Republican Pleasures: Emerson’s “Circles,” Oratory, and the Log Cabin Campaign

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In recent decades of Emerson scholarship, there have been primarily two ways of situating the political orientation of Emerson’s writing: the first, and most widely held, proclaims Emerson’s status as an architect of democratic individualism. Generally supported by readings of “Circles,” “New England Reformers,” and “Self-Reliance,” scholars such as Richard Poirier, Sacvan Bercovitch, Stanley Cavell, and George Kateb have argued that Emerson’s writing defines American democratic individuality as an endless process of personal renovation. These scholars hold that by saying no to whatever social forces threaten to foreclose upon the individual’s potential for growth, the Emersonian poet is really saying yes to a dream of a better communal and democratic future. At best, this argument is a sophisticated and precarious enterprise, as several reviewers have noted (Wolfe, Rosenblum, Patell). Although Poirier, Cavell, and Kateb have emphasized the ways in which Emerson is antagonistic to the commercial greed of the Jacksonian era (and to unqualified, atomistic individualisms), their portrayals of Emerson’s democratic individualism often sound more like descriptions of a genteel temper of mind than a recognizable politics.¹

In contrast to viewing Emerson as a prophet of American liberalism, a second political movement in Emerson scholarship is best illustrated by Len Gougeon’s work on Emerson’s anti-slavery speeches and essays. In a book and several articles, Gougeon has recovered Emerson’s activist commitment to the pressing political issues of his day, such as the Cherokee removals, abolition, and women’s rights. The analysis of Emerson’s interest in civic duty continues to be a minority voice in Emerson studies, but it is of longstanding tradition, and it provides a helpful explanation of the origins of the spirit of (social) reform that often animate Emerson’s lectures and writing (see also Francis, Rose, Cayton). The problem with these civic recuperations of Emerson, however, is that they have difficulty articulating the aesthetic side of Emerson’s work.
At the risk of trying to pass between Scylla and Charybdis, the contrast I have sketched is evocative of the recent liberal/republican debates in American historiography. At stake is whether Emerson represents the commerce-oriented individual of liberalism, or whether he is inspired by a legacy of republican civic conscience. Fortunately, in the last ten years, both liberal and republican historians have begun to see themselves as describing two sides of the same coin (Shalhope 39). The virtue of this rapprochement is that literary scholars have begun to hear strains of republican rhetoric in commercial discourse and vice versa. Grantland Rice’s study of eighteenth-century authorship thus shows how the profession of author in the United States eventually came to be defined economically, albeit significantly inflected by ideological republican leftovers from an earlier age (10-11; also Teichgraeber). Daniel Malachuk’s essay on Emerson’s “cosmic” republicanism has also helped to put the liberal and republican faces of Emerson in dialogue. Similarly, Sam Worley, drawing on Michael Walzer’s notion of the immanent or connected critic, has demonstrated Emerson and Thoreau’s complex fusion of communitarian and individualist philosophies in their cultural criticism. In accord with these attempts to connect early national ideals of fellow-feeling with individualist spirit, I argue that Emerson’s infatuation with oratory supplies an influential ethos of collective individuality in his mature essays. This socially-connected individuality is pivotal in “Circles,” a text which is often invoked as a pragmatist manifesto of American liberalism. If the text is indeed a seminal moment in United States pragmatism, the communalist philosophy of that essay carries a political freight that contemporary liberal pragmatists, such as Richard Rorty, have had difficulty sustaining (“Intellectuals”; “Reply” 267).

In the following essay, I argue that an examination of the dynamics of public speech provides a useful framework for brokering the vexed issue of Emerson’s twin sympathies for social reform and individualism. In both his essays and journals, Emerson recognized that oratory was not simply a spectacle of one person’s transcendent voice. Rather, for Emerson, effective public speaking generated a union of speaker and hearer that exhibits a co-operative evolution of individual identity, an exciting renewal of individual identities through social interaction. Emerson meditates on this sociological phenomenon often in his lectures and journals, and even associated it, surprisingly, with the topsy-turvy political debates leading up to the Log Cabin Campaign. After demonstrating the way in which Emerson adopted his thoughts about the Log Cabin Campaign for his essay “Circles,” I point out that several other passages from “Circles” also draw from journal entries that comment on a peculiar communion of minds which occurs during public speech,
most notably, Emerson’s enthusiasm for the magnetic style of the Methodist preacher, Father Edward Thompson Taylor. In accord with the anti-foundationalist accounts of human identity formation posed by scholars such as Rorty, I find that Emerson’s descriptions of oratorical experiences are most fruitfully approached from the critical frameworks of speech theory and phenomenology. Drawing on the musicological work of Alfred Schutz, I suggest that Emerson’s writing is similar to a piece of music whose significance develops in the interaction between performer and audience, an event Emerson associated with the concert of sympathy that occurs during successful public speech. I conclude that Emerson’s embrace of the transformative elements of republican oratory—an evolving drama of fellow-feeling—retains the fluid poetics of Emersonian individuality so compellingly developed by scholars like Poirier without the need to apologize for Emerson’s engagement with the political issues of his day.

“Circles” and the Log Cabin Campaign

Republican oratory provides a central means of personal and cultural renewal in Emerson’s “Circles,” the essay generally thought to mark a transition between the optimism of Nature and the melancholy of Experience,” where Emerson confronts the fleeting duration of life and thought. “Circles,” however, discovers compensation for the transience of knowledge in the celebration of eloquence. Drawn from journal tributes to Emerson’s favorite orators and the rhetoric of the Log Cabin Campaign, “Circles” is an exposition of the serial triumphs of public eloquence. It is a crucial essay in Emerson’s First Series essays because it explores a logic of communal vocal identity. In contrast to the “aversive” Emersonian subject advanced by Poirier and Cavell, a continually exfoliating temperament shaped by “aversion” from conformity, the identity Emerson describes in “Circles” is formed through resonance and serial affiliation with others. For Emerson, vocality enacts a fluid and regenerative mode of Being-with-others that transcends the static world of Ideas-in-themselves and the dogmas of reform. In “Circles,” the poet discovers a flexible, socially-constructed ontology to replace bookish theories of the bounds and content of knowledge (epistemology). Thus, he concludes the essay with the discovery that because “so to be is the sole inlet of so to know . . . I cast away in this new moment all my once hoarded knowledge, as vacant and vain” (EL 413). Although Emerson is frequently invoked as a writer little interested in politics, the political rhetoric of the Log Cabin Campaign inspires the poet’s exposition of new forms of personal identity in “Circles.”
Largely composed from a series of journal entries written in the late
spring and summer of 1840 (and reworked for publication by 1841),
"Circles" took form during the electioneering of the Whigs' Log Cabin
Campaign, one of the most sensational contests of party rhetoric in the
nineteenth century (Gunderson). Capitalizing on the popular unrest
causcd by the depression of 1837, the Whigs launched an unusually
boisterous campaign, fielding close to 100,000 people at Harrison's
nomination (3). Fifteen acres of men and 6000 women camped for the
weekend at Tippecanoe to celebrate Harrison's military victory over the
Indians in the War of 1812 (109). Drawing on the populist strategies the
Democrats used in 1828, the Whigs composed a book of campaign songs,
and even a dance, "The Tippecanoe, or the Log-Cabin Quickstep." The
stump oratory was also sensational: Webster went hoarse from the
speaking tour he waged between January and November of 1840. At one
point he even spoke to a crowd of 15,000 people at the top of Mt. Stratton,
Vermont, with the words, "From the clouds, I address you ... encamped
with the Green Mountain boys on the summit of these far famed hills"
(180).

Although Emerson never mentions the details of the campaign in
"Circles," he remarks in his journal about a great multi-colored sphere
that the Whigs rolled through Concord on July 4th:

The simplest things are always better than curiosities. The most
imposing part of this Harrison celebration of the Fourth of July in
Concord as in Baltimore was this ball, 12 or 13 feet in diameter which
as it mounts the little heights & descends the little slopes of the road
draws all eyes with a certain sublime movement especially as the
imagination is incessantly addressed with its political significance. So
the Log Cabin is a lucky watchword. (JMN 7:378-79)

Part of the "political significance" of the ball's up-and-down movement
over the hilly terrain refers to the see-saw origins of the Log Cabin slogan.
The campaign's "lucky watchword" derived from the Whigs' appropriation
of an insult: a Democratic newspaper editor once claimed that the
Whig candidate Henry Harrison would be happier drinking cider in a log
cabin than working in the White House. The Whigs unexpectedly
embraced the charge and made it into the theme of the election, dragging
around log cabin floats and distributing hard cider. Speaking of his own
log cabin origins in a speech in Saratoga, Webster nearly cried (Gunderson
180; Webster 476-77). Although Emerson privately disliked electioneering
and probably did not seek to emulate the cheap eloquence it brought
to his mind, "Circles" is a profound meditation on the social dialectic of
oratory (JMN 5:203).

The most important connection between Emerson's essay and the
oratory of the Log Cabin campaign is suggested by the genesis of the
parade ball which Emerson notes in his journal. The ball was designed in response to a long political debate of the 1830s known as the Expunging Controversy. It began in 1832 when, in his attack on the Bank of the United States, President Jackson fired the Secretary of the Treasury for refusing to remove government deposits from the Bank. Outraged by his conduct, in 1834 the Whigs passed a Senate motion officially censuring Jackson for his conduct in the affair. In 1836, Democratic senator Thomas Hart Benton, still fuming over the Senate vote, moved to expunge the censure of Jackson from the Congressional record. By attempting to void the Whigs’ censure, he wanted to protect Jackson’s legacy, and with it, the reputation of the Democratic party. Responding to Daniel Webster’s charge that he was attempting to “disfigure” the official records of the government, Benton argued that his bill would not disfigure the Senate records because, in his words, the “matter expunged would not be destroyed.” It would be incorporated into the expunging resolution and live on “as long as that lives” (qtd. in Meigs 234). Benton’s resolution asked that the censure be circled and the word “expunged” be written over it. Although Benton had few supporters, he relentlessly pushed the bill for three years, finally passing the Expunging Resolution in 1839 with the intention that it would have a strong effect on the following summer’s election campaign (233). In a speech just prior to the bill’s enactment, Benton adopted the posture of a public-spirited underdog, a familiar credential of republican virtue, and he claimed that the success of his Expunging Resolution lay in the collective will of the people:

I finish the task which, three years ago, I imposed on myself. Solitary and alone, and amidst the jeers and taunts of my opponents, I put this ball in motion. The people have taken it up and rolled it forward and I am no longer anything but a unit in the vast mass which now propels it. In the name of that mass I speak. I demand the execution of the will of the people. (238, emphasis mine)

After this speech, the secretary brought forward the manuscript record of the Senate, and the resolution was carried out, as Benton had specified, by circling the censure in “broad, black lines” (339). In a remarkably symbolic maneuver, the Democrats humiliated the Whigs by circumscribing their former glory within a new political framework.

The following year, however, the Whigs struck back at the Democrats with an uncharacteristically rowdy presidential campaign, a strategy with oddly Democratic overtones. Until that point, the Whigs had been largely associated with the staid elitism of the old Federalist party. Historians of the two-party system have often remarked about the Whigs’ ironically successful adoption of the populist tactics which the Democrats had formerly used against them to elect Jackson, a synthesis
of modern democratic electoral rhetoric with the martial republican ethos of fighting on behalf of the public good (McCormick, Kruman, Wilson).

At the nominating convention in Baltimore, the Whigs proved they had hardly been vanquished by rolling Benton’s “ball.” They picked it up, made it their own, and rolled it back at him by marching 12-foot diameter parade balls from north to south, covered in Whig campaign slogans and painted red, white, and blue. According to the Niles Weekly Register, one large ball carried at Harrison’s nomination procession reclaimed public virtue for the Whigs by comparing Benton and Van Buren’s party to a declining monarchy:

This Democratic Ball
Set rolling first by Benton
Is on another track
From that it first was sent on...
As rolls the ball
Van’s [Buren’s] reign doth fail
And he must look
To Kinterhook...
"The Gathering ball is rolling still,
and still gathering as it rolls."
("National" 155)

The Whigs' parade ball was a gleeful symbol of their appropriation of the Democrats' rhetoric, and the Whigs also circulated pictures of it to headline the columns of their campaign paper, The Log Cabin Advocate. In the August 15th edition of the paper, the parade ball looks like a globe of the earth turned sideways, covered with stars at the poles and with broad stripes radiating between them. Beneath the image, the Whig slogans boast, "WITH HEART AND SOUL THIS BALL WE ROLL... THE LOG CABIN BOYS COMING! TEN THOUSAND MAJORITY IN EACH OF THE STATES OF INDIANA AND KENTUCKY." Like the co-opted poetry of "Log Cabin" motto itself, the parade ball represented the Whigs' triumphant theft of the Democrats' symbolism as well as the invigoration of Whig politics by their opponents' philosophy. The four-year Expunging Controversy dramatized the idea that the victories of one party could be reversed and incorporated at a later date by the opposing one. Initiated by Jackson's attack on the bank, the strategy was successfully used by both the Democrats and the Whigs.

The "political significance" of the ball in Emerson's journal thus refers to a dialectically-evolving poetry of appropriation and transformation, originating in the political debates between the Whigs and the Democrats. Emerson's "Circles" begins with a drama which would have been instantly recognizable to readers of 1841:
The man finishes his story,—how good! how final! how it puts a new face on all things! He fills the sky. Lol on the other side rises also a man, and draws a circle around the circle we had just pronounced the outline of the sphere. Then already is our first speaker not man, but only a first speaker. His only redress is to draw a circle outside his antagonist. And so men do by themselves. (EL 405)

In simple terms, the passage celebrates process over product, of dialectical growth over static triumph.

Although the circles of Emerson’s essay have often been discussed in epistemological terms—the endlessly evolving angle of vision, or knowing, that makes opaque objects translucent and which reveals the transcendent unity behind apparent multiplicity—Emerson’s illustration also emphasizes a spirit of ontological transformation where the being of the world changes as a result of debate. The poet is describing an interactive lifeworld of vocal activity—an ontology of political experience. Emerson defines the public story as an immanent act of worlding (in Heideggerian terms), of re-constituting the world, which reciprocally involves a speaker’s action and public consent. The circle Emerson describes is not just a fixed boundary to be transcended, but a transforming world of ideas, agents, speakers, and audiences—the Whigs’ political Ball. In his journal, Emerson returns to the image two months later to remark: “See how fond of symbols people are. See the Great Ball which they roll from Baltimore to Bunker Hill. . . . They say and think that they hate poetry and all sorts of moonshine; & they are all the while mystics and transcendentalists,” a remark which explicitly ties the Whig political gimmick to the symbolism of his essay (JMN 7:394).

Emerson’s insight in his journal is thus that the campaigning and wordplay of the 1840 election represent the poetry of politics or, more intriguingly, the politics of poetry. In their struggle with each other, the Whigs and Democrats wrestle for possession of the meaning of each other’s words and deeds; their political tumult is the forceful activity of creating poetry. In his journal comments about the campaign, Emerson suggests that the poet’s challenge, like that of the politician’s, is to remake the world with words that act as they represent.

Part of the reason for emphasizing the relationship between poetry and society in the preceding analysis is that Poirier, Cavell, and Kateb’s extraordinarily sophisticated interpretations of Emerson in the last several decades have tended to de-socialize Emerson’s poetics in ways that might have seemed foreign to audiences of Emerson’s own day. As all of these critics are aware, however, when Emerson writes of the “infinitude of the private man,” he is not simply advocating elitist individualism (JMN 7:342). Rather, alternative notions of individuality and privacy, derived from millennialist republican traditions but not identical to
classical republicanism, also contribute to Emerson’s concept of the private individual (Anderson, Robinson, Toulouse, Hodder). Emersonian citizens are speakers as well as writers.

**Oratory and Community**

The agency of the speaking voice was a profoundly influential rhetorical mode in the early nineteenth century, shaping educational practices, popular and belles-lettres literature, religion, and politics. Today, we are somewhat bored by the sermonizing and the spread-eagled rhetoric of patriotic address for which the nineteenth century is notorious, and we often have difficulty understanding what those audiences could have genuinely liked about oratory. When George Ticknor, a rather sober Boston Brahmin, writes that “I thought my temples would burst with the gush of blood” while listening to Webster at Plymouth in 1820, it is hard to take him seriously (330). Stories of Webster’s effect during his “Second Reply to Hayne”—when he supposedly made full-grown Congressmen cry like children during his speech—suggest that the nation was in the grip of hysteria (Curtis). Similarly, one of Edwin Forrest’s heroic apostrophes from the 1829 play, *Metamora*, (“we are no more—we are forever!”) seems intolerably flat melodrama, yet Forrest made a living from such performances for twenty years.

Part of the reason why nineteenth-century audiences responded so enthusiastically to oratory is because it provided a rhetorical occasion, or literary *topos*, where principles of community were explored and shaped. Rather than creating an unpleasant divide between audience and speaker (which is why bombast is alienating to listeners), good oratory fulfills a desire for sympathetic feeling and public consent. Oratory is a participatory *ritual* oriented around voice and performance, where audience members expect to be instructed and socialized during address and audition. Emerson writes, “An audience is not a simple addition of the individuals in it. Their sympathy gives them a certain social organism, which fills each member, in his own degree, and most of all, the orator, as a jar in a battery is charged with the whole electricity of the battery” (*W*7:63). Speech theorist and abolition scholar, Ernest Bormann, drawing on Robert F. Bales’s studies of group interaction, has described the phenomenon of public consent during speech as the creation of common culture (see also McGee). The experience upsets commonsense ideas of individual and society, blurring boundaries of public and private. As entertainment, the unexpected displacement of these boundaries can be extraordinarily exciting, such as the momentary and collective identification with the spirit of the Founding Fathers during a powerful Daniel
Webster performance, or auditors' surprise to discover that Frederick Douglass was as human as they.

Emerson's essay "Circles" is an attempt to duplicate on the printed page some of the transformational and intersubjective effects Emerson experienced while listening to successful oratory. Several of the passages in "Circles" come from journal entries originally describing the oratory of William Ellery Channing, Edward Everett, Daniel Webster, and Father Taylor, all figures whom Emerson greatly admired. In his 1847 and 1867 lectures on eloquence, Emerson occasionally compares successful orators to Napoleonic sovereigns whose job is to bend the audience to their will (W 7:65, 8:117), but he more often speaks of the importance of entreating one's audience, of orators summoning a force generated in collaboration with their listeners (W 7:61, 63, 66, 82; 8:130). For example, Emerson admired Webster's ability to "galvanize" himself to his auditors (an electric bonding of two metals), an act that caused both to "speak words not their own" (JMN 5:103). Emerson criticized his brother Charles's oratory because he attempted to bully his audience rather than "seek" it out (L 1:239-40). For Emerson, oratory was an interactive art, not simply a spectacle of transcendent individualism (Railton, Sloan, Ray, Field).

Oratory fascinated Emerson because it featured the action of receptive minds that could exchange their activity in a reciprocal moment of contact. Emerson envisioned oratory as politically egalitarian, and, of all literary genres, the one best able to express the energetic movement of thought, not just static concepts. In a series of journal entries written during 1838, several of which appear in "Circles," Emerson writes of the shortcomings of print: "There is a limit to the effect of written eloquence. It may do much but the miracles of eloquence can only be expected from the man who thinks on his legs; he who thinks may thunder; on him the Holy Ghost may fall & from him pass" (JMN 7:41). Although Emerson clearly suggests that the moment of eloquence confers a spiritual majesty on the speaker, the "miracle" is in the reciprocal interaction between speaker and audience. Emerson imagines oratory as an intimate conversation between two people: "In perfect eloquence, the hearer would lose the sense of dualism; of hearing from another; would cease to distinguish between the orator & himself; would have the sense only of high activity & progress" (JMN 7:52).

In "Circles," Emerson's reference to the man who "fills the sky" alludes both to the Webster/Benton debates of the Expunging Controversy and to Emerson's waning estimate of Channing. Emerson had written in his journal that "Once Dr. Channing filled our sky. Now we become so conscious of his limits & of the difficulty attending any effort to show him our point of view, that we doubt if it be worth while" (JMN
Rephrasing this memory in "Circles" Emerson writes: "Infinitely alluring and attractive was he to you yesterday, a great hope, a sea to swim in; now you have found his shores, found it a pond, and you care not if you see it again" (EL 406). Central to the poet’s discontent is the man who has textualized himself into fixed doctrine—a person who no longer experiences a dialectical connection to a changing world.

Another speaker Emerson associated with the evanescence of thought was Edward Everett. Although Everett's speeches are not very entertaining today, their value for nineteenth-century audiences lay in Everett's surprising ability to bring the past back to life, and to make Americans of the 1820s feel that they were a part of a living history. Emerson once wrote that Everett had an uncanny ability to connect the past and the present in a living fusion: "let [Everett] rise to speak on what occasion soever, [and] a fact had always just transpired which composed, with some other fact well known to the audience, the most pregnant and happy coincidence" (W 10:331). In his ceremonial and historical speeches, Everett disinterred the Greeks and Romans from antiquarian piety, pulled them down from their pedestals, and stood them on their feet before his astonished listeners. One passage from "Circles" commemorates Everett's ability to transform the past into a living thing during his historical lectures:

We all stand waiting, empty,—knowing, possibly, that we can be full, surrounded by mighty symbols which are not symbols to us, but prose and trivial toys. Then cometh the god, and converts the statues into fiery men, and by the flash of his eye burns up the veil which shrouded all things, and the meaning of the very furniture, of cup and saucer, of chair and clock and tester, is manifest. The facts which loomed so large in the fogs of yesterday,—property, climate, breeding, personal beauty, and the like, have strangely changed their proportions. All that we reckoned settled shakes and rattles; and literatures, cities, climates and religions, leave their foundations, and dance before our eyes. (EL 408)

Emerson is recalling the memory of creative insight that Everett evoked in his historical lectures at Harvard and during his most famous performances, such as his "Plymouth Oration." Although Emerson compares the teacher to a god (an expression that tends to emphasize the individual's sovereign gifts), the magic Emerson experiences is participatory: Emerson's account emphasizes the expectations of the audience, "waiting" and "empty." The union of speaker's activity and the audience's expectation is what transforms "statues into fiery men." For Emerson, reading the "Plymouth Oration" was like "staring at the sun" because of the way Everett connected past and present, orator and audience. Emerson claimed it was one of the few compositions he had read with unreserved approbation, comparing it to Socrates's Apology, and Milton's Comus and Areopagitica (JMN 2:318, 6:194).
Republican Pleasures 267

Emerson’s emphasis on the galvanizing effects of oratory is a central theme in “Circles.” Emerson’s journal account of the May 1840 meeting of the Transcendental Club, reproduced verbatim in “Circles,” compares the parlor conversations of the Club to serial oratory:

Conversation is a game of circles. In conversation we pluck up the termini which bound the common of silence on every side. The parties are not to be judged by the spirit they partake and even express under this Pentecost. ... Yet let us enjoy the cloven flame whilst it glows upon our walls. When each new speaker strikes a new light, emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker, to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer, we seem to recover our rights, to become men. (EL 408)

The Christian imagery of this passage—Pentecost and the gift of tongues—ostensibly identifies Emerson’s subject as the materialization of truth, of Holy Spirit expressed through inspired words, but Emerson focuses on the serial acts of speaking and hearing rather than on the content of speech itself. Uninterested in the timeless value of Pentecostal truth, Emerson prefers watching the “cloven” flame of eloquence pass from speaker to speaker. Emerson shifts the emphasis of Pentecostal regeneration toward the rotation of fellowship, a process of serial identification and growth.

Tuning In with Father Taylor

In addition to the sociological satisfactions of oratory—the physical and ritualistic practices of community life—the cognitive elements of oratorical experience have great appeal as well. One useful framework for understanding the intersubjective modes of identity generated through public speech is provided through the work of Alfred Schutz (1899-1959), who is best known for his phenomenological analyses of music. A disciple of Husserl and Bergson, Schutz was part of a theoretical movement which attempted to break from a tradition of western philosophy oriented around static metaphors of sight, and spatial analyses of subject and object considered within the hypothetical, frozen moments of Cartesian space. For phenomenologists of the early part of the twentieth century, getting access to life required grappling with the temporal duration of human experience, as well as with the phenomena of multiple perception and human interaction, such as found in social situations.

Schutz became interested in the effects of music as a means of discussing the duration of consciousness through time, what Bergson had termed the durée psychologique. Because the musical significance of a note is expressed primarily in relation to other notes through time, Schutz felt
the analysis of hearing music could provide a workable means for discussing the operations of consciousness, human sociality, and the "possibility of living together simultaneously in specific dimensions of time" (162). Schutz thought of music as a communicative structure that takes listeners through the durée psychologique of another person—that is, through several turns of their stream of consciousness. Listeners follow the pattern of the composer's mental state and journey through that experience. Schutz called this experience "tuning in" to the mental durée behind the music (Mendoza de Arce 58). Schutz's hypothesis is a provocative way of discussing Emerson's belief that the foremost value of effective oratory was the dissemination of the living action of the human mind.

For Schutz, instrumental music was a doorway to the living consciousness of other people, stripped of conceptual ideas (159). He felt that some forms of literary narrative could achieve the same effect, but words generally obstruct contact with the durée itself. In contrast to the spatial significance of a word or a thought on a page (which is conveyed in an instant, and which refers to a previously established network of ideas), the significance of a musical note is conveyed largely through contextual moments in time. Schutz usually referred to Mozart and Wagner in his examples, types of scripted music that seem far more rigid than an extemporaneous oratorical performance, but toward the end of his life, Schutz became greatly interested in improvisational jazz. Schutz's characterization of musical experience helps to explain how oratory can be thought of as an experience of communal consciousness where the orator and listeners become mutually inspired by the movement of thought that the occasion generates.

Schutz's discussion of music provides a particularly useful cognitive model for discussing Emerson's interest in the active mind, the orator who "thinks on his legs" (JMN7:41). Despite Schutz's caveat that words and ideas tend to cloud perception of the activity of the durée, he does admit that some forms of narrative, like lyric poetry, can awaken readers to flow-of-consciousness in the same way that music can. As Emerson's most sophisticated critics have noted, Emerson's aphoristic and paratactic style seems engineered to promote the activity of thought rather than the logical development of argument (Packer 6). For Emerson, "tuning in" was not simply a fawning submission to power, but a mutual exploration of the mind's potential.

In Emerson's view, the speaker who could best transfer the active flux of thought to his audiences was Father Taylor, pastor of the Seaman's Bethel in Boston. Emerson's portrait of conversation in "Circles" comes from his journal, just after his reflections about an exhilarating evening
he had spent with Taylor. Emerson describes the meeting with characteristic infatuation with Taylor, but he emphasizes the communal bond generated through conversation with the orator: "how willingly every man is willing to be nothing in his presence, to share this surprising emanation & be steeped & ennobled by the new wine of this eloquence" (JMN 7:359, emphasis mine). In particular, Emerson thought of Father Taylor as a conduit to open a spiritual conversation between speaker and audience.

According to most accounts, the magic of Taylor's oratory was his direct contact with the audience—he spoke with people, not just at them (Haven, Reynolds). His speaking style was simple and colloquial. Taylor also spoke extemporaneously and allowed himself to be carried away by his own speech, apparently never planning where his sermons would end. The conjunction of his colloquial appeal and personal enthusiasm had enormous effect. To be present when Taylor spoke was like being taken on a journey. Emerson writes:

What an eloquence he suggests. Ah could he guide those grand seahorses of his, with which he rides & caracoles on the waves of the sunny ocean. But no; he sits & is drawn up & down the ocean currents by the strong seamonsters;—only on that condition that he shall not guide. One orator makes many. How many orators sit mute there below. They come to get justice done to that ear & intuition which no Chatham & no Demosthenes has begun to satisfy. (JMN 10:402)

Part of the effect of Taylor's speech was the transference of his enthusiasm to his audience. As Emerson remarks, Taylor spoke to the latent orators in his audience, fulfilling their own expectations of justice to the word.

Guided by mysterious "seamonsters" of eloquence, Taylor appeared to have no control over his discourse. According to Emerson, Taylor did not get in the way of his words—they came out in complete faith to the possibilities of the next moment:

Leave him alone & there is no man: There is no substance, but a relation. . . . I think every hearer feels that something like it were possible to himself, if he could consent. . . . He runs for luck, & by readiness to say every thing, good & bad, now and then he says the best things. Then a new will & understanding organize themselves in this new sphere of no-will and no-understanding. (JMN 10:402-3)

Like the evolving symbolism of the Log Cabin Campaign, Taylor keeps redefining himself. Emerson explores the analogy between words and speakers when he discusses the way Taylor redistributes the significance of a word. Taylor tosses ideas from "hand to hand" like a ball. Just as he gives himself over to the possibilities of a "new will," his language undergoes a similar transformation: "Everything dances & disappears,
changes, becomes its contrary in his sculpturing hands. How he played with the word *Lost* yesterday! . . . *Lost* became found in the twinkling of an eye*" (JMN 10:401). The polar inversions of Taylor's wordplay resemble the dynamic poetics of the Log Cabin Campaign where failure becomes triumph and where meaning will not stand still. At the same time, Emerson's comments about Taylor provide a means for understanding the social experience which Emerson associates with speech: both Taylor and the audience momentarily identify with the "lost" soul, and they subsequently feel its redemption, too. Together, they journey through a series of emotional and ontological states.

As Emerson's tributes to Father Taylor's oratory suggest, oratorical performance was an occasion to refresh one's sense of *being*. Rather than defining this shifting identity as a study in continual negation, as Poirier and Cavell do, Emerson often defines *identity* in terms of serial affiliation. Emerson's experiences as both a listener and speaker attuned him to a highly socialized identity during the experience of public speech. In this sense, "Circles" demonstrates not an "aversion" from conformity (Cavell) or "writing off the self" (Poirier, *Renewal*), where presence is constantly evacuated, but rather Emerson's awareness that something fleeting but magnificent—"the fiery life of the moment"—develops in the relation between speakers and hearers (*W* 7:95).

As we see in Father Taylor's surrender to the forces of eloquence, Emerson's sense of successful oratory is closely tied to the concept of *abandonment*, a word he associates with oracular genius at the end of "Circles." Abandonment is one of the key words in Cavell's description of Emersonian thought. In Cavell's *The Senses of Walden*, he argues that Emerson uses the term in several ways, as "enthusiasm," as "shunning," and as "trust" (139). In Cavell's essay, "Aversive Thinking," written several years later, however, he focuses almost exclusively on the middle sense, Emerson's abandonment as *shunning*. For Cavell, the key to "Circles" is in its timeless negativity, its avoidance of thought-restricting thought. But in "Circles," Emerson explicitly connects the word *abandonment* to affirmation: "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment" (*EL* 414). Although abandonment can mean shunning in this passage, its conjunction with "enthusiasm" also refers to *giving over* or *consent*—the consent to enthusiasm, to chthonic powers beyond the control of the individual. Several times in his journal, Emerson defines true eloquence as the ability to "let out all the reins," suggesting that orators must abandon themselves to "the instruction flowing in from all sides" (JMN 5:459, 469; *EL* 412). The act of such abandonment is what makes "the verge of today the new centre" of a circle (*EL* 410). The poet's discussion of prudence as the
ability to abandon oneself to a great trust connects the orator's performance with the creation of a new orbit (EL 410). If the brazen voice of the speaker and the excited sympathy of the audience constitute the new world, then retreats to aversive or democratic individualism are incomplete pictures of Emersonian identity. Rather, the Emerson of "Circles" looks forward to unions with others.

Part of the problem that literary scholars face in recuperating the republican elements of Emerson's poetics is that republicanism, at least in the classical sense of duty-oriented conduct, does not initially seem like much fun. Self-denying, functional, and didactic, republican literatures tend to promote an ethos of stoical satisfaction rather than exotic pleasure. Emerson's liberal interpreters have been able to articulate far more aesthetically intriguing aspects of his work than scholars like Gougeon, despite the fact that Emerson had powerful interests in social reform. By re-examining some of the sociological and cognitive gratifications of oratorical experience, however, it is also possible to recognize that the manipulation of ideals of community could have rewarding aesthetic qualities as well. Rather than simply an oppressive tradition of public duty and personal restraint, nineteenth-century republicanism was a lively discursive medium that encouraged dramatic individuality and sociality at the same time. The future-oriented, dialectical sense of being that Emerson witnessed in the Log Cabin Campaign opens up new ways of explaining the connections between Emerson's poetics and the spirit of secular millennialism that underwrites so many of his essays, including "Self-Reliance." Recuperating republican tropes of active virtue without the myopia of New England reformers such as William Lloyd Garrison, Emerson is one of a number of northern-oriented writers, such as Thoreau, Stowe, Douglass, and Whitman, who fused collectivist social practices to the media of liberal democracy. John Diggins may be right to claim that the political efficacy of republicanism had been long "lost" even prior to the Revolution, that talk of the public good was merely a rhetorical "species of language" to dress up the political agenda of liberal mercantile culture (63). During the period of antebellum social reform, however, this lost species of language had circled back in another form.

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Notes

1 Although these critics discuss Emerson's involvement in a political world, they provide little motive or mechanism through which the individual acts politically. Richard Poirier
associates "self obliteration" (Renewal 193) with "possibilities for personal and cultural renewal" (Poetry 11), but he is much more interested in applauding Emerson's individual genius than in explaining how that literary genius supports community. Similarly, Stanley Cavell appreciates Emerson's effort to move beyond the hypothetical category of individual subjectivity (Senses 127), but he continually re-inscribes the model of an "aversive" individual ("Aversive"). For criticisms of Cavell, see Cyrus Patell and Cary Wolfe. George Kateb, in his two works, The Inner Ocean and Self-Reliance, argues passionately to establish Emerson as the source of a form of modern "democratic individualism," but, like Cavell, he provides little explanation how his hypothetical individual sustains a liberal republic. For assessments of Kateb's project, see the essays in Austin Sarat and Dana Villa, particularly those by Cornel West and Judith Shklar. See also essays in Political Theory 18.4 (1990) by Shklar, Nancy Rosenblum, and Leo Marx.

3This developmental interpretation of "Circles," which places the essay within larger arguments concerning Emerson's feelings about loss and the inability of words to capture life, is richly expressed in Poirier, Cavell, Barbara Packer, and Steven Whicher. Leonard Neufeldt and Christopher Barr, in their Derridean reading of "Circles," argue the essay enacts a deconstructive epistemology. Although Neufeldt and Barr often use the word voice in their analysis of the essay, their entire framework is so oriented around writing that the complex dynamics of the spoken word—and the collaborative sense of identity that comes with speech—are hardly considered. For a similar emphasis on writing, see also Cavell's comments on "Circles" in "What Is the Emersonian Event?"

1I use the following abbreviations for the major Emerson collections: L Letters; W Complete Works; JMN Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks; EL Essays and Lectures. All quotations from these sources are in clear text, insertions included; I have not included manuscript cancellations.

4For the relation between print and oratory on the lyceum circuit, see Donald Scott. A number of longer studies over the past twenty years have closely examined the relationship between oral and written modes of expression in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century United States, including David Hall, Lawrence Buell, Kenneth Cmiel, Jay Fliegelman, Michael Warner, Thomas Gustafson, Susan Gustafson, and Christopher Looby.

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