

In pursuing such a mode of theorizing, I turn to an unexpected critic of modern democracy, Gustave Flaubert. Political theorists have rarely paid attention to Flaubert's writings. And when they do, they regard him merely as an anti-democratic thinker, an artist of *l'art pour l'art*, or “Parnassian liberal” at best.³ In fact, Flaubert presents a certain affirmation of democracy. In his novels and personal correspondences Flaubert relentlessly attacked democratic society: he criticized the way in which people assumed that they were speaking in their authentic voices all the while they were speaking in cliché. According to him, the problem lies in the very assumption that one is speaking in his/her authentic voices while failing to recognize the possibility that one is not. His

² I examined the ontological priority of problem to solutions in the third chapter of my dissertation, “Stupidity in Politics: Its Unavoidability and Potential” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, April 2013).

attack culminates in *The Dictionary of Received Ideas*, the collection of clichés. At first glance it appears that he would be against such modes of democratic society, a society where everyone is assuming to be speaking in one's own voices while he/she in fact is not—yet to the contrary Flaubert strikes out a position which affirms this very working of clichés in democratic society. On clichés and democracy he once wrote: “That [*Dictionary of Received Ideas*] would lead to the modern democratic idea of equality, using Fourier's remark that ‘great men won't be needed’; and it is for this purpose, I would say, that the book is written” (1926-1930, 3: 67; 1980, 176). As a thinker who identified both the problem of cliché while also affirmed democracy Flaubert's writing can offer an alternative modes of democratic theory. Exploring Flaubert's writings, I will find in his “realist” style a model of political theorizing that could affirm both the ideal and reality of democracy.

In the next section of the paper, I explore how modern democracy problematized the problem of cliché with the introduction of new ideal of individuality. Politics before the advent of modern democracy, namely ancient Greek society, safeguarded itself from direct engagement with the problem of cliché with two premises that made voicing one's opinion in politics a matter of qualification. The first premise concerns the knowledge necessary for politics: politics needs a specific craft (*technē*) that rulers need to master regardless of their general intellectual capacity and personal traits. Thus voicing one's opinion does not necessarily mean to speak one's own concern in one's proper voice, but speak from a general standpoint, in a specific language attuned to politics: the authenticity and inauthenticity of voice did not matter. Second, participation in politics requires qualification. Individuals, or the masses, in themselves are politically irrelevant, so that their thoughts do not matter in politics. Under these two premises, the problem of cliché, which results from the confusion or contamination of individuality and the general, did not matter to politics.

The rise of modern democracy—a watershed point I find in Rousseau—dissolved these two premises; now cliché appears as a problem of politics. I trace this dissolution focusing upon Rousseau's idea of individuality.⁴ His celebration of individuality without

⁴ The current scholarship on modern democracy and Rousseau sees an increasing number of studies that focus on techniques of government—that is, governmentality—offered by Rousseau rather than on the

social and political qualification, and his conceptualization of a just political order based upon such individuality dissolved the qualification-based politics. Now individual opinion, or *doxa*, matters directly to politics, and stupidity, which is deficient yet endogenous to intelligence, appears as an inherent problem of politics. By analyzing this shift, I also reveal how this internalization makes cliché an inherent problem of modern democracy.

Having revealed the democratic internalization of stupidity, the rest of the paper addresses how political thought after Rousseau tackled this new problem. In the third section, I focus on J. S. Mill's and Alexis de Tocqueville's orientations to the "tyranny of opinion" (Mill 1991, 9) as well as Rousseau's own response to the problem of people's opinion-formation. Their proposed solutions, despite their influences upon contemporary liberal and democratic theories, appear insufficient to grasp the new configuration, in which democracy, while trying to repel stupid clichés, in fact proliferates them. To go beyond these proposed insufficient solutions, the fourth section turns to Flaubert's observation of opinion-formation under democracy. Drawing upon his writings, I propose strategies of immanent negotiation as a more sustainable approach than those solutions offered in response to our conditions of democracy.

2. Rousseau and the Emergence of the Problem of Cliché

In this section, I trace the emergence of the democratic ideal and problem of voicing our opinions through examining Rousseau's texts. Why Rousseau? Rousseau is not a simple exponent of democracy as we know it. The ideal political community he admires is Sparta. Democracy, he states in *Social Contract*, is a form that is not only difficult to maintain in a large community but also vulnerable to civil strife. According to him, such a form of Government is suited only for "a people of Gods" (Rousseau 1997e,

novelty of his notion of individuality (see e.g., Johnston 1999, ch. 4). Rousseau's political texts such as "The Government of Poland" (Rousseau 1997d) develop multiple instruments of government that resonate (while showing differences as well) with Hobbes's idea of government. My exploration of Rousseau's notion of individuality does not deny the importance of Rousseau's orientations toward governmentality. As Strauss (2002) points out, his proposed techniques of government are to some extent the consequence of his notion of individuality; the Rousseauian individuality requires a certain mode of policing as an act of government. In other words, we need to probe into Rousseau's notion individuality to assess his orientation toward governmentality as well.

92; 3:406). Indeed, his ideas of the general will and lawgiver are subject to relentless criticisms as proto-totalitarian elements by democrats despite his influence upon modern democratic thought. Accompanying such non- or anti-democratic ideas is his strong distrust for opinion, which he regards a collusive illness in the society of his time. Rousseau argues that his general will, in which there is no room for individual opinions, frees people from their constraint in individual interests.

Notwithstanding all those counter-evidences, Rousseau's orientation toward equal individuality marks a departure that changed the political configuration concerning individual opinion. By basing morality and politics upon the individual consciousness that is stripped of any title or qualification, Rousseau turned individual, which the ancient Greek thought regarded as *idiotes* incapable of political participation, into a basic component of politics.⁵ Now individual reason bears a communal significance beyond oneself, for a larger community or even for general humankind.⁶ Formerly seen as the other of political reasoning, individual opinion now becomes a basis of socio-political order.

Rousseau and other democrats are no different in founding their respective political ideals upon this new notion of equal individuality. Or rather, as I will show in the next section, the anti-democratic measures in Rousseau's political thought are nothing but responses to problems caused by his own new notion of individuality. With such a hypothetical perspective, I want to interpret Rousseau's texts contra his own responses, to identify the content and effect of the fundamental shift he brings about with regard to individuality. In the following, I first examine how Rousseauian individuality dissolves the traditional assumptions of necessity of skill (*technē*) in politics and of the division between commonality and private realms. Then, by focusing on its internal mechanism, I analyze how Rousseauian individuality, despite its hostility to the world of mimetic opinions, leads to the proliferation of clichés.

⁵ For the Greek notion of *idiotes*, see Sparkes (1988).

⁶ Hobbes already initiated this modification by granting natural right over individual reason and the individual. Yet, in Hobbes's political thought, individual reason and judgment had no broader political significance except over one's own preservation in the state of nature.

Rousseau's new orientation toward individuality is a product of the fundamental motif that drives his diverse writings—vindication of human freedom and innocence.⁷ Multiple strands of his thought, despite their mutual inconsistencies (such as the incongruence between the *Second Discourse's* natural man and the *Social Contract's* citizen), all result from his conviction that man is in his proper nature free and innocent, a conviction that he articulates into the well-known formula at the beginning of *The Social Contract*: “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (Rousseau 1997e, 41; 3:351). Similar diagnoses are abundant throughout his writings. For example, *Discourse on the Science and Arts*, in identifying the source of unfreedom in science and arts, deploys a similar expression, to which Rousseau responds with a different solution: “While the Government and the Laws see to the safety and well-being of men assembled, the Sciences, Letters and Arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron *chains* with which they are laden” (Rousseau 1997c, 6; 3:9, italics mine). This diagnosis of man in chains is coupled with the assertion of the righteousness of individual consciousness in one's original state, of each untrammelled individual. In *Emile's* “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar,” he celebrates his notion of individuality as the following:

Conscience, conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice, assured guide of a being that is *ignorant and limited but intelligent and free, infallible judge of good and evil*, which makes man similar to the Gods; it is you alone that makes up the excellence of my nature. Without you I feel nothing in myself that *raises me above the beasts*, except for the sad privilege of leading myself astray from error to error with the aid of an understanding without rule and reason without principle. (Rousseau 1979, 290; 4:600, italics mine)⁸

This celebration of individual consciousness as the “infallible” judge leads to a departure from the qualification-based orientation toward politics that Ancient Greek

⁷ Both Ernst Cassirer (1954) and Jean Starobinski (1988) describe Rousseau's project as a theodicy that attributes the source of evil neither to God nor human beings. According to Starobinski, for Rousseau, “Emil is produced by history and society without altering the essence of the individual. The flaw in society is not a flaw in man's essential nature but in the relations among men. ... But he always has the opinion of securing his salvation by turning inward” (Starobinski 1988, 20).

⁸ The same sentences appear in his *Moral Letters* as well (Rousseau 2007, 197).

political thought exemplified. First, this individual consciousness dissociates the capacity for judgment from specific skill, founding the latter instead onto “ignorant” conscience. While, for example, Aristotle disqualifies political participation of common individual because not everybody is equipped with the necessary skill for ruling (*phronēsis*) or educated for it, Rousseau sees in the natural consciousness the source of judgment. For Rousseau, goodness and freedom of man lies in the natural individual without any specific quality. Thus, at the beginning of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau proudly claims his entitlement as an ordinary citizen in discussing politics as an ordinary person: “I shall be asked whether I am a prince or a lawgiver that I write on Politics? I reply not, and that is why I write on Politics” (Rousseau 1997e, 41; 3:351). Following this statement Rousseau finds his justification to discuss politics in his suffrage—that is, qualification—in a particular community: “Born a citizen of a free State, and a member of the sovereign, the right to vote in it is enough to impose on me the duty to learn about political affairs, regardless of how weak might be the influence of my voice on them” (Rousseau 1997e, 41; 3:351). However, it would be misleading to ascribe this justification to his attachment to Geneva. Rather, Rousseau’s project, including his political writings, is ultimately founded upon the recovery of the freedom and goodness of the individual.

Secondly, this individual but equal distribution of consciousness dissolves the separation between individuality and commonality. Individuals are no longer idiots outside commonality. Instead, they take on a certain communal, if not public, quality while remaining separated. The beginning paragraph of *Confessions* presents a most audacious expression of this communal quality of individual consciousness:

I am resolved on an undertaking that has no model and will have no imitator. I want to show my fellow-men a man in all the truth of nature; and this man is to be myself.

Myself alone. I feel my heart and I know men. I am not made like any that I have seen; I venture to believe that I was not made like any that exist. If I am not more deserving, at least I am different. As to whether nature did well or ill to break the mold in which I was cast, that is something no one can judge until they have read me.

Let the trumpet of judgment sound when it will, I will present myself with this book in my hand before the Supreme Judge. I will say boldly: “Here is what I have done, what I have thought, what I was. I have told the good and the bad with equal frankness. I have concealed nothing that was ill, added nothing that was good, and if I have sometimes used some indifferent ornamentation, this has only ever been to fill a void occasioned by my lack of memory; I may have supposed to be true what I know could have been so, never what I know to be false. I have shown myself as I was, contemptible and vile when that is how I was, good, generous, sublime, when that is how I was; I have disclosed my innermost self as you alone know it to be. Assemble about me, Eternal Being, the numberless host of my fellow-men; let them hear my confessions, let them groan at my unworthiness, let them blush at my wretchedness. Let each of them, here on the steps of your throne, in turn reveal his heart with the same sincerity; and then let one of them say to you, if he dares: *I was better than that man.*” (Rousseau 2000, 5; 1:5, italics in original)

The above paragraphs demonstrate the characteristics of Rousseau’s individuality in their eloquence, and they evince the paradoxical impasse of the same individuality in its complexity, the impasse that perpetually disturbs the realization of the ideal of individuality while inciting the desire for the ideal. In the following, I start with exploring how Rousseau’s orientation bridges the division between communality and individuality. Then, I return to examine the impasse that leads to ironical proliferation of imitative opinions, that is, clichés.

Rousseau’s individual claims importance by virtue of its uniqueness. The underlying tone of the paragraphs is Rousseau’s conviction of the uniqueness of his individuality. Not only does he embrace the difference between himself and others, but he also maintains novelty in writing *Confessions*, though it is unlikely that he was unaware of previous works, including Montaigne’s *Essays* and Augustine’s *Confession*. Nevertheless, his individuality is not simply distinctive in its difference from others. Rather, it is distinctive in that he is convinced of the value of his uniqueness to others. You, Rousseau asserts, should know Jean-Jacques. On the very first page of *Confessions*,

he asks readers the following: “Whoever you may be, whom destiny or my trust has made the arbiter of the fate of these notebooks, I entreat you, in the name of my misfortunes, of your compassion, and *of all human kind*, not to destroy a *unique* and *useful* work” (Rousseau 2000, 3; 1:3, italics mine).⁹ It is such conviction about the general importance of each separate individual that distinguishes *Confessions* from its predecessors. Augustine, for example, starts his *Confession* by humbly begging for God’s mercy to talk of himself: “[A]llow me to speak before your mercy, though I am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18: 27). Allow me to speak: for *I am addressing your mercy, not a man who would laugh at me*” (Augustine 1998, 6, italics mine). As worthless as “dust and ashes,” he addresses his *Confessions* to God. Nearly twelve hundred years after Augustine, Michel de Montaigne inserts at the beginning of his *Essays* a brief message to readers in which the assertion of humbleness is not entirely different from Augustine’s. “This book was written in good faith,” Montaigne excuses, “in it I have set myself no goal but a *domestic and private* one. I have had no thought of serving either you or my own glory” (Montaigne 1965, 2, italics mine). While both Augustine and Montaigne do not address their inward reflections to their readers and remain humble about the values of their individual stories, Rousseau embraces the communal value of his story. We should not ascribe this to mere differences in their personal dispositions. The humbleness of Augustine or Montaigne may disguise expressions of their audacities, as Rousseau criticizes “the false naivety” of Montaigne, who, “while pretending to confess his faults, is very careful to give himself only lovable ones” (Rousseau 2000, 505; 1:516-17). Yet, what is more important than the sincerity of each author is *the structure of narrative* that enables Rousseau to proudly claim the need for us to know his authentic self. We should not take his statement solely as the expression of the invention of a new inward self.¹⁰ While Rousseau is anxious that readers recognize his inner, authentic self, his statement goes beyond mere yearning for recognition, toward the need for others to understand him in the general interest of human beings.

⁹ In the preface of the Neuchâtel edition, he argues the need for readers more outspokenly: “I should like each person, in order that he might learn to judge himself correctly, to have at least one other point of comparison; that he should know himself and one other person, and that other person will be me” (Rousseau 2000, 643).

¹⁰ Representative interpretations that focus on Rousseau’s inwardness tend to pay less attention to the structure of narrative (see, e.g., Trilling 1971; Taylor 1989).

Why, then, does he believe in the importance of his *Confessions* for others? The world needs to know the unique story of Jean-Jacques, despite all his differences from other men, because it presents the truth. The truth here does not only mean the truthfulness of his narrative but also the truth of man in general: “I want to show my fellow-men *a man in all the truth of nature*” (Rousseau 2000, 5; 1:5, italics mine). As previously mentioned, Rousseau regards individuals to be equally free and good in nature. For him, all constraints and vices stem from society. While Jean-Jacques may look vile to others, his innermost self, his conscience/consciousness—in the French language, the word *conscience* means both—preserves the natural goodness that is equally attributed to each individual. The purpose of *Confessions* is to vindicate the innocence of human beings through presenting his own authentic, inner self that vile society never understands. Simply put, his authentic individuality, while unique in its existence and separated from others by the veil society imposes upon them, bears communal quality by virtue of its natural goodness. Therefore, narration of his personal history, that is, his conflictive interaction with society, is intended to reveal human innocence as well as the vice and unfreedom of society. Or, more precisely, Rousseau’s confession attains universal communality by explicating the crystallization of Jean-Jacques, a unique individual. For it is only through his conflict with society that he can show his innocence. As Starobinski illustrates, to vindicate human innocence and goodness, Rousseau presents his “beautiful soul” isolated from society: “The proposition that society is the opposite of nature leads immediately to the statement: *I am opposed to society....Society is collectively the negation of nature; Jean-Jacques would make himself, as a solitary individual, the negation of society*” (Starobinski 1988, 37, italics in original).

Now it is clear how Rousseau’s individuality dissolves the second assumption concerning the separation between commonality and individuality. While Aristotle regarded idiots to be constrained in their private, individual concerns, Rousseau’s individuality is connected with the whole human being qua unique individual¹¹; now individual opinion matters as a general public concern because of its natural goodness preserved in unique individuality against vile society. By virtue of this connection, one’s

¹¹ It is on this assumption of the deficiency of the individual—not the many, as such—that Aristotle defends the judgment of the many, even though “each individual, left to himself, forms an imperfect judgment” (Aristotle 1996, 1281b).

inner judgment attains common and communal value. In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze finds in Rousseau the emergence of a new mode of enunciation. Rousseauian orientation grounds language upon the “finite synthetic unity of the person” so that “the I and representation” coexist (Deleuze 1990, 138; 1969, 163).¹² While the Platonic philosopher achieves truthfulness of his words by ascending from the individual constrained in a cave to the infinite world of Ideas, that is, by stripping off the particularities that constrain him, Rousseau’s unique individuality grounds the infinite world of representation upon his unique individuality against society.

Notwithstanding his thorough criticism against opinion—products of stupid intelligence of men in society (the *Second Discourse*)—and notwithstanding his firm conviction that under general will citizen leave aside their individual opinions (*The Social Contract*), Rousseau is a paradoxical protagonist of democratic ideal of voicing individual opinion in that his notion of individuality, while meant to repel subjugation to opinions, leads to the proliferation of opinions, which then turn into clichés.

This paradoxical effect of Rousseau’s individuality has its cause in its double characteristics of uniqueness and universality. As previously mentioned, Rousseau holds that each unique individual bears universal communality through attesting to the natural goodness and freedom of human beings. The uniqueness does not contradict its universal commonality and communality, but rather, they sustain each other within Rousseau’s conviction: human beings are born free, but everywhere in chains. To vindicate this maxim, Rousseau appeals to his authentic uniqueness as evidence, but only on the condition that it is hidden to society. In a sense, the power of his argumentation depends upon the extent to which society misunderstands him. Because Jean-Jacques is “not made like any that exist” (Rousseau 2000, 5; 1:5) in the corrupt society of his time, he can claim his authentic goodness, which has not been contaminated by the evil of society.

Here lies a dilemma of Rousseau’s individuality; because this individual is hidden from society, he can show his authenticity and natural goodness through perpetual conflict with the society around him. If society starts to understand him, such reconciliation means the contamination of his authentic individuality by vile society.

¹² In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze calls Rousseauian unique individuality “personality,” distinguishing it from what he calls the “individual,” the analytical identity of individual being (Deleuze 1990, “Nineteenth Series of Humor”).

Thus, the conflict in the relationship needs to be perpetuated; revelation and recognition of unique individuality will never be achieved. This subverted logic, moreover, drives the individual into *inauthentic pursuit of authenticity*. Pressed by the fear of being assimilated into society, or the realm of imbecility, Jean-Jacques acts against its expectations and morals. But his revolt is inauthentic in that his passive reaction against society is still under the influence of society. As a result, his behavior becomes theatrical, or even mimetic. It is theatrical in that Rousseau needs to mold his individuality in an antagonistic relationship with society (thus, he needs to produce conflicts with society). And, his theatrical behavior becomes imitative: in presenting his innocent individuality, he models it following examples of imaginary or historical heroic people. Focusing on Rousseau's obsession with imaginary lives and pseudonym, Starobinski states:

With few exceptions, he never sought to hide his true identity but instead to acquire a new identity and make it his own. He donned masks not to dupe others but to change his own life. When Rousseau lies, he believes in his lies, just as he believed he had become Tasso while reading *Gerusalemme Liberata* and Roman while reading Plutarch. Rousseau becomes absorbed in his fiction to such a degree that no hiatus remains between the old "reality" that he leaves behind and the fiction that fascinates him. (Starobinski 1988, 59)

Starobinski's observation would be entirely applicable to Emma Bovary, the heroin of inauthentic voic whom I discuss later in this paper. The irony here is that Rousseau, while criticizing the imbecility of society where people are subject to deceptive opinions, becomes subject to the image of others. In so doing, Rousseau's criticism of imbecile society translates the imbecility into the logic of authenticity and intensifies it. In fact, Rousseau's imbecile subjugation is more formidable: while people in society—in salons, at court—play with opinions as masks, Rousseau believes his mask to be an authentic expression of himself. With this confusion, or dissolution of the distinction between fiction and reality, imbecility of deceptive opinion turns into the stupidity of cliché, in which we can no longer distinguish opinions qua masks and authentic opinions: *the Rousseauian individual speaks and lives the opinion of others without knowing it*.

The same dilemma appears in Rousseau's orientation to language and communication. Rousseau's vindication of universal human goodness with unique

individuality faces a fundamental difficulty when it attempts to express such individuality. If people in society are “in chains” and if, as such, those people as a whole are antagonistic to Rousseau, how can he persuade them of his authenticity with unveiled eyes? In terms of communication, the very difficulty of Rousseau’s project lies in finding an authentic language uncorrupted by opinions. As previously seen, for Rousseau, language is a critical moment that turns good and free people in nature into those unfree and corrupted with vanity and opinions. Then, are not Rousseau’s own narration, expression, and communication, too, subject to this corruptive quality of language, and becoming opinions? At the level of internal conviction, Rousseau can rely on the simple fact that society is against him. Standing, or purged outside society, he can claim for his authenticity as a reservoir of natural goodness of human beings. However, as soon as he starts showing his authenticity to others, the simple antagonism between corrupt society and innocent individual becomes untenable. Now Rousseau as an author needs to enter society again, showing his innocence through the medium of corrupt society, the language of opinions.

Rousseau is not ignorant of this difficulty of communication. Indeed, he talks of a “melodic language” as another, authentic language different from our degenerated imitative language. According to his “Essay on the Origin of Languages,” this melodic language, as a primitive form closer to the origin of language, enables people to communicate their immediate passions without distorting them by virtue of the power of sensuous melody, while our contemporary language is a degenerate form that, having lost its sensuous melodious quality, is able not to move or persuade people but only to preach sermons (Rousseau 1997a, 295-99; 5:424-29).¹³ However, he cannot dissolve the difficulty of communication by appealing to the melodious language. For, the language has already degenerated so thoroughly that the “final catastrophe occurred which destroyed the progress of the human spirit” (Rousseau 1997a, 296; 5:425). The melodious language is no longer available. Rousseau seems to retain the prospect of turning the

¹³ Related characteristics in Rousseau’s work are his reliance on sense and feeling as the guides of action and his delegation of thought. Thus, it seems misleading to find in Rousseau the origin of democratic orientation toward individual reflection. However, despite his recurrent criticism of thinking activity (especially reasoning), Rousseau’s orientation toward individuality marks a stark departure from the tradition before him, and the effect of his new orientation reaches the issue of reflection regardless of his own attitude toward thought.

degenerate language back into the melodious language; indeed, he writes in a style designed to do so. The idea of the lawgiver in *The Social Contract* echoes this hope when Rousseau presents himself as a genius who, equipped with the power to change human nature itself, could give entirely new institutions and laws to people.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the lawgiver does not solve the difficulty of communication either. As Rousseau himself admits: “The wise who would speak to the vulgar in their own rather than in the vulgar language will not be understood by them” (Rousseau 1997b, 70; 3:383). Even if the lawgiver or genius could deliver authentic language to people, s/he needs to address it in the inauthentic language people use.

In the end, this difficulty pushed Rousseau toward the denunciation of communication with others in *Reveries of the Solitary Thinker*. Written as a “return to the rigorous and sincere self-examination that I formerly called my *Confession*,” the *Reveries* no longer wished to gain the public’s support: “Everything external is henceforth foreign to me. I no longer have any neighbors, fellow-men or brothers in this world” (Rousseau 1979b, 31-2; 1:999). However, we, the readers, are tempted to ask: Then, why did he keep writing? Despite his disavowal of the reading public, the very fact that Rousseau wrote the *Reveries* shows his yearning and dependence on communication.¹⁵ Instead of exploring Rousseau’s personal trajectory, here I want to focus on the effect Rousseau’s orientation toward individuality had for the subsequent period, the time of democracy.

Rousseau’s legacy lies in his liberation of speech and call for individual authenticity. As we have seen, Rousseau’s orientation toward individuality is different from that of his predecessors in its universal significance. The universality here does not only refer to that of Rousseau’s unique individual, but also to that of its need for everybody. His appeal to readers in the first paragraphs of *Confession* attempts to awaken others by calling for their judgment of Jean-Jacques. Those readers can do so because

¹⁴ Textual evidence suggests the connection between Rousseau’s criticism of degenerate language in the “Essay on the Origin of the Languages” and his idea of lawgiver in *The Social Contract*. The “Essay,” originally written as a part of the *Second Discourse*, ends by explicating the political consequence of the degeneration of language. There Rousseau laments that, under the degenerate language, people are fettered. While the melodious language enabled people to assemble with each other to exchange, deliver, and hear eloquent persuasion, our society and language keep people scattered and “impossible to speak” (Rousseau 1997a, 299; 5:429). This diagnosis of his contemporary political condition resonates with the argument in *Second Discourse*, which he suggests would be followed by *The Social Contract*. For a detailed elaboration, see Scott (1997).

¹⁵ See Starobinski (1988, 251-53).

they, too, can be unique individuals when they are apart from the vile society around them (this is a conclusion from the aforementioned premise that natural human beings are free and innocent). Rousseau's appeal asks everybody to become unique individuals. However, as individuals, readers need to be able to narrate their own unique stories because, as seen above, the hallmark of uniqueness depends on such a narrative. Awakened by Rousseau's confession, a multitude of readers starts to narrate their own stories, believing themselves to be unique. Yet, their narrations are prone to the same difficulty of communication as Rousseau faced: though they believe in authenticity, they lack proof in distinguishing their authentic voices from inauthentic ones. Indeed, the very fact of their being awakened to become individuals shows their fundamental dependence on another's opinion. Does Rousseau not say that his *Confessions* would not have any "imitator"? And indeed, Rousseau's pursuit of authenticity itself slides into inauthentic imitation of others. In terms of its effect, *Confessions* rather marks the birth of a time when everybody speaks in the voice of others, which they believe to be their proper and authentic voices. Such proliferation of opinions is the consequence of Rousseau's individuality. Intended to rescue "infallible" conscience from the stupid opinions of society, Rousseau's individuality paradoxically results in the proliferation of stupid opinions, that is, the voice of others now enunciated as the authentic voices of individuals' uniqueness.

This proliferation of individual voices is congruent with democracy. It is congruent not only because of Rousseau's influence upon democratic thought or the importance of individual opinion for democratic politics. Rather, more importantly, we experience such a proliferation of voices because democracy is based upon the equal individuality Rousseau espouses. The Rousseauian equal individuality I have explored so far is constituted of three moments: nobodiness, everybodiness, and becoming-ness. First, the individual is nobody, because vile society hides his true nature. Second, the individual is also everybody by virtue of the common human goodness preserved in authenticity. Third, to reveal and attain authenticity, the individual needs to become somebody different from nobody. These triangulated moments of individuality constitute what Sieyès ascribes to "the third estate," the democratic sovereign, in his manifesto of

democracy, *What is the Third Estate?*, written under the strong influence of Rousseau. The first page of the manifesto reads:

The plan of this work is quite simple. There are three questions that we have to ask of ourselves:

1. What is the Third Estate?—*Everything*
2. What, until now, has it been in the existing political order?—*Nothing*
3. What does it want to be?—*Something* (Sieyès 2003, 94)

The subject here is the entity rather than the individual. But what is more important is the parallel structure between the Rousseauian individual and the democratic subject. Sieyès's formulation is only made possible by the structure of individuality Rousseau introduced. And, the result of such democratic orientation to the Third Estate and individual is, as we will see in the next section, the proliferation of voices in which authenticity is always indiscernible with inauthentic imitation.¹⁶

3. Strategy of Solutions: Rousseau, J. S. Mill and Tocqueville

Political thought after Rousseau did not entirely fail to notice this new constellation of opinion in politics, the constellation caused by the ideal of the democratic notion of equal individuality. Some of the central problems the post-Rousseauian political thinkers tackled, such as the capacity of judgment of an ignorant mass, the predicament of individualism, and the tyranny of opinion, stem from this new constellation. Furthermore, their diagnoses and proposed solutions have been providing perspectives under which the influential ideas of political theory operate today, including Kantian impartial morality, Schmittean decisionism, liberal individuality, and civil society. Nevertheless, their respective diagnoses, I argue, fail to acknowledge adequately the condition that the very idea of individual opinion-making, while meant to repel the stupid opinions of others, reproduces stupid clichés. Consequently, their solutions do not suffice to respond to the reality of democratic politics, the reality produced by the ideal of

¹⁶ Regarding the possible effect of Sieyès's formula upon the production of autonomous subjugation to others, I owe much to Tominaga (2005).

democracy. This insufficiency bears a fundamental implication for political theorizing: the need to turn a mode of political theorizing from solving problems to negotiating problems. The insufficiency of these solutions attests to the ineluctable quality of the problematic reality, rather than faults inherent to the specific solutions. Although these thinkers acknowledge the difficulty of solving the problem once and for all, their orientations are still directed toward solution. If the problem of cliché is ineluctable, it implies the need to *negotiate* the problem rather than to give solutions.

Rousseau's Lawgiver

Before moving on to examine post-Rousseauian thinkers, I want to briefly look at Rousseau's own solution to the deficient intellect in politics. The impasse of Rousseau's solution—the lawgiver—helps clarify the need for negotiation, which post-Rousseauian political thought in the nineteenth century addresses but does not fully develop. The impasse of Rousseau's own orientation, which dreams of establishing an entirely new society via political measure, reveals the need for political thought to negotiate in realms other than that of formal, institutionalized politics—that is, in the realm of society.

A reaction to the problem of speaking inauthentic opinions is already observable in *The Social Contract*, at two junctures, of which the second theoretically precedes the first.¹⁷ The first is concerning the difficulty of distinguishing the general will from the will of all, or public interest from private interest. People can make errors; they cannot always discern the public interest, as they could confuse it with the aggregation of private interests. This difficulty of distinguishing the two is troubling for democratic theories. How can we reason to reach the correct public interest, when democratic politics are often governed by the aggregative democracy of private interests? On the theoretical level, however, theorists pose promising solutions. For Rousseau, the distinction can be made by letting individuals stay true to their individual authentic, proper voices. Yet, how can we identify what is proper to each? Dissatisfied with Rousseau's answer, Habermas and deliberative democrats turn to Kant, introducing, instead, the impartial moral standpoint of “what is proper to each.” Habermas's solution echoes in his narrative of the

¹⁷ In tracking the problems of *The Social Contract*—and of democratic politics—my explanation is indebted to Honig's interpretation, which she develops in Honig (2009, ch. 1).

development of the “bourgeois public sphere” (Habermas 1991), in which he regards the Kantian notion of critique as an appropriate antidote to Rousseau’s lack of critical attitude. Surely, Habermas and the deliberative democrats are not entirely satisfied with Kant, for whom moral imperative can introduce the despotism of (moral) truth. But the difficulty can be solved by introducing a discourse ethics, or public deliberation, that helps us to agree on reasonable morality beyond respective private interests. Thus, the problem seems to be solved. In fact, the second juncture in Rousseau runs deeper, limiting the relevance and the scope of these solutions.

At the second juncture, such resolution is not available. The second difficulty, the problem of “blind multitude,” concerns the very capacity of people’s judgment—the capacity for proper opinion: “How will a *blind multitude*, which often does not know what it wills because it rarely knows what is good for it, carry out an undertaking as great, as difficult as a system of legislation? By itself the people always wills the good, but by itself it does not always see it. The general will is always upright, but the judgment which guides it is not always enlightened” (Rousseau 1997e, 68; 3:380, italics mine). Unable to judge, the blindness of the multitude disavows the above solutions to the first altogether. The problem here does not concern correct reasoning, but rather, the existence of such a body that reasons. How can we first reach an agreement to establish the polity, whereby constituencies start reasoning? Lacking such body, “[a]ll are equally in need of guides” (Rousseau 1997e, 68; 3:380).

Rousseau’s own solution to this blindness is the lawgiver. The lawgiver, with whom Rousseau compares “the mechanic who invents the machine” (Rousseau 1997e, 69; 3:381), creates law with his extraordinary intelligence. As an extra-ordinary figure, the lawgiver is external to the people: “In a word, he must take from man his forces in order to give him fares which are foreign to him and of which he cannot make use without the help of others” (Rousseau 1997e, 69; 3:381-2). In a broader perspective, the lawgiver anticipates two notions in the Western thought after Rousseau. The one is the idea of genius. The idea of the lawgiver as a god-like figure whose gift surpasses that of ordinary people and whose originality does not allow imitation resonates with the idea of genius that the German Romantics developed under the influence of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. The other legacy of Rousseau’s lawgiver is the political paradox that lies

behind diverse problems such as the Schmittean political decisionism. This is the chicken-and-egg paradox in which there needs to be good people to have good laws, which are supposed to come from good people. To break this paradox, thinkers such as Schmitt call for a sovereign decisionistic instance that initiates order, and more importantly, people. In both cases, this problem of the blind multitude and the solution of lawgiver attest to the long-lasting desire (as well as difficulty) for sovereignty, for a radical founder.

The lawgiver, however, cannot solve the very question Rousseau poses. As Connolly and Honig point out, the problem of the blind multitude poses the issue of the chicken and the egg. It is actually a paradox. Rousseau himself touches upon the paradoxical nature of the problem when he identifies the impasse of the lawgiver (see Connolly 2004, ch. 5; Honig 2009, ch. 1). Because the extraordinary wisdom of the lawgiver is foreign to people, Rousseau states, “The wise who would speak to the vulgar in their own rather than in the vulgar language will not be understood by them” (Rousseau 1997e, 70; 3:382). To bridge this gap, Rousseau claims that the lawgiver needs the authority of God: “This sublime reason [of the lawgiver] which rises beyond the reach of vulgar men it is whose decisions the lawgiver places in the mouth of the immortals, in order to rally by divine authority those whom human prudence could not move” (Rousseau 1997e, 71; 3:383-84). He wants the lawgiver to elucidate only a simple theology to avoid the kind of complexity that leads to multiple interpretation. However, as Honig persuasively shows, even sacred scripts cannot prevent the proliferation of multiple interpretations.¹⁸ The solution of radical founding retains the political paradox: the extraordinary wisdom needs to be articulated in communal words. And, even if the wisdom is beyond our finite common understanding, this distance cannot prohibit us from interpreting that wisdom. Thus, what the paradox illuminates is not the need for radical founding of a polity or people, but rather, the need for an ongoing process of politics—of interpretation and responses—which, in a sense, the paradox sustains.

Indeed, this openness of political paradox to interpretation itself is the result of Rousseauian individuality. Interpretations proliferate because there is no longer the

¹⁸ The same problem haunts the work and words of genius. Indeed, the very fact that even sacred law is open to multiple interpretations seems to be the condition of politics (Cf. Nancy 1999, 107-73).

qualification of political reasoning. With the old division between craft (*technē*) on the one hand, of which philosophical truth (*epistēmē*) was a powerful candidate, and mere opinion (*doxa*) on the other, dismantled, ordinary opinions become politically meaningful voices. Put differently, Rousseau's solution of the lawgiver, or its incapacity, marks the limit of a conventional political orientation that would exclusively focus on the foundation of new polity. This limit suggests the necessity to come up with a new way of coming to terms with this new problem; in fact, J. S. Mill and Tocqueville open up new ways of doing so by focusing on society and the individual rather than the founding of new polity or an ideal form of government.

John Stuart Mill's Liberal Individuality

Whereas Rousseau's lawgiver is an attempt to found and contain people's judgment within the sovereign law, it does not directly deal with cliché as a new phenomenon under modern democratic politics. Political thought in the nineteenth century, namely those of John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville, show a more direct engagement with the new constellation of opinion under democracy—the rule of people grounded by the opinions of equal individuals. Their engagements with the new constellation appear along two new frontiers. First, they address the problem of democratic politics in society beyond the narrow sphere of formal politics; with their broader focus, they acknowledge that democracy is not only a matter of the mere form of ruling, but that it is sustained by a new configuration of individuality and equality. Rousseau touches on the social aspect when he describes the power of the lawgiver to influence human nature itself beyond its narrow political effect. In addition, Rousseau's *Second Discourse* addresses inequality in society, which attests to the emergence of society as a new social arena. However, the political thought in the nineteenth century (exemplified by J. S. Mill and Tocqueville) mark the stark difference between it and that of Rousseau in that the former addresses the social realm that is constituted of equal individuals, and as such covers all corners of life as the new political phenomenon established by the democratic principle of equal individuality. While the society Rousseau criticizes is the class society marked by inequality, the society Mill and Tocqueville observe is the totalized social realm of equal individuals, which is, in a sense,

the result of Rousseau's call for individuality.¹⁹ This emergence of society does not contradict my earlier claim about the internalization of stupidity into politics. What appears as the inclusion of individuals under politics here means the dissolution of a specifically privileged locus of politics. This new social realm, as the second difference, leads Mill and Tocqueville to problematize individuals' opinions in a different way from the classical dichotomy between *epistēmē* and *doxa*. Under a democratic society in which every individual matters equally, without any *de jure* room for a preestablished hierarchy, opinions appear to take a different value. They are no longer held in antagonism against, or considered subject to, truth; rather, opinions come to have their own quality in that opinion neither supplants truth nor devalues truth. Still, individual opinion comes to be seen as an autonomous political force independent of its subjugation to truth. Now the quality of opinion, not its truthfulness, comes matter to politics. In the following, I explore how J. S. Mill and Tocqueville, as two influential thinkers of the nineteenth century, responded to this emergence of the "rule of opinion" as an autonomous social force in contrast to the Platonic rule of truth.

Mill's *On Liberty* addresses this new constellation of opinion when he presents the "tyranny of the majority" (Mill 1991, 8) as a new problem that democracy introduces into contemporary *society*. By calling for "Civil, or Social liberty" against the social tyranny that "leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself" (Mill 1991, 5, 9), he acknowledges a fundamental shift of democratic politics that goes beyond the narrow sphere of politics; the power of opinion penetrates into individuals. Mill's liberty, therefore, concerns "the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual" (Mill 1991, 5), resisting categorization into the camp of "negative freedom" as many commentators do.²⁰ The problem for Mill is not limited to mere interference into individual rights, rather it extends to addressing a tendency of society to foster "mediocrity" through the imitation of others—that is, through clichés (Mill 1991, 73):

¹⁹ Regarding Rousseau's contribution to the emergence of society, see for example, Arendt (1998, ch. 2). Regarding post-Rousseauian society being, in principle, egalitarian and all-encompassing, I do not intend to underestimate the bourgeois character of the civil society that Hegel and Marx criticize. Yet, here I want to emphasize the indispensable role the Rousseauian orientation of individuality plays for civil society in its entirety, instead of pointing out the historical reality of a limited bourgeois civil society.

²⁰ Cf. Berlin (1969a).

As is usually the case with ideals which exclude one-half of what is desirable, the present standard of approbation produces only an inferior imitation of the other half. Instead of great energies by vigorous reason, and strong feelings strongly controlled by a conscientious will, its result is weak feelings and weak energies, which therefore can be kept in outward conformity to rule without any strength either of will or reason. (Mill 1991, 77)

The opinion of the masses makes mediocrity a prevalent tendency in society against which Mill defends the creativity of individual perfection. If Mill's purpose was to defend an individual from external intervention, he would not need to criticize the imitation of others. As far as individuals regard their actions or opinions to be their own, their subjective deception of creativity would not matter. For Mill, however, imitation and lack of originality appears as the malaise of democratic society. Indeed, the same concern for imitation stands at the core of Mill's own existential struggle against the influence of his father, James Mill—the struggle through which he becomes an original thinker, the “crisis in my mental history” that he describes in his *Autobiography*. One of the tormenting obsessions of the period, Mill recollects, is “the thought of the exhaustibility of musical combinations”: “The octave consists only of five tones and two semi-tones, which can be put together in only a limited number of ways, of which but a small proportion are beautiful: most of them, it seemed to me, must have been already discovered, and there could not be room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers, to strike out, as these had done, entirely new and surprisingly rich veins of musical beauty” (Mill 1960, 102).²¹

This obsession with the repetition of the same is consonant with his distaste for mimetic clichés (he confesses that his personal depression partly stems from his pessimism about the future of mankind—thus, his obsession does not only concern his personal enjoyment of music, but also the future prospect of society). Such criticism and fear of mimetic mediocrity may be reminiscent of the critics of mass society in the twentieth century. However, Mill's liberal principle does not allow him to ally with this camp. Rather, his admiration of the diversity of taste against monotonous society shows

²¹ For an interpretation emphasizing this obsession for novelty in Mill, see Cavell (2005, 84).

an affinity for the value-pluralistic and perfectionist strands of liberals.²² On several occasions, Mill presents diversity itself as a value to be retained, regardless of whether it is used as an instrument for any higher principle.²³ “If it were only that people have diversities of taste, that is reason enough for not attempting to shape them all after one model” (Mill 1991, 75). Simply put, his diagnosis goes well beyond the narrow realm of negative liberty and touches upon the predicament of modern, democratic, egalitarian society that I extracted from Rousseau’s notion of individuality.

To his contemporary society thus diagnosed, however, Mill’s solution draws upon a resource similar to that used by Rousseau: individuality. According to his succinct articulation in *On Liberty*, “It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. Where, not the person’s own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress” (Mill 2001, 63). Mill’s recommendation of individuals’ “different experiments of living” (Mill 2001, 63) may seem to be an appropriate and sufficient solution at first glance, given his central concern against the rule of the mass over individuals: “At present individuals are lost in the crowd. In politics it is almost a triviality to say that public opinion now rules the world” (Mill 2001, 73). And Mill’s call for individual perfection remains a powerful inspiration among current liberal and democratic theories that hope to go beyond the prevalent but narrow idea of anti-perfectionist liberalism, responding to the late-modern condition of democratic society.²⁴ Regarding this solution of liberal perfection, critics often question its compatibility with Mill’s liberal principle that is seemingly a straightforward manifestation of negative liberty.²⁵

²² Perfectionism usually refers to the view maintaining that government should encourage individual pursuit of the good (see, e.g., Wolfe and Hittinger, 2003), and as such, it tends to recommend a specific conception of good morality. However, here I adopt Cavell’s notion of “perfectionism without perfection,” which does not recommend a specific moral code and denies ultimate perfection while emphasizing individual pursuit of moral perfection (Cavell 2005, 1-18; see also Flathman 1996; 2006).

²³ Cf. Ten (2004, 42-44).

²⁴ See, for example, Rosenblum (1987) and Kateb (2003).

²⁵ “[T]he sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any number of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm from others....” (Mill 2001, 14).

But, a more fundamental question to be asked here is the capacity of Mill's proposal to solve the problem, that is, the tyranny of the majority, or the world of clichés. Even if we succeed in implementing the liberal individuality among constituencies, it does not necessarily solve the problem of mimetic desire among individuals. Liberal individuality may diversify the opinions of people, but such diversification may be most likely to replace the tyranny of opinion with that of opinions—pluralism of clichés. A mere liberal resistance against conformism does not suffice to solve the obsession Mill had in his personal crisis, the exhaustion of novelty: Having diverse melodies does not preclude the proliferation of familiar melodies.

The difficulty with Mill's solution is that the very desire underlying his ideal of individuality is paradoxically the cause of the problem as well. As we have seen in the previous section, the notion of equal individuality—that is, everybody wishing to shed anonymity to become somebody—ironically produces individuals who mimic the opinions and actions of others while believing themselves to be authentic. Furthermore, despite being inspired from “Pagan self-assertion” (Mill 2001, 69), which Mill thinks is unavailable in the Christian-European tradition of his time, Mill's individuality, too, shares three elements of Rousseauian individuality.²⁶ First, Mill's individual is threatened by the pressure of dissolution into anonymity under the tyranny of the majority. Second, his individual strives for unique originality. Third, despite differentiation from others, Mill admires the individual not only for private happiness but for contributing to the progress of the larger society, stating individuality to be “the chief ingredient of individual and social progress” (Mill 2003, 63). Notwithstanding these shared elements, Mill proposes the very cause of the problem as a solution when he ascribes a weak individual to mere “outward conformity,” the lack of “strength either of will or reason” (Mill 1991, 77). But again, the strength of will or reason does not suffice to solve Mill's melancholy over the exhaustion of newness. In fact, the very idea of music in terms of novelty and originality is relatively new; without this idea, the exhaustion cannot appear as a problem. Mill's solution fails to acknowledge this complicity between the cause and solution.

²⁶ As Urbinati persuasively argues, Greek thought plays a crucial role in forming Mill's orientation to individuality and politics. Yet, this Greek influence does not contradict the modernity of Mill's diagnoses and ideas.

Tocqueville's Association

Alexis de Tocqueville shares with Mill an insight on the malaise of democratic society, while offering a different kind of solution that is presumably more influential than Mill's among current democratic theories. In diagnosing contemporary politics, Tocqueville, too, sees democracy not only as a matter of formal institution but also as a matter of a fundamental shift in society, or moreover, as a matter of way of life.²⁷ For him, democracy's distinctiveness lies in the equality of condition—toward which Western society has been developing—as well as in its generative cause, and individualism as democracy's principal manifestation rather than popular sovereignty or universal suffrage.

Moreover, Tocqueville concurs with Mill on the diagnosis of democratic malaise, which is the erosion of isolated individuals and subjugation to public opinion that Tocqueville thinks leads to “democratic despotism.”²⁸

In times of equality, because of their similarity, men have no faith in one another; but this same similarity gives them an almost unlimited trust in the judgment of the public; for it does not seem plausible to them that when all have the same enlightenment, truth is not found on the side of the greatest number.

...The same equality that makes him independent of each of his fellow citizens in particular leaves him isolated and without defense against the action of the greatest number.

The public therefore has a singular power among democratic peoples, the very idea of which aristocratic nations could not conceive. It does not persuade [one] [*sic*] of its beliefs, it imposes them and makes them penetrate souls by a sort of immense pressure of the minds of all on the intellect of each. (Tocqueville 2000, 409)

By problematizing the rule of opinion, however, Tocqueville does not deny democratic rule based on people's opinion, equality, and individualism or replace the rule

²⁷ For a study that assesses Tocqueville's political thought as democratic theory beyond narrow institutions, see, for example, Manent (1996, especially ch. 1).

²⁸ While the first volume of *Democracy of America* addresses the problem as the “tyranny of majority,” the second volume, on which my analysis focuses, addresses it in a wider perspective as the “tyranny of opinion.”

of opinion with that of truth. Along with Mill, he acknowledges the irresistible and irrefutable tendency toward democratic society as a condition that constrains his solution: mere denial or criticism of democracy from an external standpoint is no longer relevant and should be replaced by a new political science that would critically engage democratic society from within. In fact, he seems to go further than Mill to acknowledge the pervasive quality of democratic ideals in society when, for example, he mentions the idea of the individual's perfectibility under democratic equality. While the idea of perfectibility itself is as old as human society, Tocqueville argues, democratic equality "gives it a new character" (Tocqueville 2000, 427): in a time of democratic equality, people's pursuit of perfection and development becomes infinite, while pre-democratic society kept such pursuit modest and circumscribed.

By ascribing this drive toward infinite perfectibility to democracy, he shows an understanding that individual perfection, which Mill proposes as a solution to democratic society, is nothing but an effect of the democratic society itself. Indeed, Tocqueville shares a deep awareness of the constraint of his time upon his own observation, that his diagnosis, too, is set by the democratic society, emanating from within it. Pointing out the influence of American democracy on language,²⁹ that is, the preference for abstract words and ideas, he does not fail to notice that his own observations reflect this preference as well:

I have often made use of the word equality in an absolute sense; I have, in addition, personified equality in several places, and so I have come to say that equality does certain things or abstains from certain others. One can affirm that the men of the century of Louis XIV would not have spoken in this way; it would never have come into the mind of any of them to use the word equality without applying it to a particular thing, and they would sooner have renounced the use of it than have consented to make equality into a living person. (Tocqueville 2000, 457)

Tocqueville may be aristocratic in his personal disposition, torn between his nostalgia for virtuous and static aristocratic society on the one hand and the irrefutable reality of

²⁹ "These abstract words that fill democratic languages, and of which use is made at every turn without linking them to any particular fact, enlarge and veil thought; they render the expression more rapid and the idea less clear" (Tocqueville 2000, 457).

emerging democratic society on the other. But it is misleading to view his diagnosis as made from a standpoint outside democratic society.

Tocqueville's awareness of the pervasiveness of democracy, moreover, credits his observation with a certain insight upon the democratic ideal of opinion-making along two lines. The first is the central role individual judgment plays under democracy. According to Tocqueville, democratic individuals rely upon their respective reasoning as the sole source for their judgments. Relying upon one's own reasoning here does not mean that they are more rational than those in feudal society—Tocqueville, as we will see later, notices a certain erroneous quality of individual judgment as well as its tendency toward subordinating particulars to general ideas—but that individuals' *opinions* (that is, doxa based on their judgments) play the central role in society and politics. With his observation of individuals' preference for general ideas, Tocqueville's notion of individualism captures the moment of totality—the individual being everybody—that assumes the general importance of distinctive individuals for society, as well as the other two moments of individuals being nobody and becoming somebody. It is easy to see that his notion of individualism penetrates the latter two moments when he notices the individual's similarity with others, which threatens the individual's disappearance into the anonymity of nobody, and the ambition to become an independent and distinctive individual.³⁰ Finally, the preference for general ideas among individuals attests to the moment of totality, elucidating how individuals assume the importance of their respective opinions vis-à-vis the entire society. According to Tocqueville, general ideas, which fit the condition of equality whereby particular differences are assimilated to sameness, lead individuals to speak on behalf of general causes:

Previously I showed how equality of conditions brought each to seek the truth by himself. It is easy to see that such a method will imperceptibly make the human mind tend toward general ideas. When I repudiate the traditions of class, profession, and family, when I escape the empire of example to seek by the effort of my reason alone the path to follow, I am inclined to draw the grounds of my opinions from the very nature of man, which necessarily leads me, *almost without*

³⁰ Surely, when Sieyès calls the third estate “nobody,” he has in his mind its marginalized status in his contemporary hierarchical society. Yet, what is important is that the structure itself persists in democratic society, where anonymity presses individuality into insignificance.

my knowing it, toward a great number of very general notions. (Tocqueville 2000, 413-44, italics mine)

In this way, the independence of one's own judgment ironically leads individuals to speak on behalf of general humankind, society, etc., while "without knowing it," assuming one's independence.

Second, we can see that such dependence on general ideas underlies the subjugation to the opinions of others, or even imitations of others. Although Tocqueville himself does not analyze the connection explicitly, it is not difficult to see in his account the mechanism of this slide into subjugation and imitation. Unable to grasp the particulars, individuals rely upon general causes that apply to everybody, or imitate the precedents that seem to resemble their situations. Thus, as Tocqueville notices about an incident in the 1848 February Revolution, protagonists of the revolution imitated the words and deeds of those of the 1789 French Revolution, which were inadequate as exemplary models at that time:

In this case the imitation was so evident that the terrible originality of the facts remained concealed beneath it. It was a time when every imagination was besmeared with the crude colours with which Lamartine had been daubing his *Girondins*. The men of the first Revolution were living in every mind, their deeds and words present to every memory. All that I saw that day bore the visible impress of those recollections; it seemed to me throughout as though they were engaged in acting the French Revolution, rather than continuing it. (Tocqueville 1896, 68)

Tocqueville's observation here is resonant with Marx's famous assertion in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* that revolutions are carried out "[t]he first time as high tragedy, and the second time again as low farce" (Marx 1996, 31), as well as with Flaubert's description of the revolution in *Sentimental Education*, in which characters speak and play only in clichés. Democratic society's desire for perfection and novelty relapses into the reproduction of the same and ignorance of novelty amidst events around them (such as the difference between 1789 and 1848). This is the stupidity of the 1848.

Tocqueville's proposed solution to the predicament of democratic society, however, appears insufficient. His proposals for solution vary significantly even within

Democracy in America, but here I focus on his idea of association.³¹ Association, whether civil or political, counters the predicament of democratic society, namely the despotism of opinion, in two ways. First, free associations prevent individuals' subjugation to monotonous opinion by giving them the necessary measures to spread their own opinions and influence others. With this influential power of group, individuals can disseminate their new ideas to broader society and politics. Second, in addition to helping to voice one's own ideas, association teaches isolated individuals how to interact with others, opening their otherwise closed society composed of homogeneous members to plurality and differences. Through participating in associational activities, people come to learn the skill of cooperating with others, the skill that is most actively pursued in politics.

Tocqueville's solution to the problem of the tyranny of opinion through association has inspired contemporary democratic theory's preoccupation with civil society, which republican, deliberative, and communitarian theorists regard as the key to revive participatory democratic practices among citizens against the privatization and atomization of citizens and bureaucratization of politics.³² For example, we can see in Tocqueville the image of deliberating members of association, which although the purpose is not necessarily political, nonetheless has a positive effect on politics—a vision similar to Habermas's "literary public sphere" (Habermas 1991). Thus, Tocqueville's solution of association exemplifies one dominant strand in democratic theory.

Despite its huge influence on the literature on civil society, I maintain that Tocqueville's association is insufficient to solve the problem it is meant to combat. The difficulty lies in his implicit assumption that communication held within and between associations should be less prone to distortion and control than those among privatized individuals and those between individuals and centralized bureaucracy. "Reciprocal action of men upon one another," which Tocqueville claims to be the key to enlarge hearts, develop minds, and renew ideas, can be operative only in associations that sustain

³¹ The other proposals include grassroots democracy of township, the doctrine of well-understood self-interest, religion, and most of all, political freedom, which underlies all of those proposals. Here I focus on the idea of association (1) because the idea most directly responds to the despotism of opinion that Tocqueville problematized in the second volume of *Democracy*, and while he does not mention the township in the second volume, he does not necessarily discuss religion or self-interest as solutions to the problem, and (2) because the idea of association has a significant influence on current literature regarding civil society.

³² See, e.g., Taylor (1995) and Cohen and Arato (1994).

and renew “the circulation of sentiments and ideas” (Tocqueville 2000, 491). Moreover, without this reciprocal communication, we can fall prey to imposition or indoctrination by a tyrannical government. Tocqueville further claims that this is so because we cannot distinguish the counsel of government from its orders. He may well be right. The associations certainly bring diversity into societal and political spheres, preventing the excessive centralization of government. But, it remains unclear whether we can distinguish counsel from orders even in communications within associations. Rather, Tocqueville seems to believe in spontaneous, free, and authentic communication in close, face-to-face human interactions, contrary to his acknowledgement of the pervasive quality of cliché in the democratic era. Put in Habermasian terminology, Tocqueville’s associational civic public sphere ignores the possibility that the communication held in such associations may not be clearly distinguishable from controlled public opinion.³³ Tocqueville’s optimism about the undistorted communication within associations leads him to overlook the danger that small associations, too, can harbor mediocrity and clichés rather than renew ideas. As we will see in Flaubert’s observations, associations may diversify in quantity the range of acceptable opinions, but they do not necessarily bring novelty adjusted to changing situations.³⁴ A mere replacement of opinion with opinions would not dissolve the despotism of cliché.

Underlying Tocqueville’s insufficient solution is his judgment that individualism is an error, that is, a deficiency to be corrected. While calling individualism “reflective and peaceable sentiment,” as distinguished from mere selfishness, he nonetheless ascribes individualism to “erroneous judgment”: “Selfishness is born of a blind instinct; individualism proceeds from an erroneous judgment rather than a depraved sentiment. It has its source in the defects of the mind as much as in the vices of the heart” (Tocqueville 2000, 482). As previously mentioned, Tocqueville sees abstract individualism to be an irresistible tendency under the condition of democratic equality, but he finds a certain positive element as well as problem in this tendency. Moreover, Tocqueville’s orientation

³³ Chambers (2009) points out a similar tendency to privilege face-to-face deliberation within small communities as undistorted communication, echoing the current notion of deliberative democracy.

³⁴ By pointing out the insufficiency of Tocqueville’s solution, however, I do not suggest the need for other solutions that could better save our communication from cliché. Actors of the 1848 revolution may have imitated the acts and words in the 1789 revolution. Yet, what is important here is that those imitations are by no means illusions to be corrected by words and deeds that would be more appropriate to the “reality” in 1848. Rather, the *reality of 1848 involved clichés—that is, imitations of 1789*.

toward democratic malaise, as well as Mill's, suggests the cogency of negotiation—the direction I argue based on Flaubert. Certainly, they do not regard their antidotes to be able to solve the despotism of opinion once and for all, as Rousseau hoped his lawgiver would. Notwithstanding these nuanced orientations, Tocqueville concludes individualism as an error. The same applies to Mill, who sees his celebrated individuality simply in opposition to social conformism. As such, individualism now loses its fugitive and stupefying quality, turning into a problem to be solved. And Tocqueville's solution, reciprocal communication of opinions in and between associations, is to be clearly distinguished from the despotism of opinion. But the distinction between the two modes of opinions is not susceptible to clear demarcation. In sum, Tocqueville problematizes individualism and democratic rule of opinion, only to solve them as errors.

However, what if—as I have suggested—spontaneous opinion-formation in association is indiscernible from the despotic or tyrannical imposition of opinion? What if individualism is not an error, but part of a larger problem? Then, individualism and opinion fall into the zone of indiscernibility where you cannot tell right from wrong, spontaneity from imposition. At the same time, if we are unable to dispel individual opinion as erroneous, how can we deal with it?

4. Negotiation with the Ideal and Reality of Democracy: Flaubert

My exploration so far has revealed how modern democracy, while idealizing individuals' presentation of their own voices, harbored the problem of cliché—presentation of the voice of others: by founding itself upon Rousseauian individuality, democratic politics harbors within itself the zone of indiscernibility between original opinion and imitative cliché. Post-Rousseauian thinkers such as Mill and Tocqueville addressed this intensification as the tyranny of opinion, but failed to grasp this indiscernibility as they regarded the problem of democratic despotism as something that can be countered and corrected by solutions. However, if these solutions do not eradicate the problem of opinion, how can we deal with the problem? In the rest of this paper, I want to briefly look at one key direction by examining a resource relatively unfamiliar to political theorists, that is, Flaubert's writings on stupidity. Scholars of Flaubert concur

upon Flaubert's preoccupation with the theme of stupidity. And as we will see, Flaubert finds in our making of clichés a typical expression of stupidity. His main writings—*Madame Bovary*, *Sentimental Education*, and most of all, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* and *The Dictionary of the Received Ideas*—thematize our stupid imitative modes of living in multiple dimensions, such as in country life and love affairs, in political turmoil, and in the thirst for knowledge. Despite the variety of situations, Flaubert's writings present a similar observation both in regarding stupidity as an effect of the Rousseauian, democratic notion of individuality and in detecting its expression in clichés. Political theorists, however, rarely pay attention to Flaubert, based on a common misunderstanding of Flaubert as an anti-democratic, or even anti-political, writer of *l'art pour l'art*, thus ignoring the richness of his insight.³⁵ In fact, Flaubert's orientation toward stupid cliché stems from his "realism," that is, his acknowledgement of the problem of opinion-presentation, which allows no clear solution. While political thinkers such as Mill and Tocqueville finally turn the tyranny of opinion into solvable error—an illusion to be eradicated—Flaubert, in acknowledging its stubbornness, manages to maintain the insolvability of the democratic problem of opinion-making. His acknowledgement, more importantly, results in the distinctive contribution of Flaubert's orientation. Realizing its endogeneity to the democratic ideal, Flaubert negotiates the problem of opinion-making through immersion in clichés. Such negotiation does not solve the problem of cliché, but for Flaubert, brings about the effect of *stupefaction*. Stupefaction, which Flaubert experienced himself (as I touch on later, in an encounter with "Thompson") and produced in his writings, shocks us into silence at first. However, the stupefying encounter can also ignite new thoughts, can push us into thinking.

In one of his earliest remarks on stupidity, Flaubert views stupidity as an effect of the new notion of individuality that I identified in Rousseau. In a letter to Parain, dated October 6, 1850, he reports his encounter with stupidity, a gigantic sign on an ancient column of Pompey written by a British man, "Thompson":

Stupidity is unshakable; nobody can attack it without succumbing to it. It has the quality of firm and resistant granite. At Alexandria, a Thompson, from

³⁵ One of the few studies of political theory that deals with Flaubert, George Armstrong Kelly's *The Humane Comedy* (1992), situates Flaubert as a nonpolitical "Parnassian liberal" (Kelly 1992, ch. 6) and aligns Flaubert with Tocqueville, but as a more extreme case.

Sunderland, wrote his name upon a column of Pompey in six-foot high letters. We could read the letters from five leagues away. There is no way of looking at the column without seeing the name of Thompson, and consequentially, without thinking of Thompson. That moron is incorporated into the monument and perpetuates himself with it. No, he overwhelms the monument by the magnificence of his gigantic letters....All imbeciles are more or less like that Thompson of Sunderland.³⁶ (1926-1930, 2:243)

What struck, or *stupefied*, Flaubert in his preoccupation with stupidity is Thompson's cheerful equating of himself and the historic site of the ancient world. Such a comparison would be unimaginable without the notion of individuality that Rousseau's *Confession* exemplifies; as Rousseau claims the importance of his own singular individuality for the general public, so Thompson inscribes his individual name upon the world's monument. The same connection between stupidity and individuality are observable in Flaubert's novels. Emma Bovary, for example, is a successor of Jean-Jacques in her wish to become an authentic individual through romance.³⁷ Moreover, *Madame Bovary* is a post-Rousseauian novel in revealing the underlying dependence of the pursuit of authenticity upon imitation. As we have seen, Rousseau's notion of individuality implicitly leads to the imitation of others despite, or *because of*, its eloquent aversion to inauthentic imitation. In a similar manner, Emma's desire to become her authentic self is always inspired by the novels she reads.³⁸ Emma's tragedy, if we can call her desire for authenticity a tragic hubris, is not that she draws her romantic desire from mediocre literature or that she ignores her own social standing as a countryside middle-class woman, but that she was ignorant of the imitative quality of her desire. Flaubert's

³⁶ « La bêtise est quelque chose d'inébranlable ; rien ne l'attaque sans se briser contre elle. Elle est de la nature du granit, dure et résistante. À Alexandrie, un certain Thompson, de Sunderland, a sur la colonne de Pompée écrit son nom en lettres de six pieds de haut. Cela se lit à un quart de lieue de distance. Il n'y a pas moyen de voir la colonne sans voir le nom de Thompson, et par conséquent sans penser à Thompson. Ce crétin s'est incorporé au monument et se perpétue avec lui. Que dis-je ? Il l'écrase par la splendeur de ses lettres gigantesques. N'est-ce pas très fort de forcer les voyageurs futurs à penser à soi et à se souvenir de vous ? Tous les imbéciles sont plus ou moins des Thompson de Sunderland. »

³⁷ For a study that analyzes *Madame Bovary* as operating within Rousseau's idea of authenticity, see, for example, Trilling (1971). In his study analyzing the phenomenon of mediocrity by drawing upon *The Dictionary of Received Ideas*, Hasumi (2009) attributes the origin of Flaubertian, or Bovarian mode of narrative to Rousseau's *Confessions*. By analysing linkage between modes of language and personal identity, Strauss (2002) reveals the legacy of Rousseauian orientation toward identity in Flaubert's works.

³⁸ For the function of mimetic desires in Flaubert's novels, see Girard's classic study (Gillard 1966).

Dictionary of the Received Ideas, too, elucidates the complicity between individual distinctiveness and imitation with its entries, which are composed of stock phrases we utter as if they were distinctive opinions of our own.

In problematizing imitation and cliché, Flaubert's observation resonates with those of Mill and Tocqueville. In addition, when Flaubert, in his letter to Louis Bouilhet, dated September 4, 1850, sees stupidity to be emanating from the "desire to conclude" (1926-1930, 2:239; 1980, 128), his account comes close to Tocqueville's observation about the democratic preoccupation with general ideas: The former's presentation of stupidity takes the form of a general statement that reduces the complexity of reality into simplified explanations or assertions that are, according to Jonathan Culler, constituted by "[c]lichés, propositions, theories, assumptions" (Culler 1974, 178). In the *Dictionary*, many entries are followed by explanations or, even imperatives that contain absolute terms like "always," "never," or "every":

FLATTERERS. Never miss the chance to quote: "By God, I cannot flatter"; and "Every flatterer lives off the fool who listens to him."

PROGRESS. Always "headlong" and "ill-advised." (Flaubert 1954, 36, 69)

These propositions are stupid clichés; by uttering them we assume their universal applicability, and as a result, we overlook the multifaceted reality of things.³⁹

If Flaubert's writings present observations similar to those of Mill and Tocqueville, then what is the use of turning to Flaubert, a writer renowned for his "style as craftsmanship" (Barthes 1968, 62-66) and contribution to *l'art pour l'art*? Political theorists rarely engage with Flaubert. When they do, they usually categorize him as a disguised conservative of bourgeois society, or at best a defender of cultural liberty against the democratic despotism.⁴⁰ Both of these views stem from the myth of Flaubert as the "hermit of Croisset," that is, a pure artist who distanced himself from society for the sake of writing.⁴¹ For those critical of Flaubert, his aloofness from society appears as

³⁹ While Flaubert is known as an admirer of science, the value of science for him, according to Culler (1974, 168), lies in the establishment of facts, not in developing a law-like general explanation for facts.

⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre exemplifies the former view in his criticism of Flaubert's inability to engage with the reality of bourgeois society (Sartre 1988). Among the latter view, George Armstrong Kelly counts Flaubert as a representative figure of "Parnassian liberalism," which, with its critical, ironical, and elitist skepticism against democracy and attachment to the idea of human freedom, is characterized by the "retreat from political competition to spheres of culture and criticism, where it stands its ground" (Kelly 1992, 222).

⁴¹ Regarding this myth, see Urwin (2004).

an escape from necessary political consciousness, while others see his self-distancing as a barrier against the conformism of society.

In fact, what makes Flaubert's writings valuable resources for political theorizing is his *immersion* into the politico-social world of stupid cliché rather than a retreat from it. By "immersion," I mean Flaubert's strategy of presenting the fullness of the problem of imitative opinions without taking the higher standpoint of author or reader. His immersion is, for example, observable when he presents his own opinions vis-à-vis those of others as equally stupid opinions. As many scholars point out, some of the entries in the *Dictionary* and opinions expressed by characters in his novels, namely by Bouvard and Pécuchet, reflect Flaubert's own opinions.⁴² If imitative stupidity highlighted by democratic society is something from which we can dissociate, he would not have included his own views in his writings. Indeed, in his letters, Flaubert aligns himself with the stupidity of Bouvard and Pécuchet; in his letter to Edma Roger de Gennettes in April 1875, he states "their stupidity is mine, and it is killing me" (1926-1930, 7:237; 1982, 217); and in another letter to George Sand on November 14, 1871 he describes the stupidity as "formidable and universal," allowing no escape (1926-30, 6:307). As Jonathan Culler points out, for Flaubert, "identification of stupidity does not depend on one's ability to formulate the 'correct' alternative view" (Culler 1974, 159). In other words, for Flaubert, stupidity—our making cliché without knowing it—is not a fallacious illusion to be eradicated, but a reality to be confronted.

Furthermore, the inability to demarcate stupidity means the inability of escape through writing. Indeed, Flaubert's "realist" novels themselves become expressions of imitative opinions. The common understanding regards Flaubert as distancing himself, for better or worse, from society—the sphere of imitative opinions—through the art of writing. According to this view, Flaubert turns the stupidity of society into an aesthetic object, of which the aesthetic quality would be different from the banal and imitative writings and communications in our ordinary life. But if stupidity is universal, or ubiquitous, his writing would not be exempt from its pervasiveness. This is why Flaubert regards the act of writing itself as "the act of stupidity" (Ronnell 2002, 11-3; Culler 1974,

⁴² Derrida (1984) reveals the identity between Bouvard and Pécuchet's assessment of Spinoza's philosophy and the view Flaubert expresses in his letter. Regarding the *Dictionary*, see Culler (1974, especially 159-60).

157). Likewise, in contrast to the widely-held notion of the dichotomy between politics and literature, Jacques Rancière points out that Flaubert's novels are democratic, calling Flaubert's writings "the literary formula for the democratic principle of equality" (Rancière 2011, 11). While pre-democratic politics constructed the hierarchy and boundary of what counts as acceptable speech, that is, deliberative discourse—and this boundary of acceptable speech is parallel to the qualification of craft (*technē*) in ancient Greek thought—democratic society dissolves such boundaries and hierarchies.⁴³ Upon this "radical egalitarianism," the dismantling of the order of language, rests Flaubert's work, which no longer distinguishes specific forms of literary writing from other writings, beautiful subjects from vile subjects, literary language from ordinary, vulgar language (Rancière 2011, 10). Simply put, Flaubert's novel is based on the very same condition—democratic equality—that makes cliché a problem for politics. As democratic politics of opinions become the theater for imitative opinions, Flaubert's work, too, becomes the expression of stupidity of clichés. And it is the expression of nameless clichés, not of Flaubert the artist, because radical egalitarianism means the dissolution of a higher perspective from which the artist or statesman addresses the entire order. Herein lies Flaubert's "realist" style of writing marked by employment of a free indirect style. Narrating from the multiple perspectives of characters without unifying them under a single position of narrator or protagonist, his free indirect mode presents the world as seen from each of their viewpoints.⁴⁴ With the multiple, yet indefinite, perspectives produced by his free indirect style, Flaubert makes reality speak without recourse to conceptual generalization, through immersion in the object. Flaubert articulates his democratic style of immanence in a letter to Louise Colet, December 17, 1852, in which he explains the purpose of the *Dictionary*: "That would lead to the modern democratic idea of equality, using Fourier's remark that 'great men won't be needed'; and it is for this purpose, I would say, that the book is written" (1926-1930, 3: 67; 1980, 176). As democracy demolishes the "great men" who would encompass the order in politics, Flaubert's *Dictionary* displaces an author's standpoint with anonymous words of people.

⁴³ "In a sense, all political activity is a conflict aimed at deciding what is speech or mere growl; in other words, aimed at retracing the perceptible boundaries by means of which political capacity is demonstrated" (Rancière 2011, 4).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Colebrook (2002, ch. 6). In addition, Colebrook emphasizes that the use of the same free-indirect style in the writings of Foucault and Deleuze, namely in *Difference and Repetition*.

While denying any solutions such as those Mill and Tocqueville offer, Flaubert's realist style by no means lacks a certain negotiation with the problem of imitative opinion in democracy. On the contrary, in the aforementioned quote, he affirms "the modern democratic idea of equality." Surely Flaubert does not hide the ironical tone of his affirmation, when in the same letter he explicates the "modern democratic idea" as "doing away, once and for all, with all eccentricities, whatever they might be" (1926-30, 3:67; 1980, 175-76). But it is misleading to regard his irony to mean the repudiation of democracy. As we have seen, the democratic dissolution of hierarchy disables such irony as widely understood, that is, as a rhetoric of meaning the opposite of what one states. Such rhetorical irony presumes the existence of a higher code that is different from the language employed in literal expression: the higher code is not available to those who speak only the ordinary, common language, but needs to be identifiable to some people as an independent and fixed code.⁴⁵ In the case of Flaubert's remark above, there must be a higher code according to which some readers who are equipped with the craft of reading can interpret the uttered affirmation to secretly mean negation. Democracy's radical equality of language, however, no longer allows such a higher perspective. Thus, despite its (ironical) ambiguity, Flaubert's remark is at least not the denial of democracy. At the same time, it does not mean the affirmation of the status quo or the unconditioned affirmation of the opinions of people, either.⁴⁶ The *Dictionary*, as well as his other writings, takes on a certain critical orientation to democratic opinions from within. Otherwise, these opinions would become *the* truth and there would be no need for writing. What is, then, the critical, yet neither entirely affirmative nor negative, purpose of his writings?

Flaubert's immersive orientation toward stupid clichés fosters stupor in his readers. In the same letter to Louise Colet, he expects the *Dictionary* to be a "lead shot" to readers: "I think that the whole thing would be a formidable *lead shot* [*plomb*]. There would not be a single word invented by me in the book. If properly done, anyone who

⁴⁵ For the classical mode of irony, see Behler (1990, ch. 3).

⁴⁶ The letter was written during the period of the Second Empire. Yet, the nondemocratic form of government does not entirely mean that the period has nothing to do with democracy or is against it. Rather, I interpret Flaubert's ironical affirmation of democracy under the Second Empire as pointing out the democratic structure of individuality that was already prevalent in that society regardless of the form of government.

read it would never dare open his mouth again, for fear of spontaneously uttering one of its pronouncements” (1926-30, 3:67, 1980, 176, italics in original). His “formidable lead shot”—not only of the *Dictionary*, but also his novels—stupefies his readers in the following three steps. First, his writings present democratic stupidity as an unavoidable shot for “*anybody* who reads it,” rather than for a limited number of people who share the higher standpoint, by showing its totality and elusiveness. Like scattering shotgun pellets, they hit all the readers. Moreover, as the second step, the unavailability of a higher standpoint makes the unavoidability of cliché “formidable,” allowing no easy recovery from the wounds. Even after readers recognize imitative quality of their own voices, they cannot be free from it. The final and most important step is the stupefaction of readers. The readers would never dare to open their mouths, because they are stupefied into reflecting upon stupidity as their own problem, not as an error to be corrected. This stupefaction would not make us correct, but would at least drive us into reflecting upon the quality our own thinking. To sum up: modern democracy, with its ideal of voicing one’s opinion, proliferates clichés in reality; at the same time, this reality multiplies the opportunities for reflective opinion-formation.

5. Concluding Remarks

Having identified Flaubert’s strategy as that of negotiation with the reality of democracy, we need to note the difficulty in developing his strategy for political theory. His “formidable lead shot,” in illuminating the futility of the pursuit of a solution, risks falling into the opposite extreme of muting all communication essential for political activity. In the letter to which I have been referring, Flaubert states that anyone who reads the *Dictionary* “would never dare open his mouth again, for fear of spontaneously uttering one of its pronouncements.” Such fear of utterance would contain emerging thought in its potentiality free from clichés, but only by silencing any communication. Indeed, mere silence would not free us from cliché: the fear of voicing cliché is already imitative in turning the *Dictionary* itself into *the* correct answer, a new cliché. Thus, the mutation, even though it is a very reflective reaction to clichés, would betray the

immanent negotiation with its vain attempt to move oneself outside the condition of democratic opinion-presentation.

This difficulty calls for the need of a *theoretical* style of immanence, for the danger of mutation partly stems from the very literariness of Flaubert's writings. Even though his immanent style of writing is different from an aesthetic isolation from society, the problem of authorship remains: in the end, most of us are not writers. Flaubert himself manages to avoid both the pitfalls of pursuit of a solution and mutation by presenting democratic society through his "realist" novels that are marked by the plurality of perspective and nondiscriminatory adoption of opinions. But how can we, as readers, immanently engage stupidity? This is the question left to political theorists.

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