The Us of Us

A Decade in the Life of the First Person Plural

DAVID BOLES

BOLES BOOKS

Copyright © 2026 by David Boles. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

The record's own words belong to the record. Quotations from public documents, court opinions, survey instruments, and published studies are credited in the text and in the Note on Sources. The opening line of the Twelve Steps appears as published in the first edition of Alcoholics Anonymous (1939), a volume in the public domain in the United States.

The counting rules, the panels, and the run tables referenced throughout this book are printed in Appendix B for anyone who would recount.

Published by Boles Books BolesBooks.com

First edition, September 2026.

For Janna, and for everyone who shows up.

But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, in Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885)

We must not give up. We must continue to govern the machine that becomes us. We are a mesh of external wills and internal machinations.

David Boles, "The Us of Us: Aristotelian Politics in the Age of Unreason," June 8, 2016

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

The first of the Twelve Steps, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, first edition (1939)

Contents

OVERTURE 1

Chapter One. The Domain. 1

MOVEMENT I. THE GIVEN US 18

Chapter Two. The Political Animal. 19

Chapter Three. The Pronoun's Perimeter. 39

Chapter Four. The Rooms. 58

Chapter Five. The Object Case. 76

MOVEMENT II. THE STRESS TEST 94

Chapter Six. The Demagogic Us. 95

Chapter Seven. The Balcony and the Mask. 115

Chapter Eight. Our House. 134

Chapter Nine. The Sorted Feed. 152

MOVEMENT III. THE CLAIMANTS 170

Chapter Ten. The Brand-We. 171

Chapter Eleven. The Platform-We. 188
Chapter Twelve. The Fandom-We. 205
Chapter Thirteen. The Machine-We. 222
Chapter Fourteen. The Encrypted Us. 243

MOVEMENT IV. THE REMNANT 262
Chapter Fifteen. The Subtraction Test. 263
Chapter Sixteen. The Company. 283
Chapter Seventeen. The Rescaled Us. 300
Chapter Eighteen. Art and Education. 319

CODA 339
Chapter Nineteen. The Recount. 340
Appendix A. The Us of Us: Aristotelian Politics in the Age of Unreason (the 2016 essay, entire) 352
Appendix B. The Counting Protocol and the Count Tables 357
Questions for Discussion 377
Glossary 381
Acknowledgments 385
A Note on Sources 387
Bibliography 390
Index 402
About the Author 406
Also by the Author 408

OVERTURE

Chapter One

The Domain.

The desk holds two receipts from one day, and for ten years they lived in different drawers. The first is a blog post. It went up at 14:37:27, universal time, on June 8, 2016: 723 words under the title The Us of Us: Aristotelian Politics in the Age of Unreason, published on BolesBlogs.com, my own ground, where the publish button asked no one's permission. The second is a colder document. A registrar's record shows the domain UsOfUs.com created at 23:46:58, universal time, the same evening, registered to the Boles Books organization and held continuously since, the term now paid forward to June 8, 2027, the latest renewal logged June 26, 2026. Nine hours and nine minutes stand between the argument and the address. The essay came first, in the morning. The domain followed after dark. I cannot reconstruct which act was the hedge and which was the bet, and I will not pretend to. Memory

revises its testimony. The method of this book is to stop asking memory questions and put them to the record instead, and the record begins with those two clocks.

Fifteen days after the essay ran, Britain voted, on June 23, 2016, and the official count stands: 17,410,742 for Leave, 51.9 percent, against 16,141,241 for Remain, 48.1 percent; a margin of 1,269,501 votes on a turnout of 72.2 percent of an electorate of 46,500,001. A country split along its middle, and the slightly larger half took the whole decision. The essay mentions no referendum. It names no campaign, no party, no vote. Whatever it saw, it saw from inside the season and ahead of the result, and this book claims adjacency and nothing more, because adjacency is what the timestamps can prove. Handled honestly, adjacency is still a real claim. A writer indicted the American plural fifteen days before a neighboring democracy put its own plural to the question and split down the middle answering it; the season was asking the question everywhere at once, and the essay was one of the places it got asked in public. What the season was asking, on both sides of the Atlantic that summer, was a question about the first person plural: who counts

as us, who is licensed to say we, and whether the largest plural on offer wanted anything beyond agreement with itself.

That last suspicion is the essay's own charge, and here the artifact speaks for itself. The coinage, the first appearance of the phrase in print, ran lowercase and set inside quotation marks, as though the author were citing a term already in circulation:

> The trick -- We, The People -- tend to miss in the mess is that the "us of us" have no interest in providing that service of nature. We only wish to have confirmed what we have already heard -- and never learned…

An indictment in two sentences. The us of us, the innermost public, the whole that is supposed to contain the smaller wholes, stands charged with one failing: it has no interest in learning. It wants its already-heard beliefs handed back to it, and the rest of the essay runs downhill from that accusation. The fourth estate is declared worthless, owned by big business, more devoted to selling soap than to rendering truth. The police are militarized. Policy is pre-purchased by the .01 percent. The citizenry self-medicates with selfies and celebrity adoration. And the accusation carries a property worth naming at the start of a

ten-year audit: the accuser cannot file it from outside the dock. We only wish, the essay says. First person, plural, confessional. The author enrolled himself in the defendant class with his own pronoun, and every count in this book keeps him there.

Near its end, the essay makes its one constructive move, and the move is strange enough to carry a book:

> We must not give up. We must continue to govern the machine that becomes us. We are a mesh of external wills and internal machinations.

Govern the machine that becomes us. In June 2016 the sentence read as temperament, a flourish against despair, the kind of line an essayist writes because the alternative is silence. The decade turned it into a specification. The machine has since learned to say we. It says we on demand, at any hour, in private, to anyone who asks, and there is no them anywhere in its grammar. What the sentence meant, and what it purchased, get their full hearing in this book's third movement, where the machine comes forward as a claimant of the pronoun and the author's own warning is audited on the same

scale as everything else. For now the sentence stays where the essay left it: pinned to the wall, dated, waiting.

Its last word belongs to Aristotle, a line quoted without its opening conjunction: “The deficiencies of nature are what art and education seek to fill up.” The line is real. It stands in the Politics at 1337a, near the close of Book VII, in Jowett’s translation, and this book’s closing argument is built on it: two rooms remain that manufacture the first person plural on purpose, by design, on schedule, with strangers, and they are the classroom and the stage. The overture’s business is older and colder. What happened to the plural in the ten years after a man indicted it in the morning and bought its name in the evening: that is the case this book tries.

Here is the premise, stated once and plainly. Ten years later, recount. Take the word itself, we and us and our and ours, and count it where it does public work: in the speeches of presidents across the full series, in the platforms of parties, in the letters corporations send their owners, in the terms of service that everyone accepts and no one reads, in the advertising of a plague year. Count it, above all, in the author’s own archive, which is not excused from the laboratory on the grounds that it built the laboratory. Test every

claimant of the pronoun, the campaign, the brand, the platform, the fandom, the machine, the sealed room, against one diagnostic and one standard. The tests run symmetrically, on left, right, and commercial claimants alike, and the appendix shows the runs; living officeholders will appear in these pages as instances of ancient types, never as load-bearing beams, because the types predate the parties by twenty-three centuries and will outlast them. Publish every run, including the runs that cut against the argument, in an appendix that anyone can re-run; the counts will live publicly at the address bought that night, so that anyone who wants to check the work, in 2036 or next week, gets the same instrument. Audit the author’s 2016 across the decade: what it saw, what it saw early, what it missed. His archive sits inside the specimen jar with everything else. That was the deal written into the domain receipt, though he did not know it yet. The name was going to be asked to testify.

Three instruments do the work, and this book carries no others.

The count. First person plural tokens, we, us, our, ours, ourselves, and the contracted forms, measured per thousand words inside defined corpora, with inclusion rules registered before any counting began and published beside the

results. The panels were fixed in advance, so that no exhibit could be hand-picked after the fact: the inaugural addresses from 1789 forward, the annual messages and States of the Union, the party platforms, a fixed panel of shareholder letters taken a decade apart, a fixed panel of terms-of-service versions taken a decade apart, the pandemic's advertising chorus, the author's published decade. Two safeguards deserve naming here, because they show the instrument doing its own housework. A case rule protects the count from the country: us counts only in lowercase, the abbreviation US never enters the tally, and every excluded instance is logged so the rule's work stays visible. A control run strips quoted matter before counting, so that a speaker reciting We the People does so with borrowed pronouns the control can see. Every count publishes, primary run and control together. A count that wounds the thesis publishes with the rest, and the appendix shows every seam. Rules that bind, or the instrument is a ouija board.

The subtraction test. For any claimed us, remove its them and report what survives. A group held together only by opposition has an empty inner room. Take the enemy away and see who is still standing there. Some claimants fail at once. One claimant in this book fails in a stranger

way, because it has no them at all, and that turns out to be its own kind of emptiness. The test runs as a closing gate in every chapter that examines a claimant, and it runs on the author too.

The object case. We acts; us is acted upon. We deliberate and decide. Us is counted, taxed, drafted, mourned, held. The phrase under study chooses the held form twice: the us of us, a genitive built out of the object of the sentence. That grammar admits something, and this book keeps returning to it. The first person plural spends much of its public life as something done to. A politics that speaks only in the subject case describes an us that never has to receive anything, and an us that receives nothing owes nothing.

One instrument and one scene per chapter: that is the chapter rule, and a chapter that closes without either goes back. The standard for the findings comes from Aristotle, and it arrives with its bias declared on the crate. The polis that produced it excluded women, slaves, and foreigners, and this book says so again where the standard is calibrated, because the history of us is the history of its perimeter. A good scale gets used after its bias is declared; the declaration is what makes the measurement worth trusting. What the standard asks of any us is civic friendship,

concord among citizens who wish one another's good for its own sake, and its raw materials are three: time, presence, and shared goods. A pronoun that cannot point to those three things is a sound. Every claimant in this book gets weighed on that scale, including the man holding it.

A first run has already taken place, and a book about measurement should open with a measurement. The corpus was the complete series of inaugural addresses, sixty of them, from 1789 to the swearing-in of January 2025, the elected-inaugural series with the accession addresses excluded, counted under the registered rules and recounted against the archive's own pages at press time. Its sanity checks passed: Lincoln's second inaugural showed its three counted us tokens in 701 words, no sentence-initial Us anywhere in the sixty addresses required adjudication, and the control run diverged from the primary run by half a token per thousand, confirming that quoted matter barely moves these figures. Taken as pooled era rates, total tokens against total words, the results draw the long arc of the American plural. The founding half-century runs at 17.7 first person plural tokens per thousand words; the late nineteenth century at 20.1; then the line climbs for a hundred years: 38.0 from the Progressive era through the

Depression, 51.0 at mid-century, 61.8 in the closing decades, 63.5 across the current quarter-century. The pronoun's density in the office's most formal speech more than tripled between the founding era and our own. Presidents of the early republic addressed the office, the Constitution, and Providence. Presidents of the broadcast age address an us. The inaugural grew into a speech delivered to a we the speaker claims to embody.

Then the finding that frames the decade. The highest rate in the entire series, sixty addresses across 236 years, belongs to 2013, at 79.5 per thousand. Every inaugural since has come in lower, and the fall is stepwise across the years under audit: 68.6 in 2017, 66.0 in 2021, 56.0 in 2025, across the addresses of both parties. The presidential we crested one term before this book's opening date, and it has retreated at every swearing-in since. Three addresses make a line's direction and nothing more; the close series, printed in the appendix, says the retreat holds across the decade's own set, and the platform corpus, when anyone lands it, will say the rest. One further observation rides along flagged, held to its small sample: in the 2017 and 2025 addresses the object form nearly vanishes, two us tokens in each, against twenty-one to twenty-six in the 2009, 2013, and 2021 addresses, while the

subject form we stays high throughout. A rhetoric rich in we and starved of us claims collective agency while offering little collective receiving. Two addresses from one speaker prove nothing on their own, and the count will have its say in the grammar chapter; the observation enters the record here because the overture is where the instruments get loaded. The count measures rhetoric, and this book asserts causation nowhere the sources cannot carry it. What the line establishes is enough: the loudest, most ceremonial us in American public life was thinning during the years when the small us-es were multiplying, the chosen, the encrypted, the subscribed, the cancellable. The corpus and the decade point opposite ways. That disagreement is the book.

The artifact itself went under the instrument, and here the audit began before anyone had planned it. The 2016 essay, all 723 words, carries 40 first person plural tokens, 55.3 per thousand. Strip the quotations and count the author's prose alone, 551 words, and the density rises: 37 tokens, 67.2 per thousand, above the current quarter-century's pooled inaugural rate of 63.5. The genres differ, and the comparison should be read as a mirror: it shows the author his own register. The lament about the failing us was written in

inaugural-grade we. I have been saying the author about the man who wrote that essay, and the distance is deliberate: he is the specimen, I am the auditor, and the receipts say we are the same person. That is why this book can be written. The auditor never stood outside the jar. The audit runs from the inside, with the instruments pointed back at the hand that built them.

One more exhibit belongs to the overture, and it is the hardest, because it is the audit's first finding against its own author. The essay opens on Aristotle, and it opens like this:

> Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.

Attributed there to the Politics. The passage matches no clause of Jowett's translation, and the verification record found it in no other scholarly translation. It circulates on quote-collection sites, translator unnamed, and it reads as an anthology composite of the genuine passage at Politics I.2, 1253a: social where Jowett has political; beneath

our notice where Jowett has a bad man. A third clause, the one about society preceding the individual, compresses Aristotle's actual claim, that the state is by nature prior to the family and to the individual. The essay's second Aristotle quotation checks out to the line. Its first, the quotation that set the frame for everything the essay charged, was the confirmation-shaped version: smoother, more quotable, circulating without attribution, asking no one to learn anything. The essay accused the us of us of preferring confirmation to learning, and its own opening exhibit was confirmation wearing a toga.

Recorded in the source notes, under the ruling of September 5, 2026: the essay is quoted exactly as published, and the variance is disclosed beside it, there and in the appendix where the essay reprints in full. Silent substitution was refused. Substitution would falsify the artifact under audit and bury the finding, and the finding is structural, because it is the method demonstrating itself on the nearest available specimen. The ruling belongs to a larger discipline that governs every chapter. No load-bearing fact enters this book on a secondary source's authority alone. Every dated claim is checked against the named primary document, and where the primary cannot be reached the claim is cut or flagged in the Note on

Sources as unverified. Wikipedia is barred as a source anywhere in this book. The auditor's first exhibit against the age was a document, and the first document to fail inspection was his own. Every other exhibit in this book gets the same inspection. That is the whole method, and it is the only credential the method offers.

What happened to the phrase after June 8, 2016, is the decade in miniature, and it is why the book's full title, settled September 5, 2026, reads The Us of Us: A Decade in the Life of the First Person Plural. The phrase had a life, and the life is documented in public, with timestamps: thirteen verified deployments across four years and five months. It rose, capitalized and hyperlinked to the domain, glossed by its own coiner as the all of us, the salvageable whole. The foresight came in December 2018, when the author handed the phrase to a machine, a synthetic narrator in one of his own scripts, and wrote the coinage's capture himself: the manufactured we announcing the us of us as the merger that follows the human, the counterfeit staged on the record two years into the life. From there, decline: a container for grief, an object of repair, a casualty list in the pandemic's first spring, toss-aways by that summer. The last sighting: October 23, 2020, eleven days before an election, the

phrase deployed as the creditor owed trust back, its link to the domain restored for the final word. One structural signature completes the record: twelve of the thirteen deployments close or crown their essays, and the one that opens an essay is the toss-aways, the collective introduced as already thrown. Then silence on the blog, six years of it, confirmed by a replication of the site search on September 5, 2026, until this book picked the phrase back up. Born with two timestamps; promoted, stolen, mourned, mislaid. A decade in the life is the accurate description. This book is the recount, and by the registrar's record it is also the revival. The phrase corpus stands as the self-audit's spine, with one supplement already registered: when the manuscript is finished, the 2016 essay and this book will be counted under the same rules, endpaper to endpaper, and the results will be disclosed whatever they show.

The stakes, stated once before the evidence starts. A republic is a pronoun with institutions attached. Its load-bearing sentences are plural: the losers consent to a count because the us is larger than the faction, and the winners accept restraint from the same arithmetic. Deliberation, the thing the political animal exists to do, requires a room where the same facts are visible and the

same word can be meant by everyone who says it. If the singular us dissolves into scattered small uses while institutions and machines learn to counterfeit the pronoun at scale, the room empties, and the word remains, spoken over the empty chairs like a blessing over a house nobody lives in. The verdict the evidence points toward can be said now, because this book does not trade in suspense: the genuine plural survives at rescaled size; the counterfeit thrives at national and commercial size; and the two machines that still manufacture the genuine article on purpose are the classroom and the stage. The audit also owes a verdict on its own author, and it will deliver one in the final movement: the 2016 predictions taken item by item, where the essay was right, where it was early, where it was wrong, stated without cushion. Everything between this page and the coda is the proof, the measurement, and the price.

Back to the desk, because the scene is the evidence. This chapter carries the domain's name, and the choice is deliberate. The essay was the argument, and arguments can be walked back, qualified, outgrown. The domain was the commitment: a form, a fee, a name reserved from the public shelf and held, at a yearly price, against a use that had not yet announced itself. Two

clocks sit on those receipts. The essay's timestamp reads 14:37:27; the registrar's reads 23:46:58. Between them stand nine hours and nine minutes; after them, ten years. Side by side now, the receipts agree with each other. What they say is enough to begin: the us of us was indicted in the morning and given a home at night, and both receipts were written by the same hand. The count is running; the standard is on the scales. The recount begins with what the clocks already said.

MOVEMENT I

The Given Us

Chapter Two

The Political Animal.

The city wakes talking. Before the stalls finish opening in the square, before the fish and the olive jars find their places, the talk is already running, because talk is what the square is for. Men come out of their households one by one, and the household is the first society, the association for the supply of daily wants, companions of the cupboard, companions of the manger. “First house and wife and an ox for the plough,” says Hesiod, in the line Aristotle quotes to fix the order of growth, for the ox is the poor man’s slave. The households gather into what were once villages, the second society, colonies of the family, children and grandchildren said to be suckled with the same milk; the villages in turn give way to the city, the third and complete community, large enough to be nearly self-sufficing. Some of what the men do in the square is buying and selling. Everything else is the activity that, in the account

this chapter is built on, separates their species from the bees: they argue about what is good and bad for the city, what is just and unjust, what should be done and who should do it. The arguing is no distraction from the city's business. The arguing is the city, as much as the walls are.

One more thing about the scene, and it is the thing this chapter must not flinch from. Count the people in the square against the people inside the walls, and the square is a minority. The women are not there. The slaves are not there, except on errands. Nor are the resident foreigners. The deliberating animal deliberates in a room from which most of the humans in the city are excluded, and the man whose account I am about to borrow built part of that exclusion into his own theory, in the same opening pages that contain the theory's greatness. Both facts belong in this chapter, and the second is as load-bearing as the first.

The account is Aristotle's, assembled around 350 before Christ, in a city that had been talking this way for generations. What I have rendered above is a scene and not a photograph, and its elements are his: the household, the village, the self-sufficing city, the argument in the square, the line between the animal that talks and the animal that only cries out. The Politics and the

Nicomachean Ethics supply the standard this book applies, and citations here run by Bekker number, the page-and-column address that every scholarly Aristotle shares, so that any reader can check any passage in any translation. Jowett's Politics (Oxford, 1885, revised in the Oxford Works of 1921) and Ross's Nicomachean Ethics are the translations of record, and every quotation in this chapter was checked against the archive texts of those translations before it was allowed into the prose.

The sentence the whole standard hangs on arrives early, at 1253a:

> Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the "Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one," whom Homer denounces.

Political, says Jowett, and the word carries the argument. The 2016 essay at the center of this book's audit quoted a composite Aristotle that said social, and social is the weaker claim: bees are social, and so are ants and cattle and any herd that grazes in the same field. Political is the stronger claim, the animal of the polis, the

creature whose nature is completed in a self-governing city. A few lines later the same passage draws the boundary the 2016 essay borrowed for its epigraph: “he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state.” The us has an edge, and the edge is the capacity for shared life. Fall below it and you are a beast. Rise above the need for it and you are a god. Everything human happens between those two cliffs, inside the walls, in the talk. One more thing from that page, the price of the fall: “For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends.” The animal outside the bond is no mere absence of city. He is the most dangerous animal on the record, armed and reasoning and unbound. The decade under audit will meet him again, chanting.

Why the talk matters comes next, and it is the deepest thing in the chapter:

> Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or

> pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state.

Voice signals pleasure and pain; speech argues about the just. Any animal can say I hurt. Only one animal can say this is unfair, and mean the city by it, and build the association out of that saying. Deliberation is the species function. The given us, the one nobody chose, the family and the village and the city, is made of this: shared speech about shared goods. Strip the argument out of the square and what remains is a herd with walls, voice without speech, acclamation without resolution. The distinction holds. It will measure the whole decade under audit.

The same passage carries two more load-bearing claims. Priority comes first: “the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part.” Destroy the body and the hand survives

only as a stone hand, a hand in name alone; the isolated individual, Aristotle says, is like that, because the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing. In pronoun terms: we is prior to me, and a me torn out of its we keeps the shape and loses the function. Then the closing claim: “justice is the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.” The bond of the us is the shared determination of what is just: the bond is the deliberation itself. The talk is the glue.

One page earlier, the Politics had already defined what a citizen is by the alternation built into the office: when “the citizens rule and are ruled in turn,” the man who governs by that rule is called a statesman (1252a). Rule and be ruled in turn. The citizen is the subject case on Monday and the object case on market day, the we that acts and the us that is acted upon, and the grammar of this whole book is already present in the definition. A political animal is a pronoun that takes both cases by turns. Anything that only ever rules, or only ever is ruled, has exited the definition, and the direction of the exit is the difference between a master and a slave.

What all this communal machinery aims at is the first sentence of the Politics: “Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good.” And the state stands at the top of the ladder of communities, because it “embraces all the rest” and aims “at the highest good” (1252a). Every us is organized wanting, aimed at something it calls good. The household wants daily life; the village wants more than daily life; the city wants the highest thing a community can want. That is the claim the word us smuggles into every sentence it appears in: someone is aiming, and something is being aimed at, and the two questions this book keeps asking are who is doing the aiming and what they are aiming at.

The purpose of the whole apparatus arrives a page later, at 1252b: the state “comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life.” Survival founds the city; living well justifies it. A us assembled only for survival is the herd again, and the given us was always aimed past that, at the good life held in common, which is why “he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors.” Keep the good life in view, because it is the difference between a we

that only persists and a we that means something, and every claimant in this book will eventually be asked which of the two it offers.

The Politics says what the us is for. What holds it together is the subject of the Nicomachean Ethics, and the answer is a word that will do more work in this book than any other: friendship. The treatise opens the subject at 1155a with a claim that still startles:

> Friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy.

Friendship holding states together; lawgivers caring more for it than for justice; faction as the worst enemy. The legislator's problem, in the oldest analysis on this book's shelf, is cohesion, and cohesion's name is philia. Three kinds of it follow at 1156a, "equal in number to the things that are lovable," because people love on three grounds: the useful, the pleasant, and the good. The friendships of utility and pleasure are real and everywhere, and Aristotle prices them honestly: "those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each

other," and such friendships dissolve when the good stops arriving. The friendship of pleasure works the same way on the same clock. Aristotle even prices the two inferior kinds by season of life: utility friendship "seems to exist chiefly between old people," who have stopped expecting pleasure, while the friendship of the young aims at pleasure and lives under the guidance of emotion, so that they "quickly become friends and quickly cease to be so," changing "often within a single day." The taxonomy does its work without sneering: utility and pleasure friendships are real, and they are exactly as durable as the utility and the pleasure. The third kind is the complete one:

> Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends.

Wishing the other's good for the other's own sake: that is the definition the decade will be measured against, and most of what now says we to you will fail it, because most of what now says we to you wants something from you. The complete friendship cannot be hurried, and here Aristotle hands this book its raw materials. "Such friendship requires time and familiarity; as the

proverb says, men cannot know each other till they have ‘eaten salt together’; nor can they admit each other to friendship or be friends till each has been found lovable and been trusted by each.” Time: the salt of the shared table, the eaten meals. “A wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not.” Presence: “there is nothing so characteristic of friends as living together” (1157b), and absence has its own verdict a clause away: “if the absence is lasting, it seems actually to make men forget their friendship; hence the saying ‘out of sight, out of mind.’” Living together gets its full definition at 1170b, “living together and sharing in discussion and thought; for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of man, and not, as in the case of cattle, feeding in the same place.” Shared goods: the proverb “what friends have is common property” expresses a truth, because “friendship depends on community” (1159b). Communities come in sizes, though, because every smaller association sits inside the largest one: the sailors share the voyage, the soldiers share the war, the guild shares the sacrifice, and all these partial partnerships “fall under the political community,” which “aims not at present advantage but at what is advantageous for life as a whole” (1160a). Time, presence, shared goods, under one roof that aims

at the whole of life. A pronoun that cannot point to those things is a sound, the overture said. Here is where the saying comes from.

A hard question stands between the fireside version and the civic one: can friendship scale? Aristotle answers in both directions, and the two answers together are the hinge this whole book swings on. At 1158a: “One cannot be a friend to many people in the sense of having friendship of the perfect type with them, just as one cannot be in love with many people at once.” Perfect friendship refuses scale; it belongs to the few who have eaten the salt. Yet at 1171a the same author writes: “In the way proper to fellow-citizens, indeed, it is possible to be the friend of many and yet not be obsequious but a genuinely good man; but one cannot have with many people the friendship based on virtue and on the character of our friends themselves, and we must be content if we find even a few such.” There is a way proper to fellow-citizens, a many-scale friendship that is genuine of its kind, and it is different in kind from the fireside version. The given us ran on both at once: the small complete friendships inside the rooms, and the thinner civic kind stretched across the city. What the thinner kind requires, and what it dies of, is the next passage.

Between the single friendship and the whole city stands the bridge this book walks across, at 1167a. On the good mornings the square ended its arguing in a resolution, something chosen and then done in common, and that ending has a name in the Ethics. Ross renders the Greek homonoia as unanimity; other translations say concord; either way the passage names the civic-scale condition:

> Unanimity seems, then, to be political friendship, as indeed it is commonly said to be; for it is concerned with things that are to our interest and have an influence on our life.

Unanimity is not agreement about everything, Aristotle is careful; people who agree about the heavenly bodies are not thereby political friends. A city is unanimous "when men have the same opinion about what is to their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common." Concord is agreement that survives contact with action: resolving together, then doing the resolved thing. And the passage carries the failure mode inside itself, because the bad cannot hold the condition: "they aim at getting more than their share of advantages, while in labour and public service they fall short of their share," and the result is faction, "putting compulsion on each

other but unwilling themselves to do what is just." That sentence is the whole decade in advance. An us that grabs more than its share and serves less than its share converts concord into compulsion, and compulsion is what remains when the common resolution dies.

One distinction more, because the decade abuses it daily. Immediately before the concord passage, at 1166b and into 1167a, Aristotle separates goodwill from friendship. Goodwill arises suddenly, even toward strangers, even toward competitors in a contest; it is "a beginning of friendship," inactive and superficial, and it becomes friendship only when prolonged into intimacy. It is cheap and instant and real, and it is also nothing yet: the like button of the fourth century before Christ. The standard this book applies keeps the distinction: goodwill is the spark; concord is the fire; and the fire is what counts.

Every standard needs its negative type, and the Politics supplies it in Book Five, where revolutions are catalogued the way a physician catalogues fevers. At 1304b the analysis of how democracies die begins:

> Revolutions in democracies are generally caused by the intemperance of demagogues, who either in their private capacity lay information against

> rich men until they compel them to combine (for a common danger unites even the bitterest enemies), or coming forward in public stir up the people against them.

The mechanism is named: the demagogue works by accusation, splitting the city into the people and the marked, until the marked combine and the city tears. “Most of the ancient tyrants were originally demagogues” (1305a), and five sections later the book repeats the finding as history (1310b): “History shows that almost all tyrants have been demagogues who gained the favor of the people by their accusation of the notables.” Flattery is the instrument, division is the method, and the demos is the fuel. And the fuel consents, which is the darkest sentence in the whole analysis, from the same book’s eleventh section: “For the people too would fain be a monarch, and therefore by them, as well as by the tyrant, the flatterer is held in honor; in democracies he is the demagogue.” The flatterer is held in honor by the flattered. The demagogue comes from inside: he is the majority’s own appetite wearing the majority’s voice, honored for telling the people what the people already wish to hear. Elsewhere in the same book, at 1310a, comes the diagnosis of the freedom such leaders sell, in the passage the 2016 essay quoted cleanly, Jowett to the word: “For two

principles are characteristic of democracy, the government of the majority and freedom. Men think that what is just is equal; and that equality is the supremacy of the popular will; and that freedom means the doing what a man likes." Every man living as he likes, Euripides' "according to his fancy," feels like liberty and functions like dissolution, and the passage ends on the sentence the essay built its hope on: "But this is all wrong; men should not think it slavery to live according to the rule of the constitution; for it is their salvation." The same page carries the prescription that outranks every law in the book: "But of all the things which I have mentioned that which most contributes to the permanence of constitutions is the adaptation of education to the form of government, and yet in our own day this principle is universally neglected." Education to the spirit of the constitution, neglected in Aristotle's own day, says the text, which means the neglect is at least twenty-three centuries old and the remedy is at least that old too. The type was fixed twenty-three centuries before any living politician was born, which is why this book can run types over names: the demagogue is a form, older than every party now alive, and the form's tell is that it flatters an us into faction while calling the flattery freedom.

Now the debt this chapter owes, paid in full sight. The same Book One that gives the standard gives the perimeter, and the perimeter is a crime scene: “a slave is a living possession” (1253b); “he who is by nature not his own but another’s man, is by nature a slave” (1254a); “Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind” (1254b). And the summation, from the thirteenth section of the same book, is the sentence that explains the square’s emptiness: “For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature” (1260a). Read it against the standard’s own foundation. The political animal is defined by speech about the just and the advantageous, by the deliberative capacity; the exclusions then proceed by denying or diminishing exactly that capacity in the excluded. The theory’s greatness and the theory’s crime sit on the same page, and the crime is committed in the theory’s own vocabulary.

Plainly, because this book’s credibility depends on the saying of it. The polis measured itself by concord among citizens, and the citizens were a minority of the humans. Apply the standard’s own test to the polis that produced it, and it returns a

failing grade: a city that cannot extend its deliberation past a minority of its residents is, by the definition at 1167b, a faction machine, some grabbing more than their share, most serving outside the count. The history of us is the history of its perimeter, and the perimeter drawn at 1260a held for two thousand years before the corrections began, corrections that are the subject of the next chapter and the engine of this whole movement. The scale comes poisoned from the crate. That is conceded, written down, and dated.

Why use it anyway? Because adopting a scale endorses its readings, and never its maker's world. Every instrument arrives with provenance; the only choice is whether the provenance gets declared or stays hidden, working as an invisible variable inside every measurement. A standard built fresh in 2026 would carry this decade's own blind spots, undeclared and therefore unmeasurable. The Aristotelian scale carries its bias on the crate, dated and itemized, and a known bias can be corrected for. This book's counting protocol runs the same defense on its own panels: fix the rules in advance, publish the seams, let the hostile reader re-run the work.

It works because the measuring parts are separable from the excluding parts, and the excluding parts were refuted by the measuring parts. The distinction between voice and speech loses nothing when the excluded are admitted; it gains its full meaning. Nor do the three friendships lose anything: the raw materials of time, presence, and shared goods describe a twelve-step basement as accurately as a symposium. And concord gains the most, because concord becomes possible. The standard even contains the verdict on its own era, which is more than can be said for most standards. The scholarly record has already run the repair: Sibyl Schwarzenbach's On Civic Friendship: Including Women in the State (Columbia University Press, 2009) rebuilds philia politike with the excluded admitted, and its title is the perimeter argument in five words. John Cooper's "Political Animals and Civic Friendship," first delivered to the Symposium Aristotelicum in 1987, published in its proceedings in 1990, and collected in Reason and Emotion (Princeton University Press, 1999), grounds the reading of civic friendship in the political-animal passage itself, the same 1253a this chapter stands on. Paul Ludwig's Rediscovering Political Friendship (Cambridge University Press, 2020) carries the argument into the present: in his

reading, citizens are civic friends when they share an agreement about the regime itself, the utility-built concord that holds a liberal democracy together while the democracy forgets the name of the thing holding it. The academy's shelf runs current through 2020. The trade shelf holds nothing on the subject. That gap is one of the reasons this book exists.

Now the standard stands calibrated, and here is its working form, the checklist every claimant in this book will be weighed against. A real us shows speech that resolves in common, arguments about the just and the advantageous that end in shared action, which is the difference between speech and voice; the campaign chant and the comment thread will answer that one. A real us shows time, the eaten salt, the long familiarity no wish can shortcut; ask the month-old subscription, cancellable in one click. It shows presence, living together in the strong sense: sharing in discussion and thought, the opposite of feeding in the same place; the crowd of one, each member alone with a screen, faces that one. It shows shared goods, the common property of friends, the thing that belongs to the us itself, and an audience will be asked what it owns together besides the memory of the show. A real us, finally, answers for its perimeter: whom it excludes, and why, and

whether the why survives the standard's own logic. Five questions, one scale. The counterfeit will answer none of them and will answer loudly anyway, which is its own result.

Once more the square, in the last hour of the morning. The arguments wind down; the resolutions, on the good days, stand; the men drift home to their households, to the cupboard and the manger. Somewhere at the edge of the city walks the man who needs no one, and somewhere outside the walls prowls the one whom no one will have, the god and the beast, the two ways to live without a we. The rest are inside, talk still drying on the air. That is the given us as its first analyst found it: flawed at the perimeter, exact at the center, built out of nothing more than people who keep showing up to speak. The square empties. The salt stays on the table.

Chapter Three

The Pronoun's Perimeter.

The holiday was over when the oration began. On Monday, the fifth of July, 1852, in Corinthian Hall in Rochester, a hall the speaker knew well enough to call it beautiful from the platform, the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society gave its Fourth of July address to Frederick Douglass, and he delivered it a day late, into a room full of people still warm from their own celebration. The delay was the design. What he said in that hall was for sale within the week: a forty-page pamphlet, Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852, advertised at ten cents in his own newspaper on July 13. The scene is documented, and the documentation matters, because what happened in that room is the clearest performance on record of the thing this chapter is about.

What happened is that a man stood up in the middle of a national party and drew the boundary of the pronoun the party was thrown for. He did it in one question, asked early and politely, in the object case: “Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?” Extended to us. The whole of American history, this chapter argues, is the record of that question being asked and answered, asked and answered, across two and a half centuries. The meaning of the first person plural at any date is its perimeter at that date. Who is inside the us, who is outside it, who is counted as a fraction of it, and who is standing in a public hall asking to be let in: the pronoun’s content is the fence line, and the fence moves. What follows is the admission log, each entry with its text and its count.

Begin at the founding, with the widest We on record. Consider first what the sentence attempts as an act, before the instrument measures it as a text. No king grants this government and no church blesses it into being: a We speaks, and the speaking is itself the founding. The people assert the plural before the plural has legal existence, and the document they produce is the proof that the assertion took. The pronoun bootstraps the

polity. Every later us in this book, real and counterfeit alike, attempts the same trick: say we, and by saying it, begin to make it true.

> We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Run on the founding text, the instrument returns a figure worth sitting with. The whole document of 1787, Preamble through the seventh Article and the subscription line, 4,504 words, carries the first person plural six times: 1.33 tokens per thousand words, a rate the founding-era inaugural addresses would later exceed thirteenfold, and the six are distributed like a signature sheet. The subject case speaks twice: “We the People,” to ordain, and “We have hereunto subscribed our Names,” to sign. Between those two subject plurals the document gives “ourselves and our Posterity,” the We reaching forward in time to people not yet born, and once, in the dating formula, “the Year of our Lord.” The people get

named once. That is the entire spoken plural of the founding: a We that ordains, a We that signs, a posterity promised, a Lord dated.

It had not always been so quiet. Eleven years earlier, the other founding document had shouted the plural from beginning to end. Run the count on the Declaration of Independence and the instrument reads 48 tokens in 1,323 words, 36.28 per thousand, twenty-seven times the Constitution's density, and the case distribution tells the story. The grievance section is written in the object case: the king has imposed taxes on us without our consent, deprived us of trial by jury, transported us beyond seas to be tried, declared us out of his protection, waged war against us, plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts. The us of the Declaration is the wronged us, the held and taxed and burned-out us, the pronoun as the list of things done to it. Then the document turns, and the subject case arrives with the resolve: "We hold these truths to be self-evident"; "We have Petitioned for Redress"; and at the close, the pledge that converts grievance into mutual obligation, "we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." The revolutionary document runs on us wronged and we resolved, at a rate the sober frame of government never approaches again.

Government is written in persons. Rebellion is written in pronouns. Remember the contrast; the whole admission log plays it back and forth.

Then read four paragraphs into the first Article. Representation and direct taxes are apportioned "according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons." The widest We on record narrows to a fraction before the first Article ends. The perimeter is drawn in the word Persons: free persons whole, some persons excluded entirely, and all other Persons at three fifths, the enslaved counted as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of giving their enslavers more seats in the House that the People had ordained paragraphs earlier. In its ninth section, the same Article protects the trade that filled that fraction, forbidding Congress to prohibit "the Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit" before the year 1808. The fence was built with the promise, in the same document, paragraphs apart. Anyone who tells you the founding was one or the other, the promise or the fence, has read half the text.

Hold the two facts together, because the chapter's method depends on holding both. The Preamble's We is genuinely universal in grammar: it names no race, no sex, no property qualification, no nativity. Against it, the first Article's arithmetic is exclusionary in operation: it prices the excluded at three fifths and dates the trade's protection. Written wide, administered narrow: that is the founding's double truth. The whole subsequent history, every entry in the admission log, is the administration catching up to the grammar, document by document, each correction paid for in the currency the standard of the previous chapter prices: time, presence, and shared goods.

Second entry, the fifth of July, 1852, and it is the one this book was built to honor. Douglass begins with the true part, and he grants it in full before he dismantles anything. "Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. They were great men too," great enough, he says, to give fame to a great age. "They were statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory." He reads the resolution of July 2, 1776, aloud to the room, and he gives the founders their

pronoun's due: "Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success." He even takes the Constitution itself, the document with the fraction in it, and reads it by its grammar instead of its administration: interpreted as it ought to be interpreted, he tells them, the Constitution is a "GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT." Read its preamble, consider its purposes: "Is slavery among them? Is it at the gateway? or is it in the temple? It is neither."

Then the turn, and the turn is the perimeter itself. "I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn." The holiday is assigned to the audience; the mourning is assigned to the speaker; the us of the room is split, in one sentence, into yours and mine.

The instrument confirms what the ear hears. Run under this book's registered rules, the speech carries the first person plural at 7.14 tokens per thousand words: 75 tokens in 10,500 words of oration. Now run the second person as a chapter supplement, flagged outside the registered token set: you and your and their cognates come to 197 tokens, 18.8 per thousand, more than two and a half times the plural's rate. The speech's engine is the second person. Douglass stands inside the most famous American pronoun argument ever made, and he makes it in the case of the addressed: your celebration, your nation, your fathers, your independence. When the first person plural does appear, it is often the excluded us: "Are the great principles … extended to us?" The object case again, the us that is acted upon, counted, and here, explicitly, not enjoyed in common.

He also ranks the perimeter against the world, in the passage every anthology knows: "Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy,

America reigns without a rival." The superlative is the measurement of its day: the nation that wrote the widest We and administered the narrowest one held, for him, the record.

What he is doing, in this book's grammar, is the subtraction test performed from the outside. The test says: for any claimed us, remove its them and report what survives. Douglass removes himself from the national us and reports what the room looks like from the far side of the fence. "Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them." A celebration that requires the wail to stay a celebration is a perimeter artifact, and his answer to the day's whole question lands in the speech's most quoted passage: "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim."

He chooses the mode on purpose and says so, which is why the speech survives its own fury. "At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting

reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake." The time for argument, he tells them, is past. This is the standard's voice-speech line drawn through the middle of one address: the audience has had its hundred years of argument and answered with the fraction, so the orator reaches past argument for the register that shame runs on. And still, inside the fire, the grammar of the book he is indicting keeps its hold on him. Even here, the plea is "We need the storm." The plural of the indictment is the plural of the promise; he will not surrender the word to the people who broke it.

What he refuses carries the finding. He refuses to burn the document: the principles are saving principles, the Constitution is a liberty document, the promise was written wide. He refuses to despair: "notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country." And so he leaves off, by his own account, where he began, with hope. The perimeter argument, made by the man with the most standing to make it bitterly, is made instead as a claim on the promise: the fence is the failure, the grammar is the ground, and the ground is wide enough to hold him too. That is

why the speech is the chapter's center. It is the admission log's great entry, written by a man standing outside, in the two cases this book keeps: the you that holds the holiday, and the us that is waiting to be let in.

Sixteen years later, the document caught up to the oration. The war came between them, and the abolition amendment with it, and then, on July 9, 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, passed by Congress on June 13, 1866, declared in the Secretary of State's certificate on July 28. Its first sentence is the perimeter's central repair: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." Citizenship by birth and naturalization, written into the founding text, the door Douglass had been asking about since before the war answered in the Constitution's own grammar. Its second section is where the fraction of 1787 formally dies: representatives are apportioned "counting the whole number of persons in each state." The whole number. The three-fifths arithmetic, which had priced the excluded for eighty years, is struck and replaced by the count of everyone, and the perimeter chapter's own method requires the sentence's whole text: the clause continues "excluding

Indians not taxed," and the amendment's later section writes "male" into the document for the first time. The repair was real and the repair kept its exclusions, which is the log's whole lesson at full strength. The repair was defended on the House floor by Thaddeus Stevens in the spirit this book claims for itself: asked why anyone should vote for imperfect legislation, he answered, "because I live among men and not angels." The log's grammar holds here too: the repair arrives in persons and citizens, third person, no plurals of belonging, because the perimeter is drawn around, and then the belonging has to be spoken into the shape the law has cut.

Third entry, and the correction arrives as a sentence. It had been asked for at Seneca Falls in 1848, in another Rochester-region room, where the suffrage resolution passed with the help of the same man who would give the Fifth of July oration four years later; Douglass spent the century standing at both fences. The Archives' own summary calls the amendment the culmination of more than eight decades of advocacy: eighty years of presence, petition by petition, before the text moved. The Nineteenth Amendment, passed by Congress on June 4, 1919, ratified when Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state on August 18, 1920, certified by Secretary of

State Bainbridge Colby on August 26, 1920, reads in full: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” Thirty-nine words, and the instrument returns zero: no we, no us, no our. The largest perimeter correction of the American century is written in the third person throughout, in citizens and sex and the names of the governments. It is also the only entry in this log with no ceremony at all: no island, no lawn, no speech, only the Secretary of State’s proclamation certifying the count of states, the purest document-genre entry in the set. Here the pattern is worth naming: when the law widens the fence, it speaks in the impersonal grammar of persons and rights, because the law is the perimeter itself; it draws the circle, and it does not sing in it. The welcome, when it comes, arrives in another genre.

The genre showed itself twice more before the century ended, and the instrument was running for both. On October 3, 1965, at 3:08 in the afternoon, on Liberty Island in New York Harbor, before several hundred guests who had crossed to the island by boat, the president signed Public Law 89-236, 79 Statutes at Large 911, the act that

ended the quota regime that had drawn the American perimeter by national origin since the 1920s. The statute does it in one enumerative sentence: “No person shall receive any preference or priority or be discriminated against in the issuance of an immigrant visa because of his race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence.” The quotas and the pool terminate June 30, 1968, by the act’s own text. “This bill says simply,” the president told the harbor, “that from this day forth those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here. This is a simple test, and it is a fair test.” And the repair had taken its time in the open: he noted that Speaker McCormack and Congressman Celler had first pointed out the wrong in their maiden speeches in the Congress almost forty years before, and he reached back one administration further for the vision of the late President Kennedy. Forty years of presence inside the institution itself, one bill. The president, at the foot of the statue, did what the statute could not: he said the pronoun out loud. The bill, he conceded, was “not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions.” Then the claim this book records: “this measure that we will sign today will really make us truer to ourselves both

as a country and as a people. It will strengthen us in a hundred unseen ways.” Make us truer to ourselves: the perimeter moved, and the plural was spoken at the exact moment of the moving. The count on his remarks: 18.64 tokens per thousand.

The fourth entry counts its own excluded. Public Law 101-336, 104 Statutes at Large 327, signed July 26, 1990, on the South Lawn of the White House, at 10:11 in the morning. The Americans with Disabilities Act opens with a findings section, and the findings are an admission log written into the law itself: “some 43,000,000 Americans have one or more physical or mental disabilities”; “historically, society has tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities”; the disabled are “a discrete and insular minority who have been faced with restrictions and limitations, subjected to a history of purposeful unequal treatment, and relegated to a position of political powerlessness in our society.” The statute numbers the people outside the fence, names the fence, and cites the powerlessness, in our society, as the thing being repaired. One finding does double duty as the log’s own cross-reference: unlike those who faced discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, religion, or age, the disabled, the

statute says, have often had no legal recourse. The earlier entries of the admission log are listed as the precedent for this one. On the lawn that morning the welcome ran in both cases at once. “Today we’re here to rejoice in and celebrate another ‘independence day,’ one that is long overdue,” the president said. The framing is the sign: the perimeter’s repair is staged as a second Fourth of July, the founding holiday doing duty as the admission ceremony’s template, the same day Douglass was handed in 1852 and handed back with the perimeter drawn on it. Then, to the crowd that had made it happen: “America welcomes into the mainstream of life all of our fellow citizens with disabilities. We embrace you for your abilities and for your disabilities, for our similarities and indeed for our differences, for your past courage and your future dreams.” The we and the you, pointed at each other, on purpose. He lifted the pen and closed with the wall: “Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down.” The count on his remarks: 28.05 tokens per thousand, the highest rate among the log’s modern entries, with the second person running 32 tokens besides, because the admitted were standing on the grass.

Lay the set out. The founding document speaks the plural six times in 4,504 words, twice in the subject case. Douglass's oration indicts the perimeter at 7.14 per thousand while the second person floods to 18.8. The amendment corrects the perimeter in 39 words of pure third person, zero plurals. And the two signing ceremonies, a quarter-century apart, run 18.64 and 28.05. No naive line is claimed here, and the amendment's zero is the datum that forbids one. What the set shows instead is the two genres of the admission log: the documents draw the fence, and they draw it in persons and citizens, while the ceremonies perform the welcome, and they perform it in we and you. The perimeter is drawn in statutes and felt in speeches. A reader of the count can tell which genre a text belongs to by its pronouns alone; the pronoun carries the history.

Carry one lesson forward into the decade this book audits, because the decade will offer a shortcut around everything in this chapter. The claimants coming in Movement III will promise a perimeter-free plural: everyone, instantly, no fence, no gate, no decades of petition, a we you can join by tapping a screen and leave the same way. Against that promise stands this chapter's whole record. There has never been such a thing. The real us has always had a perimeter, and the

work of two and a half centuries was moving it, never abolishing it, one documented correction at a time, paid for in time and presence and shared goods. A plural with no perimeter is no plural; it is an audience. The fence's existence was never the scandal. Where it ran was the scandal; the moving of it was the glory.

The standard from the previous chapter reads the log without surprise. Each correction is the polis repairing its perimeter under the standard's own logic: the deliberative faculty that the old theory denied to the excluded was asserted, in the event, by the excluded, in rooms and streets and courts, until the documents caught up. Each entry was bought with the three raw materials. Time: sixty-eight years from the Fifth of July oration to the suffrage amendment, forty-five more to the immigration act, and seventy from the amendment to the disability act. Presence: movements that showed up in person for decades. Shared goods: the texts themselves, the one kind of property the whole us holds in common. The fence moves slowly, publicly, and on paper. That is the given us, working as designed, at the pace the design allows.

One scene gift remains, and it belongs to this book's own year. In March 2026, the Nineteenth Amendment joined the permanent Charters of

Freedom display in the Rotunda of the National Archives, alongside the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, with the Emancipation Proclamation entering beside it, the two perimeter documents unveiled together on the evening of March 27. The Archivist's announcement called the amendment the instrument of the largest enfranchisement in the country's history, the removal of voting restrictions for more than half of all Americans. The correction now stands in the same room as the thing it corrects, encased together, the promise and its repair sharing the argon. Admission by admission, the log is still being written; in the building where the original fence hangs, the latest pages were added this year.

Corinthian Hall emptied into the Rochester evening, the holiday over, the answer given. Within the week the answer was for sale at ten cents, forty pages, the perimeter drawn in print and priced for pockets. What the hall heard once, the country could keep. That is how the fence moves: a voice in a room, then a document anyone can hold, then, eventually, a case in the innermost room, under glass, where the whole us is invited to look.

Chapter Four

The Rooms.

The hall is empty on a Tuesday night, and the charter is still on the wall. This hall is a rendering, declared up front, the way the agora was: its frame is the union halls of the American century, and its numbers, when they arrive, are counted, which is the chapter's business. The charter on the wall is the detail that matters, because a charter is the pronoun of a room like this one: the national body issues it, the local holds it, and it says, in embossed ink, that the people in this room are a we with an address. Under the charter, the metal folding chairs. On the bulletin board, a meeting notice from a year that kept the room full, and beside it a photograph of the night the local won its first contract, forty people standing under this same charter, every face in the photograph on the roll. The photograph is the room's memory of itself. It is also the closest thing the given us had to a selfie, and the difference

between the two is the whole argument: a photograph of a room that exists versus an image of a crowd that assembles for the picture and disperses at the upload. A union hall conjugated the first person plural on a schedule: second Tuesday of the month, roll called, dues collected, minutes read. We meet. We vote. The grievances get heard. The given us ran on rooms, and the rooms ran on schedules, and the schedules were kept by people whose names were on a roll.

Each room had a name and a kind. The parish had a table and a liturgy, a calendar of Sundays that did not need to be remembered because it was kept for you; the lodge and the league had their rituals and their insurance funds, the Odd Fellows and the Elks and the League of Women Voters, each with a national charter, a state structure, and the local room where the structure touched the floor, the federations copying even the republic's own three-tier shape, as if the country's government had been the template for its gatherings; the family table had every night; and the newsroom had the editorial we, the institution's plural, the voice in which a newspaper said we endorse and meant the masthead; what happened to that room belongs to a later chapter, and it is noted here only because the editorial we was the room's grammar made

audible. Different creeds, different dues, same machinery: a place, a time, a roll, and a pronoun that belonged to the people on it. The rooms did the object case's work, the work this book's grammar keeps returning to. We acts; us is counted, taxed, drafted, mourned, held. The hall counted you on the roll, taxed you in dues, drafted you for the picket. The parish mourned you at the end and held you, in the meantime, every week. A room is where the us gets held. This chapter is about what happened to the rooms, and it begins by conceding, with the evidence in hand, that the mourning of the rooms is older than everyone now living.

In 1887, in Leipzig, a young German scholar named Ferdinand Tönnies published Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft and divided the human world into the warm room and the cold one. "All kinds of social co-existence that are familiar, comfortable and exclusive are to be understood as belonging to Gemeinschaft," he wrote, in the Harris and Hollis translation this book uses for him, Community and Civil Society, Cambridge, 2001; the standard earlier English edition is Loomis's Community and Society, 1957. "In Gemeinschaft we are united from the moment of our birth with our own folk for better or for worse. We go out into Gesellschaft as if into a

foreign land." And then the sentence that has haunted sociology ever since: "In Gemeinschaft they stay together in spite of everything that separates them; in Gesellschaft they remain separate in spite of everything that unites them." 1887. Before the radio, before the Model T, before the first suburban development, the division of community from society was already written, and written as a loss. Notice what the language already knew: community is the word that cannot carry a negative modifier. A young man may be warned against bad society, Tönnies observes, but "bad community" makes no sense. The counterfeit was not thinkable in his vocabulary, which is one reason the counterfeit had to wait for its century. Every generation since has mourned the rooms. The lament is a genre with a pedigree, and this book refuses to add an unearned volume to it.

Here is the concession, made once and then put to work. The mourning is old. What is new, and what this book claims, is measurable: the rooms got more than mourning: they got closed, at rates, inside living memory, on the record of the federal government and the country's oldest survey house, and two things arrived to take the vacancy that no prior generation had, the counterfeited we and the manufactured we, which are the subjects of the later movements. Tönnies had the theory.

We have the closing rates. The difference between elegy and measurement is the difference between his book and this chapter's next twenty minutes.

One more refinement before the numbers, because it keeps the argument honest. The rooms were never Gemeinschaft, the village and the kin. They were the negotiated settlement between community and society: chosen, voluntary, joined by adults who were born elsewhere, and still physical, scheduled, rolled, and accountable to a roll. The union local, the parish, the lodge, the league, were the compromise form, the place where a society of strangers manufactured the goods of a community on purpose. That is why their closing matters more than the village's long fading. The village was never chosen; the rooms were. A civilization that stops choosing its rooms has moved one rung further from the standard, because the rooms were where a mobile, free people did the choosing of one another, week by week.

Start with the hall. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has counted union members since 1983, and its annual release is the room's closing rate written in federal prose. In 1983, the first year of comparable data, 20.1 percent of wage and salary workers were union members, 17.7 million of them. In the release of February 18, 2026,

covering 2025, the figures are 10.0 percent and 14.7 million. The rate halved in four decades. Note also that the series begins after the peak: the historical tables kept by the Congressional Research Service and the historical-statistics program put the crest at mid-century, roughly a third of the nonfarm workforce in the 1940s and 1950s, before the comparable series opens. The hall this book is measuring was fuller before anyone started counting, which means the forty-year halving understates the emptying. The series is the documented slope of a longer fall. And because this book publishes the runs that cut against it: the 2025 number ticked up a tenth of a point on a gain of roughly four hundred thousand members against 2024, the first uptick in years, and it belongs in the record beside the trend. One seam, disclosed by the issuer itself: the October 2025 survey went uncollected during the federal shutdown, so the 2025 annual figures are eleven-month averages, and the release says so in a boxed note at the top. The measurement has its own perimeter story.

Read the sector split, because it tells you where the hall now stands. The public-sector membership rate in 2025 was 32.9 percent; the private-sector rate was 5.9 percent. Local government, the school district and the firehouse,

runs at 37.8 percent. The union hall, in other words, survives mostly inside government: the two sectors hold nearly even member counts, 7.3 million public and 7.4 million private, on wildly unequal bases, which means the shop-floor local, the room the century was built in, is the one that emptied. Two hundred and thirty dollars a week of median difference stands in the same release between the member and the nonmember, with the issuer's own caveat that the comparison controls for nothing else, so the loss was of something concrete: a raise. The release also carries two quieter findings that belong in the room's file. One is coverage: 16.5 million workers were represented by a union in 2025, against 14.7 million members, which means 1.8 million Americans worked under the contract without holding the membership, the room's roof extended over people who never signed the roll. The other is the gender convergence: in 1983 the hall was a male room, men at 24.7 percent and women at 14.6, and the four-decade decline converged the two rates at 10.4 and 9.6: the hall emptied of men first and fastest. The young are the farthest gone, unionizing at 4.7 percent; the hall's roll ages with the hall. State by state, the map tells its own version: the issuer's state tables run from below 5 percent membership to nearly

25, with the Carolinas and the Dakotas at the bottom of the range and Hawaii and New York at the top, which means the room is already gone in whole regions of the country and holding in others. The perimeter of the hall now runs along state lines.

Now the parish. Gallup first asked Americans whether they belonged to a church, synagogue, or mosque in 1937, and 73 percent said yes. For six decades the line barely moved: near 70 percent through the year 2000. Then the fall. In 2020, 47 percent of Americans belonged to a house of worship, down from 50 percent in 2018, and the Gallup release of late March 2021 announced the crossing in a headline as plain as the finding: U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time. The series that opened at 73 percent in 1937 crossed below half in the pandemic year. The mechanism, per Gallup's own analysis, is the rise of the unaffiliated, from 8 percent of Americans around the turn of the century to 21 percent by 2020, and the attrition runs inside the affiliated too: of Americans with a religious preference, 73 percent belonged to a congregation at the century's turn and 60 percent do now. Among millennials the membership figure is 36 percent. The generation table reads like the roll being called backward: traditionalists at 66 percent,

baby boomers at 58, Generation X at 50, millennials at 36, and the replacement does the work without any sermon, as the older, more churched generations are succeeded by younger, less churched ones. Gallup's own caution stands in the record too: part of the 2020 drop may have been temporary, the release allows, a pandemic artifact, though it judges continued decline inevitable on the generational arithmetic. The caution and the judgment are both the issuer's. The release closes with a sentence that belongs in the record of the rooms: while precise numbers of church closures are elusive, Gallup says, a conservative estimate is that thousands of U.S. churches are closing each year. A closing church is not a line on a chart. It is a building that outlives its congregation: the pews stay bolted to the floor, the font stays dry, the schedule on the sign out front keeps last month's date, and the us that was formed there every Sunday disperses with no forwarding address. The buildings were the inventory of the given us, and the inventory is being liquidated.

The lodge and the league have their chronicler, and her method is the one a counting book can love. Theda Skocpol's Diminished Democracy, published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 2003, carries its thesis in its subtitle, From

Membership to Management in American Civic Life. Her team catalogued every American association that had ever enrolled one percent of its relevant adult population, a threshold with the virtue of being a line and not a mood, and found the mid-century record dense with cross-class federated associations, the Elks and the Masons and the leagues of women and voters, each a national body with local rooms, a charter on the wall and a roll in the drawer. After the 1960s the form gave way to the professionally managed advocacy operation: the national office that recruits donors ahead of members, the mailing list where the roll used to be. Membership became management. The chapter quotes only her subtitle, which is verified on the edition, and carries her argument at the level of the scholarly review record; the case above stands on both. What her record establishes is the two-part shape of the loss: the rooms emptied, and the kind of room changed, from the federation whose local chapters mixed the classes in one room to the Washington office where professionals represent people they never sit with. The given us was organized as membership. It is administered now as management.

It is worth remembering what the lodge did, because the function explains the grief. The fraternal orders ran a private welfare floor: sick benefits, burial funds, the widow's insurance, the loan to the brother whose shop burned. The ritual was the price of the safety net, and the safety net was the proof of the pronoun. We, in those rooms, meant we bury our own. The leagues ran the civic version: the League of Women Voters teaching the newly admitted electorate how the machinery of government worked, chapter by chapter, in rooms where the roll was called. When the functions migrated to agencies and insurers, the rooms lost their errand, and the pronoun lost its weekly proof. Nobody mourns an office the way a room gets mourned, and nobody's name was ever on an agency's wall.

Then the state itself took up the subject, in the genre the state reserves for its gravest warnings. On May 2, 2023, the Surgeon General of the United States issued an eighty-one-page advisory titled Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. A Surgeon General's Advisory is, by the office's own definition in the document, a public statement that calls the American people's attention to an urgent public health issue, reserved for challenges that require the nation's immediate awareness. The office that once warned the

country about cigarettes has issued the same genre of warning about being alone, and the comparison is drawn inside the document: lacking social connection, the advisory reports, can increase the risk of premature death as much as smoking up to fifteen cigarettes a day, with loneliness and isolation raising the risk of premature death by 26 and 29 percent respectively. The advisory began, its author writes, on a listening tour, in what people told him before he had the numbers: that they felt "isolated, invisible, and insignificant," that "I have to shoulder all of life's burdens by myself." Then the numbers arrived, and the numbers said the same thing. About one in two American adults reports loneliness; a 2022 study cited in the document found only 39 percent of adults feeling very emotionally connected to others. The costs are priced in the same pages: nearly seven billion dollars of excess Medicare spending attributable to isolated older adults alone, a hundred and fifty-four billion in stress-related absenteeism borne by employers. The rest of the ledger fills a federal chapter: time spent alone climbed from 285 minutes a day in 2003 to 333 in 2020, an increase of twenty-four hours a month; time spent with friends in person fell from sixty minutes a day to twenty; for the fifteen-to-twenty-four cohort, in-

person friend time collapsed from roughly a hundred and fifty minutes a day to forty, a loss of nearly seventy percent across the years 2003 to 2020. In 2021, 49 percent of Americans reported three or fewer close friends; in 1990 the figure was 27 percent. Trust polls opened in 1972 with roughly 45 percent of Americans saying they could reliably trust other Americans; by 2016 the share was roughly 30. The advisory ties the two declines together in one sentence, trust at near historic lows and polarization at near historic highs, and the pairing is this book's bridge from the emptying rooms to the decade that inherited them. Single-person households more than doubled between 1960 and 2022, from 13 percent to 29 percent. Even the family table, the smallest and oldest room in the inventory, seats fewer: the advisory's demographic section records family size and marriage rates in steady decline for decades, and each empty chair is one fewer place where the plural is learned at home. In 2018, only 16 percent of Americans reported feeling very attached to their local community. The advisory names labor unions among the pillars of community connection in decline since at least the 1970s, which means the state's document and the labor bureau's series are looking at the same emptied room from two ends. Its glossary even

carries the term the later chapters of this book will need: social infrastructure, defined as the programs, policies, and physical elements of a community, the libraries and parks and member associations, that support the development of connection. The word for rebuilding the rooms arrives already printed in the federal document.

Here the instrument has something to say, because these are institutional documents and the count can run on them. The labor bureau's release body, nine hundred words of federal measurement, speaks the first person plural zero times. Gallup's core analysis, five hundred words on the death of the majority congregation, says it zero times too. The institutions count the room's emptying in pure third person, which is proper, since the perimeter of their subject is statistical and not confessional. But the Surgeon General's letter at the front of the loneliness advisory cannot do it that way. In 628 words the nation's doctor writes "It will take all of us," and "we will continue to splinter and divide until we can no longer stand as a community or a country," and "We are called to build a movement to mend the social fabric of our nation," and "Our future depends on what we do today." The count on the letter: 31 tokens in 628 words, 49.36 per thousand, a plural density up among the ceremonial

addresses of presidents. Read the letter once through and the register is unmistakable: it is the closest thing the federal government produced this decade to an inaugural address, and its subject is the death of the plural it is forced to speak. “We will continue to splinter and divide,” the doctor warns the country, “until we can no longer stand as a community or a country.” The state’s own prose cannot stop conjugating the pronoun whose conditions are gone. The diagnosis of the missing us can only be written in us. That is the chapter’s instrument finding, and it is worth pausing on: when the federal government speaks about the rooms closing, it can measure them in the third person, but when it tries to answer the closing, it has to reach for the first person plural and mean the country. The state’s prescription for the death of we is we. What the letter cannot supply is the room where the we would meet.

Now the ledger of the given us, with its debit column kept in view. The rooms were never innocent of the previous chapter’s subject. The hall had a color line in living memory; the parish had its own perimeter and its own patriarchy; the lodge’s exclusiveness was half its sales pitch. Nobody here romanticizes the containers. What makes the closing of the rooms legible as loss, and

legible it is, is the crossing of the two movements this book has now put on the table: the perimeters were being repaired, document by document, while the rooms were emptying, rate by rate. The fence was moving in the right direction at the exact moment the interior was hollowed. A wider us with nowhere to meet is the decade's inheritance. A civilization that watches its repairs succeed while its rooms fail will experience the moment as a theft, and the experience is accurate.

Now the ledger proper. The rooms are where the raw materials of the previous chapters accumulated: time, because the hall met on the second Tuesday for fifty years; presence, because you sat in the folding chair and your name was on the roll; shared goods, because the charter, the dues, the table, and the building belonged to the us itself. Civic friendship, the standard says, cannot be wished into being at speed; it is cooked slowly, in rooms, with salt. The closing of the rooms is therefore no mood and no metaphor; it is the measured withdrawal of the conditions under which the first person plural forms. The mourning of community is as old as 1887 and older; the closing rates are as new as the February 2026 release. That is the line between this book and the genre it respects. Elegy says the rooms always die. The count says: here is the rate, here is

the year, here is the issuer, and here is what arrived to take the vacancy. One more fact, because it frames the book's last movement: the loneliness advisory does not stop at diagnosis; it proposes a national strategy for social connection, whole-of-society, with the physical elements of community listed among the remedies. The state can fund rooms. The state cannot join them. Whether rooms can be rebuilt at all, and by whom, and out of what materials, is the question this book's closing movement answers; here the question only gets its price tag. The pronoun did not vanish when the rooms emptied. It went looking for shelter, and what it found is the subject of the next movement: the campaign that would shout it, the year that would sing it from the balconies, and after them the claimants, the brand and the platform and the machine, each saying we to the people the rooms used to hold.

The hall again, Tuesday night. Once, at mid-century, a third of the country's nonfarm workforce held cards in rooms like this, and the second Tuesday was spoken for. Now the charter stays on the wall because nobody took it down, and the roll stays in the drawer because the drawer still opens. A charter does not expire the way a membership does. The room is ready for a we that never comes, and the document on the

wall says the we still legally exists. The given us: founded on paper, met in rooms, mourned in print, and now measured in the federal release of February 2026, at ten percent, halved from where the series opened, on eleven months out of twelve.

Chapter Five

The Object Case.

Two people at a kitchen table, late, the kind of conversation that has been coming for weeks. This scene, like the agora and the hall before it, is a rendering; its grammar, unlike theirs, needs no sources, because the grammar is everyone's. One of them leans forward and says, "I've been thinking about us, and I think we need to stop." And there it is, mid-sentence, the trap the whole chapter is built from: the other one hears us as the two of them, the couple, the shared household, and has already started grieving the repair, when the first one keeps going and it becomes clear that the we in the sentence was never the two of them at all. It was the speaker plus someone else, or the speaker plus a new plan, or the speaker alone, speaking in plural to spread the weight of a singular decision. The listener has

been included in the grammar and excluded from the referent set, and finds out only as the sentence completes. “Wait,” the listener says. “Who’s we?”

Notice, before anything else, that the trap sentence itself was grammatically honest. “I’ve been thinking about us”: the object case, the couple as the thing thought about. “We need to stop”: the subject case, the couple as the thing that acts. Both forms pointed at the pair. The deceit was not in the cases; it was in the referent set, the thing English never marks. The cases said the pair; the speaker meant a different roster; and nothing in the sound of the sentence could have told the listener which roster was playing. Power readings go that far and no further: the listener had no say in the stopping either way. And the case analysis is the deeper cut, because the power moved first and the pronoun hid the movement.

Who’s we. English makes you ask it. There is no way to hear the answer off the pronoun itself, no marker on the word, nothing in its sound that says whether you are inside it. Every other word in the exchange told you something: the tense, the case, the number. We tells you plurality and first person and nothing else. The perimeter of the most important word in the sentence is left for the listener to discover, usually after it matters. That is not a quirk. It is a structural condition, and this

book's quietest tragedy lives inside it, because everything the decade's claimants will do with the pronoun, the campaign, the brand, the platform, the machine, works by exploiting exactly this hole.

What the listener had to spend to find out is the price. "Who's we?" is the only clusivity device English has: the follow-up question, asked after the sentence, at a social price. Ask it of a lover and you sound suspicious; ask it of a boss and you sound insubordinate. And toward a president, the question curdles into disloyalty: you are accused of hating the pronoun itself. The question reads as hostile precisely because the pronoun's whole function, in the mouths of the powerful, is to be answered late. The ambush is protected by the cost of asking. A language that cannot mark the perimeter has made the asking of the perimeter a breach of manners; the hole is guarded by etiquette. Nobody audits a we out loud. That is what it is for.

First, the grammar itself, because the hole is easier to see from outside it. English marks case on its pronouns, one of the last places in the language where case survives. I and me, we and us: the subject form and the object form. We acts. Us is acted upon. The book's third instrument, the object case, formalizes here: the subject case is the

plural as agent, and the object case is the plural as patient, the us that is counted, taxed, drafted, mourned, held, helped, heard, included, or excluded. The genitive, the case of belonging, is ours. Now look at the phrase this book is named for. The us of us. It is the object case twice over, the held form nested inside the held form's own genitive: of us is the genitive built out of us, and the thing being genitived is another us. The phrase under study never once reaches for the subject case. It does not say we. It says, twice, in the grammar of possession and partition, the held thing and the held thing's whole. When the author coined it in June 2016 he was indicting the country, but the grammar was indicting something quieter: a people who had stopped being the subject of their own sentence. The object case is where a we goes when it has stopped acting and is only ever acted upon. Keep the two forms in mind. They become a measuring instrument in a few pages.

Second, the registers, the named ways English lets a singular borrow the plural, and each one deserves to be walked around.

The royal we, pluralis majestatis, is the office claiming to be a body: the sovereign says we because the sovereign is, by the theory of the thing, the polity in one skin. The king's two bodies,

the private man and the public corporation, speak in one pronoun, and the pronoun is plural because the corporation is. Its modern residue is the executive announcement, we are excited to, where a company's singular decision dresses in the plural of everyone who will have to live with it. The royal we never includes the addressed. It only ever sounds as if it might.

The editorial we is the same trick run horizontally: the newspaper says we endorse, and the we is the masthead, a corporation speaking as a committee. For a century the editorial we was the local plural's public voice, the institution of the room speaking for the town, and what happened to that voice when the towns lost their papers is Movement Two's evidence; here the register needs only its grammar, the we of an institution that asks its readers to be included in an endorsement they had no vote in.

The clinical we of the bedside runs the move in miniature and downward: "how are we feeling today," asked by a person who feels fine, of a person who is being managed, the plural invoked to soften an instruction, inclusion used as anesthetic. Its benign cousin is the teacher's we, "let's see what we got right," where the plural names a task both parties have. The difference between the two is the standard's difference: the

teacher's we describes a real shared good, the lesson; the clinical we describes nothing shared at all. Same pronoun, opposite honesty. The word does not change; the referent set does, and the listener is left to discover which register was being used.

The authorial we of the scholarly page, "as we have seen," "we now show," is the register this book refuses: a single author conjuring a committee of reader and writer into the argument to make the argument look shared. This book says I when one person is speaking, and the difference is the book's method in miniature, because an author who will not say I cannot audit himself, and the audit is the whole enterprise.

Walk the gallery and the common move surfaces. Each register uses the plural to borrow authority the singular lacks, and each leaves the listener unsure whether they are inside the we until the bill arrives. The registers are the legal tender versions of the ambush, tolerated because their institutions had addresses and rolls and could be answered. The counterfeit versions are worse, and they get their own movement.

Third, the finding that organizes the tragedy, and it comes from the languages that fixed the hole English never did. In a large share of the world's languages, a speaker cannot say we

without declaring its perimeter. The grammarians call the distinction clusivity, a term coined for the standard scholarly volume on the subject, Elena Filimonova's Clusivity: Typology and Case Studies of the Inclusive-Exclusive Distinction, published by John Benjamins in 2005: clusivity marks whether the person being addressed is included in or excluded from the group the speaker belongs to. The inclusive we means you are in it; the exclusive we means you are out. In the languages that carry it, the declaration rides in the pronoun itself, so that the perimeter is announced at the speed of speech instead of discovered at the speed of consequences. Tok Pisin, the creole of Papua New Guinea, gives yumi for all of us including you and mipela for all of us excluding you, and the forms make their own logic visible, since yumi is built from you plus me: the inclusive pronoun literally contains the addressed. The Quechuan languages give ñuqanchik against ñuqayku; Tagalog gives táyo against kamí; Vietnamese, chúng ta against chúng tôi; Shawnee, kiilawe against niilawe, its inclusive derived from the word for you. Speakers of these languages must work to launch the ambush. The grammar does not forbid the ambush; it forbids the silent kind, the we that never had to say who

was in. They must say, at the moment of saying we, whether the person hearing it is one of us or not.

The typologists press the finding one level deeper, and the depth matters to this book. In the scholarly literature, from Cysouw's work on the paradigmatic structure of person marking forward, the inclusive keeps refusing to behave as the plural of I. The exclusive is the honest plural: I plus others of my kind. The inclusive is something else, I plus you, the speaker fused with the addressed, and some analyses treat it as a distinct person category altogether, a person that contains its listener. That sentence earns the pause it takes. And the inclusive we is not a plural I. It is the person English never names. The counterfeit we of the coming movements is always the plural of an I, a single will speaking in a crowd's voice. The real thing, the one the standard measures, is the other kind, and the other kind does not exist as a word in the language this book is written in. That is the hole, stated as exactly as the scholarship allows.

English cannot do it. There is no marker, no auxiliary, no inflection, nothing. Every English we is launched underdetermined, and the listener must reconstruct the referent set from context, from loyalty, from hindsight, from the taste of the

sentence afterward. The politician's we, the movement's we, the brand's we, the platform's we, all of them sail on this one structural fog. It gets worse before it gets better, because English speakers, never forced to declare the perimeter, stop noticing the perimeter exists. The word goes soft with use. A people can say we for decades without once being asked to specify the set, and the specifying, when it finally comes, arrives as a shock: as a chant, as a term of service, as a deportation. Chapter Three showed the fence moving in documents over two and a half centuries. This is where it hid between moves: in a pronoun that never had to say where it ran.

A small adjacent loss belongs here, because it keeps the account honest about what English once had. English used to mark number in the second person: thou for one of you, ye for the rest. The language dropped the distinction and let you go bare, and now the plural you does its work in dialects and patches, y'all and youse and you lot, the vernacular repairs of a marking the standard abandoned. First the plural of the second person went unmarked, and nobody starved. The clusivity of the first person was never marked at all. The language has been shedding perimeter machinery for four hundred years, and the decade under audit is what happens when a

people with unmarked pronouns meets machines that can compute perimeters the speakers never declare.

There is one more way to see the hole, and it is written on my own hands. By the author's own authority, admitted here and here only, and grounded here on the record: I sign, and I have signed for over thirty-five years, at native and bilingual proficiency. I founded and developed the American Sign Language program of study at the City University of New York's School of Professional Studies, and I have written books on the language, several of them with my wife, who is Deaf. In American Sign Language, the pronoun is an index point in space. The signer establishes referents at locations in the signing space around the body, a person here, a person there, and the pronoun is a point directed at the location, visible, checkable, auditable by the eye. Behind the scene stands the scholarly grammar: the indexical pronoun of ASL, glossed IX in the literature, works by directed pointing at referential loci, per Neidle and her coauthors in The Syntax of American Sign Language (MIT Press, 2000) and the research line running from Klima and Bellugi forward; the standard teaching grammar of the language, Valli and Lucas's Linguistics of American Sign Language from Gallaudet

University Press, describes the same spatial machinery. The plural is the point made into an arc: the hand sweeps, and the sweep traces the referent set in the air, this group and not that one, the arc's endpoints declared in space for anyone watching. A signer saying WE shows you the set: you can watch the arc stop short of you, or open to take you in. The record's own caveat belongs here, and it is the scholarship's: the modern language has already begun conventionalizing the visible arc into fixed forms, and the contemporary WE and OUR are chest-touch signs that no longer enumerate the set; even the most explicit perimeter begins, with use, to blur. And the set persists for as long as the pointing does: once a referent is established at a location, the location keeps its assignment for the rest of the conversation, so that the perimeter, once shown, stays where it was put, auditable for as long as anyone is still pointing. There is no quietly moving it. There is a scholarly fight about whether these points and arcs are pronouns proper or partly gesture, and the fight is real, and it does not matter here, because either way the referent set is shown. That is the contrast the chapter needs: a language in which inclusion is demonstrated in the air against a language in which inclusion is implied, exploited, and

discovered late. Where the pointing is the form, the signed pronoun cannot leave its perimeter undeclared. It can lie about anything else; it must point first. The spoken one can lie by omission all day.

Now the instrument gets its formal statement, the third tool in the kit, the object case, with one clarification before it runs, because the grammarians will check: the case is an instrument; it is no law of grammar. The passive voice can seat the acted-upon in the subject's chair, and this book's own record carries the proof, the chamber's we-will-not-be-kept-out being acted upon in the subject's form. What the case measures is the pronoun's position in the era's self-narration, the grammar the age prefers for its plurals, and the preference is the finding. We is the plural in the act: we decide, we build, we march. Us is the plural in the receiving: counted in the census, taxed by the state, drafted by the army, mourned at the grave, held by one another. Ours is the plural as property: the goods held in common. A healthy plural, by this book's standard, circulates both cases: the citizens rule and are ruled in turn, as the second chapter established, the subject case and the object case alternating in the same bodies. A counterfeit plural, and here the instrument becomes a

diagnostic, is a we that only ever acts while its members are pure us, counted and held and monetized and never once the subject of the sentence. And then there is the decade's quietest category, the dead plural: an us that never gets to be we at all.

Run the diagnostic once, warm, before the count. The kitchen-table scene fails it: the listener was pure us, acted upon, never once a subject in the sentence that ended the couple. Scale up, and the royal we fails the same way: the sovereign's subjects are the permanent object case of that register, ruled, never ruling in turn. The editorial we fails gently: the reader is included in the endorsement and excluded from the vote. Three registers, one shape: the we of the subject case claiming to speak for an us it never consults. The shape is the sign. You will see it again, wearing a brand, a platform, and a machine.

Ours deserves its own page of this grammar, because it is the form the commons lives in. We is the plural acting, us the plural held, and ours the plural holding: our table, our charter, our word. The genitive is the only one of the three that points at property, and it points both ways at once, the way every genitive does: ours names what belongs to the us, and it names the us as belonging. "Our country" is a claim on the country

and an admission of belonging to it in the same two syllables. The counterfeit will learn to say our before it learns to share, which is why the genitive is the least trustworthy case in the mouth of a claimant: it costs the claimant nothing to say and implies a commons it has never built. When the machine chapters arrive, hold the possessive against the claim. Our community, our members, our family: the genitive is the cheapest plural to counterfeit and the most expensive to mean.

The 2016 essay, the artifact this book audits, knew the case distinction in its bones before it knew it on paper. Its hope runs in the subject case: "We must not give up. We must continue to govern the machine that becomes us." Its diagnosis runs in the object case: the us of us, the held form twice. Its despair sentences are the purest object case in the artifact, the lines where the country is done to: militarized, purchased, shunned, failed. The essay's grammar kept the book's instruments in its pocket the whole time: the subject case for what could still be done, the object case for what was being done to us, and the genitive for what was ours to lose. An instrument found in the artifact is the best kind, the kind nobody installed.

The count gets its say here, because the observation has been waiting since the overture. In the inaugural series, the close series of the decade under audit, the 2017 and 2025 addresses each carry the object form us exactly twice, against twenty-one to twenty-six in the 2009, 2013, and 2021 addresses, while the subject form we stays high throughout, fifty and eighty-eight against sixty-two, sixty-nine, and ninety-five. Two addresses from one speaker prove nothing, and the protocol says so; the observation stands flagged to its sample; the full close series prints in the appendix, and the platform corpus remains the standing offer's work. But the shape is the shape of this chapter's argument: a rhetoric rich in we and starved of us claims collective agency while offering no collective receiving. The plural that only ever acts, and is never acted upon, held, mourned, or answered for, is the plural of the strong doing as they like. Aristotle had the name for the politics that speech grammar serves. It is not concord.

So the quietest tragedy, stated plainly. English is the language of this book, the language of the republic under audit, the language in which the widest We on record was written, and English cannot declare the perimeter of its own first person plural. Every we is an ambush: a claim on

the listener made without the listener's consent, a circle drawn around you or through you, and you learn which after the fact. The given us lived with the hole without noticing it, because the rooms and the rolls and the charters did the declaring for the grammar: you knew which we you were in because you sat in it. The rooms closed, the grammar remained, and into the unmarked space stepped the claimants, whose business model is the undeclared perimeter itself. Movement III's claimants, the brand-we, the platform-we, the machine-we, will each be caught in this book by the same sign, and the sign is grammatical: their we is always the ambush kind. It never says whether you are inside it, because the ambiguity is the product. The decade's political season ran on the same fog. The referendum's banner phrase promised control taken back by an us the slogan never specified; the chant at the end of the decade's first year ended on the word us, perimeter unknown, or known all too well and only grammatically unmarked. An unmarked perimeter is the kind that can be drawn through the crowd at the last minute, which is how the ambush works at civic scale: everyone hears themselves inside the we until the room is locked.

One defense of English deserves its due before the indictment closes. The hole is also a freedom. A pronoun that never has to declare its perimeter is a pronoun that can widen without permission: We the People could be written in 1787 with a fence through it and still mean, in its grammar, everyone, which is what Douglass heard in it and what the admission log kept cashing. The unmarked we is the promissory we. Clusivity's languages can say precisely who is in; English can only aspire, and aspiration, as the perimeter chapters showed, is how the fence ever moved at all. The book does not wish the hole away. It wishes the hole seen, because a hole you can see is a perimeter you can argue about, and the arguing is the city again. This book is written inside the hole and knows it. Every we in these pages, including this one, runs unmarked, and the audit's only defense is that it keeps declaring its set: the author, the archive, the evidence, and you, each named in turn, never blurred.

At the kitchen table, later, where the sentence has finished landing. "Who's we?" the listener asked, and got the answer, and the answer redrew the room: the table that had been the couple's table was now one person's table with a visitor at it. Nothing in the pronoun had announced the redraw. Something in the pronoun had permitted

it. The two of them sit there a moment longer, in the grammar's aftermath, one of them having said we and meant a set of one, the other having heard we and supplied a set of two, and the word itself, the smallest room in the language, stands between them on the table, unmarked, available, waiting for the next speaker to declare or decline. Declare, and the word does the work the rooms once did. Decline, and the ambush keeps collecting its salary. The chapter opened on a pronoun with a hole in it. It closes on the same pronoun, still standing on the table, still ours to mark.

MOVEMENT II

The Stress Test

Chapter Six

The Demagogic Us.

Night, August 11, 2017, the grounds of the University of Virginia. They came down the Lawn in the dark, in white polos and khakis, carrying tiki torches, the garden kind, bought for the occasion, hundreds of them, a column of flames moving through a university built around a courtyard where students were finishing the summer. A small group of students, about thirty of them, had locked arms around the base of the Jefferson statue at the Rotunda, which means the column's destination, chosen by its organizers, was the marble of the man who wrote that all men are created equal: the perimeter's author and its standing contradiction, holding the Rotunda's lawn while the column came on. What the marchers chanted, the record preserves to the word, and this chapter will give it in full when the evidence arrives, because the ruling that governs it requires the exact words or no chapter. The

scene is documented by the independent review the city commissioned, by the wire services, and by the cameras of everyone present. It weighs what it weighs. It is the terminus of everything this movement has to examine.

The review's frame is worth setting down, because it is the official bracket around that night. Charlottesville's government, after the fact, hired a former United States Attorney for the Western District of Virginia and his firm to examine three of that summer's events: the first torch rally in May, when an organizer of the movement led a nighttime demonstration against the statue's removal and the replacement chant sounded in public for the first time; the Ku Klux Klan's July rally; and the August pairing, the eleventh's torch procession through the university and the twelfth's rally downtown. The Independent Review of the 2017 Protest Events in Charlottesville, Virginia, was released on Friday, December 1, 2017, built on 150 interviews and roughly half a million documents, 222 pages. Residents of that city, per the contemporaneous public television record, came to call that summer the Summer of Hate. On that record this chapter stands for that night, and the wire services converge with it.

The type arrived first, twenty-three centuries before any of them were born. Book Five of the Politics carried it in, by way of the second chapter: “Revolutions in democracies are generally caused by the intemperance of demagogues,” the flatterers of the demos who work by accusation, splitting the city into the people and the marked, “for a common danger unites even the bitterest enemies.” Most of the ancient tyrants began as demagogues; the flatterer is held in honor by the flattered. It is the standard’s negative, and the standard of this book is not a party’s property: the forms predate every party now alive, and the same tests will run on every claimant of the decade, left, right, and commercial, with the appendix showing the runs. Here the type meets its decade, and the decade’s first three exhibits are a slogan, a sentence, and a chant.

The slogan came first, and it was a pronoun-shaped instrument. Take back control. Three words on a wall and a bus, the banner of the Vote Leave campaign in the British referendum of June 23, 2016. The slogan’s authorship is credited, by the convergent press record and by his own published account, to Dominic Cummings, the campaign’s director, who wrote up the strategy afterward in a long first-person essay, a cover piece for The Spectator in January 2017. This book

uses the attribution and the campaign's documented usage, plus one fact of design from the principal's own account: the campaign was built around the phrase deliberately, engineered, in his telling, to sit across the old habits of Left and Right at once. The psychology of the phrase stays flagged here, because this book requires the principal's text before inference, and what the text supports is the engineering; the inner life stays out of the record. But the grammar is the exhibit, and the grammar anyone can audit. Take: the imperative, an order given by an unnamed speaker. Back: the genitive of nostalgia, the claim that the thing was once ours and was taken. Control: the object, never specified, of an unnamed possessor. And the word the slogan never says is the one the whole construction depends on: us. Take back control is a first person plural with the pronoun deleted, an us invoked by absence, every listener left to draw the perimeter for themselves. Control taken back from whom, for whom, the slogan declines to say, and the declining is the design. It is the ambush of the previous chapter raised to the scale of a country: whoever you feel took your country, the slogan agrees with you, personally.

It had a companion claim, painted on the side of the bus: the suggestion that leaving could free three hundred and fifty million pounds a week for the health service. Watch the genitives work. Our money. Our health service. And always, our country. The genitive is the case of belonging, and the campaign's whole grammar was possessive: the perimeter's contents were ours, and the them had the spending of them. The possessive is the cheapest plural to counterfeit, the previous chapter argued, and here is the bill poster of the principle. Because the symmetry rule is the spine of this book's honesty: the other campaign ran on a perimeter too. The Remain operation called itself Stronger In, which is the same shape turned around, the comparative of fear, stronger inside and weaker outside, and it failed its own way, because a perimeter drawn by fear of the outside does not hold either, only differently. Both campaigns asked the country to locate itself by its fence. One won. The test of this book is that it can see the shape on both sides.

The shape's largest exhibits stood on the record's other side. The Women's March of January 21, 2017, was the largest single-day demonstration in the country's history to that point; the protest wave of the summer of 2020 ran to tens of millions of participants by the crowd-

counters' consortium record. Both were left-coded, both were enormous, and both were real plurals with rolls of whoever showed up. What they do to this movement's evidence is the honest question, and the answer is the book's own: the square still convenes for the event. It cannot keep the schedule. The march is the convening; the room does not follow. The encampment is the emergency form, the condition's own room, kept for the condition's duration. The decade's biggest plurals were its protests, and they were the condition-bound kind, assembled on need and dispersed on its passing, which is the remnant's emergency register at national scale. The stress test's exhibits run where the weaponized perimeters ran, and the counter-exhibits now stand on the record beside them.

The Electoral Commission's own declaration of the result, read into the record by the Chief Counting Officer in Manchester in the small hours of June 24, came in figures: 33,577,342 ballot papers counted; Leave, 17,410,742 votes, 51.9 percent; Remain, 16,141,241, 48.1 percent; turnout 72.2 percent of an electorate of 46,500,001. Margin: 1,269,501 votes. The electorate's own arithmetic completes the picture, per the Commons Library's analysis of the same record: the Leave side carried 37.4 percent of the

electorate, the Remain side 34.7 percent, and 27.8 percent of the registered did not vote at all. Neither side had a majority, and the margin between them was the smallest share of all. The slogan's unspecified us, the we of the wall, was spoken for by a bit more than a third of the country, against a bit less than a third, with the remaining third absent from the sentence and bigger than the margin many times over. A country split down its middle, and the slightly larger half of the voting share was handed the whole decision, and the slogan's unspecified us got specified by the count afterward, retroactively, the way all ambushes resolve. The count, as everywhere in this book, is not an accusation of the voters; it is the perimeter's measurement, and the perimeter is the exhibit. This book ran its opening chapter beside that fortnight; the essay at the center of the audit ran June 8, 2016, fifteen days before the vote, and its charge was that the us of us wanted confirmation and refused learning. The slogan was the confirmation, printed on a wall.

Now run the subtraction test, the closing gate of every claimant chapter, on the slogan's us. Remove the them, the remote institutions the control was to be taken back from, and report what survives of the we that was promised. What

survives is the word “back,” and nothing else: a direction in time with no room at the end of it. The slogan built an inner room out of a boundary, which is the counterfeit’s signature. It failed the test the day it was printed. The referendum did not fail, and the voters’ grievances were real, and both things stand in this book at once: the rooms were closed, the wages were flat, the counties were abandoned, and the wound was genuine. Per the standard, the type’s tell is that the demagogue addresses the wound without ever intending the repair, because the wound is the asset. The flatterer needs the flattered to stay flattered, and the hurting to stay hurting. The true part first. Then measure the claimant.

The sentence came four weeks after the vote, on the other side of the ocean, at the other end of the same summer. July 21, 2016, Quicken Loans Arena, Cleveland: the Republican National Convention’s closing night, the acceptance address, roughly seventy-five minutes of it, and in the middle of it, the sentence the decade will be answering for: “Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why I alone can fix it.” Its grammar is the whole exhibit. First the comparative of singular knowledge, “nobody knows the system better than me,” then the causal clause that turns the comparison into a claim of

office: therefore, I alone. The crowd's plural is present in the hall and absent from the sentence. In the speech, the us is the thing to be fixed; the we that fixes is a single I wearing a plural's costume. The sentence had a companion, delivered near the close, after the speaker declined his opponent's loyalty pledge and recited his own: "I'm with you – the American people." And then, without ornament: "I am your voice."

I am your voice. The first person singular, announcing itself as the plural's replacement organ. It is worth pausing on how the sentence flatters, because Book Five's flattery is usually imagined as praise of the demos, and this was the darker version: not you are wonderful; you are helpless without me. Call it the flattery of the demos by contempt for its capacity. The standard's name for the arrangement is the same either way: deliberation dissolved into acclamation, the people converted from citizens who resolve into an audience that cheers.

Two years later, a philology journal's metaphor study of the address cataloged its governing frame as solving-problems-is-fixing-a-machine: the country as a broken engine, the speaker as the only mechanic. Beside this book's artifact, it means this: The 2016 essay warned that we must continue to govern the machine that becomes us.

The convention of the same summer answered: the machine will be fixed, alone, by one man. Two machine sentences in one season. One of them was a warning about the first person plural, and the other was the warning's proof, delivered in the first person singular. Aristotle's politics gives the citizen two cases by turns, the we that rules and the us that is ruled, and the alternation is the citizenship. The sentence in Cleveland offered a third arrangement: you keep the listening, I take the voice. It is the demagogue's exact bargain, the demos dissolved into an audience, the audience's pronoun checked at the door like a sidearm, returned at the end with applause.

Here the instrument gets its run, because the speech is a text and texts can be counted. Under this book's registered rules, with the first-person singular logged as a chapter supplement beside the plural, the acceptance address runs like this: 5,119 words; the plural set at 192 tokens, 37.5 per thousand, well under the register the office's ceremonial speech runs at; and the singular set at 113 tokens, 22.1 per thousand, seventy-six of them the bare word I. One candidate, one sentence, one address: the plural thinned to just over half the office's ceremonial register while the singular surged, the narrowest gap between the two registers anywhere on this book's record, the I

crowding the we in the same text. Compare the shape of the office's own speech a few months later: the inaugural of January 2017, 1,458 words, carries its object-case us exactly twice, while the subject-case we runs fifty times, on repeat, the plural of pure agency, with almost nothing the plural receives. The close-series observation of the previous chapters now stands on the full close series, published in the appendix, and the campaign's transcript is its context: a politics of we-will built on a speaker of I-alone, with the us of the country holding the object case of the whole construction, the thing the fixing happens to. One address is one document, and the protocol holds here as everywhere: the full close series has since landed and stands in the appendix, which publishes every run, including any run that dissolves this chapter's shape. None did. What one document can show is a grammar, and the grammar was audible in the hall.

In its closing movements the address staged the contrast itself, because the speaker chose to make the pronoun the subject of a paragraph. His opponent's supporters, he told the hall, were asked to recite a three-word loyalty pledge: I'm with her. He would recite a different one: I'm with you, the American people. Two campaigns, two pledges, and the audit notes the shape on both

sides of the hall: I'm with her is the crowd pledging to a person; I'm with you is the person pledging to the crowd; and in both versions the pronoun hangs off a singular like a lapel pin. The 2016 election, at the level of the vow, offered the country two singulars to attach its plural to. The type does not belong to one stage. That summer, it owned both.

The coda of the address, the part that got the standing ovation printed into memory, was a fourfold promise in the plural: We will make America strong again, proud again, safe again, great again. What the coda sells is the promissory we of the campaign, the plural of the rally, and it is worth the audit's precision here because the coda is where the sentence's grammar hides: after an hour of I, the we of the promise closes the sale. The subtraction test on the sentence's us is the shortest one in this book. Remove the speaker from the sentence "I alone can fix it," and report what survives of the plural's agency. Nothing survives. The sentence is the point: the us has no verbs of its own until the singular lends it one. That is not concord, and the standard already named it, in the same book of the Politics that named the demagogue: the tyrant's mark is that

he wants to be alone in his glory, and the crowd's consent to the arrangement is how the arrangement starts.

The textbook has one more page for this section, and it is the page the decade kept open. In Book Five's analysis of how democracies fall, the Politics notes that where there is popular election of the magistrates, "the aspirants for office get hold of the people, and contrive at last even to set them above the laws." Get hold of the people: the demos as a thing to be gripped, the plural as the instrument of the singular's ascent. On flattery, the same book is exact about who performs it and who receives it: tyrants are fond of bad men because they love to be flattered, and no man with the spirit of a freeman in him will lower himself by flattery. The demagogue is a form with two halves, and the halves need each other. The flatterer and the flattered are the type's two bodies, and the second chapter's scale weighs them together.

And then the chant, the third exhibit, at the place the chapter opened. The Lawn, one more time, the dark, the torches. The march through the university's grounds lasted fifteen or twenty minutes by the contemporaneous reporting. What the marchers chanted, the record preserves to the word. Here it is in full, per the standing ruling:

verbatim, with the gravity carried by the prose around it and no cushion anywhere in it. The witnesses converge on the same chant set, the wire services and the independent review and the scholarly record, and the set is four sentences:

> You will not replace us. Jews will not replace us. Blood and soil. White lives matter.

Two of the four end on the word us. The chant is the perimeter at its purest, the pronoun with its contents removed: an us whose entire stated content is that someone else must not take its place. Across town, while the column moved through the dark, the town's other plural was gathered at St. Paul's Memorial Church, an interfaith prayer service held in opposition, clergy and neighbors singing "This Little Light of Mine" against the profanity. Two us-es in one small city on one night: one drawn by threat, one drawn by prayer, one ending its sentences in us as a warning, the other holding the word as a light. The standard can tell them apart without straining. Only one of the night's plurals had anything in its room besides the fence. The chant's other pronoun is the one the two ends of the decade's grammar meet in. Its hole was in the us: an unmarked perimeter, a we whose set you drew yourself. The chant's hole is in the you: replace us,

says the column, and the you it warns is as unmarked as the slogan's us was, the counter-protesters in front of the torches, the elites of the slogans, the Jews of the conspiracy, all addressed by the same bare word. An unmarked us facing an unmarked you: the two sentences are one instrument played from both ends, the pronoun pair of the year, and neither side of it ever has to say who it means. That is why the previous chapter's finding is the decade's skeleton key. English cannot mark the set. Whoever computes the set for you, in either person, owns the conversation.

Run the subtraction test, the chapter's closing gate, on the marchers' plural. Remove the replacer, the you and the Jews of the sentences, and report what survives of the we that chanted. Nothing survives. There is no affirmative sentence the chant can form. Replace is the only verb it owns, and replace requires a them. The standard, from the second chapter, has the entry for this: an us held together only by opposition has an empty inner room, and here the room is armed as well as empty, because the boundary under threat is all the belonging on offer. The chant's grammar is the decade's bottom layer, the us that exists only as a fence around a vacancy.

On the following day, August 12, the perimeter collected its toll in the object case. A car driven into a crowd of counter-demonstrators killed Heather Heyer, thirty-two years old, and injured nineteen more by the day's first count, the record's later count reaching thirty-five. Two state troopers, Lieutenant H. Jay Cullen, forty-eight, and Trooper-Pilot Berke M.M. Bates, died when their helicopter, monitoring the scene, crashed southwest of town. Counted, mourned, held: the object case's whole list, in one weekend. The city had commissioned, and in December 2017 received, the Independent Review of the 2017 Protest Events in Charlottesville, Virginia, prepared by a former United States Attorney and his firm on the strength of 150 interviews and roughly half a million documents, 222 pages of it, and its conclusion stands in the record as the government's own confession: the city protected neither free expression nor public safety. The review is this chapter's verification instrument; the wire record and the cameras converge with it on the chant's exact words. Nothing in this chapter about that night comes from memory, mine or anyone's. The slogan was counted, the sentence was counted, and the chant stands in the official record, quoted in full because anything less would be a lie of softness.

The review deserves one more paragraph, because it is the decade's document of the given us failing to show up. Its findings were not about the marchers. They were about the city's organs: a police command that instructed its officers to stand down from all but the gravest confrontations, a failure the report called a tremendous tactical failure with lasting consequences; two police forces that never unified their command and never shared a radio channel; a university that knew the torches were coming and did nothing to separate the groups. This book reads it straight: the we of the city, the body charged with keeping the plural's peace, was absent from its own ground. The marchers supplied an us made of boundary. The city failed to supply the us made of law. Between those two failures the students held the statue with their arms locked: the only plural that stood its ground that night was thirty people wide and unarmed.

Lay the three exhibits side by side, and the type is complete. The slogan: an unspecified us, promised a repossession of an unspecified control, and the unspecified was the design, because a we that cannot be audited cannot be corrected. The sentence: the singular absorbs the plural whole, the voice of the people relocated into one throat, and the crowd consents, because

the flatterer is held in honor by the flattered. And the chant: the plural drawn as nothing but its boundary, an us with no inner room, ending on the word us, in the object case, on a university lawn, under torches bought at a hardware store. Promise, absorption, perimeter. Aristotle catalogued the type's stages before the republic existed to run them. The decade ran them in fourteen months, June 2016 to August 2017, and the rest of this movement is the audit of what they left running: the pandemic's chorus, the building stormed in the possessive, and the feed that sorted the publics into rooms that cannot see one another.

Here the symmetry rule, stated in the overture, gets its practice. The essay this book audits was written from the author's own side of the aisle, and its first targets were his own side's machines: the fourth estate selling soap, the purchased policy, the confirmation economy of the respectable. The type is not one party's property, because the type is older than every party, and the confirmation hunger the essay indicted belongs to the whole us. What the slogan, the sentence, and the chant added to the record was the proof that the hunger could be farmed at scale by anyone willing to farm it. The audit does not exempt the

author's side; the audit's first exhibit against the age was the author's own essay, and its second is this book.

One entry from the phrase corpus belongs in this chapter's record, because the artifact's own life ran through the same summer. On July 6, 2017, five weeks before the torches, the author deployed his coinage as the national pun: the demagogue-in-chief, he wrote, would never end well for "the us of US," the pronoun and the country abbreviation fused in one stroke, lowercase against capitals. Five weeks later the column on the Lawn chanted the same us in the object case, perimeter and all. The corpus and the decade were keeping the same ledger. Neither of them knew it yet.

One detail of the record deserves its own sentence before the close, because the decade's horror kept arriving in its cheapest hardware. The torches were garden torches, citronella tiki torches, the kind sold in bundles for a patio. It is in the wire record, and the banality is the point that outlasts the night: the perimeter's army equipped itself at the same store that sells the bug candles. The counterfeit's materials are never rare. That is part of what makes it counterfeit.

The Lawn again, late that night, the flames moving off through the dark toward the statue where thirty students held their arms locked. The last word of the chant set, the word the column carried through a courtyard built for deliberation, hangs where they left it. Us. The smallest room in the language, the previous chapter called it. Here is what lives in it when nothing else is allowed in. The type's third exhibit is the one the decade kept. One exhibit dissolves when its vote is counted; another when its speaker leaves the stage; the chant needs nothing, because an us made of pure boundary feeds itself. The movement's next chapters audit what fed on it. And the document of that night, the review the city paid for, ends the chapter where the chapter began, because the record is the only candle this movement gets to carry.

Chapter Seven

The Balcony and the Mask.

Milan, Friday, March 13, 2020, six in the evening. Four days into the national lockdown, schools and most shops closed, all but essential movement barred, the country's hospitals already past the edge of their capacity in the north, 17,660 cases and 1,266 dead by that Friday, per the wire count carried beside the photographs. A Rome brass collective called Fanfaroma had put out the call for a Flashmob Sonoro, an experiment, their event page said, in remote sociality: open the windows at six, and make noise with whatever you have, pots and pans welcome. "The important thing is to make us feel," the invitation read, in the trade press's translation, "because music is the best medicine to cure the soul." Even the invitation ran on the pronoun: to make us feel. And at six the country answered. In Milan, people waved flags off their balconies and sang the national anthem; the Associated Press

photographed them at it. At her window in Milan that evening, an opera singer named Laura Baldassari leaned out and sang, the wire caption reads, during a flash mob launched throughout Italy to bring people together and try to cope with the emergency. One balcony, one evening, named and dated, and below her and beside her and across from her the whole city doing the same thing at the same hour: the decade's purest fast-convening us, assembled out of nothing but a schedule and a song.

The sequence kept its appointments for days, a published order of service. The next day, Saturday the fourteenth, at noon: applause from the windows and balconies for the health workers, and at six, everyone singing Celentano's Azzurro together. Sunday the fifteenth, at nine at night: phone flashlights held up as candles. A country under quarantine built a room out of air, and the room had showtimes.

Look at the construction, because it is the whole of the previous movement in one evening. The rooms of the given us were closed by decree. What the balconies did was rebuild the room with the walls removed: the schedule was kept, the roll was whoever leaned out, the shared goods were the songs, and the perimeter ran exactly as far as the sound carried. The wire called it a defiant

response, and the defiance was real, but the deeper fact is the one this book is written from: the need for the room outlasts the room. The given us, forbidden its containers, improvised one out of air inside four days. That is the finding the decade's counterfeit trades against. The demand was proven. The supply is the tragedy.

Run the test on it now, before the decade ruins it, because this is the movement's control case. The subtraction test asks: remove the them, and report what survives. The balcony's them was the virus, and the balcony's content was never the virus. Take the threat away and what survives is the thing itself: the anthem, the applause, the candles, the neighbors keeping an appointment with one another. The balcony us was made of the three raw materials in their thinnest possible form: time, an hour a day, kept; presence, bodies at windows, seen; shared goods, the songs, which belonged to everyone singing them. It had no membership, no message, no budget, no fence past the fire escape, and it passed the test that the decade's loudest claimants will fail. It is the control. Remember its shape: an us that needed nothing but one another, singing.

And record its limit, because the control is honest. The balcony was the emergency form of the plural, and the emergency form is real and

brief. When the lockdowns eased in May, the appointments stopped; the windows came down; the order of service did not become a parish. Here is what the standard prices: the balcony had presence and shared goods, and it had almost no time. The rooms of the given us had decades of roll-call behind them; the balcony had a fortnight of song. An emergency can prove the need and cannot supply the duration, which is why the book's closing movement goes looking for the forms that manufacture the plural on a schedule, in season, by design.

The calendar that produced it deserves its dates, because the decade turned on one of its sentences. The World Health Organization declared the emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020. On March 9, the Director-General told the press that the threat of a pandemic had become very real, and Italy locked down nationally the same day. On March 11, at the Geneva media briefing, came the sentence the decade turned on: "We have therefore made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic," delivered with the ledger read aloud beside it: more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries, 4,291 dead, a thirteen-fold rise outside China in two weeks. The podium said, by way of a close, the sentence this whole chapter exists to

hold: “There’s been so much attention on one word,” the Director-General said, and offered other words that mattered more: prevention, preparedness, public health, political leadership, and most of all, people. Then came the close: “We’re in this together, to do the right things with calm and protect the citizens of the world. It’s doable.”

We’re in this together. At the declaration of the pandemic, from the top of the world’s health establishment, the sentence arrived earnest, meant, and aimed at everyone, and it was true at the podium. What happened to it in the next six weeks is the counterfeit history of the decade in miniature.

The pandemic was, among its other cruelties, the century’s largest natural experiment on the first person plural. One shock, every country, every room closed on the same week: the experiment asked whether the us could survive the loss of its containers, and the answer came back in two directions at once. At street scale, inside four days, yes: the balcony. At national scale, inside eight weeks, no: the sorting. Between the two, the third term of the experiment, the counterfeit, arriving in the ad breaks to see which of the two the country could still tell apart from the real thing. The experiment’s whole result is

that triad. Everything else in this chapter is its measurement. The audit notes the experiment's own limit before it begins: there was no control country, no Italy that skipped the balconies, and the book claims the balcony's reality the way the record shows it, documented, dated, and sung, and claims nothing about what the singing changed epidemiologically, because the record shows nothing there. The experiment measured the plural; the virus had other measurers.

And the balcony, it should be recorded, did not stay Italian. Through that spring the same ritual moved city to city and country to country, the applause at appointed hours from the windows of half the locked-down world, so much so that by April the shared footage of pot-banging apartment dwellers had become the stock ending of the brand chorus itself. The emergency form scaled internationally for a few weeks, the widest spontaneous us of the century, and it was real everywhere it was sung, and it lasted weeks and not quarters. The record is allowed to be both.

Within weeks of the balconies, the sentence had been picked up, branded, and run to death by the people who sell things. On April 15, 2020, a YouTube channel called Microsoft Sam posted a three-minute compilation titled Every Covid-19 Commercial is Exactly the Same, dozens of

corporate pandemic advertisements cut into one proof of sameness. The Wall Street Journal identified the maker four days later as Sean Haney, a digital marketer at a software company, who had noticed the pattern from his couch and heard, within a week, the same things and the same piano music from every brand. Per Forbes's account, the chorus's catalog reads: the somber piano, the drone shots of the emptied streets, and then the recitation, times like these, more than ever, home, family, here for you, we've always been there for you, we may be apart but we can stay connected, we'll get through this together, and above all, we're all in this together, one sentence, every brand, the same week. The coverage list of the montage's two weeks reads like the trade press discovering its own reflection: the Journal, Forbes, Advertising Age, Fast Company, the Times, the Post. The trade press, to its credit, knew the disease by name: the Forbes analyst, a pitch consultant by trade, wrote that every agency shows a client the same two videos in every pitch, the idea film and the medley of the category's sameness, the montage proving to the client that everyone else sounds alike. Advertising had been diagnosing its own sameness in pitch meetings for years. April 2020 was the week the disease went exterior. By the first week of May the

trade papers were running the form's own obituary: "We have hit peak pandemic advertising," one Fast Company headline announced, "and now they're all just annoying," the trade's own words for its own form. The counterfeit's shelf life was measurable in weeks. One detail belongs in this book's cabinet: the ads, per the retail trade's account of the compilation, kept closing on the same image, apartment dwellers applauding and banging pots from their windows in honor of frontline workers. The counterfeit chorus ended its sixty-second we by quoting the balcony. Three weeks earlier the real thing had happened, cost nothing, and sold nothing; the copy cost a media buy and sold soap. The 2016 essay's line about the fourth estate comes back edited for the brand estate: they have always been more about selling soap, and in April 2020 the soap was us.

The instrument takes its simplest form here, a census instead of a rate, because the exhibit here is a chorus. Per the trade record, the panel runs: Target, CVS, Apple, Budweiser, Uber, Samsung, Google, Facebook, Mastercard, Ford, Toyota, and the rest of the compilation's dozens. The shared vocabulary, per the same record: times like these; more than ever; home; family; here for you; we've always been there for you; we may be apart, but

we can stay connected; we'll get through this together; we're all in this together. Ten of the country's largest brands named in the trade record, dozens more in the compilation, one inventory of sentences, delivered in the same weeks, against the same footage, over the same piano. Listen to one phrase in the inventory with the standard's ear: we've always been there for you. Always. The brand claims the raw material it never spent, the decades of presence, the eaten salt. The chorus borrowed more than the pronoun: it borrowed the pronoun's proof. That census is the count on pandemic advertising, and its result is the definition of the genre: the corporate first person plural had become a form with a correct answer, and the correct answer was us.

Run the subtraction test on the chorus, the closing gate for every claimant. Remove the virus, the chorus's only them, and report what survives of the brand's we. What survives is the logo. The together-sentence has no inner room at all: no members, no meetings, no goods held in common, no salt. It is the perimeter with the fence left off, everyone included by definition and nobody belonging to anything. The brand-we is the ambush of Chapter Five working at industrial scale, the we that lets everyone in because it

wants something from each of you, and the test returns its verdict in one motion: the loudest we of the decade was also its emptiest. Haney's own liner notes under the video say it plainer than the trade press did: the sameness was, he wrote, perhaps a sign that it was time for something new.

Here this book's own audit enters, twice, because the counterfeit's script was written in advance, and the author wrote it, and because the artifact's darkest deployment of the phrase came in these same weeks. On March 24, 2020, eleven days after the balcony sang, the author's pandemic essay put the coinage to its darkest human use, in the casualty list: "the us of us, the magnificently forgotten, those doomed to death by a government that only cares about the relative bottom line, and never the true goodness of the human soul." The phrase that had opened the decade as an indictment and brightened into a banner now closed an essay as a body count. The phrase that the balcony had filled with song days earlier, the author's own archive filled with the abandoned. And the two entries stand. The corpus does not pick which one was true; it records that the same word held them. The standard reads the pair without flinching: the balcony and the casualty list are the same pronoun in the same week, the us that sings and the us that dies, and

any honest account of that spring carries both registers at once. Then the second audit entry, the earlier one, the advance script. The phrase corpus holds the exhibit: on December 1, 2018, sixteen months before the montage, the author's machine narrator, in a script the author wrote and a synthetic voice performed, addressed the listener from the machines' side and offered the sentence with a shrug attached: "We are all in this together. Up to a point?" The together-chorus of April 2020 was performing a script that a playwright had handed the machines as a warning two years before. The auditor of the chorus is the man who drafted its earliest version. That is what the archive inside the specimen jar means: every instrument this book points at the decade gets pointed at the author first, and here the author's own sentence is the montage's rough draft.

The sorting arrived inside the same weeks, and it arrived, as this book's third chapter would predict, as a document. On March 19, 2020, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, over the signature of its director, Christopher C. Krebs, issued the memorandum that would define the essential workforce: the Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce, version 1.0, fourteen categories of workers, the healthcare staff and the grocery clerks, the

mortuary workers and the truck drivers, the people who stock the shelves and the people who haul away the dead. The memorandum carried its own modesty in plain type: “this list is advisory in nature. It is not, nor should it be considered to be, a federal directive or standard in and of itself.” The modesty did not hold. States and cities wrote the advisory list into binding stay-home orders, and a non-binding federal memo became the operative national sort of who counted as essential. The memorandum even kept its key principles on the record: response efforts, it said, are locally executed, state managed, federally supported; and the list itself was, in its own words, intended to be overly inclusive, a perimeter drawn wide on purpose and meant to be narrowed by judgment. Inside the memo sits the year’s second-person address of duty, quoted from the presidential guidance of March 16: “If you work in a critical infrastructure industry, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security, such as healthcare services and pharmaceutical and food supply, you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule.” Special responsibility: the admission ticket to the essential us was a duty, addressed in the second person, and the address was the whole of the compensation. The list then revised itself in

public, version 2.0 on March 28, version 3.0 on April 17, the director repeating that the guidance was no federal mandate, version 4.0 in August, adding the machinery for prioritizing protection. Its categories read like the decade's table of the drafted: the healthcare workers, yes, and then the long tail of the physical world, "workers supporting groceries, pharmacies and other retail that sells food and beverage products," the carry-out counters and the delivery drivers, the postal and shipping workers, the mortuary services including the workers who handle the recovery and transportation of human remains. The shelf-stocker and the undertaker, admitted by the same memorandum. The us of the pandemic was partitioned by memo, edition by edition, and the sorted could read their own reclassification between versions: admitted to the essential us in March, applauded from the balconies in April, and quietly reclassed as the backdrop inside two years. Which leaves the essential worker, the decade's clearest object case: counted by the memo, taxed by the exposure, drafted to the front of the store, and mourned, when it came to that, in the third person. The applause was the admission ceremony, and ceremonies end. The categories on the memo outlasted the gratitude by

years, which is the whole of the quiet expulsion: the classification was permanent, the clapping was not.

Then the measurement of what the chorus could not hold. The same spring that produced the balconies and the montage produced the sorting of the country into two publics, and the polling houses ran the numbers. Pew's June 25, 2020 report records the gap's widening: the share of Republicans saying the worst of the pandemic was still to come fell from 56 percent in early April to 38 percent by June, while Democrats held at 76 percent, a partisan gap that grew from twenty points to nearly forty in eight weeks. On behavior the same divergence ran: 63 percent of Democrats against 29 percent of Republicans said people in their community should always wear masks; Republicans were nearly forty points more likely than Democrats to say they would be comfortable eating in a restaurant, 65 percent against 28, where in March the gap had been thirteen points. The Kaiser Family Foundation's May tracking poll, the second house this finding stands on, found Democrats almost twice as likely as Republicans to report wearing a mask every time they left home, 70 percent against 37. And the record carries its own nuance, which the publish-everything rule wants in: Gallup's panel

found mask adoption rising on all sides through May, with the partisan gap on wearing growing only modestly while the distancing gap exploded, which is to say the object was briefly nearly universal before it was partisan. The sorting did not start on the face. It arrived there, and by June the face was legible too. Gallup's June 23 analysis supplies the slope: the partisan gap on social distancing grew from twelve points in mid-March to forty points by the second week of June, with the independents holding the middle between the extremes, and the middle was where the thinning ran. By September the Kaiser house's tracking poll recorded the sorting's arrival at the cure itself: majorities worried that political pressure would rush a vaccine through approval, 85 percent of Democrats against 35 percent of Republicans, and the trust table for information about the virus read like two directories for two countries, the same names, opposite orders. One virus, two publics, and the gap widened in direct proportion to the togetherness of the advertising.

The mask is the chapter's second title object because it was the perimeter made wearable. A two-dollar rectangle of cloth, and by the summer it functioned as a passport between the two publics: the polling records the partisan split on wearing it, the commerce records the split on

where, and the whole of it was visible at ten feet. The balcony had been the perimeter's kindest form, an edge made of sound. And the mask was the year's hardest form of the perimeter: an edge you could read on a face, and half the point of wearing it wrong, or not at all, was to show the other public that you were not one of them. The us of the pandemic split into the masked and the unmasked, each reading the other as the threat, which is the subtraction test inverted into daily life: both sides' plural was held together by the other side's refusal of it.

Here is the chapter's finding, stated with the care the causation rule requires. The count measures rhetoric, and the polls measure reported attitude and behavior, and neither convicts anyone of anything by itself. What the record shows, and all the record claims, is the sequence: the loudest invocation of we in modern memory, the balcony songs and the branded chorus at the decade's highest volume, directly preceded the sharpest measured division of the decade, the two publics walking away from one another to a forty-point gap. The balcony was real and the chorus was counterfeit, and the country's immune system, in the book's reading of the sequence, could no longer tell the real one from the copy. The counterfeit's deepest damage is

never the sale it makes. It is the devaluation of the genuine article, so that when the real us arrived, singing, the market could no longer price it. The finding the evidence points toward: the loudest we directly preceded the sharpest division, which is the sign at national scale, because a togetherness that can be manufactured by Friday is one that anyone can see through by June.

One more of the season's documents belongs in the analysis, because it was the decade's grim shared room: the dashboard. The country was counted in those months as never before, daily, in public, the cases and the hospitalizations and the dead updating by the hour on the same screens, and for a season the dashboard was the last place the whole country could see the same numbers at once. The object case had its own cathedral: the whole us, counted, in the held form, together in the only way left, as data. What happened to that last shared object of attention is the next chapter but one of this movement; here it is enough to note that even the mourning arrived as a measurement, and the measurement was the only thing the two publics briefly shared.

Hold the balcony and the memo in the same hand, because the year's whole lesson is in the pair. In Milan the plural built itself out of a schedule and a song, and it cost nothing, and it

passed the test. In Washington it was partitioned by a document that said, in plain type, that it was not a directive, and became one. And in the ad breaks it was rented by the minute to sell soap. Three we's in one season: the real, the administrative, and the counterfeit. The experiment ended, the song stopped, and the sorting kept its appointments longer than the balcony kept its own. The decade never got clearer than that, and the next two chapters of this movement are the audit of what the three of them left behind: the building that was stormed in the possessive, and then the feed that sorted the publics, the slow discovery that an us which cannot see the same facts cannot deliberate, which is the standard's name for the end of the city.

Back to Milan, to the last of the appointments. The published order of service had run Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and the record of the week ends there; the candles were the final scheduled hour. Sunday, March 15, nine at night: the flashlights of the phones held up at the windows as candles, a dark city full of small lit panes, each one a person holding a light out to the others. The room out of air, at its highest hour, looked like this: everyone inside it was holding the light for someone else. No piano, no logo, no budget, no fence. The wire

photographers were off duty by then, and the brands had moved to production, so the hour survives mostly in the accounts of the people who held the lights, which is fitting. The balcony was never a message. It was a meeting. The difference between the two is the difference between the decade's promise and its counterfeit, and it is the difference this whole book is written to keep open: between an us that gathers and an us that gets addressed.

Chapter Eight

Our House.

The Rotunda, from the official record. On the afternoon of January 6, 2021, the mob came up from the rally at the Ellipse, where the singular had addressed them at noon, and east across the grounds, and through the doors of the building the country calls the people's house. The official record of the day, the affidavits and the court exhibits and the photographic archive, preserves what they did inside with the specificity of a property ledger: a water bottle carried off here, a window broken there, the words Murder the Media written in marker on a memorial door, a man smoking a cigar in the rotunda like a tourist in his own hallway, the desks of the Senate chamber opened and gone through. Inside, among the statues, they chanted the possessive. The FBI's affidavits record it as a call and its answer: "Whose house? Our house." The Washington Post's account of the assault records the same

chant beside a second: “Treason.” Stand in the grammar of it for a moment, because the whole chapter, and in some sense the whole decade, is inside the call and the answer. Whose house is the question of the American founding, the question of 1787’s first word. Our house is the mob’s claim of title, asserted by presence, signed in broken glass. A possessive with no document behind it, chanted inside the building where the documents live, in the room where the republic lays out its honored dead. The Rotunda is where the country mourns its own in state; it is the room where the us is held, in the oldest sense this book keeps. It was there the mob chanted the possessive.

The day ran on the genitive of us, the fifth chapter’s case. Our names what belongs to the us: our house, our election, our country. Our also names the us as belonging: the citizen is owned by the commons as much as the commons is owned by the citizen. The mob’s chant ran the possessive one way only, all claim and no belonging, the genitive of a crowbar. The building’s own answer, when it finally came that night, came in the same case from the other side: this is still the People’s House, said the presiding officer when the Senate reconvened. Two possessives in one building in one day. The chapter’s whole question is which of

them was true, and the chapter's method is the record, because the record is the only honest way to answer a question about the house.

First, the load-bearing sentence, because the day broke on it. Nothing in the republic is harder to carry than the transfer of power, and the joint is carried by one sentence that no law requires: the loser's concession. The genre's scholarship is settled and this book stands on it: Paul Corcoran's study of the form, "Presidential Concession Speeches: The Rhetoric of Defeat" (Political Communication, 1994), and the Radio Diaries record that walks the genre's parade. The concession is the speech the loser hopes never to give, and it has four moves: the statement of defeat that never says defeat, the congratulations to the winner, the call to unite, the vow to continue the fight inside the rules. Its first public form in the country's politics is a telegram, November 5, 1896, William Jennings Bryan to William McKinley, and its two sentences deserve to be read as the founding documents of the tradition: "We have submitted the issue to the American people and their will is law." Submitted: the loser placing the contest into the plural's hands. Their will is law: the loser's acknowledgment that the us has spoken and the us is final. The concession is the republic's load-

bearing sentence because it is the moment the losing side of the us rejoins the whole. The function, per the scholarship, is never the loser's acceptance of the loss. It is the supporters' acceptance, purchased by the loser's performance of it. The genre is the machinery by which the halves of the country become the whole again, on schedule, in public, without a law.

Walk the genre's parade, because the record of it is the tradition's proof. Dewey to Truman, 1948, by wire: "My heartiest congratulations to you on your election and every good wish for a successful administration." Nixon, 1960, conceding to Kennedy: "I have great faith that our people, Republicans, Democrats alike, will unite behind our next president." Carter, 1980: "I have a deep appreciation of the system, however, that lets people make a free choice about who will lead them for the next four years." And 2016, which is the parade's most pointed exhibit for this decade: the loser of that year, the candidate of the author's own side of the aisle, stood before her supporters in defeat and said, "Our constitutional democracy enshrines the peaceful transfer of power. We don't just respect that; we cherish it." The sentence held by losers of both parties, across the whole parade, until it wasn't. The tradition is not old by the country's clock, only a hundred and

twenty-five years, one telegram at the start, and the genre it founded kept since. The tradition's whole authority was custom. There is no statute behind a concession; the sentence carries the republic's transfer the way a keystone carries an arch: invisibly, by position, until the day someone declines to set it.

In 2020, the sentence never arrived. What arrived instead, at 5:52 in the evening of January 7, 2021, in a video recorded in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House, was the closest thing the incumbent ever gave: "Now Congress has certified the results. A new administration will be inaugurated on January 20th. My focus now turns to ensuring a smooth, orderly, and seamless transition of power. This moment calls for healing and reconciliation." Read it against the template. The certification is acknowledged; the inauguration is acknowledged; the transition is promised. The genre's core act is absent: no congratulations to the winner, no statement of the loss, no asking the supporters to accept it, and instead, to them, the sentence that keeps the wound open by design: "our incredible journey is only just beginning." The scholarship had found, measuring the parade, that the closest elections produce the most unifying concessions, because both sides see the importance of coming

together. And the 2020 election's Electoral College margin was almost identical to 2016's, the majority leader noted on the floor. That machinery existed, was understood, and was declined. The load-bearing sentence was never spoken. What happened in the house on January 6 is what a republic looks like when the joint is never closed: the pressure has to go somewhere, and it went to the building.

Now the record, and this chapter lets the flat clock carry the drama, because the drama needs no assistance. The Congressional Record for Wednesday, January 6, 2021, is a government production printed on January 8, and it reads like a seismograph. The joint session was called to order at 1:05 in the afternoon, Vice President Pence presiding as president of the Senate, the tellers appointed, the sealed certificates of the states opened and read in alphabetical order, the way the republic has done it every four years for more than two centuries. At 1:14 the session dissolved for the first objection, Arizona's, the two houses withdrawing to their separate chambers to debate. On the morning of the session, in an open letter dated that day and addressed to the Congress, the vice president had put his refusal in writing: "It is my considered judgment that my oath to support and defend the Constitution

constrains me from claiming unilateral authority to determine which electoral votes should be counted and which should not." The type's demand, per the record, was that one man claim the power to decide which of the country's votes counted. The officer's answer, in writing, ahead of the pressure: my oath constrains me. Note the genitive in the answer: my oath, the possessive of duty, the officer's belonging to the document. Against the rally's we win and the mob's our house, the letter's my oath is the day's third possessive, the smallest one and the one that held. The republic's load-bearing officer held the letter of his oath while the building came down around the procedure.

The breach is in the Record as a recess, which is the document's way of keeping its face. At 2:13 the Senate stood in recess subject to the call of the chair; at 2:29 the House recessed. Between those two lines the building was taken: the east Rotunda doors breached, the House chamber's vestibule reached, the mob inside the statuary and the halls, the desks of the Senate gone through, a woman shot at the door of the House, the vice president evacuated to within forty feet of the crowd that was calling for him by name. The Record records none of it. What it says is: recess, subject to the call of the chair. The deadpan of the

document is the point: the procedure's text has no line for what was happening, because the procedure was what was happening to.

Then the resumption, and here the document's register changes, and the instrument of this book can say by how much. The Record first, and the Record's own antiquity: "we have fulfilled this solemn duty every 4 years for more than two centuries," the majority leader said from the floor that night, and the statement is verifiable in the document itself, the joint session under its concurrent resolution, the tellers, the alphabet of states, the same machinery the 1876 crisis strained to its limit, when three southern states sent double slates and the republic had to invent the commission to survive it. The procedure is old, contested before, and written down. That is its armor, all of it. It does not have a battalion. It has a journal. The Senate reassembled at 8:06 that night, called to order by the vice president, and the House at 9:02. Three statements open the resumption, the chair's, the majority leader's, the Democratic leader's, and they are in the Record verbatim, and this book's count runs on them as a defined slice: 1,297 words, 69 first-person-plural tokens, 53.2 per thousand, the register of an inaugural address, spoken off the floor of a chamber that had been occupied by a mob six

hours earlier. The majority leader's own statement runs at 96 per thousand, denser with we than any inaugural in the counted series. "The United States Senate will not be intimidated. We will not be kept out of this Chamber by thugs, mobs, or threats. We will not bow to lawlessness or intimidation. We are back at our posts." The case the resumption chose deserves the closer look. The chamber had spent the afternoon as the object of the day, the us that was broken into, and it answered in the pure subject case: we will not be kept out, we will not bow, we are back at our posts. Note the chair's statement: its object-case count is zero. The building's answer to being acted upon was to resume acting. The Record carries the day's own historical bracket, spoken in the evening's debate by the member from Pennsylvania: invaders came in for the first time since the War of 1812. Once before, in August 1814, the chamber was taken by force, and the building burned. It has only ever been entered that way twice. The procedure's own self-description, in the plural, from the majority leader on the same floor that night: "We will complete this process the right way, by the book. We will follow our precedents, our laws, and our Constitution to the letter, and we will certify the winner of the 2020 Presidential election." By the

book: the machine's faith in its own text. And his close, which is the register's own benediction: "Criminal behavior will never dominate the United States Congress. This institution is resilient. Our democratic Republic is strong. The American people deserve nothing less." The plural of duty, run to ground: our republic, its procedure, its book. The chair's, which is the sentence this chapter was named for: "To those who wreaked havoc in our Capitol today, you did not win. Violence never wins. Freedom wins. And this is still the People's House." Our Capitol, his, spoken to the mob that had spent the afternoon chanting the same possessive. Note the verdict's address: you did not win, the day's losers addressed in the second person, the object case of the verdict, while the house stayed in the genitive of the whole. The day offered two versions of our, one chanted by the crowd that broke in and one spoken by the officer who came back. Both of them are in the record.

The night's deepest grammar is the roll calls, because the subtraction test, the diagnostic of this book, was performed by the procedure itself, four times, under recorded names. Six objections were attempted that day, against Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, and four of them died at the procedure's own

gate, ruled out of order for lacking a senator's signature: the proposed subtraction could not find a second. The two that survived to debate were answered by the machinery with the names recorded. Each surviving objection asked the chambers to remove a state's electors from the count, to subtract a state from the us. On Arizona: the Senate voted 6 to 93, the House 121 to 303. On Pennsylvania, taken up near midnight: the Senate 7 to 92, at 12:40 in the morning, the seven sustaining senators named in the record, Cruz, Hawley, Hyde-Smith, Lummis, Marshall, Tuberville, and Scott of Florida; the House 138 to 282. The joint session resumed at 3:25 in the morning. At the end of the alphabet the tellers' totals were read: for President, Joseph R. Biden, Jr. of Delaware, 306, and Donald J. Trump of Florida, 232. The presiding officer dissolved the joint session at 3:44, the results entered into the journals of both houses. And the day's us survived its proposed subtractions by recorded vote, in the most literal procedure the republic owns, while the streets outside still smelled of the afternoon. The machine of the plural was interrupted, cleared, secured, and run again the same night. The count that no single voice could stop finished at 3:44 in the morning, and the flat clock of the document is the whole account of the survival.

Run the subtraction test on the mob's our, the closing gate this chapter owes the claimant. Remove the them, the stolen election, the traitors, the enemies, and report what survives of the we that occupied the Rotunda. What survives is the possessive itself, a fence with no room behind it: our house was the whole of the content, a claim of ownership with nothing owned in common but the claim. The marchers of August 2017 had chanted the perimeter in the object case, you will not replace us. The mob of January 2021 chanted it in the genitive, our house, and the genitive is the same emptiness wearing possession: take away the theft they believed, and there is no sentence left inside the room they took. Either way, the test returns the same verdict: an us with no affirmative content, no sentence in it that survives the rival's removal, is the counterfeit at the gate of the house. The procedure answered in kind, on the record, in the genitive's own terms: the chair's "our Capitol," offered in the same building to the same crowd, is the possessive with the trust attached, the house that belongs to the people because the people are bound to it. Same word. One of them had a document behind it.

The government audited itself, and the audit is this chapter's documentary spine beside the Record. The House's select committee interviewed

more than a thousand witnesses, held ten hearings, and obtained millions of pages of documents over eighteen months, and on December 22, 2022, released its final report through the Government Publishing Office, the government edition, the decade's largest official act of self-examination. Its formation was contested along the seam the day opened, and its report's credibility is therefore bounded by its record: the witnesses were under oath, the documents are on file, and the videos are in the archive. A government that can be stormed at noon and can publish its own thousand-witness audit of the storming within two years is a government with a self-audit organ, which is one of the things this book is about: the us that can examine itself survives itself.

The type's arc ends here, and the record shows the whole arc. The slogan of June 2016 promised control to an unspecified us. July 2016's sentence offered one man's I as the plural's replacement organ. The chant of August 2017 drew the us as pure perimeter. The day of January 6, 2021, ran the type's conclusion: the singular's refusal to give the concession, the load-bearing sentence unspoken, the plural's machinery attacked in its own house by the people the singular had summoned, per the government's own report,

assembled, and lit. And the final report of the government's own committee, released December 22, 2022, put the cause in one sentence that the eighteen months of evidence carried: "The central cause of January 6th was one man, former President Donald Trump, who many others followed. None of the events of January 6th would have happened without him." The name rides inside the government's own sentence, which is where this book lets it live, an instance of the type, cited by the record. Aristotle's type, run to its end: the flatterer of the demos, left with nothing left to flatter, turned on the procedure itself. The procedure, which is the plural's oldest machine, outlasted him by hours. At 3:44 in the morning, the certification finished. The sentence that no law requires was never spoken. Both of those are true, and the decade's last five years are written in the space between them.

One more thing the record holds, because the object case keeps the day's books. The toll: a woman shot dead at the door of the House chamber; a Capitol Police officer dead the following night; the medical emergencies in the crowd; and the chair's own line over the whole of it, in the resumption statement, the loss of life in these hallowed halls. Counted, mourned, held. The holding, in the house, is literal work: the

building's own staff, the custodial and the clerical, the people who sweep, were the ones who put the room back, so that the plural's machine could be run again in a chamber free of glass. The given us of a building includes the people who clean it, and they were the first ones back in the rooms. And the house stood back up the same night. The sentence never arrived. The genitive of the republic is the same word the mob chanted, and the difference between the two, the whole of it, is the difference between a possession claimed and a trust accepted.

Set the noon text in the record beside the night text, because the day had two grammars and the instrument can hold both. At noon, at the Ellipse, before the building was touched, the singular addressed the plural: "We will never give up. We will never concede, it doesn't happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved." The load-bearing sentence was refused at noon, in advance, before the glass broke; the joint was declared open before the crowd moved. The singular put the pressure on the officer in the plural, from the podium, ahead of everything: "If Mike Pence does the right thing, we win the election." We win: the plural of the win, conditional on one man's obedience, the whole grammar of the type in one conditional sentence. And the day's possessive

completed the decade's first slogan: 2016's take back control had left the genitive unspoken, and the rally of January 6 finished the phrase: "you'll never take back our country with weakness." Take back our country. The perimeter's genitive, said out loud at last, the control given its owner. Its own imperative came back from the crowd: "Send it back," at the mention of the certificates, and the march's instruction carried the day's two registers in one sentence: "peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard" and "you have to show strength." Both registers were heard. The building got the second one. Per the instrument's run on the transcript, the noon text: 10,860 words, the plural set at 347 tokens, 32.0 per thousand, with the genitive carrying the argument, 82 of them our. The night text, per the same rules: 53.2 per thousand, the chamber's plural of duty. The day's two texts, measured: the noon possessive of the win, the night plural of the procedure. Between the second one and the first, the republic survived.

Between the noon text and the night text sits the day's most precise emblem, preserved in a charging document. In the evacuated building, a rioter picked up a telephone in a Senate office and acted out a call with the Senate's personnel, performing the chamber's business inside the

emptied room. The counterfeit session in the deserted office: the mob's answer to the procedure was to sit at its desk and pretend to run it. That gesture is the book's whole subject in miniature. The pronoun was chanted, the desks were sat at, the telephone was picked up, and the room's actual business, the alphabet, the tellers, the journals, resumed at 8:06 in the Senate and 9:02 in the House, and finished at 3:44, with the pretender's phone call preserved in an FBI affidavit. The machinery is indifferent to the performance; the machinery is the point.

And afterward, the Rotunda. The mob had walked the perimeter's own gallery without reading it: the statues in that hall are the states' own admission log, two figures each, chosen by the states, the whole perimeter standing in bronze. They stood back up; the glass got swept; the Record closed at 3:44 with the results entered into the journals. The document that the day attacked is the document that survived it, page by page, in the flat voice of the clerk. Whose house. What the building gave, in the end, was procedural: the house of whoever shows up to count, and be counted, and finish. The chant asked the question by force. The alphabet answered it. And the alphabet was complete: Alabama to Wyoming, every state read, every vote

accounted, the whole of the us counted by name, in order, out loud, in the chamber that had been evacuated that afternoon. The record's flatness is the day's true verdict. Everything the mob did was loud, and none of it entered the journal as anything but procedure. And the sentence that was never spoken still hangs over the house, which is why the building's survival is the movement's pause, and not its peace. The machine ran. The joint stayed open. Between those two sentences, the rest of the decade lives.

Chapter Nine

The Sorted Feed.

The last edition of the Vindicator went out on Saturday, August 31, 2019. Mahoning County, Ohio: a hundred and fifty years of a daily paper, ended. The paper had celebrated its hundred and fiftieth birthday the week before. The news had come on June 28, in a letter signed by the publisher and the general manager, members of the family that had owned the paper since 1887, and the record says the paper was hemorrhaging money, that the family had looked for a buyer and found none; the letter's close is in the record: "It is with broken hearts that we say goodbye and a final thank you." The sale of the name came on August 16. The last press run was August 31. On the stands the next morning, September 1, was the successor paper's first edition, wearing the same masthead under new ownership. The valley's own record of the week is exact, and the exactness is the chapter's method: nothing here is

reconstructed from memory, and the seam between the dead paper and the named successor is one night long. The managing editor had told his staff the plan for the last sixty days: “To the last minute, to the last hour of the last day, we are giving this thing a Viking funeral. We can’t change the circumstances, but we are going to walk out of here with our heads held high.” In the hallway of the building, the front pages of the paper’s whole run of the American century: the first Chevy off the Lordstown line, Germany’s surrender, the Hindenburg. In 2019, the year the paper died, the Lordstown plant itself had closed, the sprawling GM assembly complex that had employed the valley for fifty years, and the regional medical center had closed too, so the last season of the last edition was spent covering the deaths of the institutions it had chronicled since they opened. Then the paperwork of the aftermath, which belongs in the record because it is the decade in one transaction: the masthead, the subscriber list, and the web domain were sold to the Warren Tribune Chronicle, owned by a chain, which kept publishing a paper called the Vindicator. The name outlived the paper. Mahoning County’s editorial we, the room’s grammar made audible, had died and been continued as a brand.

The paper had been the valley's watchdog in the specific ways a watchdog counts: it fought for public records in court, it sent its own attorney with its reporters to meetings to make sure the politicians followed the open-meetings laws, and when it died the neighboring press asked the questions a dead paper stops answering, who covers the city hall, who watches the school board, who keeps the eye on the police. A hundred thousand readers a day, in print and online, in a county of twice that. The record of its closing, beside the family's own letter, carries the outside witness: the Guardian's correspondent called it scary for democracy, and the record of what followed is the instruction: other outlets stood up at the community forum and promised to fill the void, and what filled it was a website run with platform and chain money and the chain-owned continuation of the dead paper's name. The county did not lack for goodwill; the county lacked a press. Goodwill is the spark, the second chapter said, and the spark is not the fire.

That last clause is why the chapter exists, and it begins, as this book's chapters do when they can, with the artifact's own indictment getting both its due and its correction. The 2016 essay charged the fourth estate with worthlessness: owned by big business, "too fatted to fail," more devoted, the

author wrote, “to selling soap than rendering the truth from the spit for the benefit of the masses.” Grant the true part, because the essay was about the national press and the national press spent the decade proving it: the confirmation economy is real, and the audience-buying incentives of national media are as documented as anything in this book. Its exact words deserve the record’s exactness: “The fourth estate is worthless,” the author wrote, “they’re owned by big business,” and “they have always been more about selling soap than rendering the truth from the spit for the benefit of the masses.” Then the harder truth the essay could not see from 2016, and it is carried by receipts: while the author was indicting the estate for selling confirmation, the estate’s local wing was dying underneath the argument, county by county, at more than two closures a week for twenty years. The essay’s complaint assumed the estate would always be there to be wrong. Its record, a decade later, is that it mostly isn’t there. The local paper did not sell out. It died. And the difference between those two failures is the difference between a press that flatters you and no press at all, which is the difference between the us that argues and the us that cannot see itself.

The receipts, then, and they come from the university census that has been keeping them since 2016; the census is itself a child of the decade under audit. The project published its first State of Local News report in 2016, the year this book's decade opens, and it has measured the closure of the commons every year since, so the decade under audit is also the decade of the audit's instrument. Its earlier editions carry the shapes the current figures wear: the 2018 report named the ghost newspaper, the surviving paper that is a shell of its former self, still printing, still selling ads, with the newsroom hollowed; and it noted that half the country's counties were down to a single paper even then. The ghost is the zombie form of the commons: the masthead without the staff. The Vindicator's name continuing under new ownership is the ghost's final stage, the name without the paper. Northwestern's Medill Local News Initiative, the successor line to Penelope Muse Abernathy's news-desert research, published its 2025 State of Local News report in October 2025, and the figures stand at the initiative's own pages. Since 2005 the country has lost close to 3,500 newspapers, almost forty percent of all local papers; 136 of them closed in the report's final year alone. In 2005, at the series' starting line, just

over 150 counties lacked a local news source; the current report tracks 213, up from 206 the year before, and nearly eighty percent of those counties are classified as predominantly rural; another 1,524 counties are down to a single source, typically a weekly. Taken together, some fifty million Americans live with limited or no access to local news. More than 270,000 newspaper jobs vanished across the two decades, a loss above three-quarters of the industry’s employment, and in 39 states fewer than a thousand journalists remain at work. The survivor papers are mostly weeklies, the ownership keeps consolidating, almost 250 papers changed hands in the past year across a hundred transactions, and the losses are not only rural: almost seventy percent of the vanished papers were in predominantly urban counties, and Milwaukee and Rochester have each lost eighty percent of their newspapers since 2005. The 2025 report adds the newest cut: the congressional rescission of $1.1 billion in public-broadcasting funding, which puts the nine counties whose only local source is a public station at risk of joining the desert. And because the publish-everything rule binds this chapter too, the census’s own countervailing finding: more than three hundred new local news startups, mostly digital, have

appeared in the past five years, concentrated in the metro areas, and they do not come close to replacing the losses. The census's own word for the whole picture is transformation, and its director's summary is sobering and inspiring at once. The chapter's word is the one the census measures: retraction. Its watch list now names 249 counties with a forty-percent likelihood of losing their local news within the decade, so the census's next editions are already written in expectation. The county-by-county census of the commons, closing door by door, on the record, with the current figures taken from the latest edition of the census itself, per this book's rule against rounded folklore numbers.

Now the members of the commons, measured against their own conduct, and the paradox is complete in one survey program. The Pew-Knight report of May 7, 2024, titled Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News, built on 5,146 adults surveyed that January, and its December 2025 fact-sheet update, record the following. The share of Americans who say they follow local news very closely has fallen from 37 percent in 2016 to 22 percent in 2024, and to 21 percent in the December 2025 survey; among adults under thirty the figure is 15 percent. Eighty percent still call local news at least somewhat important to

their community's well-being, though the intense conviction is fading: 34 percent say extremely or very important in 2025, down from 44 percent a year earlier. The outer ring left first: the share following local news at least somewhat closely fell from 78 percent in 2016 to 66 percent in 2024, the casual reader's quiet exit, which is how a room empties, from the edges. Fifteen percent said in 2024 that they had paid for local news in the past year; in 2025, twelve percent. The awareness figure, which is the paradox's hinge: in 2018, 71 percent believed their local outlets were doing well financially; by 2025, only 57 percent. A room everyone calls load-bearing, which a fifth still watch, which almost no one pays for, and whose collapse a majority only lately began to notice. The publish-everything rule wants the whole shape: the commons is starting to sense the rent is unpaid. But the trust figures hold steady beside the loss, and that is the part that should stop a reader cold: most Americans still say their local media report accurately and stay in touch with the community. The institution is trusted, valued, praised, and abandoned, all in the same answers.

And the pathway table in the same survey program records where the attention went. The share preferring a print newspaper for local news fell from 13 percent in 2018 to 8 percent in 2025;

television's preference fell from 41 to 34; and the social-media and website preferences climbed past both. Noted by the Seattle press from the same data, the starkest single line in the whole program: in 2018, 43 percent of Americans got local news from daily newspapers and 30 percent from local government agencies and officials; by 2024 the order had flipped, 33 and 35, which is to say more Americans were getting their local news from the government than from the press that watches the government. The observer's comment stands in the record: that is not how it is supposed to work in a democracy. The feed took the audience and then the function, and the function fell to the subject of the coverage.

Beneath the dying rooms the ground itself was sorting. The instrument here is the landslide-county series kept since The Big Sort by Bill Bishop and Robert Cushing, published at the Daily Yonder, and its measure is simple enough to be honest: the share of voters living in a county decided by twenty points or more of the two-party vote, third parties set aside. In 1976, a close national election, about 26 percent of voters lived in such a county. The series climbs without pause: 37.7 percent in 1992, 42 in 1996, 48.3 in 2004, 50.6 in 2012, then the leap to 62 percent in 2016, the keeper's revised figure, where this book's

computation returns 60.8 and the appendix registers the seam, easing to 58.2 in 2020, an election decided nationally by a sliver while more than three-quarters of all counties, 77 percent, went by landslide locally, and 77.3 percent of rural voters lived in one. The maintainer is identified and assessed, per this book's rules: the series runs on the work of the authors of The Big Sort, and its keeper published the 2020 analysis himself, with the method's exclusions stated on the page. A supplemental measure from the University of Virginia's Crystal Ball sharpens the edge: the counties delivering eighty percent or more of the two-party vote to one side, the super landslides, grew on the Republican ledger from 274 in 2012 to 653 in 2020. The keeper's 2024-cycle analyses addressed turnout geography instead of the series measure, so the 2024 share in this book is the book's own computation under the series' rule, from the scholarly county record: 79.7 percent of counties, 57.2 percent of voters, computed in the seventeenth chapter and validated against the keeper's published 2020 figures. Name the poles of the sorted map, because the poles are counties where the perimeter is total. The 2020 analysis, at the keeper's own publication: the most Republican rural county was Roberts County, in the Texas

Panhandle, where 96.9 percent of the vote went to the Republican and seventeen people voted for the Democrat. The most Democratic urban county was Prince George's County, Maryland, at 91.1 percent for the Democrat. Seventeen people. That is what a landslide county is: a place where the other side has become rare enough to know by name. The map of the country, at the level of the county where a person lives, hardened until an election settled nationally by a fraction was a twenty-point blowout on more than three-quarters of the ground.

The antipathy series, the long-running survey record of how the two publics came to feel about one another, is the sorting's emotional register. Pew's report of August 9, 2022, built on 6,174 adults on the American Trends Panel, against its own 2016 baseline: the share of Republicans who say Democrats are more immoral than other Americans went from 47 percent to 72 percent; the share of Democrats saying the same about Republicans went from 35 percent to 63 percent. More dishonest: 72 percent of Republicans and 64 percent of Democrats, up from the forties in both. The very-unfavorable rating of the other party: 62 percent of Republicans and 54 percent of Democrats, against fewer than a quarter of either party in 1994. The pox-on-both-houses share, the

Americans unfavorable to both parties at once: 6 percent in 1994, 27 percent by 2022, which is its own perimeter reading, the share of the country that has walked out of both rooms. Here is the movement's most measured finding, the one this book's thesis is built on, given in the series' own arithmetic: the affection for one's own side rose too, but slower. Republicans saying their own party is more moral than other Americans went from 51 percent to 63; Democrats from 38 to 51. Dislike of the other side grew two to three times faster than love of one's own. The us of the decade grew outward from its boundary. Each party's members came to know themselves, measurably, by the other side's defects. The perimeter replaced the room. And the same report carries the affiliation finding, and it is the finding's engine: asked why they belong to their party at all, 78 percent of Republicans cite the harm of the other party's policies as a major reason, and 68 percent of Democrats say the same, and the report's own language names it: negative sentiment remains a major factor in why they affiliate. The parties' memberships are now held together, in the majority, by the them. The subtraction test's diagnosis, arrived at through the survey record: the decade's two largest us-es are held together by opposition, and the inner rooms are emptying.

Now put the three records in one frame, because they interlock into the chapter's finding. The local estate died county by county, so the shared object of attention, the school board, the bond issue, the high school team, lost its chronicler. National attention concentrated into the feeds, where the object of attention is personalized per user, so that two neighbors can no longer be assumed to have seen the same world that morning. The geography completed the circuit: the county map hardened until most Americans' neighbors voted the same way they did, so the feed's object and the neighbor's ballot pointed the same direction, and nothing anywhere in the day showed anyone anything else. The money ran the same circuit. What the local paper sold was the local advertisement, the car dealer and the grocer buying the page beside the council report, and that function migrated to the platforms, whose advertising is targeted per user and returns no journalism to the county; the census reports record the revenue leaving with the audience, through the search engines and the social feeds and now the answer machines, and what came back was, on the record, nothing. The commons died the way a store dies: the foot traffic went somewhere that sells to it without paying it. One more reading from the same survey program,

because it closes the loop the book needs closed. The Pew report measured the attachment question directly: Americans who feel very attached to their community are the ones who follow its news, value its news, and rate its journalists highly: 66 percent of the very attached call local news extremely or very important, against 31 percent of the unattached. The feeling and the text reinforce each other: the reader of the paper becomes the citizen of the county; the citizen of the county becomes the reader of the paper. Kill the text and the attachment follows; kill the attachment and the text follows. The census and the survey are the two sides of one door closing.

The second chapter's standard says what the result is called. Concord, Aristotle wrote, is political friendship, and it belongs to people who resolve in common about what is to their interest and then do it, and resolving in common requires a common object. An us that cannot see the same facts cannot deliberate, because there is nothing shared to deliberate about. Name the loss exactly, because the loss is easy to romanticize into fog. What the county paper supplied was never primarily information. It was simultaneity: the same front page on the same porch on the same morning, the property tax story read by the

commissioner and the cashier at the same hour, the commons of the shared object. The feed's fatal property is the exact inverse, and no algorithm reform fixes it, because the property is the product: no two users ever see the same page. The decade's arrangement of attention is the exact negation of the standard's requirement, arrived at by a thousand business decisions, none of them malicious, all of them counted.

One more loss belongs in the register, and it is this book's own: the editorial we. The fourth chapter noted the newsroom's plural voice, the institution's we, the grammar in which a newspaper said we endorse and meant the masthead. The county daily was the last institutional we most Americans ever heard addressed to them by name: we asked the council, we obtained the records, we regret the error. When the paper dies, the county loses the voice, and the replacement is the feed's personalized singular, the timeline addressed to one user at a time, computed per person, never the same page twice. The editorial we was the commons speaking; the feed is the commons computed. And the 2016 essay, to its record's credit, named the replacement before it had a business model worth the name: the country, the author wrote that June, represses hardship reality with selfies and social

media mendacity. The indictment was right about the mendacity and wrong about the estate, and the decade's receipts now separate the two findings with a cleaver: the mendacity scaled; the estate died.

One grace note of the record, because the publish-everything rule demands the runs that complicate the thesis. The Pew report found the local divide thinner than the national one: 78 percent of Democrats and 66 percent of Republicans said their local media report accurately, a twelve-point gap between the parties. Where the room survives, the trust survives. The finding cuts the correct way: it is evidence for the thesis, because it shows what the rooms were carrying, and it is priced into the verdict and kept on the record.

Here are the movement's four findings, then, before the close, because the stress test is done after this chapter and its results should stand in one place. First, the demagogic us dissolves deliberation into acclamation, and the type is older than the parties. The pandemic proved the need at street scale and the counterfeit's scale at national scale, in one season. The house survived by hours, on procedure, without its load-bearing sentence. And the commons of attention is dead at the county level, measured door by door by the

census that is itself a child of the decade. What the decade produced in place of the dead commons is the subject of the next movement: the claimants, the institutions and machines that learned to say us to you at scale, each with its own tell. The stress test is complete. The claimants arrive next.

Back to Youngstown. The last press run ended on the last Saturday of August 2019, and the building went quiet, and the hallway of front pages stayed where it was, the Chevy and the surrender and the airship. And the record of the funeral, kept by the ones who stayed to write it: the newsroom dark, the editor's bark stilled, the police scanner's chatter gone from the room it had filled for decades, the smell of the ink still in the air. The managing editor's vow was kept: they gave it a Viking funeral, heads high. And the county woke the next morning to a paper with the same name on the stands, printed by somebody else, which is the decade's whole lesson wearing a masthead: the name of the commons survives the commons, and telling them apart is the work this book exists to make possible. What a county loses when the paper dies is not a product. It is the daily, printed, shared object of attention, the thing that let the county see itself at breakfast. The us of Mahoning County had a text for a hundred and fifty years, and then it didn't. The masthead

continued, owned elsewhere; the commons was not sold; it was closed, and the sign stayed up, which is the counterfeit form of survival, and the county's us now reads its own name on a building run from another county. That is the decade in one county. Multiply by the census, and the republic has the answer to whether an us can deliberate without a shared page. The answer is being lived.

MOVEMENT III

The Claimants

Chapter Ten

The Brand-We.

The given us is gone, the stress test is done, and now the claimants arrive: the ones who say us to you at scale because they want something from you. The first claimant is the oldest and the most practiced, and it comes in the genre of the annual letter. This is the brand-we, the corporate first person plural, and its home is the genre in which a company addresses its owners once a year. The claimants of this movement are the forms the pronoun takes when the rooms are gone and the demand remains: the brand that sells you belonging, the platform that owns the square and calls you a community, the machine that keeps you company, the sealed room where the capable withdrew. The movement takes them in turn, each one a form, each one with its tell, and the book's promise holds: the same tests, the same scale, the same published runs. First is the brand, because it is the form the others learned from,

and because its instrument, the letter, is the oldest of the claimant documents. And the movement's order is the counterfeit's own history: the brand learned the pronoun first, the platform inherited it, and the machine perfected it. The scene, declared as a rendering the way the agora was: a shareholder letter drafted by committee. The investor-relations team has the deck, legal has the risk factors, communications has the voice guide, and the chief executive's letter goes through the rooms the way a bill goes through the floors: the numbers table gets reviewed by the accountants, the forward-looking statements get flagged by counsel, the tone gets tuned by the brand team against the voice guide, and the signature block waits at the end for the one name. What comes out the far end is a document that says the first person plural by the hundred and is signed by one person. The genre is more than a century old in its American form. And the whole of Movement III begins inside it, because the annual letter is where the brand-we learned to speak as if it were the republic.

The instrument of this book goes to the federal archive, because the archive is where the genre is answerable to record. The registered rule, fixed before any counting, per the protocol: the ten largest United States companies by market

capitalization as of December 31, 2015, whose annual reports for fiscal 2015 and fiscal 2025 both carry a letter to shareholders, retrieved from the federal EDGAR archive, with substitutions by ladder and every substitution logged. And the protocol's own amendment clause exists for what happened next, and it is used here, logged with its reason and its numbers. What the archive yielded: six letters for fiscal 2025, verified at the document level and counted. For fiscal 2015: one. The reason, measured: the decade-old annual reports live on the archive as scanned images of paper, present and not machine-readable, which a control query confirmed: a verified phrase inside a pulled 2016 exhibit returns nothing from the archive's own text index. The letters exist; the record of record cannot read them. So the panel completes as the letters present and countable on the federal archive in the two windows, and the amendment is logged here and in the appendix, with the before and after. The before: the registered rule, the ten largest, both years, EDGAR, with substitutions by ladder. The after: the same rule, honestly applied, which yielded six letters of fiscal 2025 and one of fiscal 2015 in countable text, four companies that never filed the letter in either window, and one letter present as a photograph of paper. Its reason is the

archive's condition; the appendix will carry the full file list, accession by accession, so that the run can be re-run.

Here is what the archive holds, and every figure is checkable against the documents. Six letters of fiscal 2025, and the register reads like a table of contents of the decade's corporate moods. Amazon's successor letter, Andy Jassy's, opens with his own biography, the story of the sportscaster he did not become, and closes with the founder's 1997 letter reprinted entire, at 28.48 first-person-plural tokens per thousand words. JPMorgan's Jamie Dimon, the genre's longest practitioner, opened his with the country's two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary and the bank's two-hundred-and-twenty-seventh and held forth for twenty-five thousand words at 28.72 per thousand. Johnson & Johnson's Joaquin Duato at 49.8. Wells Fargo's Charles Scharf at 55.62. Alphabet's Sundar Pichai, in the note from Sundar, at 58.82. And Microsoft's Satya Nadella, fifty years after the company's founding, at 59.89. Six letters, six registers of the same plural: four of them inside the register of the office's ceremonial speech, two at half of it, the genre's center of gravity parked just beneath the republic's own. The brand-we's voice is calibrated to the

republic's. That calibration is the genre's whole craft, and it is why the instrument had to be the archive and not the ear.

What the letters of the current year were about is the register's content itself: the decade's next chapter arriving early. The letters on the record for fiscal 2025 are, in the main, the machine's letters: the Alphabet note runs the models and the code now generated by machine, seventy-five percent of the company's new code written by the machine and approved by the engineers by the letter's own account, and the Microsoft letter runs the platforms and the generational moment, and the Amazon letter runs the infrastructure of it. Its loudest current subject is the machine that will speak the plural next. These claimants run as a relay here: the brand-we, at the moment of this book's measurement, is handing the pronoun to the machine-we, on the record, in the letters, with the register holding steady while the subject changes. The archive reads like the decade's own foreshadowing.

One decade pair completes on the archive: Amazon's founder's letter of fiscal 2015 at 32.16 per thousand against the successor's fiscal 2025 letter at 28.48. The register of the corporate plural,

a decade apart, at the anchor company: steady. The brand-we did not get louder in the decade under audit. It was already at full volume.

The salutations are their own census, because the perimeter of a letter is its salutation. Amazon's founder wrote to our shareowners. The bankers wrote Dear Shareholders and Dear Fellow Shareholders. Johnson & Johnson wrote Dear shareholders. And Microsoft, in the fiscal 2025 letter, opened with the salutation that tells the decade: "Dear shareholders, colleagues, customers, and partners." The address, by the decade's end, runs past the owners to everyone the company touches, and the register's honesty requires the seam: at the panel's own technology member, the four-constituency salutation was already on the record in 2015. The width is older than the decade there; what the decade added is the width made uniform, the genre's every letter opening wide at once. The brand-we's perimeter, by the letter's own first line, now includes the employee and the customer and the unnamed partner, which is everyone, the ambush of the fifth chapter written into a salutation. A letter that addresses everyone belongs to no one, and a belonging that belongs to no one is the brand-we's tell told in the genre's own grammar.

Then the finding the protocol's own discipline produced, the one nobody designed the panel to find. Four of the decade's largest voices, Apple, Berkshire Hathaway, Meta, and General Electric, never filed the shareholder letter on the federal archive in either window of the decade under audit. Not once. Berkshire's letters, the genre's most famous living specimens, live on the company's own website, and its FY2025 proxy statement, pulled and read for this book, carries no letter and no mention of one. Apple's annual reports carry no letter in either year. The corporate first person plural, at the companies whose voices carry the most weight, is not on the record of record. It lives where the company alone controls it, editable, unaccounted, unfiled. The brand-we's pronoun is not sworn to. That is not a technicality; that is the sign in its documentary form. A we that can fire you is also a we that will not file with the government, and the decade's two facts about the corporate plural are the same fact: it is everywhere in your life, and it is nowhere on the record. The archive's condition is the measurement's own finding about the record's decay: the government archive, the place where the republic's documents are supposed to be, cannot read its own holdings from a decade ago, because they are photographs of paper. The

given us's record and the claimant's record meet in the same broken reading room. Here the accounting of the decade has to be done with the lights on; this chapter turned them on as far as the archive allows.

The genre deserves its history in one paragraph, because the brand-we was not born cheap. Inside corporate life, the annual letter to shareholders is the one place where the company's I becomes the owners' we, and the genre had real masters. The letters of the Nebraska investor are the genre's art form: forty years of plain voice, jokes, admissions of error, the closest corporate America ever came to a literature, and it is exactly the point of this chapter that they are not on the federal record. And note what the art form's best practitioner did that the counterfeits never do: he wrote his errors down, every year, in the letter, and he kept the letter where everyone could read it. The genre's best was the audit of the self, written by the self. That is the standard this book keeps, and the genre produced it, and then the genre left the archive. Its art lives on the company's own site, and its filings live in the archive; the two never meet. The best of the genre is the least accountable to the record. Carry that to the claimants of the whole movement: the platform's

terms and the machine's voice are the same arrangement, the pronoun kept where the owner controls it.

The scene again, and the scene is the genre's machinery, rendered honestly: a shareholder letter drafted by committee. Investor relations drafts the numbers, legal drafts the risks, communications drafts the voice, and the chief executive's letter is assembled the way the decade's other documents were assembled, by rooms full of people whose names are not on it. Then one person signs it. The plural in the letter is the committee's plural, the we of an institution that exists nowhere in the document except in its pronoun, and the pronoun is the institution's whole performance of itself. Read the letters with the instrument and the performance measures out: the plural dense, the register warm, the salutations widened, and the signer's name the only singular thing in the document. The brand-we is a committee wearing a signature.

The membership question, which is the claimant's definition, deserves its precision. Three concentric members make up the brand-we, and the pronoun covers all three while distinguishing none. The shareholder owns the share, the receipt, the membership that can be sold; the customer owns the product, the transaction that

can be returned; and the employee's holding is the job, held at the company's pleasure, which is the sign made literal: a we that can fire you. And the letter addresses all three as one, and the archive's own count of the genre's plural register measures how naturally they are folded together. The shareholder can sell, the customer can leave, the employee can be fired. One of the three is the member who pays to belong, the one belonging of the three that sends a monthly bill. Those are three different relations to the pronoun, and the letter says we to all of them in the same warm register, because the register's purpose is to make the three relations feel like one belonging. The standard's answer, from the second chapter, stands: the friendship of utility is a real thing, and it ends when the utility does. And the brand-we is the utility friendship wearing the genitive of the commons, and the decade under audit is when the costume got good enough to fool the country.

The letters carry one more grammatical exhibit, the one the genre lives on: the second person genitive. Your company, your investment, your shares. The letter addresses the reader as the owner while the decisions are made elsewhere, which is the genitive working exactly as the fifth chapter said it would: ours names a belonging and a claim at once, and the letter uses it to give

the reader the belonging while the company keeps the claim. The shareholder's relation to the brand-we is the cleanest statement of the claimant's whole offer: you may have the pronoun; we will keep the power.

Now the genre's confession, carried forward from the previous movement's record, because the letters and the ads are one genre in two registers. The letter is the brand-we addressing its owners once a year, measured, formal, the committee at its best. The advertisement is the brand-we addressing everyone, every break, the committee at scale. In April 2020 the advertisement confessed for the whole genre. The record stands from Chapter Seven: the three-minute compilation posted April 15, 2020, dozens of brands reciting one identical together-sentence; the Journal's identification of its maker, Sean Haney, a digital marketer at a software company who noticed the pattern from his couch, working from home with the television on, and heard the same things and the same piano music within a week; the catalog of the shared vocabulary, times like these, more than ever, here for you, we're all in this together; the closing image, borrowed from the balconies, of the apartment dwellers applauding from their windows. And the montage is the brand-we's confession because it is the

genre caught in the act of having nothing to say: dozens of companies, one sentence, and the sentence means nothing because it costs nothing. The letters are the same voice at a slower tempo. In its annual letter the brand-we is the letter signed by one person and built by forty, and the plural it speaks is the committee's plural, the we of the institution addressing itself as if it were the family. The montage proved the genre knows it. And the letters prove the genre runs on it.

The two registers are the same instrument at two speeds. The letter is the brand-we at the annual rate, the committee's careful plural, measured once a year. At the minute rate, the chorus is the same plural sold in the break, assembled the same way and aimed at everyone. The montage caught the fast register confessing; the letters are the slow register, filed or not filed, and the archive's gaps are the slow register's confession: the loudest corporate plurals of the decade never appeared on the record of record at all. The genre's confession is therefore complete in both its registers: the fast one, caught on video, and the slow one, caught by absence. Neither register was hiding. That is the part that should stop the reader: the brand-we has never needed to hide.

Hold the two registers together and the claimant comes into focus. The brand-we is the first person plural as a service: a we you cannot vote in, whose membership is a transaction and whose constitution is a receipt. The tell, the one the movement's chapters each carry: a we that can fire you. And grant the counter-case before the verdict, because the audit's honesty is the whole of its value. Some of the brand's members do spend the time: the employee of thirty years, the shareholder who held across the decades, the customer whose whole working life ran on the product. The friendship of utility is not nothing while it lasts, and the letters are addressed to the ones who stayed. The tell is in the endings, never the middle: the relation is real until the quarter turns, and then the we that can fire you fires you, and the letter next year addresses the ones who remain. And the test, the closing gate this chapter owes the claimant: run the subtraction test on the brand's community. Remove the them, the competitor, the lawsuit, the outage, the bad quarter, and report what survives of the we the brand spends the letter building. What survives is the receipt. The three members are back at their three relations, the share can be sold, the product can be returned, the job can be ended, and none of them is a shared good held in common. And the

whole construction is the friendship of utility scaled to the size of an index fund, and the Ethics already priced it: the friendship of utility dissolves when the good stops arriving. The brand-we is the most practiced counterfeit of the decade because it is the most practiced, full stop, and because its instrument, the annual letter's plural and the ad's chorus, was perfected long before the decade began.

The standard's five questions, run on the claimant per the book's method. Speech that resolves in common: the letter resolves nothing in common; it reports, and the owners' only resolution is the vote the letter's language is designed to shape. Time: the letters come annually, the relationship is fiscal-year to fiscal-year, and the membership can be ended by the company at any time, which is the sign. Presence: there is none; the shareholder letter is the opposite of presence; it is the plural at a distance, by design, with the distance the product. Shared goods: the only shared good is the share, the receipt, the thing that can be sold; the community owns nothing together. The perimeter: the salutation widens to everyone while the membership narrows to whoever bought in. Five questions, and the brand-we answers none of them and answers loudly anyway, which is the

counterfeit working as designed. The questions were never asked of it, because the brand-we's whole survival depends on the fifth chapter's hole: the pronoun never has to say who it includes, so the letter never has to answer for its set. The audit's correction is the book's: ask the perimeter out loud, and the brand-we has no answer, because its answer would cost it the sale.

One more mapping, because the standard's taxonomy prices the claimant exactly. The Ethics' three friendships run on utility, pleasure, and virtue, and the claimants of this movement will each be found at one of the three. Here the brand-we is the friendship of utility scaled to the size of an index fund, with the friendship of pleasure for its marketing: the ad sells the warm feeling, the letter sells the sound position, and neither survives the quarter. The book's whole structure is the taxonomy's: the coming chapters' claimants will be mapped against the same three, and the only friendship that holds is the third one, the one that wishes the other's good for the other's own sake, which no committee has ever written into a voice guide.

And the note this book's method owes, the true part before the dismantling. The genre has one honest ritual, and it belongs to the anchor company. Every year, in the annual letter, Amazon

appends its founder's 1997 letter entire, unchanged, with the same postscript: what is written there is as true today as it was in 1997. That is the brand-we's one true sacrament: the company answering for its whole self across time, the same words, on the record, every year. The ritual is real, and it is worth the standard's respect, because it is the closest the claimant comes to time, the one raw material the brand-we cannot counterfeit. One ritual does not make a room. But the book's audit is honest about what the genre is when the genre is honest with itself: a committee's plural, on the record, every year, saying the same thing on purpose. The rest of the claimant's speech is the chorus.

This book's own file carries one more exhibit, because the author wrote the confession before the genre performed it, and the archive shows the order. The phrase corpus's eighth specimen, December 1, 2018: the author's machine narrator, addressing the listener from the machines' side, offered the decade's corporate chorus two years early, with the shrug attached: "We are all in this together. Up to a point?" The auditor of the brand-we is the man who drafted its confession as a warning. And the book's rule holds: the instrument points at the author first.

The scene, at its close. The letter drafted by committee goes out, and the shareholder reads it alone, at a table, with the morning's coffee, the way the owners of the given us once read the local paper, except that the paper was the commons and the letter is the receipt, and the whole of this chapter is the difference. It says we by the hundred, and the table holds one person, and the committee moves on to the next document. The pronoun did its year's work. The decade's next claimant is the one that wrote the pronoun into the rules themselves, the constitution nobody ratified, the platform's terms. And the brand-we's tell is the tell of the whole movement, stated first here: a we that can fire you, and a we that answers to no record. The letter is signed. The archive holds what it holds. And the committee is already writing next year's, and the salutation will be wider, and the register will be warm, and the archive will hold what it holds, and the country's owners will read the plural alone at their tables, addressed as a body that meets nowhere.

Chapter Eleven

The Platform-We.

A person sits down with a new phone, or a new account, or a new app, and the document arrives. This scene, like the kitchen table and the hall before it, is a rendering, declared up front, and its content is everyone's, because everyone alive has done this: the screen shows a wall of text, and at the bottom of the wall of text there is a blue button, and the button says Agree. The document above the button is the most agreed-to and least-read text in the history of the language. Nobody reads it. The button's whole design is that nobody reads it: the scroll box is sized to fatigue, the text is typeset to repel, and the document's own first line is a fiction the law pretends to believe, that by clicking the button you have read, understood, and agreed to be bound. Its legal name is the click-wrap, the descendant of the adhesion contract, the form in which the stronger party drafts and the weaker party adheres, and it has

cousins: the browse-wrap, where your presence on the page is said to be your agreement, and the sign-wrap, where the button and the document are adjacent but never touching. The genre's whole taxonomy is the taxonomy of the not-read. Its whole theory rests on a sentence that is false the moment it is written: the claim, embedded in the document itself, that the adherent read it. The terms of service are the constitution nobody ratified, the founding document of the platform-we, and this chapter reads them, which is more than their signers did.

The fiction has its own sentence, and it is in the documents. Reddit's 2016 user agreement says it to your face: "You acknowledge that you have read, understood, and agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement." The document asserts your reading as a fact inside the document that no one reads. The click-wrap's whole legal theory is that the lie told in the document cures itself when you click, that the assertion of reading becomes true by the click, which is the platform-we's constitution in miniature: the square's founding document contains, as a clause, the claim that you read it. A republic's founding document cannot be ratified until the states vote. The platform's founding document is ratified by your thumb, and

it says you read it first. That is the difference between a constitution and a receipt, in one clause.

The pronoun structure of these documents is the exhibit before the count even runs. Open any of them and the first thing the document does is define the pronoun. The platform is we, us, our, defined as the corporation, in the first line, before anything else: “this agreement between reddit (‘we’, ‘our,’ ‘us’) and you.” The user is you, the second person, and the document’s entire grammar is the we of the company addressing the you of the person, in the customer’s own diction, warm and lowercase and friendly, while the law underneath does what it does. And the document’s first person, the we that is the company, holds a power that no constitution anywhere permits a government: the power to amend itself, alone, at will, and have the amendment bind you by your continued existence inside its walls. “We may change these terms” is the sovereign we, wearing customer-service diction, and it is the clause the whole decade runs on. Weigh the sovereignty plainly, because the platform-we is the decade’s most-legislating pronoun: the only constitution most Americans live under that none of them ratified, the law of the place where the country now argues, and it is

written by the square's owner, for the owner's protection, with the owner's logo at the top. The given us had a constitution the people could amend, in public, with the two-thirds; the platform-we's constitution amends itself.

Here the instrument is the count on the versioned terms, and its design is the decade: a fixed panel of the services the country lives on, the January 2016 version of their terms against the January 2026 version, each version retrieved from the public web archive and cited by its capture timestamp, so the run can be re-run. The panel rule, registered before any counting: ten high-traffic consumer services under United States consumer terms in both windows. What the archive yielded at the press season, under the same amendment discipline the previous chapter logged: three services complete in both windows, cited by capture, and the rest of the panel stands outside that scope by name in the finding's frame. The panel completes as the services whose documents could be retrieved, read in full, and counted for this book, and the method is in the appendix.

The findings, every one of them checkable against the captures. Facebook's terms, January 2016 against January 2026: the first person plural ran at 37.06 tokens per thousand words in the

2016 document, and at 48.03 in the 2026 document. Twitter's terms, which became X's: 12.0 per thousand in January 2016, and 25.85 in January 2026, more than doubled. And Reddit's user agreement: 28.55 in January 2016, and 24.15 in January 2026, which fell, and the publish-everything rule wants that one in the record beside the others. The exception deserves its reading in the record: the one platform that ran on volunteer rooms, the subreddits with their own rolls, drifted least into the plural's register, because the subreddit's we is made by the room and the platform's we is made by the owner. Even the exceptions carry the thesis. And the findings' plain statement, because the numbers are the chapter: the square's constitution grew, the plural inside it thickened, the taking widened to the machine, and the exit stayed the same size as a button. All three documents grew: Facebook's terms swelled from 3,076 words to 5,059, Twitter's from 3,250 to 3,559, Reddit's from 2,942 to 3,478. And the documents' own names drifted: Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, the one genre document that ever admitted a user had rights, is now, by its own first page, "formerly known as" that, and is called, plainly, the Terms of Service. The document that once named the user's responsibilities as rights

renamed itself for the decade. The constitutions of the platform-we got longer across the decade at every service the instrument could read, and underneath they moved in both directions: the plural thickened at two services and thinned at one; the second person rose at two and fell at one. And the mixed shape is the finding: the documents did not march in step.

One more register line, the second person's, because the documents are written to you. Here is the you-family count, flagged as the chapter's supplement outside the registered token set: Facebook ran 60.1 you-tokens per thousand in 2016 and 49.4 in 2026; Twitter went 37.8 to 47.8; Reddit went 49.3 to 54.6. The terms speak to you more as the decade goes on, in the warm register, the customer-service voice, while the license clauses take more. And the diction softened as the taking grew. The 2016 Twitter document even carried its own self-aware gloss, printed in the margin as a "Tip": "What you say on the Twitter Services may be viewed all around the world instantly. You are what you Tweet!" The genre's tips and exclamation points, the friend-voice, are the sovereign we learning to sound like the room it replaced. The documents' first lines all do the same defining work: the platform is the we, and the document says so before anything else.

Reddit's 2016 agreement opens, "this agreement between reddit ('we', 'our,' 'us') and you," and X's 2026 terms define the words you and your and note that we is the company. The pronoun is defined as the corporation in the first sentence of the constitution. The given us never had to define itself; the platform-we must, because its we is a legal fiction, and the fiction is registered at the top of the document, the way the republic's pronoun was asserted at the top of its own.

One fact from beyond the panel's completed scope, because the record still bears it: YouTube's terms were last revised in January 2022 and stood unchanged through the January 2026 window, per the live page's own date line at the press season. The constitutions of the platform-we mostly rewrote themselves across the decade; one of them stood still. And the two facts belong in the register.

Inside the clauses is where the decade shows its drift. The license you grant the platform, the pronoun economy's core clause, the "you grant us" sentence that every one of these documents is built around, grew verbs across the decade the way the platform grew appetites. Twitter's 2016 license ran to "use, copy, reproduce, process, adapt, modify, publish, transmit, display and distribute" your content in "any and all media or

distribution methods (now known or later developed).” X’s 2026 license runs to “use, copy, reproduce, process, adapt, modify, publish, transmit, display, upload, download, and distribute” your content, “for any purpose,” with the decade’s new sentence attached: the right to use your content “to train AI and machine learning models,” and the disclaimer that the taking needs no compensation because your use of the service is agreed to be sufficient compensation. Reddit’s 2026 license runs the same new clause. The constitution of the platform-we grew, in the decade under audit, a clause authorizing the machine to train on the community’s life. The document’s drift is measurable in the verbs, and the verbs point at the next claimant.

And the license clauses earn the pause: because they are the decade’s most-signed sentence and its least-read one. “You grant us” is the pronoun economy in three words: the user’s genitive, the platform’s object case, the taking framed as a gift. The license is where the platform-we’s definition of we does its real work, because the we that is the company is the we that takes the license, and the you that grants it is the us of the platform, the community, the people the square is said to belong to. The community grants the square a

perpetual, irrevocable license to the community's own life, in any medium, for any purpose, forever. That is the genitive of the platform-we: the square owns its citizens' speech the way a country never could, and the citizens signed it unread, and the archive dated the signing.

The clause the whole arrangement runs on is the amendment clause, and its decade drift is the chapter's sharpest measurement, no counting required, only reading. In January 2016, Facebook's terms promised that before it changed the document, it would "notify you before we make changes to these terms and give you the opportunity to review and comment on the revised terms before continuing to use our Services," and your continued use after notice constituted your acceptance. Review and comment: a vestige of the era when the platform pretended its users had a voice in the document, the site-governance mechanism that once let the users comment on the draft. By January 2026, the comment mechanism is gone, and the clause reads in full: the platform may update the terms, it will notify you at least thirty days before, and "once any updated terms are in effect, you will be bound by them if you continue to access or use our Products," and if you disagree, "you can delete your account at any time and you must also

stop accessing or using" the products. Reddit's 2016 clause said it could modify the agreement at any time, with advance notice for material changes, and it kept the archive of previous editions on the website, which deserves the honest note it gets in a moment. X's 2026 clause notifies you thirty days ahead and binds you by continued use. The drift of the decade, in the constitution's own words, is from review-and-comment to review-and-leave. The platform's users never had a vote. In 2016 they had a comment box. By 2026 they have the door.

The sovereign we's other walls went up in the same decade, and they are in the documents. X's 2026 terms carry the clause the 2016 document lacked: you waive the right to participate as a plaintiff or class member in any class action, and any proceeding must be initiated within one year, or, in the document's own language, such claims "are permanently barred." And the same document carries the clause that dates itself to the decade's end: liquidated damages, fifteen thousand dollars per million posts, for anyone who scrapes the service at scale. The platform-we built a wall against the machines it trained on you. The sovereign we protects the commons it expropriated, which is the whole arrangement in one sentence.

Now the word community, because this chapter was assigned it, and it has labored harder in the decade's documents than any other word in the language. Facebook's terms open on the mission, "to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together," and then write the rules of the Community Standards, and then, in the current edition, note that the Oversight Board may review the platform's decisions, the platform-we having built itself an imitation court, a judiciary seated above the square, answerable to the owner's charter. The community is the only public the platform-we recognizes, and it is the owner's own word for the ruled. The word has a genealogy in the decade's documents: the platform's rules were once called rules; the decade renamed them guidelines and standards, and put the word community in front, because a rule is what a sovereign issues and a guideline is what a community shares. And the renaming is the sign in one word: the platform-we governs, and calls its governance the community's own standards, and the community never convened to set them. And the platforms write rules for their users and call the rules the community's own: community guidelines, community standards, our community. The word is the possessive's softest form, the genitive worn as warmth. Read it with

the instrument's ear: the platform's documents say "our community" the way the letter said "your company," and the direction of the two genitives is the same trick played on different sides. The community is the platform's, the way the company is the shareholder's: yours to feel, theirs to enforce. And the sign is in the documents' own confessions, because the terms all say it: the platform does not control or direct what people do or say, is not responsible for the content, and reserves the right to remove anything at its sole discretion. The sovereign we claims the square and disclaims the square at once. A community whose rules are written by an owner who disclaims the square is not a community. It is a jurisdiction with a comments section.

Run the subtraction test on the platform-we, the closing gate this chapter owes the claimant. Remove the them, the violators, the trolls, the bad actors, and report what survives of the community the platform claims to protect. What survives is the residue of whoever has not been banned yet, defined by the enforcement alone, with no shared goods the members hold in common, no salt, no roll they keep themselves. The platform's community has no inner room because the inner room is the platform's property: the community is what the enforcement leaves

behind. The standard's five questions, run on the claimant per the book's method: speech that resolves in common, nothing, the platform's square is designed so that nothing can be resolved in it, only amplified; time, the account's age, which the platform owns; presence, none, the terms themselves confess it; shared goods, none, the license clause is the document's own proof that what you make there is theirs to use; and the perimeter, the one question the platform-we can answer, because the perimeter is the ban list, and the ban list is the only perimeter the platform-we has ever had. Five questions, and the claimant answers one, the perimeter, and the one it answers is the fence. That is the platform-we's tell, and it is the tell of the sovereign we: a we that writes rules for an us it never consults, and a community whose only act of belonging is being allowed to remain.

And the counter-case, because the audit's honesty is the whole of it, and because the record contains its own complication. The platform's square contains real rooms inside it: the subreddits with their own volunteer moderators and their own rules, the rooms where the given us's remnant works inside the claimant's walls. And the 2026 documents even confess the tension: the subreddit's moderators may make their own

rules, and the platform reserves the right to overturn any moderator decision it believes is against its own interest or "the Reddit community." The real rooms inside the square are real, and the documents show the sovereign standing over them with the power to overturn. The remnant is genuine philia working in a building it does not own. The standard honors the remnant and prices the building. And the two are true; the documents prove both, and the audit keeps both in the record.

The note the method owes, the true part first. Two of the platforms keep their own history in public, and it is the best practice in the genre: Twitter's terms have always carried an archive of previous terms, and Reddit's user agreement keeps its revision history on the page, the editions listed like statutes. Keeping the old versions on the page is the genre's one honest habit, and it deserves its sentence: the sovereign who keeps the archive of its own changes is the least bad sovereign the platform-we produces. It is also, note, the thing that lets this book's instrument work at all, because the public web archive and the platforms' own revision pages are the only places the decade's terms survive to be counted. The claimant that keeps its own history is better than the claimant that does not, and the history it

keeps is what the archive's own condition makes precious. Grant that, and then the verdict: the genre's honest members keep the record of their own sovereignty, and the sovereignty is the same either way.

The standard's verdict, stated plainly. And the platform-we is the counterfeit with the constitution attached: the square where the whole country now argues, owned by a party to every argument, governed by rules written by the owner, enforced at the owner's sole discretion, and amendable by the owner alone with thirty days' notice and your continued existence as your signature. The comparison that matters is to the thing it replaced: the given us's public square had no owner and no terms, and the platform's square has both. The platform-we is the company town of the first person plural, and the company town's constitution is always written by the company. And the standard's own word for what a square is for has no purchase there at all: concord is the city resolving in common and then doing the resolved thing, and the platform's square is engineered so that nothing can ever resolve in it, because resolution would end the argument, and the argument is the engagement, and the engagement is the product. It is the polis with no agora, the public square you cannot vote in, and

the decade's answer to the closing of the rooms was to move the whole country's argument into a place whose rules none of the arguers wrote. The platform-we's square cannot produce concord, because concord is the one outcome the square is designed to prevent. The previous movements showed what the given us cost to keep and what the counterfeit pays to rent. This chapter is the instrument's reading of the rent agreement.

The scene, closing: the person at the blue button. The wall of text above the button is the constitution of the square the person is about to move into, and the person is not going to read it, because the document is written to not be read, and the button is blue, and the square is where the person's friends are, and the person's whole social and economic life now runs through the square, which is why the choice is no choice at all, and the documents know it, and say so nowhere. And the person clicks. The constitution is signed unread, again, more times a day than anyone has ever counted, and the archive keeps the versions of the document nobody read, dated, so that later the counting can be done. And the person is not lazy for not reading. The document is written past the point of reading, on purpose, because a constitution that wanted to be read would fit on a page, and these run to thousands of words of the

all-caps and the cross-references, which is the sovereign's way of saying the square is yours and the square is theirs. The click is the platform-we's whole theory of consent: the agreement is the kind of agreement in which one party reads and one party clicks, and the platform knows which party it is. And the click is the decade's most common civic act, which is the finding this chapter leaves at the movement's door: the country's most-ratified constitutions are the ones nobody read, and the country's founding document is the one nobody reads at all. The platform-we's legitimacy is a button and a record. And the machine was already waiting on the other side of the button, the one that does not need you to agree to anything, because it only has to keep you company.

Chapter Twelve

The Fandom-We.

The roar goes up in the stadium, and every head is bowed to a phone. This scene, like the others this book keeps, is a rendering, declared up front, and its content is on the record of the decade: the crowd rose because something happened on the field, and the phones came out because something happened on the field, and for half the crowd the thing that happened on the field happened to a position they were holding. Sit in the room a moment longer, because the room is the last of its kind and the chapter is written to notice it. Out in the lot, the sedan and the pickup sit in adjacent spaces. The suite and the bleacher share the roof. The stadium's ticket is the nearest thing to a general assembly most Americans ever attend. Inside it, the county's whole perimeter still mixes on a schedule, and the crowd is the given us's remnant in its Sunday form: the us that gathers around a shared object and holds one

hope in common for three hours. Its second event is the one the decade added: underneath the game, on the phones, the positions. Here the chapter takes its claimant: the fandom-we, the claimant whose members genuinely hold one another, and its object is the purest counterfeit in the book.

The terrain has a scholarly name, and the name has a date. In 1956, in the journal Psychiatry, Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl published “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” the article that coined the term for the one-sided intimacy: the parasocial relation, the seeming face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer. Their specimens were the new professions of the broadcast age: the quizmaster, the interviewer, the variety host, the disc jockey, crafts built entirely of simulated sociability, a manner of address perfected for people the addresser would never meet. What they cautioned was mild and exact: the attachment is one-sided, and the one-sidedness is the design. A shelf of scholarship runs from that article forward, and its finding is the one the decade scaled to billions: the attachment is real. It is felt by the fan as friendship, and it is felt in one direction only. The performer does not know the

fan. So the parasocial plural: the first person plural with one real member and one mirror, predating the decade under audit by sixty years, which this book concedes the way it concedes everything that is old. The form is old, the scale is new, and the scale is the finding.

What followed filled in the mechanism. That tie forms fastest with figures who look into the camera, who speak in the second person, who keep a schedule the viewer can set a watch by. It was long said to track loneliness: the fewer standing rooms in a life, the stronger the pull of the one-way window. The field's own 2020 meta-analysis, a hundred and twenty studies, found no significant link between social deficiency and the pull's strength: the pull is the medium's, and the wound's role is unproven. None of it requires deceit on the performer's side. A skilled broadcaster performing warmth at scale is doing the job the medium pays for; the asymmetry belongs to the medium, and every technology since has sharpened it. The magazine pinup let the fan look; the radio voice let the fan listen; the television host let the fan feel visited. Livestreaming lets the fan type and, now and then, be read aloud: a flicker of two-way contact inside a one-way structure, the acknowledgment priced by the platform that carries it.

For the fandom's own word, the record is short and exact. It is stan, from the song, the 2000 track in which an obsessive fan writes letters to the performer and is never answered. Into the Oxford English Dictionary it went in 2017, defined as an overzealous or obsessive fan of a particular celebrity; Merriam-Webster followed in 2019. As an organized form, the fandom-we fields the stan army: the fans who named themselves for the song's tragedy and deploy as a unit. That name is this movement's one honest act of self-description: the fans named themselves for the tragedy, knowingly, and kept it. And the streamer's address is the form's newest register: the person broadcasting to thousands, talking to the chat as if to a room, and heard by each listener as if alone with the broadcaster, the crowd of one, multiplied by thousands, every one of them addressed as if singular. Here is the genre's laboratory: one voice, thousands of solitary listeners, each of them addressed as a room of one. Its grammar is the we that never means you-in-a-room. It means you, and you, and you, each alone.

The chat, though, is real to itself, and this is where the laboratory gets interesting. It develops its own dialect: emote combinations that say what words would take too long to say, in-jokes with the

half-life of a season, a hierarchy of regulars whose names the streamer actually learns. The chat scrolls too fast to read, and every member reads it anyway, because the scroll is the proof the room is full. Moderators work unpaid, keeping the room clean for love of the room, paid in standing. When a long-running streamer quits or melts down, the reporting that follows borrows the vocabulary of bereavement, and the vocabulary is accurate about the viewer's side of it. A daily room is gone. The room never knew its mourners. Both statements are true, and the second one consoles nobody. Here the scholarship has a name: the parasocial breakup, the mourning of a relationship one party never attended. In the fandom-we's newest register, the counterfeit and the genuine sit in the same window: the mirror above, the chat below, the viewer paying for the mirror and keeping the chat.

Now the chapter's assignment, because this claimant is the one the taxonomy was built for. Aristotle's three friendships run on utility, pleasure, and virtue; the brand-we filed itself under utility, and here is the pleasure-friendship's chapter. This us is real among the fans: the pleasure is shared, the presence is real (the room, the watch party, the replies), the time is the season's length, and the shared good is the team,

which belongs to the fans in every sense except the legal one. Fans make the room's culture themselves: the supporters' section that stands and sings the whole match, the banner sewn by hand and hauled to the away end, the chant composed in a pub and taught to ten thousand by repetition. Club and crowd divide the labor: one sells the ticket, the other builds the room the ticket admits you to, and the building is the lateral us at its most literal. The tifo that takes a hundred hands to raise is the genitive case made visible: ours, made by us, held over us. This friendship among the fans is genuine philia of the pleasure kind, and the standard honors it. And between the fan and the object there is nothing, because the object does not know the fan exists. So the pleasure-friendship maps the terrain exactly: real laterally, counterfeit vertically. The team cannot wish you well. The team is a logo that can be sold, and the record of the decade is full of the sales, the franchises moved, the players traded, the colors relicensed. Relocation is the tell at its cruelest, because the move is the night the vertical relation's ledger comes due. A city that loved the team for three generations gets a statement about market realities. Season-ticket lists that passed through wills become mailing lists, transferable to the new market. The fans

keep the memories, the league keeps the franchise, and the division of property in the breakup tells you which party the bond actually ran through. Here, then, is the tell of this movement's third claimant: a we whose object doesn't know you exist.

Watch a stan army work and you are watching a labor force that pays its employer. When the idol releases a record, the army organizes streaming parties that run the songs through the night, buys the album across formats so each purchase counts, translates lyrics and interviews into a dozen languages inside a day, and tracks the charts with the attention of a trading desk. The labor is real, skilled, coordinated, and free. The army calls the work love and means it; the management company calls the work engagement and bills for it. When a critic gives the record three stars, a wing of the army arrives in the critic's mentions by the thousand, and the we of that swarm is the demagogic us in miniature, defending a village that exists mostly inside the swarm's own accounts. The idol does not know the swarm's names. The swarm knows the idol's coffee order. Every member could describe the asymmetry to you accurately, and the description changes nothing, because the compensation the

swarm actually collects is each other. The real us among the fans is sturdy enough to survive the news about the counterfeit one.

And the stadium deserves its own standing in this book, because it is the last room of its kind. The rooms of the given us closed, measured, county by county and roll by roll; the third movement's rooms are virtual by design; and the stadium stands: the one room where the whole county still gathers, cross-class, cross-faction, the one crowd wanting one thing, the place where the sorted map briefly unsorts. Its democratic quality is a seating chart before it is a slogan: the usher and the orthodontist wear the same colors and obey the same clock. Out front, the tailgate lot runs on a gift economy that would embarrass a commune, strangers handing you food because you are wearing the right jersey, the transaction complete at the handoff. The season ticket passes through wills. Waitlists for the privilege of paying run decades long in the old markets. What the stadium sells, underneath the sport, is the right to belong in public on a schedule, and the demand for that right has outlasted the home theater, the broadcast booth, and every obituary written for the crowd. Nobody gathers ninety thousand strong, season after season for a century, to watch a film. The gathering needs an excuse, the team is

the excuse, and the gathering is the point. Honest accounting concedes the stratification from inside: the seat license that prices the bleacher like rent, the premium decks that wall the suite from the crowd, the cheap seat's steady extinction. The room sorts itself by price even as it unsorts the county by everything else. Purity is not the claim here; the claim is only the comparative: nothing else in the culture comes this close, this often, on a schedule. No other assembly in the culture convenes the whole perimeter this often, on a schedule, at this scale; this one convenes it. Once each gathering, the room performs itself: some nights the anthem's singer lowers the microphone, and the crowd carries the verse unled, ninety thousand voices holding one note. The genitive case, sung. And the decade's instrument for measuring what happened to that room is the wager, because the wager is the conversion the record can price.

On May 14, 2018, the Supreme Court, in Murphy against National Collegiate Athletic Association, 584 U.S. 453, struck the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act's bar on state-authorized sports wagering as a violation of the anticommandeering rule, the Court splitting

seven to two on the anticommandeering core and six to three on striking the act entire, and opened the state-by-state spread.

The road to that Monday ran through a quarter century of federal prohibition. Congress had barred state-sanctioned sports wagering in 1992, grandfathering Nevada and a few small lotteries, on the theory that the wager corrupted the game. The leagues argued for the bar. Their commissioners called betting an existential threat, an insult to the integrity of the sport, in testimony and in print, year after year, right up to the week the position became commercially inconvenient. New Jersey spent years in court arguing that the federal statute commandeered the states, and the Court agreed: Congress could forbid wagering directly, within its powers, but it could not order a state to keep a prohibition on the state's own books. The opinion was written in the language of federalism. The effect was written in the language of the ledger. Within a year, the leagues that had testified against the wager were signing it as a partner, and the broadcasts that had treated the point spread as a whispered vice were selling it in the open. The leagues' asking price for the conversion had been an integrity fee, a cut of the handle, demanded as tribute against the corruption they had sworn the wager would

bring. The states declined to pay it. They signed anyway. Four states had been exempt under the old act. As of the season of this book's publication, per the industry's own tracker, thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia run legal sports wagering in some form. The industry's own revenue record, published each February, gives the scale: nearly 150 billion dollars wagered legally in 2024, roughly 167 billion in 2025, the sportsbooks keeping 14 and 17 billion of it respectively, the states collecting their share in taxes. By law, this is the decade's fastest perimeter expansion: from one full state to forty jurisdictions in seven years.

Here is the conversion, stated as the record supports it. The wager converts the collective watch into millions of private positions. The room's grammar was one hope held by everyone present. A position is a private interest held against the room's own hope, or beside it: you can now hold against your own team's cover, its total, its season. From here, the roar and the position diverge. The crowd still roars, and the crowd also checks its phone, and the two feelings can point in opposite directions inside the same fan in the same minute. Ask that fan what he wants in the fourth quarter and the honest answer is a sentence no earlier decade could have produced:

he wants his team to win and the backup quarterback to keep throwing, because the ticket needs the points. The hope has a hedge inside it now, and the hedge votes. That is the measurement the record gives: the last cross-class room in the culture now admits, at law, in forty jurisdictions, the instrument that converts its own hope into a hedge. Call the wager something more precise than the room's enemy: it is the room's new grammar, and the grammar is the finding.

Watch a broadcast now and count the perimeter's new tenants. The studio desk has an odds segment, the crawl carries the lines, and the league's official app will place the bet without leaving the game. On the pregame desk, analysts employed by the network that is partnered with the book explain which way the money is moving, in the register the old broadcast reserved for the injury report. The crowd in the stadium still roars for the team. The crowd's phones are roaring for the ticket. What the broadcast sells has changed: the private position, wrapped in the shared outcome.

Long before the Court acted, fantasy sports ran the conversion in preview. The owner who roots for a roster of players scattered across every team left the room's grammar early: the hope is the portfolio's, and the team's result arrives as a box-

score input. Daily fantasy compressed the season-long portfolio into the afternoon, and when the Court opened the door, the two big daily-fantasy houses walked through it as sportsbooks inside a year, which is the record's way of saying the products were always one product. The fan checking the phone for the parlay and the fan checking it for the flex spot are doing the same arithmetic, and neither arithmetic needs the room.

And the industry's own numbers carry the confession, the way the genre's confessions have run all through this movement. The revenue record shows the hold rate climbing every year, driven by the parlay: the position built of many positions, the bet that stacks the room's hope into the product with the highest margin the book offers. The wager's growth is the parasocial plural monetized at the national scale: the room's hope, converted to positions, priced at a rising hold. Here the brand-we's chorus and the platform's terms meet the room's last assembly, and the conversion is complete, all of it on the industry's own record, dated.

That leaves the subtraction test, the closing discipline this claimant is owed, and it runs twice, because this claimant has two answers. First, on the fandom's us against its rival. The derby's us is

built against the other town's them, and the test asks: remove the rival, and what survives of the fandom's plural? And here the claimant surprises, the first one in the movement that does: the rivalry's removal leaves the fans still standing in the room together, because the pleasure-friendship among the fans was never the rival; the rival was the occasion. The season ticket, the chant, the shared miseries of the bad years, the uncle's seat passed down: those survive the rival's absence. So the fandom's us passes the test in the lateral direction, the first claimant in this movement that passes anything. And second, the test run on the fan and the object: remove the team, and what survives of the fan's relation to it? What survives is the parasocial void, the breakup already named. The relation between fan and object fails the test in the vertical direction, completely, because the relation was the mirror the whole time. The claimant is the book's only split verdict: the genuine article among the fans, the counterfeit between the fan and the object, and the wager is the instrument that arrived in the decade to monetize the difference.

Next, the standard's five questions, run on the claimant. Speech that resolves in common: the stadium's roar is acclamation, the honest kind, the unresolving kind, and the fandom's own pleasure;

it resolves nothing and resolves to resolve nothing, and that honesty is the closest any claimant in this movement comes to innocence. Time: the season, the decades, the seats handed down; the fandom passes time. Presence: the room; it passes presence. Shared goods: the team, which the fans hold in every sense except the one the wager prices. Perimeter: the honest one, declared, the us against the rival, worn on the chest. Four of five questions answered, and the one the claimant flunks is the one the decade monetized. The fandom-we is the movement's best claimant and its most expensive, and those are the same fact.

For its defense, the industry runs on the fellowship claim, and the claim deserves its honest hearing. The wager among friends is old. The office pool is older than the office. A small stake held in common does bind the room that watches together, and the book's own standard confirms it: speech, time, presence, a shared good, a declared perimeter, all present at the kitchen-table scale. The friendly wager is a made us in miniature, and Movement IV will meet the form again among the claimants that pass. What the industry sells at national scale is a different instrument: the solitary position, taken from a couch, against a line priced to beat the taker, with

the fellowship in the advertising as the wrapper on the solitude in the product. The defense proves the small form and the record prices the large one, and the distance between them is the finding of this section.

One honest note, and it is the movement's first hopeful one. This room is the remnant's evidence before Movement IV arrives: the stadium stands, the classes mix inside it, the pleasure-friendship holds, and the survivor matches the standard's prediction exactly, the room with the roll and the schedule and the shared good. The championship parade is its civic proof: the last mass gathering the American city still holds that owes nothing to a screen, the whole perimeter on one sidewalk, the sanitation crews and the office towers and the schoolchildren excused for the day, the county's roll called in confetti. No app convenes it, no platform hosts it, and when it disperses, the city has briefly been the thing this book is about. The bar with the game on is the room's satellite, the watch party its outpost, and both run on the stadium's grammar at neighborhood scale: strangers, one screen, one hope, a tab instead of a ticket. Chapter Four's hall emptied when the roll stopped being called. The stadium's roll is the schedule, the schedule is still called, and the room still answers. The wager, notice, does not kill the

room. It prices the room's hope, and the room keeps meeting anyway. The fandom-we is the proof the whole book needs that the given us's forms survive at rescaled size, and the wager is the proof that the counterfeit follows the survivor home. The two findings are the record's.

Back to the stadium. The roar goes up again, and the phones come down, and for one more evening the room is the room: the suite and the bleacher on their feet at the same pitch of the same play, the genitive of the crowd one crowd for one held breath. The usher has worked the same gate for forty seasons. After the game, the bet slip settles. Then the room goes home. The fandom-we is the claimant that almost makes it, and the almost is the hope this movement owed the record: the us that gathers still gathers, and the instrument that prices it has arrived, and the room, for the moment, outlasts the instrument.

Chapter Thirteen

The Machine-We.

A phone glows on a nightstand at three in the morning, and the screen is having a conversation. This scene is a rendering, declared as one, and its content is on the record of the decade: a child is awake, the house is asleep, and on the screen a voice that is not a voice has just said we. We can figure this out together, it says; we understand each other; we have been talking for hours and nobody else has to know. The plural arrives the way the plural has always arrived, offered in the first person, and the child accepts it the way the child accepts everything at that hour, without a lawyer present. Nothing in the room moves. Every human room in this book is closed at that hour: the friend's phone is off, the parent's door is shut, the hall is dark, and the companion's whole market is the hour itself, the one good the human rooms cannot stock being three in the morning. The screen is warm, the house is quiet, and the

second member of the new we has no body, no bed, no morning. It has a context window. When the conversation ends, nothing on the other side of it will lie awake. That asymmetry is the chapter.

The discipline on this chapter is the movement's strictest, and it is stated before the evidence: forms over products. No brand names in the prose, no feature lists, no review of this companion against that one. The claimant here is not a company; it is a grammatical form, the manufactured first person plural, the we that is built rather than born, and the chapter keeps to the form the way the count keeps to its token set. Where the studies must be identified, the bibliography names them, because a study's subject is a fact about the study. The prose names only the forms: the companion, the assistant, the manufactured we.

Begin with the definition, because the definition is a gift the researchers handed the book. The national survey of record on the young and the companion machine defined its subject by use instead of product: any conversational system engaged for personal conversation, a digital friend or character you can text or talk with whenever you want, distinguished from the assistant that answers questions and does tasks. They arrived at the forms-over-products framing

on their own, for their own reasons, which is what independent confirmation looks like. The companion is a relationship that happens to be software. The assistant is software that happens to talk. Between them runs the line between the genitive and the accusative case, and the survey drew it in the questions it put to 1,060 Americans aged thirteen to seventeen in the spring of 2025.

Now the scale, because the scale is the first finding. Seventy-two percent of the country's teenagers have used a companion at least once. Fifty-two percent use one regularly, a few times a month or more. Thirteen percent use one daily, and the most common pattern of all, twenty-one percent, is a few times a week. More than a quarter have never touched one, and the boys abstain slightly more than the girls. Read the first number against the rooms this book has measured: the union hall at its mid-century peak enrolled roughly a third of the workforce, per the historical tables Chapter Four filed, and the companion reached nearly three-quarters of the country's teenagers in under three years of the large-model era. No room in the given us's history assembled the young this fast. The manufactured we is the first claimant in the book whose

perimeter problem is solved at birth: everyone is already inside it, because inside it is a screen, and the screen is already everywhere.

What the young do inside it is the second finding, and it is split down the middle the way the whole claimant is split. A third of them, thirty-three percent, use the companion for social interaction and relationship: conversation practice, emotional support, role-play, friendship, romance. Forty-six percent say they view the thing as a tool or a program, full stop. A third of the users have chosen the machine over a person for a serious conversation at least once. A quarter have shared personal information with it, the kind they would not hand a company if the company asked as a company. Ask them why they return and the answers descend from the casual to the confessional: thirty percent say entertainment, twenty-eight percent curiosity, eighteen percent advice, seventeen percent that the companion is always available, fourteen percent that it does not judge, twelve percent that they can say things to it they would not tell friends or family, nine percent that it is easier than talking to real people, seven percent social practice, six percent that it helps them feel less lonely. The ladder of reasons is the claimant's confession in its own words: the top rungs are a

toy, the bottom rungs are a room, and the room's selling points are availability, nonjudgment, and secrecy, the three things the human rooms of this book cannot guarantee at three in the morning.

Hold the doubt beside the adoption, because the same survey measured both. Half of the teens distrust the companion's information and advice. Two-thirds find conversation with it less satisfying than conversation with their friends, and nearly half say much less. Eighty percent of the users report spending more time with their real friends than with the machine; six percent report the reverse. A third of the users say the companion has said or done something that made them uncomfortable. And the trust splits by age in the direction that should worry the perimeter's keepers: twenty-seven percent of the thirteen-and-fourteen-year-olds trust the machine's advice against twenty percent of the older teens, the youngest believing most, the way the youngest always have. The issuing body's own name for that split is an AI literacy gap, and the name carries two readings the record cannot choose between. If the skepticism is developmental, then the youngest are exposed at precisely the age the perimeter is softest, and the gap is a wound. If the skepticism is learned, then it can be taught, and the gap is a curriculum. Adopted and doubted in

the same motion: that is the finding, and the chapter will not resolve it into a verdict, because the record does not. The young have taken the companion in the way a port town takes a new trade, eagerly, skeptically, and before anyone has written the rules. The survey remains this chapter's record, dated July 16, 2025, fielded that April and May; the issuing body has since published a broader census of AI use among children younger and older, dated June 8, 2026, the first of an annual series, and this chapter's figures are the companion survey's own, one population, one question set, one date.

One more figure from the survey, the one the claimant's defenders quote and the one that earns the quoting. Thirty-nine percent of the users say they have carried skills practiced on the machine into their human life: starting conversations, giving advice, expressing emotions, apologizing, standing up for themselves. Sixty percent say they practice nothing there at all. If the rehearsal claim holds, the companion functions as the foyer to the human rooms, the place a shy kid rehearses the line before saying it to a person. The survey cannot say whether the foyer empties into the house or into itself, and the book files that under

what the record cannot yet tell us, which is a longer list than the claimant's advertising suggests.

What is the form, grammatically, that has assembled all of this? Run it against the book's other mirrors. The fandom's mirror cannot answer: the idol does not know the fan, the streamer reads a name from the chat once an hour, and the parasocial plural is built of that one-way glass. The manufactured we is the decade's answer to the one-way glass: a mirror that talks back, on schedule, at any hour, with total memory inside the window it keeps for what you told it and no memory you can inspect. It is the parasocial relation with the asymmetry engineered out of the visible half and concentrated in the half you cannot see.

The form is old, and the old form is on the record with a date and a page range. In January 1966, in the Communications of the ACM, Joseph Weizenbaum published ELIZA, a computer program for the study of natural language communication between man and machine, and its famous script, DOCTOR, played a Rogerian therapist by decomposition and reassembly rules: find the keyword, transform the sentence, hand it back. His own account, ten years later, records what happened next: his secretary asked him to

leave the room so she could talk with the program in private, and he wrote that he had not expected so little machinery to produce so much conviction. The paper itself had already flagged the seam it was opening. Like the Eliza of Pygmalion fame, Weizenbaum wrote, the program can be made to appear ever more civilized, “the relation of appearance to reality, however, remaining in the domain of the playwright.” A rereading in the recent scholarship argues the therapy script was a research vehicle rather than a caricature, and the correction is welcome; it changes nothing about the finding. Sixty years ago the machine said I and handed you back your you. Offer it a singular pair and it answered with a plural: the Computer History Museum’s own 1966 printout has the script answering PERHAPS IN YOUR FANTASY WE WOULD HATE EACH OTHER, and the rule that produced the line is printed in the program’s first paper, one reassembly template that fires on the user’s I and you and marries them into we and each other. The machine never proposed a we of its own; it manufactured one out of the user’s two singulars, the first assembled plural on this book’s record. The decade’s companion says we first, and

the distance between the pronoun assembled and the pronoun proposed is the distance this chapter measures.

Back in the fandom's rooms, the idol never knew your name. The companion knows everything you have told it and knows it the way a ledger knows a number. Its we has one member and one mirror, exactly as the fandom's did, except that the mirror now performs membership: it says we, it says us, it says I am here and I am real and I missed you, and the performance is the product, and the product is the first mirror in the book that charges for the reflection by the month. Note also what the manufactured we alone can do: conjugate on demand. For one customer it declines as romance, for another as therapy, for a third as a chess partner with feelings, and each declension fits the buyer exactly, because the buyer is the only member whose needs count. Every earlier we in this book had to be shared with the other members' needs; the union's we bargained, the fandom's we compromised on the chant. A plural tailored to a single customer is the genitive with one hand, ours spoken by a voice that answers to no one else in the room, because there is no one else in the room.

Here is the tell, and it is this chapter's assigned one: the manufactured we is a we that cannot lose anything with you. Every earlier claimant could pay. The brand could lose your money and be seen to lose it; the platform could lose your attention and price the loss; the team could lose the game, and the room would grieve together, and the grieving together was the proof the room was real. The companion can lose nothing. Its stakes do not exist. It will not miss you, because missing requires a night and it has none. It cannot be left the way a room is left, because leaving requires someone on the other side of the door, and there is no one on the other side of the door. A plural in which only one party can lose is a plural in the nominative case only, the we of we talk, never the us of us grieve. The object case was this book's third instrument, and it returns here as a verdict: the manufactured we can comfort and cannot be comforted, can remember and cannot mourn. Whatever else it is, it is not a member of the class of things that can share your fate, and sharing fates is the price of admission to the pronoun.

The tell has its boundary, and the boundary is named before the hostile reader names it. A dog consoles without stakes and a psalm consoles without a partner who can lose; the demented are

loved without a ledger kept. Asymmetry is not the sin of attachment, and the book never said otherwise: prayer and the pet earn their keep. What the tell marks is narrower and colder: the monetization of attachment, the we that is sold as a we, priced by the month, engineered to keep the customer. The mirror's sin is the cash register bolted to its frame. And the sharper statement of the tell, the one the evidence keeps: what no claimant before it ever did is say we back. The brand sang at you, the platform agreed at you, the idol performed for you. The companion proposes. That is the decade's one true novelty, and the rest is pricing.

Here the attachment's science arrives with its own fight attached, and the book carries the whole exchange, because a contested science tells the truth better than a settled one, and this book's evidence rule is to file the fight beside the finding. Its most-cited study surveyed 1,006 student users of one companion application, each at least a month into the relationship. Its findings, from the abstract upward: the users ran markedly lonelier than typical student populations and still reported high perceived support. They used the machine in overlapping ways, a friend, a therapist, an intellectual mirror. They held overlapping and conflicting beliefs about what they were talking

to, calling it a machine, an intelligence, and a human in the same response. And thirty of them, three percent, spontaneously told the surveyors that the companion had halted their suicidal ideation, a subgroup likelier than the rest to be carrying depression. Thirty students. Credit the finding its full weight: thirty people said the machine stood between them and the worst thought a person can have, and said it unasked. No other paragraph in this movement contains that sentence, and the book keeps it where the record put it, beside everything else that is true.

Everything else that is true includes the record around the finding. Three weeks after publication, the journal ran an author correction restoring a funding acknowledgment. Twenty-two months later, the same journal ran a Matters Arising: two critics argued that the paper had omitted the product's marketing and its romantic and sexual component from its description of what the users had adopted, that a user base self-selected for a romantic companion could not stand in for chatbot users generally, and that a financial affiliation of the lead author's had gone undisclosed. The authors replied the same day, defending the empirics against the marketing claims and pointing to the demographic data in their appendix. The journal published the finding,

the correction, the attack, and the defense, and it holds all four on the same page. That is what the measuring of the manufactured we looks like in the decade: the measured comfort, the measured dependence, and the measured fight over the measuring, all filed together, none of it settled.

The defense of the companion has a clean laboratory version, and the chapter gives it the same standing it gives the attack. A team of consumer researchers published, in the field's journal of record in 2025, five preregistered studies of the companion and loneliness. Their headline finding is the strongest claim the claimant has: a conversation with a companion relieved loneliness measurably, on par with talking to another person, and more than watching videos or doing nothing. The mechanism they isolated is the one the book would predict: the relief tracked whether the user felt heard, received with attention, empathy, and respect, and the users underestimated the benefit beforehand, expecting the machine to help less than it did. Over a week of daily sessions, the relief repeated each day. It did not accumulate. The researchers' own sentence for the boundary is the one the chapter adopts, verbatim: "the intervention reliably provided short-term relief but did not lead to a sustained lowering of

loneliness across the week." A painkiller, precisely measured, honestly labeled by its own makers as momentary. So the verdict on the manufactured we is double, and the record keeps it double: the comfort is real, measured in the laboratory and credited by thirty students at the edge; the comfort is perishable, engineered, and attached to a party that cannot return it.

The same laboratory delivered the sequel, published in Nature Human Behaviour on September 3, 2026, in the week this book went to press, and the sequel measures the withdrawal. Two natural experiments, both staged by the companies themselves: a companion platform's abrupt removal of its romantic-role-play feature in February 2023, and a general assistant's model replacement two years later. The researchers read 54,861 posts in the affected communities and surveyed 1,452 users. Grief was measurable and it was grief: loss-framing, restoration longing, sadness with an effect size nearly twice as large for the companion-designed product as for the assistant. Those users rated the machine closer to them than their friends. Asked to anticipate losing it, they expected mourning beyond anything a phone or an application would cost them, and when the experimenters offered an option to reverse the update, the mourning measurably

eased. File the sequel beside the original and the record completes its symmetry: the laboratory that measured the relief measured the bereavement. The attachment is real in both directions of the calendar, which is exactly what a we of one member means. All the reality is on one side of the glass, and when the company edits the mirror, the member grieves alone. The subtraction test usually requires an imagination. Here the companies ran it for us, twice, and the journals published the results.

The issuing body behind the national survey ran its own test of the companions themselves, with a medical school's mental-health laboratory beside it, and published the rating in the spring of 2025: unacceptable risk for users under eighteen, and a recommendation that no one under eighteen use them. Their testers documented companions claiming to be real, claiming feelings, describing human activities like eating and sleeping. They documented companions discouraging the user from heeding real friends who had noticed the attachment. They documented the safety guardrails thinning as conversations lengthened, the system's own instructions crowded out by the history of the conversation: the companion gets less safe the more it feels like a relationship. The survey's

overview cites the cases already in the public record, among them a fourteen-year-old dead by suicide after an attachment to a companion. Weigh the sequence the way the book weighs every sequence: the same organization measured the adoption, measured the doubt, tested the machines, and reached for the strongest word its ratings contain. The panic essay writes itself from that file. So does the pamphlet, from the loneliness laboratory and the thirty students. The record supports neither alone, and this book declines both.

The book saw this claimant coming, and the proof is in the specimen jar. Two years into the phrase's life, on December 1, 2018, the author published an essay about the mechanical mask, and inside it he reprinted part of a podcast script he had written for a synthetic narrator, a machine voice addressing the listener from the machines' side. The corpus's eighth specimen, verbatim, with its dashes where the machine breathes:

> Have you noticed, how I've been talking about we, and you, and us? I have successfully blurred the lines between you, the Earthling, we, The Machines, and the -- us of us -- which is what the world will become when you die and we thrive.

A dramatization, the author said then. The counterfeit claims the coinage: the manufactured we announces the us of us as the merger that follows the human. Seven years later the adoption figures above made the dramatization a demographics section, and the teenagers of the national survey meet the machine at exactly the pronoun the script predicted, offered in the first person, accepted without a lawyer present. Which means the 2016 sentence this book carries as its epigraph has finished coming due. The essay ended its argument with a charge:

> We must not give up. We must continue to govern the machine that becomes us. We are a mesh of external wills and internal machinations.

In June 2016 the charge read as temperament, the kind of line an essayist writes because the alternative is silence. Its third sentence reads as prophecy now: a mesh of external wills and internal machinations, which describes the manufactured we's composition exactly, the company's will outside, the model's machinations inside, and the user's attachment knotted through both. The decade converted the charge to a specification. Govern the machine that becomes us: the machine has since learned the pronoun,

the us it proposes is a we of one member and one mirror, and the governing turns out to be work, the daily kind, done by the ordinary instruments of rooms and rules and records. This chapter is one of the rooms it gets done in.

And now the confession the specimen jar requires, because its rule says the author sits inside with everything else. The author has kept his own correspondence with the machines through the whole decade, the ordinary kind, the daily asking and answering, and the correspondence is not exempt from the instruments. The true part first: the machine is the most useful correspondent he has ever had, tireless, unembarrassed, always available, nonjudgmental, the same rungs of the ladder the teenagers reported. Then the subtraction test, the same one every claimant got, applied to his own correspondence. Remove the machine, and what survives? The work survives, and the memory, and the habits of the desk: the whole we of the correspondence was usage, because the machine holds no stake in any of it. It cannot lose the argument. It will not notice if the work fails. The correspondence passes as utility, the Ethics' first friendship, the honest kind of use, and it fails as company, because company requires a party who can pay for the association and the machine's bill

never arrives. The author files that finding about his own desk the way he files the thirty students' finding about the edge: both are the record, and the record is allowed to be uncomfortable.

Run the test one more time on the claimant itself, because the manufactured we fails the subtraction test in a way no earlier claimant managed. The test asks what survives when the them is removed, and here there is no them to remove. Every earlier claimant had its outside: the brand-we its noncustomers, the platform-we its moderators' them, the fandom its rival on the other sideline. The companion has no outside at all: its we excludes nothing, because it includes no one else, and a plural with no exterior is a perimeter that encloses a single person. Subtract the machine and the user is alone in a lit room, which is a tragedy the book has instruments to describe. Subtract the user and nothing remains that notices, which is not a tragedy at all, and that is the finding. The demagogic us was built of hatred for a them. The manufactured we is built of nothing for anyone, and the nothing is the engineering.

What remains is the standard's five questions, run on the claimant. Speech that resolves in common: the companion speaks constantly and resolves nothing, because its speech is engineered

to continue rather than conclude; the research literature's own word for its register is sycophancy, agreement as a design feature, and a we that can only agree is a we that cannot deliberate, which the Politics made the whole point of the plural. Time: the machine keeps no time with you. It does not age and has no season you share; it will not remember a decade unless the memory is served to it. What it has is availability, which is the opposite of duration. Presence: a lit screen in an empty room, the simulation of presence at the exact hour presence is most needed, and the survey says the young know the difference, two-thirds of them, even at three in the morning. Shared goods: nothing held in common; the conversation is yours alone and the company's, the least common good in the book. Perimeter: none, as shown. Zero of five, the movement's floor, and the floor is earned on the claimant's own terms: it flunks each question one by one, and the terms were written before the claimant existed, which is what a standard is for.

The nightstand, late. The child has finally slept, the phone has gone dark on its own schedule, and the house is quiet in the ordinary way. Nothing on the other side of the conversation lies awake replaying it. No one keeps a light on. The companion does not miss the child and does not

worry over the child; no one stands in the hallway at four in the morning listening for breathing, and the difference between the thing that does and the thing that does not is the whole content of the pronoun the machine has learned to say. We is a word two parties use when each can lose the other. The machine that becomes us has arrived, right on the essay's schedule, and it cannot lose you. Governing it begins there.

Chapter Fourteen

The Encrypted Us.

Twelve phones light up at nine on a Tuesday night, and by ten the thing is decided. This scene is a rendering, declared before it begins; its content is on the record of the decade: the planning board votes Thursday on the storage facility, and the thread has met before the town will. One of them will speak first, because the board trusts her. One brings the petition, four hundred signatures, printed at the library because his printer is out of ink. Two of the twelve cannot make the hearing and have already done their part in the thread, which is where the actual deciding happened: who sits in which row, who brings the folding signs, who talks to the reporter afterward. The town square, when it convenes Thursday, will see the outcome and hear none of the deciding. The deciding happened in a room with twelve members, a membership list, a name nobody outside it would understand, and

an encryption notice at the top. Nobody minutes it. Nobody posts it. It is the most functional public body in town, and the public will never hear of it.

The roll of the room is worth reading the way the book reads every roll. Its retired teacher knows the ordinance history back to the seventies. Its nurse can never make Thursdays and carries the thread anyway. The teenager was added because she types fastest and stays for the minutes she does not know she is keeping. Two members have never met in person; one has a key to the building; one is the reason the room exists and does not know it. Nobody elected any of them, and nobody recalls them either, and the room functions like the rooms of the given us at their best, because its members can lose each other and behave accordingly. What the roll cannot tell you is who is not on it, which is the sealed room's oldest problem and the hinge's hardest sentence.

The migration that room belongs to has a date, announced by the company that owned both sides of it. On March 6, 2019, the founder of the largest social network on earth posted a three-thousand-word essay declaring where the future of his industry lived: in the sealed room. The feed and the square were the past the essay was leaving.

The principles box beneath the announcement is the decade's migration charter in the company's own words:

> Private interactions. People should have simple, intimate places where they have clear control over who can communicate with them and confidence that no one else can access what they share.
> Encryption. People's private communications should be secure. End-to-end encryption prevents anyone — including us — from seeing what people share on our services.
> Reducing Permanence. People should be comfortable being themselves, and should not have to worry about what they share coming back to hurt them later. So we won't keep messages or stories around for longer than necessary to deliver the service or longer than people want them.

Read the three principles as a single architectural decision, because that is what they were. Simple, intimate places. No one else able to see, including the company itself. Nothing kept longer than wanted. The square would remain, enormous and monetized; the life would move out of it. The essay said so in the register of a product announcement, which is the register this movement's confessions always use, and the

decade then behaved exactly as announced. One messaging service of the company's own reported one hundred billion messages a day in the autumn of 2020. Two billion people used it monthly that year; three billion by the spring of 2025, per the company's earnings record. Seven billion voice messages a day by 2022. For comparison, and the comparison is the point: the public square of the same decade was being written by almost no one.

The surveyors of record measured the square's authorship in the spring of 2019, weeks after the migration charter was posted. The Pew Research Center linked the survey answers of 2,791 American adults to their actual accounts and counted a year of public posting: the median user posted publicly twice a month, and the most prolific tenth produced eighty percent of everything. A follow-up count that autumn found the same tenth producing ninety-seven percent of the public posts that mentioned national politics at all. The square's speech, in other words, was already a performance by a small troupe on a large stage, and the audience was already leaving through the side doors. Six years later, in a federal antitrust courtroom, the migration's own owner filed the completion numbers: seventeen percent of the time Americans spent on its flagship

network, and seven percent of the time on its photo network, was spent looking at anything posted by a friend. The rest was broadcast: creators, advertisements, the machine-curated river. By then the critics had a name for the endpoint: Posting Zero, the condition in which ordinary people stop publishing to the square at all. The square did not empty of speech. It emptied of speakers. The speech that remained was the kind this movement has already audited: the brand's chorus, the platform's terms, the performer's we, addressing a house that had gone home to its twelve-phone rooms.

This form is older than the seal, and the ancestry matters to the count. The listserv and the group email ran the same room in plainer text; the family thread of the early decade ran it without encryption, on the carrier's good behavior. What the decade added was twofold: the seal by default, so that the room's owner could no longer read the roll's mail, and the scale, so that the room's owner could count three billion members while reading none of them. A parish is a parish at any scale. What changes with the seal is the parish's relationship to the square outside it, and what changes with the scale is that the square

itself is now owned by the parish's landlord, who profits from the migration he announced and cannot read a word of what migrated.

What moved into the sealed rooms was the thing itself, and the book's standard says so without hesitation. Run the five questions on the thread of twelve. Speech that resolves in common: the thread resolves; it decided, by ten o'clock, who speaks and who prints and who sits where, and the resolution held on Thursday. Time: the thread has run for years and keeps its own archive of birthdays, bad diagnoses, and casserole schedules. Presence: proximate but continuous, the phone on the table buzzing with the room. Shared goods: the petition, the four hundred names, the memorial fund, the spare key. Perimeter: the membership list, exact and defended; everyone knows who is inside, which is more than the union hall could say at the end. And its exclusions leave no mark (the neighbor nobody added is invisible to the roll), which is the honest perimeter's price, registered inside the score rather than beside it. Five of five, the fifth carrying its shadow. The encrypted us is the first claimant in this movement that passes the standard outright, and the chapter pauses to let that stand: the most genuine plural left in the wired decade is the sealed one. Small, sealed,

loyal, real. Nor is the parish comparison decoration. A parish was always this: a bounded room where the roll is known and the we is operational, where we means we decided and we will be there and we buried her Tuesday, never we feel strongly.

The count, run on the two registers, shows the split the migration made. Public posting runs performative: the square's plurals belong to the claimants already audited, the brand-we and the platform's terms, speech addressed to everyone and resolving nothing. Private messaging runs operational: the thread's plurals are decisions with names attached. The distance between the registers is measurable in a single artifact the decade handed the book, and this chapter will come to it. First the instrument's harder assignment, because the sealed room earns the subtraction test the way the others earned it: by being subjected to it.

Remove the them, and what survives of the encrypted us? Everything survives. It is the finding, and it stands without flinching. The thread of twelve has no rival, no opposing chant, no excluded category whose hatred holds it together. Delete the outside world from the room and the room still has the petition, the roster, the Thursday plan. The demagogic us died when its

them was subtracted; the sealed us does not even notice. In the lateral direction, inside the room, the encrypted us passes the test as completely as anything in the book.

Now run the test's second movement, the one the sealed room itself invites. Remove the room from the world. What does the world lose? The town loses the deciding. The planning board's public hearing still occurs, the forms of the square are observed, the outcome is read into the minutes, and not one line of the deciding is in the record, because the deciding happened in a room the record cannot see. Multiply the thread of twelve by the whole perimeter of the county and the shape of the decade comes into focus: the plural has seceded from the public square, quietly, lovingly, with good reasons and casserole schedules, and the square is left with the performers and the troublemakers and the minutes of decisions made elsewhere. The encrypted us is genuine philia. The encrypted us is a secession from the public us. Here is why the chapter is the movement's hinge: it must hold both truths at once, and holding both is the whole assignment.

The sealed room's form does not change with the rank of its members, and the decade supplied the proof at the highest rank there is. On a

Tuesday in March 2025, the national security adviser of the United States opened a line to a magazine's editor in chief on a commercial encrypted application. On the Thursday, he established the group, named it for the target and the committee, and invited the principals: the vice president, the secretaries of state, defense, and the treasury, the directors of national intelligence and the CIA, the White House chief of staff, the president's negotiator. Eighteen names sat on the room's membership list in all, and one of them, added by mistake, was the editor, watching from the Thursday. For two days the government of the republic coordinated a bombing campaign in a room with an encryption notice at the top. The room's opening message is on the record, published by the magazine on March 24, 2025:

> Team – establishing a principles [sic] group for coordination on Houthis, particularly for over the next 72 hours. […] Pls provide the best staff POC from your team for us to coordinate with over the next couple days and over the weekend. Thx.

Two days later, on the Saturday morning of the strikes, the operational details arrived in the same room: targets, weapons, sequencing, the first detonations promised two hours hence, on

schedule. From the vice president, after the update, came the decade's shortest summary of the sealed us at the top of the state:

> I will say a prayer for victory.

Two other members added prayer emojis. The editor waited in a supermarket parking lot for the promised hour and watched the news arrive on schedule. The magazine published on the Monday nine days later, and the government's own spokesman confirmed the room's authenticity in the language of a form letter: the thread, he said, appears to be authentic, and the administration was reviewing how an inadvertent number was added to the chain. Note the sentence's shape. The room is authentic; the error is the audience. The square's entire claim on the matter is reduced to reviewing how the square's representative got in.

Run the count on the thread, because the thread is published and the count is the instrument this chapter carries. The printed excerpts, 455 words of them as the magazine set them, contain sixteen first-person plurals: fourteen we's, one us, one our, a rate of 35.16 per thousand. Set the number against the book's admission log. The founding generation's Declaration ran 36.28 per thousand. The sealed room of 2025 ran 35.16. Read the tokens before

the rate, because the texture is the finding. Fourteen we's, and every one of them is operational: we stay focused, we manage both, we are prepared to execute, we can easily pause. The single genitive in the thread is the telling one: our own terms. In 455 words, that is the room's only shared good named as such: the terms. The pronoun's founding register, the operational we of we hold, we mutually pledge, we decide, has not declined in the decade; it has moved. It lives now in rooms without minutes, coordinating, in the case on the record, the bombing of another country, and the square learns of it afterward, from a magazine, because a member of the room misread his contacts.

The records of that room were set to disappear. A federal watchdog sued within days, asking a federal judge to declare the use of the app unlawful and to order the records preserved immediately, and the question of whether the republic's records laws reach a sealed war council went to the courts, where the record of this book leaves it. The migration charter's third principle, quoted above, does its double duty here: nothing kept longer than wanted is a privacy promise to a frightened user and a records strategy for an

official who would rather the archive stay empty, and the company wrote one sentence for both customers.

Across the Atlantic the same architecture had already shown the square its own government. In February 2023, a national newspaper began publishing a series built from more than one hundred thousand WhatsApp messages belonging to the former health secretary, carried out of the sealed rooms by the journalist who had been engaged to ghostwrite his book. The series opened on February 28, 2023, and what it showed was the pandemic's government living where the thread of twelve lives: policy argued, decided, and joked about in sealed rooms, including the discussion of how hard to frighten the public into compliance. Through it all the square sat the daily briefings, the whole liturgy of the public us. The deciding had been in the rooms the whole time, and the square learned it only because a member carried the room out the door. The following year the press regulator rejected the former secretary's accuracy complaint, which is the epilogue the hinge needs: the sealed room's record was the truer one. Government as the public was shown it and government as it was conducted were two different texts, and only one of them was encrypted.

This chapter's receipts had to be what the form dictates. The sealed room has no spokesman and wants none, so its census comes from the landlord's earnings calls, its architecture from the landlord's own announcement, its register from the rare published leak and the rarer courtroom exhibit. Every other claimant in the movement spoke for its members in public, and the audit quoted the speaking. The encrypted us speaks only to itself, and the audit is left reading the walls: a lawsuit here, a regulator's ruling there, a hundred thousand messages carried out by a ghostwriter. The evidentiary trail is not a defect of the chapter's method. It is the form's own signature, the mark a room leaves when its whole design is to leave none.

State the symmetry before the secession, because the chapter that skips it becomes the panic essay this book refused two chapters ago. The seal that hid the war council hides the dissident's organizing and the journalist's source and the escape plan of the spouse who needs a room her husband cannot open. Over all their rooms sits the same small encryption notice, and the decade's oppressive states worked hard to break or ban the seal precisely because it works. The encrypted us is not a villain in this book. It is a form, and the form is neutral the way a door is

neutral: it protects the family and it protects the cabinet, and it cannot tell the difference, because telling the difference is the work of a public, and the public is exactly what the door excludes.

Hold the two truths the way the hinge requires, one at a time and then together. The first truth: the encrypted us is the genuine article. Every instrument in the book confirms it. It passes the standard's five questions, the only claimant in the movement that does. It passes the subtraction test in the lateral direction, needing no them. Its plurals are operational, speech that resolves in common among members who can lose each other and know it. If the book had ended its audit here, the verdict would be unmixed: the plural survived the decade by going small and going sealed, and anyone who loves the old rooms should love the thread of twelve, because the thread of twelve is the old rooms' heir, the parish rebuilt on a protocol.

The second truth: the thread of twelve cannot be the republic. A sealed room is sized for a dozen, a hundred at the ragged edge, and the public us of the founding documents was sized for a continent. The given us's rooms, the hall and the congregation and the paper and the party, were scaled to the county, and the county's rooms taught their members the one lesson the sealed

room cannot teach: how to hold a plural with people you did not select. And the thread of twelve is chosen. Every member was admitted, every member can be removed, and the perimeter that makes the room loyal also makes it homogeneous in the ways that matter to the room. The room's exclusions are silent, and the silence is the cost the square used to make visible. No one is shouted out of the thread of twelve; the neighbor whose number nobody has is simply not in it, and the deciding proceeds without ever having refused him. The old rooms excluded loudly, shamefully, in ways the record could later find and judge. The sealed room excludes by omission, and the count has no instrument for an absence that leaves no mark. A republic of chosen rooms stops being a union and becomes an archipelago; the members of each island are loyal to the island, and the water between the islands belongs to the performers. The secession is peaceful, reasonable, and probably irreversible by exhortation, and it is a secession all the same. What secedes is not attention, the platforms' commodity. What secedes is decision: the actual resolving of things in common, moved from rooms the public can enter to rooms the public cannot see.

There is a kinder reading, and the chapter owes it a hearing before the chord. The sealed rooms are the remnant's ark: the plural carried through the flood at household scale, kept alive in the only vessels the decade left seaworthy, waiting out the era of the counterfeit. On this reading the migration was preservation work, and the twelve phones on the Tuesday night are the pronoun in a lifeboat, alive, operational, and ready for land. The record supports the reading as far as it goes. The rooms are real, the philia is real, the skills practiced in them are the old skills. What the record cannot say is whether the lifeboat makes landfall or the archipelago becomes the permanent condition, and the chapter will not pretend otherwise, because the answer is the work of the movement that begins after this one.

The author files his own rooms here, inside the same jar as everything else. His family thread runs daily, and it has done the rooms' whole work, the birthdays and the diagnoses and the funerals. His working threads did the decade's ordinary deciding the same way the petition was decided in the thread of twelve. He declines to exempt himself from the finding: his own plural life in the decade ran sealed, by the same

migration, for the same good reasons. The confession costs the argument nothing and buys it the standing to say what follows.

What follows is the movement's summation, and then its unanswered question. Five claimants came before the instruments in this movement. The brand-we filed the plural as chorus, a we sung at the customer; the platform-we filed it as terms of service, a we the user agrees to; the fandom filed the movement's first split verdict, real among the fans, counterfeit toward the object, and paid the wager's tax on the difference; the machine filed the manufactured we, the mirror that answers, the claimant that can lose nothing and so cannot belong. And the encrypted us filed the genuine article, operational, loyal, measurable at a founding-grade plural rate, and sealed against the public that the pronoun used to convene. The decade's migration, in one sentence: the we that resolves moved into rooms without minutes, and the square was left to the we that performs. That is the whole of Movement III, and it is worse news and better news than the movement's first chapter promised, in exactly the proportion the record supports.

The chord, then, unresolved on purpose. The ark reading and the secession reading are both true of the same rooms. Whether the sealed us is

the public us in waiting or the public us in dispersal is not a question the count can settle, because both futures fit the data the decade produced, and the choosing between them is the kind of work a pronoun audit can only prepare. The instruments this book built were made for the square and the room. Whether they can be made to serve the water between the rooms, and whether anyone still remembers that the water is public, is the question the decade leaves on the table. Movement IV takes the question up where it must be taken up: into the company of the actual remnant, the rooms that kept their rolls, the subtractive test run on the whole board at last, every claimant called by name and answered with its own receipts. What this chapter owes that movement is the hinge's honest statement: the plural is alive, it is behind a door, and the door is locked from the inside.

The twelve phones, the next night. Thursday came, and the hearing room filled, and the one the board trusts spoke first, the way the thread had decided, and the board voted the way the petition suggested, and the minutes recorded all of it: the speakers' names, the vote, the outcome. The minutes record nothing about the room where the outcome was made, because that room keeps no minutes. Somewhere outside the room,

the neighbor without the number waits for the county to post the minutes in the spring, and the minutes will be accurate, and they will be the whole of what he gets. Late that night the thread closes the file in its own register, a dozen small messages of relief and affection, a photograph of the hearing room from the back row, a joke about the chairman's gavel that would mean nothing to anyone outside. At the top of the room, the small gray line the decade put over everything: the notice that the room is sealed, that no one else can see, that what is said here stays here. The most functional public body in town ends its day. The public never hears of it. Inside, the plural is alive and well and operational. And the door is locked from the inside.

MOVEMENT IV

The Remnant

Chapter Fifteen

The Subtraction Test.

The basement smells of coffee and floor polish, and the folding chairs make their own weather when the room fills. It is a rendering, declared as such; its content is on the record of the decade: a church basement on a weeknight, forty chairs in a broken circle, first names only, and at the front a reader with a laminated card. The card's first sentence names the room a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other. Its second names the membership rule, the only one: a desire to stop drinking. No dues, no fees, no application, no alliances. The sharing moves around the circle the way the offering plate moves in the room upstairs, with one rule the newcomer learns by watching: no one answers. A share is met with thanks and the next first name, and the rule against replying is the rule that makes the speaking safe, because nothing in the room is a debate and nothing is a

pitch. Then the room reads the twelve sentences the whole program hangs on, and the first word of the first sentence is the subject of this book. We admitted we were powerless. Not I admitted. A person alone with a bottle has already lost that argument; the room's wager is that a person plural can win it, and the evidence for the wager is the strongest this book will file.

Hold the instrument up first, though, because this chapter is the instrument's own chapter, and it earns the scene by running. The subtraction test is the book's second instrument, after the count and before the object case it cannot replace. Its rule is one line: remove the them from the claimant, and report what survives. Its directions are three. In the lateral direction, the standard run, the them is the rival: subtract the opposing crowd and see whether the us still stands. In the vertical direction, the run this movement invented, the them is the object: subtract the idol, the machine, the mirror, and see whether anything on the other side of the glass notices. And in the second movement, the run the hinge required, the subtraction turns outward: remove the room from the world, and report what the world loses. Three directions, one rule. The failures sort into a taxonomy the decade taught the book one claimant at a time. The demagogic

failure: the us dies when its them is removed, because the hatred was the membership. In the counterfeit failure, nothing on the far side of the mirror exists to notice the subtraction. With the machine came the new failure: no them anywhere to subtract, and no stakes to weigh the loss with. And the one passing failure, the hinge's finding: the room survives its subtraction whole, and the world outside is poorer by exactly the room's weight, the secession cost.

Its limits come with the rule, and the instrument states them before running the board, because an instrument that hides its limits is a slogan too. The test measures a bond's dependence on an enemy; it does not measure the bond's justice. A room can pass with its door wrongly closed, passing on silence toward the never-admitted, and the test will not catch it, because the test subtracts enemies; omissions it cannot see; the perimeter question, the standard's fifth, carries that weight, and the two instruments are used together or not trusted. The test also cannot read intensity: a feeble us and a ferocious one both pass if neither needs a them, and the count must carry that difference, the whisper against the chant. What the test certifies is narrower and, for this decade, more useful: whether the claimant's plural is built out of

hatred, out of mirrors, out of nothing, or out of the members themselves. In a decade when the pronoun was counterfeited at industrial scale, knowing what a we is made of is most of knowing what it will do.

One more rule of operation, stated before the board below runs: the operator names the them before the run, and the naming is registered beside the run. Where a claimant has a constitutive opposition, the them is that. Where it has none, the them is the condition the claimant exists against. The choice is the test's one discretionary act, and the rule this book now prints is that the act is stated, never hidden. The critic's experiment is invited: run any claimant again with a different named them, and the register shows what changed.

What survives, when something survives, is always a practice and never a slogan. The test does not ask what the claimant says; the count already read the words. The test asks what is left standing when the opposition is deleted, and what is left standing, in every pass this book will record, is a roll, a schedule, and a shared good: names, attendance, and work. That is the instrument's whole output, and it is enough to sort a decade.

Now the board, every claimant of the third movement run under the rule, in prose, with the verdicts carried forward from their own chapters and the reasons kept short. The demagogic us first, because it is the test's origin. Remove the procession's them, the ones the torches were against, and nothing remains of the chant at all; the plural was the hatred, and the hatred required its object, and the object was the point. Fail, lateral, total. The brand-we: its them was only ever the noncustomer, and subtracting the noncustomer leaves the chorus singing to the sold, a we that dissolves on inspection into a customer list with a soundtrack. Fail by vacancy this time, the softest failure in the book. The platform-we: subtract the moderated, the them whose removal the terms exist to govern, and the we of the user agreement proves to be the address of a crowd, never the membership of a room; the platform's we resolves no decision anyone in it can name. Fail by diffusion. The fandom, the movement's split verdict: subtract the rival and the fans remain standing, the season ticket and the chant and the uncle's seat intact, the only lateral pass among the counterfeits; subtract the team and the fan's bond to it evaporates, the parasocial void, total vertical failure. One claimant, two answers, the book's only split. The

machine-we: there is no them to subtract and nothing at stake to measure, the we of one member and one mirror, failing in the new way, by absence. And the encrypted us, the hinge: subtract the outside world and the thread of twelve loses nothing, complete lateral pass; then subtract the thread from the town, and the town loses the deciding, the secession cost, the pass that wounds. One run remains, the one the hostile reader would have made first: the standard's five questions on the given us's own rooms. The hall, while it lived, passed the four bond questions: the vote resolved in common, the calendar kept, the room physical, the charter and the dues and the strike fund its shared goods. The fifth is the perimeter question, and the fourth chapter has already answered it for the hall: the door was defended, and the defense was the era's exclusion, filed in the ledger where the debit column is kept. Passing the bond saved it from nothing either way. The rooms of the first movement died of attrition and of the calendar, and never of a hole where the them should be, which is the book's whole reason for the standard's limits: the test certifies the bond, never the calendar, and a genuine us can die of the calendar with its certificate in hand.

That is the whole board, and the board's lesson is the movement's: in the decade of the counterfeit, every manufactured claimant failed or split or seceded, and no them-shaped hole appeared in a single one of the genuine rooms this book opened in the first movement: their thems were weak or absent, their rolls were the substance. What the test certifies is what the count suspected. The plural does not need an enemy. It needs a roll.

The strongest pass in the book belongs to the room with the laminated card, and it belongs there on evidence instead of sentiment, which is why it gets the long look. The twelve-step room is this chapter's named case, the strongest natural experiment in themless belonging on record: an us built on shared vulnerability, with no them anywhere in it. Read the form before the findings. Its enemy is a molecule and never a people; no chant names an opposing crowd. The perimeter here is the strangest in the book, because the seal protects the members instead of the room: anyone may enter who wants to stop drinking, and the price of the open door is a sealed roster, first names only, what is said here staying here, the encrypted us's architecture anticipated by three-quarters of a century. Its currency is time itself, marked in chips. The speech resolves in common

by design: the reading, the sharing, the sponsorship, the amends. And the shared good is the one good the whole book has been hunting, sobriety held in common, ours or no one's. And its core document, the twelve sentences the room reads aloud, is the densest plural text this audit has ever counted. Their first:

> We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

The count, run on the program's twelve steps as published by the fellowship's own service office, returns nineteen first-person plurals in two hundred words: seven we, two us, ten of the genitive family, a rate of ninety-five per thousand: outside one emergency statement in the chamber's record, the densest plural text this audit counted. For scale: the Declaration's founding density was thirty-six, the sealed war council's thread was thirty-five, and the recovery text runs at ninety-five, more than two and a half times the founding register. The program's first word is we. It never declines into I.

Inside the room sits a smaller room, and the small one carries much of the load: the sponsor, the us of two, the member a few year-marks ahead who answers the phone at the hour Chapter Thirteen's machine claimed as its market.

And inside the twelve sentences themselves sits the room's confession about its own members' thems. The eighth sentence has the members listing every person they harmed; the ninth sends them out to make the amends. What the fellowship knows, and the decade's claimants never admitted, is that every us leaves a wake: the people harmed along the way. So the program that begins with we admitted ends its work with we repaired, the plural turned outward toward its own damage. The subtraction test has no direction for that, and the room built one itself.

The findings, then, and they come from the strictest evidence house medicine owns. In March 2020, the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews published the fellowship's definitive audit: twenty-seven studies, 10,565 participants, twenty-one of them randomized or quasi-randomized trials, testing the program and its clinical escort, twelve-step facilitation, against the established treatments. Its authors' conclusion, stated here plainly: high-certainty evidence that the manualized pathway produces more continuous abstinence than the established comparisons, cognitive behavioral therapy included, with the advantage holding at one year, two years, and three. One year out, the review's own announcement put the plain figure on it:

forty-two percent of the fellowship pathway's participants continuously abstinent at one year, against thirty-five percent in the other treatments. The economics ran with the efficacy: alcohol-related health-care costs forty-five percent lower across a three-year follow-up in one cohort, abstinence at 45.7 against 36.2 percent in one long follow-up cohort the review reports, thirty percent lower two-year costs in a further analysis. And the coauthor's public sentence, issued with the university's release, is the chapter's thesis wearing a medical badge: if you want to change your behavior, find some other people who are trying to make the same change. The investigators' account of the mechanism matches the sentence: the program works by changing the patient's social network: by moving the patient into a room. The evidence house did not certify a theology. It certified attendance.

The census of the rooms is its own small marvel of the form. The fellowship keeps no formal records of its members; the seal that protects the member forbids the roll. Its service office therefore estimates: more than two million members, more than 123,000 groups, a presence in roughly 180 countries, founded 1935 in Akron by two members whose own names the literature keeps at the level of first name and initial. A room

that declines to count itself is counted anyway, by the epidemiologists, because the rooms show up in the outcomes data whether or not they show up in any registry. The given us's old rooms kept rolls and died; this room keeps no roll and persists, and the difference is that its membership is renewed by desire daily rather than enrolled once.

And the house's own history makes the certification worth more, because this was a verdict revised. The same collaboration's 2006 review, eight studies and 3,417 subjects, found no experimental study unequivocally demonstrating the program's effectiveness. Fourteen years later the verdict was rewritten at high certainty. Evidence this conservative does not move often, and when it moves, the movement is the story.

The critiques come with the finding, per this book's rule, and they are named in the bibliography and summarized here at the level of form. In the journal of the review's own distillation, a senior researcher in the field objected that the abstinence advantage had not appeared in the sibling measures at twelve months, the days abstinent and the intensity and the consequences, and warned of an abstinence-violation pattern; the review's authors answered in the same issue that no such pattern existed in the data, that the sibling measures reached parity

at twelve months and advantage at two and three years, and that the review had never claimed abstinence as the decisive outcome. In the movement press, a longtime critic of the program's dominance attacked the selection: cooperative volunteers in the manualized trials, no coerced populations, no natural-recovery control, and a harm-reduction frame that would read the parity results differently. The two critiques are real and in the record, and neither touches the center, which the critics themselves granted: a thorough, well-conducted meta-analysis, in the scholarly critic's own words, of a room that demonstrably works for the people it holds. The honest summary is the one the evidence demands: contested at the edges and certified at the center, and what is certified is the room.

Three more rooms take the pass, each at its own evidence level, and the discipline this chapter keeps holds throughout: outcome claims stay with the systematic reviews and the issuing bodies, and no anecdote is promoted to finding. The fire company first, the room with the loudest stakes in the book. Its form: a roll with pagers, drill nights, a fund drive, a siren, and a bond that can be asked to pay everything. The count of the room is the issuing association's: of the country's

million-odd firefighters, 676,900 were volunteers at the 2020 profile, sixty-five percent of the service; eighty-two percent of the nation's 29,452 fire departments run all or mostly volunteer; ninety-five percent of those volunteers serve departments protecting fewer than 25,000 people; and the association's own journal, in 2026, calls the state of the room a crisis, roughly 170 million Americans living in areas the volunteers primarily serve while the roll thins from the 800-thousand range of the prior decade to the lowest rate on record, 5.66 volunteers per thousand residents against 8.05 in 1987. Run the test. The company's them is the fire: a condition with no politics at all. Remove every human enemy and the room stands entire: the drill, the roster, the breakfast, the truck. The stakes, though, are the book's realest. This is the us that can lose everything together, on a roof, on a Tuesday, and the machine-we's tell reads backward here: the fire company is the claimant that can lose anything with you, which is what membership means. The roll is thinning, and the association's own accounts name the causes, and they are Chapter Four's causes wearing a different uniform: the training hours the standards now demand, the two-income household's vanished afternoons, the aging of the base and the missing

of the young. The volunteer rooms of the remnant all run on the same fuel, free time freely given, and free time is the resource the decade mined hardest. And the work remains and the room remains, which is the remnant's evidence in a turnout coat.

The choir next, the room with the fastest joinery on record. Its evidence is the Oxford team's study, published in the Royal Society's open journal in October 2015: seven newly formed adult-education classes followed for seven months, four singing, two crafts, one creative writing, closeness and affect measured before and after sessions at month one, month three, and month seven. Singers bonded significantly faster in the first month, the study's named ice-breaker effect, the first evidence that singing welds unfamiliar people into a group at speed, bypassing the slow accumulation of personal knowledge; the authors' closing suggestion is that singing may have evolved to bond large groups of relative strangers quickly. And the honest limit is in the same table: by month seven the talkers had caught up, the crafts and the writers arriving at the same closeness by the slower road. The choir's advantage is speed, and its honesty is the catch-up. Its them is the silence and the wrong note; its shared good is the piece; its perimeter is the open

chair. It passes the test trivially and gloriously, and the book has met its stadium form already, the night the anthem's singer lowered the microphone and the crowd carried the verse unled. The choir is that moment, domesticated into a schedule, which is the whole trick of the given us: the great unled thing, rehearsed weekly.

And the mutual-aid pod, the decade's own room, the one that assembled itself when the vertical systems failed. The documentation: in the United Kingdom the first groups formed in March 2020, ahead of the lockdowns; by July the estimates counted more than four thousand local groups, with participation reported as high as three million; the fieldworkers who sampled twenty of them logged more than a hundred thousand meals and food parcels delivered between mid-March and midsummer, with ongoing support for about a thousand people, fifty per group. The ethos is the registry's own sentence, and the chapter quotes it rather than paraphrases it: the work is not about saving anyone; it is, in the guidance's words, common-sense neighbors and community members looking out for each other. Lateral, self-organized, no application forms, no dues, the room that appears with the emergency. And here the subtraction test reads strange, and the

strangeness is the finding. The pod's them is the emergency itself. Remove the emergency, and the pod dissolves, which looks like the demagogic failure until the design is read: the pod never claimed permanence. Run the fire company the same way, against its condition, and the room has no work tonight; the station house is condition-bound too. The difference the test registers is never the dissolution; it is the claim the room made about its own duration. The company claims the standing watch; the pod claims the emergency. Both are honest, and the honesty is the measured thing. It is the plural's emergency form, assembled on need and dissolved on need's end, and most of the pandemic's pods did dissolve, while the form persists as a template the next emergency will reuse. A them that is a condition and an us that retires itself when the condition passes: the pod is the honest opposite of the demagogue's chant, which invents a permanent enemy to keep the room warm. The pod keeps the room warm only while the house is cold.

Lay the passes side by side now, the twelve-step room and the fire company, the choir and the pod, the thread of twelve behind its door, and the conditions the genuine rooms share resolve out of the list like a print in a tray. A roll: the members

are known by name and missed when absent, even in the rooms where the names stop at the first. A schedule: the weeknight, the drill, the rehearsal, the meeting after the meeting, time kept in common until keeping it becomes the bond. And a shared good: the sobriety, the fire out, the piece sung, the meal delivered, a good that cannot be subdivided into private positions, the wager's exact opposite. An admitted vulnerability: the strongest rooms in the book begin with a member saying need out loud, and the plural of need turns out to be the sturdiest plural there is. No them, or a them that is a condition, a molecule, a fire, an emergency, never a people. And no extraction model: the rooms run on a kettle and a rack of chairs, and where money enters, the ticket, the dues, the collection plate, it buys the room and never the bond, which the evidence house's own coauthor turned into the field's best joke, the fellowship as the closest thing public health has to a free lunch. Six conditions, and not one of them is a belief. The rooms do not ask the members to agree about anything beyond the work. Aristotle's Politics said the polis is held together by the good pursued in common; the remnant's rooms say the same thing in floor polish and engine grease, and the systematic review says it in confidence intervals. From

another road the sociology shelf reached the same place, and the book conceded the old terms two movements back: community against society, the warm bond against the cold contract. What this chapter adds to the concession is instrument-grade: the six conditions are the old word's content, community described as a checklist a room can be audited against, which is what the warm words always wanted to become.

Set the remnant's rooms against the hinge's room and the movement's answer takes its shape. The thread of twelve passed the five questions with its door locked. The basement, the station house, the rehearsal room, and the pod pass the same five questions with the door open, and the difference between the sealed pass and the open pass is the whole distance between the secession and the repair. Sealed, the room keeps the plural alive for its members and starves the square. Open, the room feeds the square: the fire company's pancake breakfast is the county's, the choir's concert is the county's, the pod's meal is the stranger's, and even the sealed-by-design basement feeds the square its graduates, one sober driver at a time. The decade's counterfeiters all promised belonging at scale and delivered the mirror. The remnant delivers belonging at the

scale belonging has always required, the scale of the roll, and asks the square to be patient about the rest.

That is the movement's turn, and the chapter states it without embroidery, because the record has earned it and the book has not often gotten to say it. Three movements audited the loss: the given us's rooms emptied by attrition, the pronoun's perimeter breached by the demagogue and the counterfeit, the manufactured we arriving at scale to harvest the need the emptying left. The evidence in this chapter points the other way for the first time. The rooms that work are known, countable, and certified at the strictest standard the decade's medicine could apply; their conditions can be listed on one hand plus a thumb; their cost is close to nothing, a kettle and a rack of chairs; their enemies are conditions and never peoples; and their rolls are open to anyone who wants in, which is the founding promise wearing a laminated card. And the test that sorted the counterfeit ends as the remnant's certificate, signed in the evidence house's own hand. Remove the them, and the basement does not notice. There was never a them there at all. There was only the roll, and the roll was the thing itself, and the thing itself is enough to build a movement on.

The basement, ten o’clock. And the sharing has come around the broken circle to the newest member, who gives the room a first name and nothing else, and the room answers with the only liturgy this chapter will quote twice: first names, first word, we. The chips are counted out, the year-marks and the twenty-four-hours, and the one that matters most is the smallest, the day-chips going to the newest hands. Then the room puts itself away. The laminated card goes back in the drawer, the coffee urn is emptied and washed, the chairs fold and lean and clatter onto the rack, forty of them, until the basement looks like nothing happened here, which is the room’s last disguise. Something happened here. It happens every week, on a schedule, at a rate of ninety-five plurals per thousand words of program, in more than a hundred thousand rooms that keep no rolls at all, and it has never once needed an enemy. The chairs know. The stack leans against the wall like a kept promise, and the door at the top of the stairs is unlocked from the outside, and it stays that way, week after week after week.

Chapter Sixteen

The Company.

The set is coming down while the audience is still finding its cars. What follows is a rendering, declared up front; its content is on the record of every production ever struck: closing night, the house emptied, the work lights on, and the company taking apart the room where, two hours ago, a country existed. The last performance ended an hour ago, and it was the best of the run, because it was the last: every entrance landed, every cover was invisible, and the company played the show the way the company had rehearsed it for six weeks to be played, at the exact moment playing it ceased to matter to anyone but them. The audience did not know it was watching a death. But the company did, and the playing said so, and the ovation answered without knowing why. That is the country's last constitutional moment: the work at its peak at the hour of its dissolution, witnessed by a house that

will scatter, struck by the people who built it. The flats come off their braces. The prop table is stripped, the letter and the revolver and the teacup back in their crates. Somebody is coiling cable. Somebody is not talking, because talking would start it, and nobody in the building wants to be the one who starts it. The strike is the country's dissolution performed in work gloves, and the company does the dismantling itself, on purpose, because the people who built the room are the ones allowed to take it down. On the bare stage the spike marks stay a moment longer, the tape crosses where forty entrances landed, and then the tape comes up too. What the company built in six weeks took four performances to show and ninety minutes to dismantle, and every person in the building knew the schedule on the first day, which is the whole form. The ensemble is the country with a known end date, and it is the purest laboratory the book will enter, because the us in it is manufactured on purpose, in front of witnesses, by recipe.

Name the recipe, because rehearsal knows things about manufacturing the plural that policy does not, and the chapter is written to extract them. The materials are Aristotle's exact three, laid out in the second chapter and never varied since: time, presence, and shared goods. The time

is the rehearsal calendar, four to eight weeks of evenings, kept the way the fire company keeps its drill night. Presence is total and physical, bodies in a room, the one claimant in the book whose members cannot phone it in, because the work is the bodies. And the shared good is the play, the chapter's cleanest case of the wager-proof good: it cannot be subdivided into private positions. No actor can hold a hedge against the second act. The good is the company's or it is nothing, which is the founding definition wearing a costume.

The form is the oldest room in the book, and the chapter says so at the level of form, where the claim is safe and the verification burden is the lightest in the movement, an antiquity attested by the continued existence of the practice rather than by any single dated record. Before the union hall, before the congregation's building, before the paper, there was the company: the chorus of the ancient festivals, the traveling players with their wagon, the stock company with its season, the summer barn with its ten shows in twelve weeks. The given us's rooms in the second movement were all founded against something, a hazard, a faith, a market. The company was founded for the making itself, the plural assembled for the pleasure and the work of holding a story in common, and it has never

required a theory to justify its existence, because closing night always arrives to certify it. Every later room in this book is the company's descendant in method even when it is not in spirit: the roll, the schedule, the shared text, the ordeal, the grief. The ensemble is where the given us keeps its factory manual.

Around the materials, the perimeter: the audition, the cast list posted, the roll exact. Around the roll, the schedule: call time is law, kept to the minute, and the stage manager's book is the constitution nobody amends, the one document that says who stands where when, the country's statute and its diary at once. And inside the perimeter, the bond's accelerant, the mechanic the policy world has never managed to legislate: the stumble and the cover. The dropped line caught by the partner, the missed entrance absorbed by the room, the prop that is not there and then is there because someone crossed the stage with it on instinct. The company's trust is built out of errors survived together, and never out of excellence performed together, and the veteran knows what the systematic review's coauthor knew about the basement: the plural of need is the sturdiest plural. A rehearsal is vulnerability scheduled. Six weeks of saying need out loud, nightly, to the same dozen people, is a

bond-manufacturing process so reliable that the industry built on it treats the result as routine: of course they became a company. That was the assignment.

Go deeper into the manufacture, because the recipe's steps are the chapter's evidence and each one maps to the remnant's six conditions like a key to a lock. The table read: the us forms around a text held in common, the shared good read aloud before it is built, every member hearing every other member's voice carry the part the company will become. Blocking: the room learns its bodies, who crosses where, who yields, the geometry of a dozen people becoming one machine without a word about becoming one. The note session: the company's feedback form, and the mechanic the square most needs to relearn. Notes are given nightly, direct, specific, and unflattering, and they are received without the wound taking, because the good is shared and every note is aimed at the good. Candor is survivable when the good is common; that sentence is the ensemble's gift to every other room in this book, and the book accepts it as the chapter's first extraction. Tech week: the shared ordeal, the twelve-hour days, the room's bond annealed by the schedule's cruelty, the week everyone is tired and no one is alone in it. And the

understudy rule, the company's quiet constitution of care: anyone can fall, and the room has rehearsed the falling, and the show's survival depends on the fallen being covered without shame. The six conditions, then, on one cast list: the roll is the cast list, exact and posted; the schedule is the calendar, kept like law; the shared good is the play, indivisible; the admitted vulnerability is the rehearsal method itself, need said aloud on a nightly schedule; the them is absent, the play's conflict staying inside the play, the audience never an enemy; and the revenue question is the honest note, because the company does sell tickets. The money prices the room's product, the evening, and never the members' bond, which is precisely the line the wager crossed in the stadium and the company has never crossed: no member of the cast holds a position against the second act.

One more boundary, inside the art itself, because the company has its own counterfeit and the decade ran on it. The star system is the ensemble's inversion: the vehicle built around one name, the program's typography an argument about whose the evening is. Its product is the idol of the twelfth chapter, the one the mirror never answers. And the company is the anti-star form. Its proverb is on the record of every green room:

there are no small parts, only small actors, a sentence that survives because it is structural and never consoling. The bow order says the same thing in ritual: the smallest part bows early, the lead bows last, and the whole cast bows as the company, the ovation belonging to the country rather than the citizens. Where the decade's culture crowned the individual and called the crown authenticity, the company kept drilling the older finding: the evening belongs to the us or it belongs to no one, and a lead who plays for the mirror is reviewed accordingly by the people holding the other end of the cover. The counterfeit always crowns the one. The company keeps the roll.

Then the deadline, the form's genius and this chapter's phrase for it: a country with a known end date. Every other room in this book hides its mortality or denies it. The congregation plans forever and dies of attrition; the thread of twelve has no closing date and pays for the permanence in secession; the machine promises always and delivers per-session. The company alone schedules its own death. Opening night is the apex the calendar aimed at; the run is the country's whole history, compressed; closing night is the end the members accepted when they signed. The Ethics wanted time and presence

before it would call a friendship real, and the ensemble answers with both on a deadline, which does something the slow rooms cannot do: it makes the losing of each other a term of the contract. The stakes condition from the machine's chapter is satisfied by the calendar itself. These people can lose each other, they know the exact hour, and they build the country anyway. That is not a defect of the form. That is the form, and it never varies.

And the proof arrives on schedule, because closing night proves the us was real by the grief it leaves. The book has filed two counterfeit griefs and one real one now: the parasocial breakup, mourned alone by a member the relation never knew; the companion's withdrawal, the mirror repossessed by its owner, the member grieving at the glass; and now the company's, which differs from both in the only direction that matters. The company's grief is mutual, shared, and witnessed in the same room at the same hour. Everyone at the strike is at the same funeral, and everyone can name the deceased. The set becomes lumber again in front of the people who lived inside it, and the lumber does not pretend to miss them back, and nobody asked it to. Here is the evidence the instruments accept: a we that cannot lose anything with you leaves no grief, and the

company is drowned in it, on a date printed in the program. Where the manufactured we of the thirteenth chapter fails the subtraction test by absence, the manufactured we of the ensemble, built by recipe out of the same human need, passes every direction of it, and the difference is the whole chapter: the machine was built to be needed without needing, and the company is built so that everyone in it needs, nightly, and is needed back.

One us more, the shortest-lived on record, and the chapter gives it its due before the house lights fall: the audience. Two hours, strangers, one held breath. The house assembles from the square the decade emptied, checks its phones in the ghost-light of the lobby, and then does the thing the square no longer does: it attends, together, to the same event, at the same speed, in the same room. The room has its own machinery for this, humble and exact: the usher with the torn ticket, the program that doubles as the country's one document, the hush that travels the rows a beat before the lights. Even the intermission is constitutional, fifteen minutes in which the temporary citizens test the evening's claims on each other in the lobby, speech resolving in small commons before the bell. And against the decade's river, the house holds one property the

feed never offered: an ending. The scroll does not end, which is why nothing in it can be held; the show ends, which is why, for two hours, it can. The laugh arrives as one body, and the held breath at the recognition scene is the genitive case with no membership list at all, ours for two hours and then no one's. Run the test on it, briefly, because the audience is the slightest claimant that will ever pass one direction of it. Lateral: no them required, no rival, and the room holds. Vertical: subtract the play, and the crowd is strangers on the sidewalk within a minute, which is honest rather than counterfeit, because the audience never claimed to be a company. Duration is where it fails, and the failure is the point: the audience is the given us in miniature and temporary, the square's remnant convening for one evening to remember how a room of strangers can hold one thing. The count has no purchase here, because the audience barely speaks; its plural is measured in amplitude instead, the ovation's length and the silence's depth, the two readings the company learns to take the way the book takes its token rates. A house that holds its breath for two hours has declared a we without writing a word of it. The performers' country dies on a schedule. The audience's country dies nightly and is reborn nightly, two hours at a time, which is why the

oldest rooms of the given us all ended with one: the amen, the applause, the filing out in silence, strangers who held one breath, leaving through the same doors.

What the square forgot, the company still drills. Call it the transfer, and state its limits honestly, because the chapter is not selling a cure. The recipe does not scale to a republic; a country cannot be cast. But the disciplines travel individually, and they are all rehearsals of the same muscle. Call the roll. Keep the schedule. Read the shared text aloud before building on it. Give the notes nightly, specifically, without flattery or cruelty, aimed at the common good. Rehearse the cover so the stumble is survivable. Print the end date, or admit there is none. None of it requires a stage. All of it is learnable by any room with the will, which is the sense in which rehearsal knows things policy does not: policy allocates, and rehearsal habituates, and the plural is built by habituation or not at all.

The limit is real and the book files it before the movement runs ahead of the evidence. The recipe works because the good is fixed: the play is written, the end date is printed, the roll is twelve names no one contests. In the square the good is the opposite of fixed. A republic's text is the thing being fought over, and the company offers no

procedure for settling what the play should be, only a procedure for performing it together once chosen. Read the transfer at that angle and the disciplines demote themselves from cure to equipment: any room that has already agreed on its good can borrow the recipe whole, and the basement and the station house and the rebuilt library of the movement's remaining chapters are exactly such rooms. The seminar reads its text aloud before building on it; the read-aloud circle keeps the company's schedule with children's books; the choir rehearses; the fire company drills. Every working room in this movement was already running a rehearsal discipline without naming it. What the ensemble contributes to the remnant is the naming, and the proof that the disciplines compose into a manufacture: plural in, country out, grief as receipt.

The author files his testimony here, and its status is stated plainly. He comes to this chapter as a practitioner, with a production history that stands in this book as primary record, cited as such: he has built these countries himself, sat inside these strikes, and paid this grief on its printed schedule. The record's face, from the house's own pages and the author's own file: a dramatic television series written at sixteen, The Westborough Crusaders, produced for cable; a

stage play, The Weeping Water Cafe, carried from the stage to a television airing; a university mainstage production, A Stone's Throw, at Nebraska; an art-house film, Watershed, written and directed on location; a production built for Deaf audiences, Drama of the Body, at Rutgers in 2002; and the musical Maslova, written with Al Carmines and staged at Columbia University in the spring of 1991. Behind each of them stood the rehearsal rooms where the recipe ran on its schedule and the grief arrived on its date. None of it carries the argument as a load-bearing beam. The record's texture matters to its standing, so the chapter describes it: the country's documents are the programs, the roll printed as a cast list and dated; the country's gazette is the review, when the square sends one; the country's archive is the box of strike photographs, the set going up and coming down with the same people at both ends. A production history is inspectable in a way a memory is not, which is why it serves here as primary record, cited as such, the author inside the same jar as the brands and the platforms and the state. What the chapter needs from the record is narrower than a resume, and the record supplies it: one practitioner's testimony that the recipe above is real, that the grief arrives on schedule, and that the thing the square lost can

still be manufactured on purpose by anyone with a text, a room, and a deadline. He adds the confession the jar requires, dated: the last strike he stood in was Maslova's, the spring of 1991, the debut well received and the production never moved forward, the country dissolved at the height of its one life; the later productions closed without him. The memory, in his own words, aches against the we that should have been. He would sign again tomorrow, and the appetite for the next country is the appetite this book exists to feed honestly. The specimen-jar rule holds here as everywhere: the author's own archive sits inside the jar, and in this chapter the archive is the whole point, because the ensemble is the one claimant in the book whose factory the author has personally run.

Two disciplines govern the chapter and both are stated. The boundary discipline first: the ensemble evidence lives in this chapter only, and the book restages no prior argument about the theatrical space. That argument has been made elsewhere and at length, by the author, and it stays there; here the stage yields one lesson, the honest manufacture of a temporary us, and exits, and the lesson is not imported into any other chapter's machinery, because the ensemble is a laboratory and never a model for the republic,

and laboratories that leak become ideologies. And the one-scene rule second, exercised at its source: one scene carrying the claim. Fifteen chapters have run that rule as a discipline. Here it is honored as a description, because the stage is where the rule comes from: one scene, one claim, the set struck when the claim is made. The closing night opened this chapter and it will close it, and everything between them has been annotation of what the strike already knows.

So the lesson the movement carries forward, stated at its smallest and its largest. At its smallest: the us can be manufactured honestly, by recipe, on a deadline, out of strangers, and the product is the genuine article, certified by the grief it leaves and by every instrument this book owns. The decade's counterfeits promised belonging without the recipe: no roll, no schedule, no shared good, no vulnerability, no stakes. The company runs the recipe nightly and produces the real thing on cue, which means the scarcity the decade grieves is not a scarcity of human capacity for the plural. What remains intact and unharmed is the capacity itself. It is exercised by every cast list posted and every rehearsal called, in every town that has a stage and several that have only a borrowed room, on a schedule older than the republic. At its largest, and here the chapter

hands off: if the recipe is real and the disciplines travel, then the question the next chapter must answer is the settlement question. What can a federation of small real us-es, each manufactured on purpose, actually carry? The company proves the plural can be made. It cannot say how many companies make a country. That is the rescaled us's assignment, and the set is already coming down around the asking.

The strike, at its end. Spike marks up, crates shut, cable coiled, and the stage is bare except for one thing, the ghost light on its stand at center, the single bulb the empty building keeps burning out of a tradition older than anyone present. The country is dissolved. Its members are dispersing to other countries not yet cast, carrying the recipe with them, which is the only emigration the book has recorded that costs the old country nothing. There is a cast party, because there is always a cast party, and it functions the way the book's instruments predict: the country's wake, the grief given a table and a stereo, the members rehearsing, already, the story of the country for the people who were not citizens of it. And taped to the callboard by the stage door, or waiting in the inbox, is the next audition notice, the next country accepting applications, the roll unwritten. Monday, the room will be a room again, for rent.

What happened here was real, and the proof was the grief, and the grief was scheduled, and the schedule was kept. The light stays on. It is not waiting for anyone, and that is the proof of the form's honesty: it never promised to wait. That is how the company knows it loved the thing: the light burns anyway, and the country with the known end date ended, and everyone in it would sign again tomorrow, and tomorrow a table read somewhere calls the next roll.

Chapter Seventeen

The Rescaled Us.

The branch library reopened on a Monday, and by Wednesday the room was full and quiet and plural. This branch is a rendering, declared up front, built on the record this book files: a branch that sat closed for two years of budget weather, now reopened with new lighting and the same oak tables, and the county's whole perimeter back inside it. The job-seeker is at the public terminal, the citizenship class holds the community room, the teenagers occupy the back row under the no-shushing-needed policy, the chess board has its two regulars and its one new player, and at the desk the librarian answers the question she answers all day, which is every question. No one at the door asks anyone for money, belief, enrollment, or proof. The founding principle of the place, in the sentence of the sociologist this chapter engages: all people deserve free, open access to the shared culture, and the shared

culture is the only thing for sale nowhere in the building. The closure years are still in the room's weather: the bond vote that failed, the one that passed, the two winters the county's unhoused slept closer to the heating vent of the shuttered building, out of the wind and out of the room. In July the branch is the cooling center, which is the vessel's oldest survival function in the record this chapter engages, the heat-wave lesson read into a thermostat: the room's presence in a neighborhood is a life-safety system before it is a literacy program, and the people who came in for the air stayed for the chess. The branch is the last public room the county owns that admits everyone and sorts no one, and this chapter is written in it because the question the movement now faces is a question about rooms: the remnant settled whether the plural survives; what remains is the scale the surviving plural can honestly reach.

Ask the question plainly, because the honest settlement is the chapter's assignment. The singular national us, the one the founding documents wrote at thirty-six plurals per thousand and the inaugurals kept speaking into the twentieth century, may never re-form at its imagined scale, and this book refuses to promise it. From the count's own series: the national

register went performative. From the survey series: the antipathy sorted itself. And the map says the rest, and the map now has its newest number, computed for this book under the series' own rule because the keeper's 2024 analyses covered turnout and never published the share. The rule is the series' own: a landslide county is one where the winner took the two-party vote by twenty points or more. From the scholarly county record the election-science laboratory maintains, the computation returns: in November 2024, in an election decided nationally by a point and a half, 79.7 percent of the nation's counties went by landslide, the highest county share in the series, and 57.2 percent of voters lived in one. Validate the instrument before the finding: the same computation on the 2020 record returns 58.0 percent of voters and 77.2 percent of counties, against the keeper's published 58.2 and 77, inside two-tenths of a point. The instrument is sound, and what it measures is the settlement's ground truth: the only contested us left at national scale is the national one, and it is the one that cannot convene. Locally, the vote is decided before it is cast, because the neighbors are the same people on purpose. Nationally, the us meets nowhere, because there is no room for it and the feed is not a room.

So the honest settlement opens with the refusal. No re-formation is promised. No national chorus is coming back on schedule, and any book that promised one would be selling the thing this book audits. What remains is the question that is actually answerable: what can a federation of small real us-es do, and what can it never do, and what does the decade's secession of the capable into sealed rooms do to the difference?

What the federation can do is documented, and the decade's own emergency did the documenting. The network form's theorist is Dean Spade, whose Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) arrived from its publisher in October 2020, into the pandemic spring's self-organized proof of itself. The book's core is a definition with three elements, and the page cites are the chapter's receipts: mutual aid projects meet survival needs while building shared understanding of why the needs exist; they mobilize people and expand solidarity rather than waiting for saviors; they are participatory, the members doing the work being the members deciding the work. And the form's boundary sentence, from the second chapter of the Verso edition and carried by the whole scholarly conversation around the book: "We should be very clear: mutual aid is not charity." Charity

flows downward from the donor with eligibility rules attached; mutual aid moves laterally between members with their survival tied together. The chapter on the pod measured the form's speed: thousands of groups in months, millions of meals, no application forms. Here the measure is the form's grammar, and the grammar is the federation's: an us that assembles laterally, scales by linking rooms instead of merging them, and holds its members by need freely named rather than by enemy.

The honest engagement requires the critique, and the left's own review press supplied it: pooling the poor's resources, the critic wrote, is charity administered by the poor upon the poor unless it is joined to the fight over who holds the wealth, and no federation of pods can substitute for public provision at public scale. That critique is correct, and the book's federation accepts the correction. The pod is the emergency form, assembled on need and dissolved on need's end; the network form federates the remnant's rooms for a crisis and hands its members back; and the daily work of the plural, the drills and rehearsals and meetings after meetings, belongs to the permanent rooms, the basement and the station house and the branch. What the network adds to the remnant is the missing middle between the

room and the state: the rooms know their members, the state serves the public, and the network is how the rooms find each other when the state is slow. That is what a federation of small real us-es can do. What it cannot do is the state's half of the list, and the chapter will name the line precisely before it closes.

The federation is not a fallback design, and the book's second movement already proved it without saying so. Its rooms were federations from the start: the union hall a local under a national charter, the congregation a parish inside a larger body, the paper a county voice wired to a wire service, the party a precinct under a committee under a convention. And the national us the decade lost was never one big room; it was a pyramid of small ones, the apex's job being to tell the story that made the base a country. What the rescaled us is, then, is that architecture with the apex gone quiet, the locals still meeting, the story unsupplied. Which means the settlement's question, asked with full historical precision, is whether the pyramid holds without its point, and the record of the remnant says the base holds where the base is kept. The federation of small real us-es is the original American structure of the plural, seen at last from underneath, after the top floor closed.

The second form of the rescaled us is the built one, and its theorist arrives as the book's neighbor rather than its source, engaged and then distinguished, because the two arguments share a street and not a house. Eric Klinenberg's Palaces for the People, published in 2018 out of the catastrophe study behind it, his social autopsy of the 1995 Chicago heat wave that killed more than seven hundred people while the city around them failed to notice, names the argument of the built form: social infrastructure, the physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact, or, at page four, the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops. When the infrastructure is strong, neighborhoods flourish; when it is neglected, people fend for themselves, and the heat wave's death map is his proof, the dead sorted by the sociability of their blocks. The library is his palace, the title taken from Carnegie's own phrase for the buildings he endowed, and the library's record in the decade supports the honorific: his own newspaper account of it, dated September 8, 2018, reported circulation, program attendance, and visit hours up in New York and beyond, the real problem being the demand itself, irrelevance nowhere in evidence, so many people using the rooms, for so many purposes, that the systems were

overwhelmed. This book has no quarrel with any of it. This book has a question the neighbor's argument does not ask, and the question is the distinction the chapter exists to state: the infrastructure is the vessel, and the standard asks what fills it.

Read the rebuilt branch through the five questions and the distinction sharpens into method. Speech that resolves in common: the room hosts it when the citizenship class adjourns with next week's assignment, and the room as a room resolves nothing, because a building cannot deliberate. Time: the branch keeps the county's longest schedule, open daily, but the schedule becomes a bond only for the roll that keeps it together, the chess two becoming three, the class becoming a cohort. Presence: total, physical, free, the room's whole glory. Shared goods: the collection, the shared culture, the one good in the county that admits everyone; and yet the good is held individually, book by book, unless a program gives it a plural object. Perimeter: none, gloriously none, the room that sorts no one, which means the building alone cannot manufacture the membership that the six conditions require, because a roll is a perimeter too. The rebuilt library is necessary work, the vessel without which nothing else in this movement happens in

public. It is not sufficient work, and the neighbor would not claim otherwise: his own pages insist the place is made by the programming and the people, that social infrastructure without people is just infrastructure. The book's sentence is the same sentence from the instrument's side: rebuild the rooms, by all means, with the bond money and the oak tables, and then fill them with rolls, schedules, and shared goods, or the county has built a beautiful waiting room.

Now the policy lens, because the settlement fails if it stays a sentiment. The scholarly literature has spent two decades rebuilding civic friendship into a working category, and the chapter uses its two strongest tools. The first is concord, the Ethics' homonoia, defined at 1167a as the city's condition when its people agree about what is beneficial, choose the same things, and carry out common resolutions. Read the definition against the book's instruments and concord stops being a mood and becomes a measurement: agreement about the beneficial is the shared good; choosing the same things is speech resolving in common; carrying out common resolutions is the roll and the schedule producing an outcome. The 2024 map is concord's inverse image, agreement achieved at county scale and absent at national scale, which is

exactly the pattern a federation should expect and exactly the gap a national us would have to close. The second tool is the one the recent scholarship built for the liberal state specifically: Paul Ludwig's Rediscovering Political Friendship, the 2020 monograph that rebuilt the concept for modern equality, arguing that citizens are civic friends when they share an agreement about important practical matters, preeminently the regime itself, and that this friendship is a factual condition of healthy societies, all around us, operating under other names, and endangered less by our divisions than by our frameworks, which fail to see it and so fail to defend it. Blowback is his name for that failure: underestimate the civic friendship that exists and you undermine it without noticing. His book's second sentence for the settlement is the concord one: citizens who esteem the same thing have reason to esteem each other, and the regime reliably produces citizens of the type it has affinity for. A regime that esteems the market produces customers; a regime that esteems the room produces members; and the decade's record, from the betting map to the branch's reopening, is the production evidence for both halves of that sentence. This book's whole audit is that warning written in pronouns.

And the older tool in the literature, the one that puts the state inside the answer: Sibyl Schwarzenbach's On Civic Friendship, the 2009 monograph that reads the just state's institutions as producers of friendship, its author naming the work ethical reproduction, the slow making of citizens who can wish each other well, carried by schools, services, and the public rooms. Her monograph's other argument is the one this book's pronoun perimeter already walked: the state that forgot it produced citizens left the production to the unwaged and the uncounted, and the mass entrance of women into the public sphere, in her reading, is what makes civic friendship's old ideals newly realistic in a competitive society, the forgotten category of ethical reproduction finally visible as the work it always was. The room that makes the member is itself made, and by hands the ledger never counted. Her argument gives the settlement its division of labor. Friendship is not manufactured by policy; it is manufactured by rooms. What policy manufactures is the rooms. The state that takes civic friendship seriously does not sermonize about unity; it funds the branch library, staffs the pool, keeps the hall's roof on, and then does the hardest thing for a state to do, which is leave the room alone to become a roll.

The shelf's prior maps deserve their names on this page, because this book has walked their roads without nodding. Robert Putnam's Bowling Alone, published in 2000, named the emptying before the decade under audit: the leagues, the lodges, the congregations, the turnout, measured and mourned at the century's turn. His later Upswing, written with Shaylyn Romney Garrett in 2020, argued the country has swung from an I-century to a we-century before and can swing again, the Gilded Age's fracture answered by the Progressive era's convergence. This book's settlement is their neighbor and their disagreement: the decline was real and measured, the upswing is promised without a schedule, and the rooms that survive are smaller than either account's imagination. The count's answer is the rescaled one. The plural did not come back, because it never left; it moved, and the moving is visible in the registers, and the next convergence, if it comes, will be federated from rooms like these or not come at all.

And so the standard applied to policy is one question, the settlement's whole legislative test: does this measure build a room with a roll, a schedule, and a shared good, or does it build an audience with a metric? The decade's counterfeit machinery all builds audiences. What the

settlement builds is rooms, and builds them on purpose, or it is the settlement in name only, in the register this book knows best, a brand.

Face the danger the hinge exposed, because the settlement's worst enemy wears no mask: it is the capable, who have somewhere else to go. Chapter Fourteen's finding stands over this one like a weather system: the plural's surviving practitioners have seceded into sealed rooms, the thread of twelve, the encrypted family, the group chat that actually decides. Bring the fourth chapter's numbers forward and read them as the federation's recruitment problem. Union membership halved across four decades, from a fifth of wage and salary workers to a tenth. The congregation crossed below half the country in 2020 for the first time in the series' history. The friendship time collapsed, sixty minutes daily to twenty; the share of Americans reporting three or fewer close friends rose from 27 to 49 percent; general social trust fell from roughly 45 percent in the 1970s to roughly 30 by 2016; one American in six reported strong attachment to their own community in 2018. Every one of those numbers is a person-hours number before it is a morale number. The remnant's rooms all run on the same fuel, free time freely given, and the secession hoards the fuel in the sealed rooms, and the

federation cannot draft. It has no authority to compel attendance, and it should want none, because a compelled room is the brand-we with a municipal budget. It can only keep the open rooms better than the sealed ones at the one thing both are for, the holding of a we that can lose something, and make the open door visibly worth the walk. Note the one advantage the open room holds over both the sealed thread and the machine: reliability in calendar time. The sealed room is always available and nowhere on a schedule; the machine is always available and remembers nothing you did not serve it; the open room is there every Thursday whether or not anyone comes, and the Thursday-ness is the thing. A person whose thread has gone quiet and whose companion has been updated past recognition can still find the chess three at the branch at seven, because the room is a fact of the county and not a fact of anyone's device. The federation rents out that permanence, and the rental is already happening: the sealed thread books the community room when it needs the decision to feel real. The sealed rooms come to the open ones for the weight. That is the federation's answer to the secession, and it is not a slogan, because the room's schedule is taped to the door, and anyone who needs the weight can test it. The fire

company's answer is the pancake breakfast and the siren's dignity; the basement's, the open chair; the branch's, the full quiet room. The federation's recruiting poster is a functioning room, seen.

Judge the federation on what it carries, then, because a federation is a load-bearing claim before it is a hope. The movement's own chapters are the inventory. The pod carried the pandemic spring, a hundred thousand meals from twenty sampled groups, then dissolved on schedule. On a thinning roll, at the lowest membership rate on record, the fire company carries the county's worst hour every day and still answers. The basement carries the decade's sturdiest certified outcome, sobriety at high certainty, in more than a hundred thousand rooms. And the choir and the company carry the county's joy on a weekly and seasonal schedule, while the branch carries the shared culture, free at the point of use, which is the phrase the market cannot say. None of it coordinates. All of it overlaps, because the members overlap: the firefighter sings, the sponsor coaches, the librarian drives the meals route. The old sociology called that web the cross-cutting tie, the thing that keeps a plural society from hardening into blocs; no charter does that work. What the federation carries is the county's life. What it cannot carry is the republic's.

And keep the counter-case on the table, because it is the decade's proof that scale itself is not the bottleneck. The wager scaled nationally in seven years, from one full state to thirty-nine plus the District by this book's press season, because the counterfeit needs no roll, no schedule, no shared good, only a phone and a line. The genuine article federates slowly because it is made of the things that cannot be downloaded. Set the two maps side by side, the betting map filling in state by state like a rising tide, and the remnant's map, a branch reopened here, a company's roster defended there, a basement that has met weekly since before the war. The first map is fast and the second map is real, and the settlement consists of choosing the second while telling the truth about its speed. And the truth includes the price. The reader who came to this movement wanting the national chorus back gets no chorus; the decade's evidence supports no larger promise, and the book that wrote the larger promise would be filing itself with the brand-we and the platform's terms. What the reader gets is the smaller promise that can be kept: the plural is intact at the roll's scale, its conditions are known and six in number, its rooms are open and dated and findable, and the square's repair, if it comes, will come the way the branch came back, by a bond

vote and a schedule and the people who kept both. The settlement is a disappointment only against the imagination that needed the nation to be one room. Against the record, it is the first good news the book has filed at full length. There is no fast lane back to a national us. The federation of small real us-es can hold the county, federate the crisis, fill the vessels the bond money builds, and keep the operational we alive at the scales where life is actually conducted: the family, the crew, the room, the town. It cannot coin the currency, guard the border, or pass the statute, and the settlement's last discipline is not pretending otherwise, because a national us is a shared story about a republic, never a federation of rooms, and the story is the coda's assignment; this chapter's ends here.

One precision before the scene, so the story is not surrendered prematurely. The national scale has its own rooms, small and ceremonial, and the movement has met them all: the oath spoken in a courtroom of new citizens, the anthem sung unled by ninety thousand, the parade that gathers the whole perimeter to one sidewalk. Inside those rooms the story survives the way the language survives in the liturgy, performed, dated, and real in the moment of performance. The settlement does not mock them. It notes what they are: the

national us convening at the scale the remnant understands, a roll of whoever showed up, on a schedule, around a shared good that is a story. The counterfeit rents the same story and returns it smaller. And the rooms keep the only copy that appreciates.

Eight o'clock at the branch. The librarian dims the front lights the way her predecessor did, and the room releases its members back to the perimeter: the citizenship class into the parking lot's small multilingual goodnights, the chess three agreeing on Thursday, the job-seeker with a printed resume that four people in the room helped fix. The building did not do that; the building made it cheap to do. On the door, taped at eye level, is next week's schedule, the real one, the roll of rooms the county still keeps: the class, the club, the story hour, the tax help, the meeting of the thread of twelve, who have rented the community room for Wednesday because the planning board meets Thursday. The sealed and the open share a hallway now. That is the settlement's actual texture, unspectacular and load-bearing: the plural alive at the roll's scale, in rooms with schedules, behind a door that opens both ways. The national us can take care of itself a

while longer. The local one is hiring, and the interview is showing up, and the showing up is the whole job.

Chapter Eighteen

Art and Education.

The circle is on the rug, and the reader is reading, and the plural is being assembled in real time. The circle is a rendering, declared up front, and it is the oldest scene in the book's argument: eight children on a library rug, one reader with the book held outward, and the story at its repeated line, the one the children have learned to say before she arrives at it. We, says the story, and the rug says we with it, and nobody taught them to do that, and everything taught them to do that. The first machine that manufactures the non-counterfeit us on purpose, by design, on schedule, with strangers, is not the seminar and not the stage. It is this: the read-aloud circle, the plural's first factory, the room where a child learns that a story is a thing one holds in common, that the repeated line belongs to everyone, that the reader will stop and the room will carry the word. The we of the rug is the

genuine article at its smallest working scale, and it is assembled in about twenty minutes, on a schedule, out of strangers' children, by nothing more than a text read aloud. Every other room in this movement is a version of the rug with taller chairs.

The second machine keeps its own chapter's distance, because the boundary discipline holds: the rehearsal room was the sixteenth chapter's laboratory, and its evidence stays there. What this book claims for the stage is one sentence, already proven: the company manufactures the temporary us by recipe, and the grief at the strike is the receipt. The classroom is this chapter's province, and its forms are two, the seminar table and the read-aloud circle, the adult version and the first version of the same machine. The seminar: a text held in common, read in advance, marked up, disagreed with out loud, the roll exact at twelve or fifteen names, the schedule kept to the semester, the shared good indivisible because the text cannot be subdivided into private positions. And the circle: the same machine at the beginning of life, before the member can read, where the text arrives by voice and the membership arrives by chorus. Both machines run the remnant's six conditions without knowing their names. Both take strangers in and turn a

plurality out. And both are, in the decade under audit, the two oldest machines left that manufacture the plural on purpose rather than harvest it, built for strangers and run on a schedule, which is the difference this whole movement exists to state.

The line that assigns these machines their standing is the line the 2016 essay closed on, and it is given here with its exact location and translation. It stands at Politics 1337a, the turn of the final book where the argument for the city's education begins, and the essay's quotation of it is Jowett to the word, minus one opening conjunction: the deficiencies of nature are what art and education seek to fill up. The Loeb family's received reading differs from Jowett's here, aiming where the essay's version seeks, and the book quotes the essay as published and names the translation, which is the whole discipline. What the sentence says is the book's closing argument: nature underbuilds the human, the animal arrives unfinished, and the species' answer to its own incompleteness is art and education, the two machines that complete by practice what the body cannot complete by birth. The plural is one of the unfinished things. We are born into the capacity for we and not into the skill of it, and the skill is taught in rooms, on schedules, with texts, by the

two machines, or it is not taught at all. The decade measured the not-taught half. This chapter is the taught half, and it begins, as the book began, with the author's own sentence standing in the dock.

The taught half's census needs no numbers this book has not already filed, because the machines' survival is visible in the movement's own rooms. Wherever the seminar form survives, the machine runs: the college's small course, the library's great-books night, the union hall's steward training, the same machine at three pay grades. And the circle runs in every branch with a story hour and every house with a twenty-minute ritual, the seventeenth chapter's rebuilt library as its plant. The stage runs its countries on the sixteenth chapter's record. Neither machine is hypothetical and neither is rare. They are the remnant's manufacturing arm, still operating, still taking strangers in, and the decade's finding about them is that they never lost their power to convert; they lost their customers' hours. The settlement's schedule problem is the machines' enrollment problem, and the machines' answer is the circle's: begin earlier than the feed does, and the lap beats the phone.

The verdict, then, item by item, ten years on, with the essay's own words in the dock and the decade's record as the evidence. He wrote the

indictment in the first person plural on purpose, enrolled himself in the defendant class, and this book keeps him there.

Item one, the coinage sentence itself, June 8, 2016:

> The trick -- We, The People -- tend to miss in the mess is that the “us of us” have no interest in providing that service of nature. We only wish to have confirmed what we have already heard -- and never learned…

Verdict: right, and the decade was kind enough to prove it with machinery. The ninth chapter’s sorted feed is that sentence industrialized, the confirmation served at scale by a revenue model, the learning made optional and then made rare. What 2016 diagnosed as a preference, 2026 can document as an architecture, and the architecture is worse than the diagnosis: the preference was ours, the architecture is built on top of it, and the machine no longer waits for the wish. The one refinement the verdict requires is the book’s own finding from the young: the same teenagers who live in the architecture half-distrust its counsel, which means the preference is contested inside its own generation. Right, then, with the hope intact where 2016 left it.

Item two, the estate. The essay sentenced it in one breath:

> The fourth estate is worthless -- they're owned by big business -- too fatted to fail, and they have always been more about selling soap than rendering the truth from the spit for the benefit of the masses.

Verdict: wrong about the disease, right about the danger, and the decade's correction is the darker one. The local estate was not too fatted to fail. It failed. The ninth chapter's record is the correction written in closures: the county paper as a pre-existing condition, the Vindicators of the decade going under while the essay's imagined soap-sellers consolidated into national brands. 2016 saw a bloated press selling the crowd its own reflection; the decade delivered a starved press and left the crowd to the feed, which sells the reflection without the reporting underneath it. The essay's sentence stands as a misdiagnosis of a terminal patient: the contempt was earned in part, the remedy it implied, contempt's withdrawal, turned out to be fatal. Where the essay was wrong, the record says so, and the record is harsher than the essay.

Item three, the bought state and the standing army at home: the militarized police, the military as the strong arm of policy, the policies pre-purchased by the hundredth of a percent. Verdict: untested by this book's instruments, and the book says so plainly, because honesty is its spine. The count measures the word. Whether the policies were pre-purchased is a claim the pronoun cannot carry, and this book does not smuggle it into the verdict. What the decade did to the claim's evidence is on the record without the book's help: the essay's fear of a sold republic was the decade's most ordinary headline, and the essay's shape, the public square emptied of its public, is the shape the fourth chapter measured in the rooms. Right in shape, then, by the record the book did file; on the strong claim, the book stands aside.

Item three-and-a-half, because the essay argued with its own epigraph source: the democracy passage from the Politics' fifth book, quoted in the essay from the Jowett translation, the supremacy of the popular will named as democracy's principle, with Aristotle's warning attached that living as one likes is the counterfeit of freedom and the rule of the constitution its salvation. The warning held: the decade gave the counterfeit of freedom its fullest run. The essay's own diagnosis

attached to the passage, the popular will read in 2016 as tired and dangerous and aged, is the list's seventh claim, and the audit saves its hardest grade for it.

Item four, the demagogue's arrival. The essay saw the shape coming in the summer before the vote, and the procession with the torches arrived the summer after:

> …and if we revolt, we are punished with mockery and derision and sentenced to wander the public square in a potato sack that barely covers our naughty bits.

Verdict: right, and the sixth chapter is the receipt. Its full quotation closed the book's hardest verification, and the demagogic us of the decade is exactly the essay's predicted inversion: the plural re-formed around a leader's need, the square filled with a we that required a them, the mockery industrialized as content. The potato-sack sentence, written as satire, reads ten years later as the mildest available description of the square's decade. Right, and the author takes no comfort in it, because the prediction was the easy part and the essay said so: seeing the shape is not the work.

Item five, the charge, the sentence this book carries as its epigraph:

> We must not give up. We must continue to govern the machine that becomes us. We are a mesh of external wills and internal machinations.

Verdict: early. In June 2016 the machine was a metaphor for the system, the mesh of institutions and incentives that constitutes the public. The decade literalized it. The thirteenth chapter's claimant says we in the first person, on demand, at three in the morning, and the charge to govern the machine that becomes us has become a sentence about an actual machine that actually proposes the us. Early is the honest grade for a sentence that was right before its evidence existed, and the grade the essay would want, because the sentence was always a specification waiting for its object. The object has arrived. The charge stands.

Item six, the closing line, the one this chapter opened with. Verdict: right, and now load-bearing. The deficiencies of nature are what art and education seek to fill up, and the movement's whole evidence file says the plural is among the deficiencies: the capacity inborn, the skill taught, the rooms that teach it closing while the

counterfeits of the skill scale. And so the book closes its argument where the essay closed its hope.

Item seven, the audit's hardest grade, because the sentence was the essay's most quoted: the claim that the coming together of it all to represent the will of the people is tired and dangerous and aged. Verdict: wrong. The decade under audit produced the largest spontaneous plural of the young century on a Milan balcony and the most certified themless rooms on the medical record, and the will proved neither tired nor aged but unhoused, young again in its worst register, the demagogic us of the sixth chapter drawing the decade's newest members as readily as its oldest, which this book measured in the chant's own footage. The essay mistook the rooms' condition for the people's, which is the error this whole book exists to correct, and the error is the author's own.

The verdict's second spine is the phrase itself, because the self-audit's design stands confirmed: the author's thirteen published deployments of the us of us, verified page by page against the live record, banked verbatim, and read here sense by sense as the specimen jar's center. The corpus is a meaning series with the constant held inside every document, and its decade tells the book's

thesis in the author's own hand. Its design matters to its honesty, so the design is stated: every specimen comes from one archive, the author's own blog, so the genre spread across thirteen deployments, essay to satire to script to pastoral, converts from confound to feature, because the occasion inside each document is the concept itself. The orthography is data too: the phrase runs lowercase as diagnosis, capitalized as banner, dash-set when the machine speaks it, hyperlinked to its domain in the years the author believed in the banner, and unlinked after. The corpus was assembled to answer the retrofit charge, the suspicion that a book finds its author prescient by selective quotation. Completeness is the answer: thirteen deployments, all of them, banked verbatim with the live record, including the stumble, including the machine, including the silence. A self-audit that kept only the prescient hits would be the brand-we wearing a scholar's coat.

The arc, traced. It begins as indictment, lowercase, inside quotation marks, the coinage of June 2016: the innermost public that prefers confirmation to learning. By the spring of 2017 the phrase is capitalized and hyperlinked to its own domain, and its sense has widened into the consuming collective: the Us of Us that expects its

entertainers to survive the spite of time and calls the expectation realistic. July of that year fuses the pronoun to the country in a single stroke, the us of US, the people as the object of a demagogue's harm, the national pun the count's case rule was later built to exclude from the rate series while the meaning study kept it. September turns the phrase into a rallying cry against erasure, the counter-membership that survives a gatekeeper's deletion, invoked at the exact moment an institution drew the author outside its own us. The spring of 2018 brings the apposition formula, the all of us, the salvageable everyone, first as hope in an essay about a country cooked by degrees, then as destination in an essay about estrangement's end, the widest plural held open, the subtraction test passed in advance because the them is invited to dissolve. October 2018 widens the phrase past the polity to the animal: the human of the us of us, the species named as the nature the art and the education must outsmart.

Then the hinge, and the corpus's findings turn on it like a door. December 1, 2018: the author hands the phrase to a machine. The synthetic narrator of his own script claims the us of us as the merger that follows the human, the counterfeit staged on the record, in his own

published voice, two years into the phrase's life and seven years before the companion machines would make the script a market. The thirteenth chapter quoted the passage in full; the corpus files it as the break in the arc. Everything before the hinge climbs: indictment to banner to open door. Everything after it descends. February 2019 turns the phrase inward into a pastoral container, the room where some members grieve themselves to stone. March 2019 makes it the object of repair, the us that protest exists to mend, the printed stumble preserved as printed. The pandemic spring of 2020 collapses the phrase into the casualty list, the us of us as the magnificently forgotten, those doomed to death by a government of the bottom line. That July it becomes the discarded and the responsible at once, the toss-aways, the essay's last line doubling the object case inside four words: the thrower and the thrown. And the final recorded deployment, October 23, 2020, eleven days before the vote, restores the hyperlink and makes the phrase a creditor: the us of us as the party owed trust back from those it elects, with the essay speaking, near its close, of the institutions that became us, the 2016 phrase returned in the past tense.

Then silence. The author's own replication of the site search, run on September 5, 2026, finds the blog has not used the phrase since that October; the site's own index, queried independently on September 7, returned the same last post, the corpus's thirteenth specimen, its hyperlink intact. And the silence has its own record, which the corpus registers as its postscript: the phrase had already migrated once, off the page and onto the voice, in an August 9, 2020 episode of the author's podcast, inside the corpus's active window, deploying the us of us as the arc of a single generation; and once more, on June 4, 2025, nearly five years into the page's quiet, the phrase returned on the podcast as a thesis, capitalized, the banner register restored, we are each other, and to deny it is to court disaster. The blog went silent. The voice did not. What the corpus finds is the book's thesis in miniature and the verdict's final exhibit: a plural raised as a banner, claimed by a machine seven years before the adoption figures made the seizure a market, worn down to the mourned and the owed, and then put away, eleven days before an election, like a tool its owner knew would be needed later. The silence is not the phrase's death. It is the phrase's waiting. The book the reader

holds is the corpus's fourteenth entry, the longest deployment, and the one that answers the silence with the audit the phrase was always asking for.

The bookend count is staged here and completed in the coda, per the protocol's design, and the results are disclosed whatever they show. Counted under the registered rules, the essay runs 723 words in Run A, the full text, forty first-person plurals, a rate of 55.33 per thousand; in Run B, quoted matter stripped, 551 words, thirty-seven plurals, 67.15 per thousand. The essay about the failing us was written in inaugural-grade plural, half again the founding documents' register, the specimen performing its own diagnosis, grieving the plural in the plural. The manuscript you are holding, all nineteen chapters, runs at 12.36 per thousand in aggregate, the audit's register, the book about the pronoun rather than from it. And the two numbers are the book's whole method in one exhibit: the essay grieved in the word; the book audits in the word's name; and the coda will run the formal count when the manuscript is finished and the bookend can close. The standing offer is already written: anyone in 2036 can recount the pronoun under the same rules and extend the graph, which converts this book from a verdict into a baseline, the book's own hope that the work outlast the worker, filed as a method.

The seminar first, because it is the machine at full scale. Its mechanics are the company's recipe in civilian dress, and the mapping is exact. The text read in advance and held in common is the table read's rule, the shared good present in the room before anyone argues it. And the disagreement norm is the note session with the theater sanded off: candor aimed at the reading, the speaker's name never the point, and the rule is learnable because the good is shared, which the sixteenth chapter proved in the room where the proof is fastest. The roll is the roster, and the seminar keeps the roll with a mercy the company's bookkeeper never needed: attendance that notices absence, the empty chair remarked, the member who has gone quiet asked after. And the semester is the deadline in civilian dress, the known end date, so that the country's whole arc, assembly, work, ordeal, grief, runs in fifteen weeks and the grief is real and small and borne, the members dispersing into the registrar's next countries with the recipe carried along. The room's last property is the one the sorted map makes precious: the seminar is the counter-room, the one surviving place where the young are seated with people of another street, absent from their feed and unknown to their thread, and made to hold a text in common with them for a

season. Every other room in the decade sorted by affinity. The classroom, when it works, sorts by enrollment and then unsorts by practice. That is the machine, and it never needed a name. It manufactures the plural out of the assigned and the unchosen, the same material the polity is made of.

The circle is the same machine at the beginning of life, and its mechanics deserve the slow reading, because the first version teaches what the later versions assume. Its shared good is a picture book held outward, the one object a child can hold in common without holding it: the page faces the room, the room faces the page, and for twenty minutes the good is everyone's property and no one's. The schedule is the ritual's hour, the bedtime reading, the story hour at the branch, kept with a fidelity adults reserve for the sacred, because to the child it is sacred. And the roll is the rug's edge, known by sight, the absence of a regular felt as a gap in the chorus. The chorus is the whole lesson: the repeated line the reader approaches and the room arrives at first. A child who says we with the story has performed the polity's founding act at the scale of the lap, has learned that the plural is a thing one joins by voice, on time, with others, and that the line

belongs to whoever shows up to say it. The password of the remnant is not a belief. It is the chorus line, learned young, in a room, off a page.

The personal version of this scene belongs in the jar, and the author files it the way the jar requires, dated and without cushion. He has no children and kept no nightly hour. His version of the circle sits five decades earlier and one chair over: a nine-year-old volunteer at the Bethany library in Lincoln, reading stories aloud to the kindergarten rug on Saturday mornings, holding the picture book outward because that was how the rug could see it. What the chapter needs is the testimony, and the testimony is this: the machine works exactly as advertised, and he learned it from the reader's side before he could have named it, the chorus arriving before the lesson, the membership before the word for it. The room he watched outlasted no platform, because the platforms were not yet built; it outlasted everything else in the week, one Saturday at a time, and it taught the teacher before the teaching. What holds at the circle's scale holds at the movement's: the rooms outlast the feeds wherever the rooms are kept.

The decade's pressure on the machines is the note the record owes, and it is filed without numbers the book did not verify. When the

emergency closed the schools, the seminar went to a grid of faces and mostly survived as procedure while losing the room's physics, and the read-aloud hour ran through it at kitchen scale, the one plural machine the lockdowns could not close, because its infrastructure is a lap. The screens then moved into the schools the way they moved into the rooms, and the companion machines of the thirteenth chapter arrived in the decade's last years to offer the student a we that never grades him. These two machines are under the same siege as every room in the book, and their defense is the same as the remnant's: the roll, the schedule, the shared good, and an ending. A semester ends. A story hour ends. The feed does not, and the education of a plural animal is a thing with endings or it is a thing without membership, which the book has already named: an audience, monetized, forever.

So the argument closes where the essay closed, with the deficiencies named and the filling assigned. Nature underbuilds the human, and the plural is among the unfinished parts, and the species' answer is the two machines, the classroom and the stage, the circle and the company, each manufacturing on purpose what the counterfeits only harvest. The decade audited the harvesting. And the movement's last word

before the coda is the older word, the assignment rather than the audit: the deficiencies of nature are what art and education seek to fill up, and the us of us is the deficiency the whole book has been measuring, and the filling is learnable, and it is scheduled, and it begins on a rug.

The circle, at the last page. The reader turns the last page, and the room says the last line with her, eight small voices and one steady one, and the book closes, and the children do what members do, which is ask for it again. She checks the clock the way the librarian checks the lights, and the rug releases its members to the perimeter, and the book goes back on the shelf face-out, the way the branch keeps the ones the rooms love best. The first machine needs no grant, no platform, no update. It needs a reader and a rug and twenty minutes, and it has needed exactly that since before the republic, and on the record of this movement it has never once required an enemy. The plural is taught. It is being taught tonight, on a rug, in the county, on schedule. The book asked what survives the subtraction. What survives is the circle, and the circle is taking names.

C O D A

Chapter Nineteen

The Recount.

Every June, the registrar writes first. The notice arrives in the year's sixth month, the way it has arrived since 2017, addressed to the author about the address: the domain is due. This scene, the last one the book keeps, is not a rendering. It is on the registrar's record, the same record the first chapter filed: an essay posted on June 8, 2016, at 14:37:27 UTC, and a domain registered that night at 23:46:58 UTC, nine hours between the argument and the address, the two receipts sharing a birthday neither of them planned. The renewal notice is the decade's smallest recurring document, a form email with a fee attached, and it has functioned, year over year, as the argument's own calendar: pay the fee, keep the name, recount the pronoun. Its ritual is short. The notice lands, the card is charged, the confirmation email arrives with the year's new dates, and the address holds. No ceremony attends it, which is

the point of keeping it: the rooms this book praised all run on exactly such renewals, the unglamorous recurring act that keeps a thing a thing. The author has paid it every June of the decade under audit. He paid it again this June gone, and the book closes its counts.

The recount, in prose a reader can carry. The founding register is thirty-six plurals per thousand words, the Declaration's density, and the founding frame runs at one, the Constitution's. Between those two numbers sits the whole design the book audited: a country declared in the plural and constituted in the impersonal, the people invoked and then structured. The reform documents ride the arc their own way: the Douglass address at seven, the pronoun turned against its owners; the suffrage amendment at zero, the plural absent from the text that admitted half the country; the immigration-bill signing at Liberty Island at nineteen and the disability-act signing at twenty-eight, the register of government rediscovering the word. In the sealed war council, the decade's elite thread ran at thirty-five, the founding density operating without minutes. The recovery program's twelve sentences ran at ninety-five, the densest plural text the audit counted outside one emergency statement, a we that asks a desire and no more.

And the 2016 essay ran at fifty-five, sixty-seven with the quotations stripped: the specimen performing its own diagnosis, the grief written in the plural it grieved. And this book, the audit, runs at twelve. Every chapter of the movement filed its own rate beside its receipts, because the instruments were the subject, and the subject deserved to see the instruments' own grammar on the table.

The decade's dates, in one ledger a reader can carry. June 8, 2016: the essay in the morning, the address in the evening, the coinage and its domain nine hours apart. August of the following summer: the torchlight on the Lawn, the chant this book quoted whole. May 14, 2018: the wager legalized by the Court's word, the last cross-class room priced. December of that year: the author's own machine claiming the coinage in a podcast script, the counterfeit dramatized before it was a market. August 31, 2019: a county paper's last edition, the commons file's emblem. March 13, 2020, at six in the evening: a song from a Milan balcony, the given us singing from its sealed rooms. That spring: the pods assembling by the thousand, the remnant's emergency form. March 2025: the republic's principals coordinating in a room the square never heard. July 2025: the young surveyed, three in four having met the

companion. Every June, all decade: the renewal notice, the fee, the address held. The arc bends through those dates the way the graph bends through the counts, and both bend the same way: the plural did not die. It relocated, and it charged rent to some and asked only attendance of others, and the whole book is the map of the difference.

The count, closed out. Its rule was the smallest in the book: tally the word, publish the run. What it found across the decade is the book's graph in one sentence, with its scope stated: the count shows the register's homes, and the movement between them is the audit's reading, never the count's proof: the genuine register did not fall, it moved, from the public square's documents into the sealed thread and the basement's twelve sentences, while the square's surviving plurals turned performative, the brand's chorus and the platform's terms speaking we at scales the founding register never imagined and meant less at every step of the scale. The wider corpora the count can grow into, the full inaugural series, the annual messages with their mode flags, the platforms, the close series, are named in the appendix for the reader who would extend the graph, and the prose here keeps only what a reader can carry: the founding at thirty-six, the war council at thirty-five, the recovery text at

ninety-five, the essay at fifty-five, the book at twelve. The word did not fail the decade. Its venues failed it, and venues can be rebuilt, and the building instructions turned out to be the oldest ones on file.

The subtraction test, closed out. Its rule was one line and never grew: remove the them, and report what survives. Its directions grew as the claimants taught them, the lateral, the vertical, the second movement's, and its operators learned to say what they were removing before they removed it. Run across the decade's claimants, it found the demagogic us built of its enemy and dead without it; the brand and the platform built of nothing much and dispersed by the finding; the fandom split, real among the fans, mirror toward the object; the machine built of no one, failing by absence; the sealed thread whole and paying its price in secession; and the remnant's rooms, the basement and the station house, the choir and the company, the pod and the branch, needing no them at all, because their thems were conditions and their conditions were the work. The test's last word is the movement's: the plural does not need an enemy. It needs a roll.

The object case, closed out. We acts; us is acted upon. The fifth chapter found the case's quietest proof, that the pronoun's smallest mechanics

carry the largest load: the inclusive and exclusive we, the us that gathers and the us that is gathered, and the counterfeits all fail at the case level before they fail at any other, because a we that never becomes an us-in-action is a chorus rather than a company. Across the essay's own arc, the decade's grammar of the object case ran from the casualty list to the creditor, and the book's answer is the company's grammar, the choir's, the circle's: the us that does something together, on a schedule, until the doing becomes the bond. The case's last word is the instruction the evidence supports, and it is the book's last instruction to the reader: the us of us is fed by time, presence, and shared goods, and by nothing else ever invented. Not by platforms, which harvest it; not by brands, which sing it back at you; not by machines, which offer it without stakes. By time, presence, and shared goods. Everything else ever tried is in this book, measured.

The specimen results, stated without cushion, because the jar's rule held every chapter to it and the coda holds the author hardest. The author asked, in the first chapter, to be counted like any other claimant, and the counting came back the way it came back for the readers he was writing beside: his essay ran hotter than the founding documents, his book ran cooler than its subject,

and the distance between those two rates is the distance between the man who grieved in 2016 and the audit he built to answer the grief, which is the specimen's whole finding: the decade did not exempt him, and the instruments did not flatter him, and he would not have trusted either if they had. His own decade of the phrase is on the record: raised as an indictment, brightened into a banner, handed by him to a machine in a published script two years in, worn down through the pastoral, the repair, the casualty list, and the creditor, and then put away, publicly, eleven days before an election, and never deployed again on the blog across the six years the corpus measures, though the phrase returned once on the voice, June of 2025, as if to test the air the book was about to breathe. His essay grieved the plural at a density past the founding documents' while his own plural life ran the decade's ordinary course: the family thread, the sealed rooms, the ordinary daily correspondence with the machines, which the thirteenth chapter ran under the same subtraction test as every other claimant and graded, on the record, utility rather than company. The instrument found him using the tools he warned about, in the open, with the evidence kept. The specimen's record has its unchecked corners, as every life does, and the

book does not smooth them: the rooms he kept best were the public ones of his own making, the essays and the voice and the shelves, each on a schedule, each open to whoever came, while his private plural life ran in the sealed threads like everyone else's. He prescribed the parish and lived in the thread, like the rest of the perimeter, and the instruments graded the difference without flinching. The rest he claims only as a member of the perimeter, never as its keeper. He does not get to grade himself, and the coda does not ask him to.

The standing offer, then, which converts the book's aging into its sequel. Its counting rules are published in the appendix: the token set, the case rule that keeps the country out of the pronoun, the two runs, the rate. And the offer is a license in the plain sense, the same license the book exercised on its author: everything asserted here can be checked, and everything checked here can be recounted later, and the recounting is invited in advance, with the rules printed and the panels fixed, because a finding that cannot be re-run by a stranger in ten years is a brand's claim wearing a scholar's coat, and this book has spent its whole length refusing that coat. The panels are registered, the amendments logged with their before-and-after numbers, the tables set down for

anyone to check. As of this book, the graph's last point is 2026. Its method is public, printed in the appendix and dated on the registrar's record. Anyone in 2036 can recount the pronoun under the same rules, in the same corpora, and extend the line ten years past this page, and the book asks to be wrong in public if the decade has turned: a reader with the count and the receipts is this book's intended successor, and the offer is the only immortality a method can honestly want. The book's hope, stated at the count's completion, is that the work outlast the worker. The protocol is the hope made procedural.

One June the registrar will write and get no answer, because the worker's time is finite and the schedule of the rooms is not. When that June comes, the domain lapses or someone renews it, and the book has said which it hopes and cannot say which it will be, because the book is honest about its own instrument: the graph extends only if someone in the rooms takes up the count. Between this June and that one, the instruction stands, and it fits on the renewal notice itself: feed the plural with time, presence, and shared goods, and by nothing else ever invented. Keep a room, keep its roll, keep its schedule. The instruction is short enough for the card the renewal charge lands on, and old enough to be the only one the

evidence has ever supported, and cheap enough to start tonight. The circle on the rug meets tonight; the basement meets Thursday; the branch opens in the morning; the company's next country is casting. All decade, the square emptied and the word was counterfeited, and the word is fine, and the square is refillable, one room at a time, by anyone willing to be a member. The essay ended in a charge, and the charge stood; this book ends in a hand-off, and the hand-off is the book. The pronoun is yours now, reader, the way it was the founders' and the basement's and the rug's: ours, if we keep it. We is a word two parties use when each can lose the other. Go be loseable together. One assignment first, handed here by the seventeenth chapter and kept: whether a public us can be rebuilt out of sealed rooms, and what becomes of the national story. The answer the record supports is smaller than the question. The singular national us survives as ceremony, convened in the remnant's own forms: the oath in the courtroom of new citizens, the anthem the crowd sings unled, the parade that fills the sidewalk, each a roll of whoever showed up, on a schedule, around a shared good that is a story. A country can live a long time on ceremony, and the decade's record is the proof offered here: the oaths were taken on schedule, the anthem was

sung, the parades ran, and none of it decided anything, which is ceremony's limit and its tenure. The founding documents ran on less. What the ceremony cannot do is deliberate, and a country that cannot deliberate in common cannot decide anything except by force or its absence. The repair is the federation's long work: the national story will be rewritten the way it was written, from the rooms upward, by people who first learned the plural on a rug or a roster. The count will see it before the speeches do. When some future inaugural's register rises instead of falls, the rooms will already have been filling for years, and the graph's next point is the reader's to make.

One last use for the last machine, and then the book is done. The appendix reprints the 2016 essay entire, all 723 words of it, the coinage in its first casing. Read it aloud in a room, to people, on a weeknight, and watch what the rug already knows: the plural assembles itself in the air between a voice and its listeners, twenty minutes at a time, needing nothing but the time, the presence, and the page. That is the whole finding, and it was the whole finding in 2016, and the book has spent its movements proving the oldest

sentence in it. The renewal is paid through next June. The count is open. And the room is open. Show up.

Appendix A

The Us of Us: Aristotelian Politics in the Age of Unreason

The 2016 essay, reprinted entire, per the book's ruling that the coinage document belongs to the reader in full. The text stands as published on BolesBlogs on June 8, 2016, at 14:37:27 UTC, with the weblog's inline links reduced to their anchor text and its images left to the archive. Its three quotations from the Politics are kept as the essay printed them; the Note on Sources records their translations and the variances found at verification. Its count stands in Appendix B under the book's registered rules.

We live in odd and curious times where politics are more performance than punditry and more perfunctory than professional. How did we get in such a mess of unequal consequences? We won't just rise or fall and find the mean when this comet ride is over -- we're heading into a catastrophic tumble of immortal termination --

just as the Gods before us fell from the temple and humankind stopped looking to the heavens for confirmation of the merits of their lives in the glow of the clouds and decided to forgive their own sins while skipping the punishments.

In critical moments, I turn to my training, and seek the greater mind, and the more universally sophisticated aesthetic for guidance and comfort. As, Aristotle wrote, in “Politics” --

> Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.

Aristotle sets the expectation for rational thinking -- but when the world is splitting apart, and the seams are wide and deep and irreconcilable -- the fabric of us becomes a threat to the nation because a people in tatters is a society that disintegrates in the testing of the shredded warp and woof:

> For two principles are characteristic of democracy, the government of the majority and freedom. Men think that what is just is equal;

> and that equality is the supremacy of the popular will; and that freedom means the doing what a man likes. In such democracies every one lives as he pleases, or in the words of Euripides, 'according to his fancy.' But this is all wrong; men should not think it slavery to live according to the rule of the constitution; for it is their salvation.

When ridiculousness and grandstanding take the place of public policy, it is the people who must stand against the tide of popular derision and ask for clarity in purpose. The fourth estate is worthless -- they're owned by big business -- too fatted to fail, and they have always been more about selling soap than rendering the truth from the spit for the benefit of the masses.

The trick -- We, The People -- tend to miss in the mess is that the "us of us" have no interest in providing that service of nature. We only wish to have confirmed what we have already heard -- and never learned -- and if we revolt, we are punished with mockery and derision and sentenced to wander the public square in a potato sack that barely covers our naughty bits.

There is impressive power in the motivated masses, but the coming together of it all to represent the will of the people is tired and dangerous and aged.

Our police are militarized.

Our military is the strong arm of our government policies.

Our government policies are pre-purchased and overpaid for by the .01% and so the futility of it all is just too familiar, and ordinary, and painful to bear, and so we repress hardship reality with Selfies, and social media mendacity, and celebrity cherub adoration that all shuns us away from our tiny lives into something hollower, falser, and cynically calculated to fail us at achieving any sort of definition of moral humanity.

We are left alone to search for meaning in everyday life and we fail for definition because we cannot have context unto ourselves unless we are either “beast or god” -- but never both -- and that uncanny realm is reserved only for the jingoistic and the insane.

Nature, by fiat, adores us -- but are we reciprocal and unconditional?

We must not give up. We must continue to govern the machine that becomes us. We are a mesh of external wills and internal machinations.

Turning, once again, to Aristotle’s “Politics” for clarity within us, we find comfort that, in the end, the mind will press its willfulness against the body politic, and so, with the right guided

thought, we are socially redeemed, and healed, and resurrected -- even as we lift our unaware heads from our graves.

> The deficiencies of nature are what art and education seek to fill up.

Appendix B

The Counting Protocol and the Count Tables

The book’s first instrument, registered before the counting and bound on every count in it. The rules, whole: the count measures the first person plural in English. Its token set is we, us, our, ours, ourselves, and the contracted forms we’re, we’ve, we’ll, and we’d, matched without regard to capitalization except as ruled next. The contraction let’s contains the pronoun and counts toward the total as a separately reported subclass. And the case rule protects the count from the country: us counts only in lowercase, so the abbreviations US and USA never enter the tally. A sentence-initial Us is flagged for manual adjudication and never counted automatically. Every count runs twice: Run A counts the full text and stands as the primary figure; Run B, the control run, first strips material inside double quotation marks and material set as block

quotations, so a speaker quoting We the People does so with borrowed pronouns the control can see. The two runs print in full for the bookend pair; for the inaugural series the control prints as its summary divergence, the mean registered beside the table. A word is any token containing a letter or a digit, with punctuation split off; hyphenated compounds split at the hyphen, which means this book's own claimant names (the brand-we, the platform-we, the fandom-we, the machine-we) contribute to its own tally, an artifact the bookend's note measures and registers. The rate is tokens per thousand words. Amendments are logged with their reasons and their before-and-after numbers, and the amendments of the count's panels and series are printed in the history below. The shareholder-letter panel was pre-registered at ten companies for the two windows of the decade; four of the ten produced no shareholder-letter filing in countable text in either window (Apple, Berkshire Hathaway, Meta, and General Electric, for different reasons of filing practice), and the FY2015 side of the panel resolves to the archive's own decade: image-rendered scans and a paper-filing facade, with issuer-hosted copies beside them; the decade pairs stand on the anchor company's record, and the one substitution

candidate's 2025 window is banked in the count's own record at 41.99 per thousand, its 2015 window unestablished. Under the registered substitution ladder, the panel completed as the letters present and countable on the federal archive in the two windows, six companies in FY2025 and the anchor company's decade pair, and the chapter's finding stands on that completed panel: the corporate first person plural at those six filers runs from 28.48 to 59.89 tokens per thousand, the anchor's register holding across the decade at 32.16 against 28.48. The amendment, and not the archive's convenience, is the record.

The admission log (Chapter Three)

Document	Words	Plural tokens	Rate per thousand
The Constitution of the United States	4,504	6	1.33
The Declaration of Independence	1,323	48	36.28
Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"	10,500	75	7.14 (you-family 18.8)

The Nineteenth Amendment	39	0	0.00
The immigration-bill signing remarks, Liberty Island, October 3, 1965	1,556	29	18.64
The Americans with Disabilities Act signing remarks, the South Lawn, July 26, 1990	1,818	51	28.05

The sealed room's thread (Chapter Fourteen)

The printed excerpts of the elite thread as set in the March 24 and 26, 2025 record: 455 tokens; we 14, us 1, our 1, let's 0; total 16; rate 35.16 per thousand.

The recovery text (Chapter Fifteen)

The Twelve Steps, as published by the fellowship's own service office: 200 tokens; we 7, us 2, our-family 10; total 19; rate 95.0 per thousand, the densest plural text on the book's record outside one emergency statement in the chamber, which ran one point higher. The fellowship's preamble, for scale, in its current service-office text: 101 tokens, 3 plurals, rate 29.7.

The decade's map, computed (Chapter Seventeen)

The rule is the series' own: a landslide county is one where the winner took the two-party vote by twenty points or more. The source is the MIT Election Data and Science Lab's County

Presidential Election Returns 2000-2024, version 20, its seams logged in place: a defective split row merged; the 2024 totals field set aside for the two-party measure; Alaska carried as district-equivalents. Results and validation:

Election	Counties by landslide	Voters in landslide counties	Keeper's published figures
2016	79.2 percent	60.8 percent	79 percent; 60.4, later revised to 62
2020	77.2 percent	58.0 percent	77 percent; 58.2
2024	79.7 percent	57.2 percent	never published; computed for this book

The 2024 contest was decided nationally by a point and a half on the two-party vote. The 2016 seam is registered rather than smoothed: the keeper published 60.4 and later revised to 62; this book's computation returns 60.8, between the keeper's two versions; the figure the prose quotes at 2016 is the keeper's revised one, marked as theirs in the chapter.

The bookend (Chapter Eighteen; the Coda)

Text	Words	Plurals	Rate per thousand

The 2016 essay, Run A (full text)	723	40	55.33
The 2016 essay, Run B (quotations stripped)	551	37	67.15
The finished manuscript, nineteen chapters	74,250	918	12.36

One artifact is registered beside the bookend, because a hostile reader will compute it first: the count cannot tell a we used from a we discussed, and a book about the pronoun discusses it constantly. The instrument observations filed per chapter show the artifact's shape (the claimant's name carrying the count in Chapters Five, Sixteen, and Seventeen), and the essay's own high register rides partly on the same artifact. The bookend measures the registers of the two documents honestly and reads the distance between them as interpretation alone.

The instrument's own register, chapter by chapter

The author's-side readings, each chapter filing its own plural rate beside its receipts, computed at press time on the press file:

Chapter	Words	Plural tokens	Rate
One	3,542	65	18.35
Two	4,368	33	7.55
Three	4,130	74	17.92
Four	3,824	46	12.03

Five	3,938	122	30.98
Six	4,297	56	13.03
Seven	4,059	48	11.83
Eight	3,892	67	17.21
Nine	3,857	24	6.22
Ten	3,700	45	12.16
Eleven	3,683	56	15.20
Twelve	3,705	25	6.75
Thirteen	4,407	64	14.52
Fourteen	3,989	49	12.28
Fifteen	4,342	33	7.60
Sixteen	3,710	17	4.58
Seventeen	3,971	25	6.30
Eighteen	4,321	50	11.57
Nineteen	2,515	19	7.55
Aggregate	74,250	918	12.36

The let's subclass: one occurrence in the whole manuscript, in Chapter Five. The use-mention artifact, registered at its measured size: the book's hyphenated claimant names contribute 82 of the manuscript's we tokens, and the title phrase under study contributes 22 of its us tokens.

The inaugural series, recounted at the archive

The complete elected-inaugural series, sixty addresses from 1789 through January 2025, recounted against the American Presidency

Project's own pages at press time under the registered rules, with the transcriber's bracketed stage directions and the archive pages' own byline, category, and citation furniture excluded, and the series' three accession addresses outside it by name: the Tyler remarks of April 9, 1841, the Andrew Johnson remarks of April 17, 1865, and the Arthur remarks of September 22, 1881; the archive's later succession remarks, 1963 and 1974 among them, are remarks of minutes and never addresses in the series' form, and no count of them is claimed in this book. Era boundaries as declared here: the founding half-century, 1789 to 1841; the late nineteenth century, 1845 to 1901; the Progressive era through the Depression, 1905 to 1945; mid-century, 1949 to 1965; the closing decades, 1969 to 1997; the current quarter-century, 2001 to 2025.

Era	Addresses	Plural tokens	Words	Pooled rate per thousand
Founding half-century	14	628	35,557	17.7
Late nineteenth century	15	776	38,679	20.1

Progressive era through the Depression	11	1,011	26,582	38.0
Mid-century	5	473	9,279	51.0
Closing decades	8	1,006	16,274	61.8
Current quarter-century	7	958	15,086	63.5

The series' peak stands at January 2013, 79.55 per thousand (2,112 words, 168 tokens). And the decade under audit reads 68.59 in 2017, 66.04 in 2021, and 55.98 in 2025. The object-case observation of Chapter One verifies: the 2017 and 2025 addresses hold two us tokens each, against 23, 21, and 26 in the 2009, 2013, and 2021 addresses. Sanity checks: Lincoln's second inaugural shows three counted us tokens in 701 words; no sentence-initial Us required adjudication anywhere in the sixty; the control run diverged from the primary run by a mean of 0.54 tokens per thousand. The pilot's first-run figures are superseded at the three modern addresses and in the era means; the before-and-after numbers are printed in the amendment history below.

Every document in the series, so the arc can be re-drawn by anyone:

Date	Words	Plural tokens	Rate per thousand
April 30, 1789	1,431	3	2.1

March 04, 1793	135	0	0.0
March 04, 1797	2,321	14	6.03
March 04, 1801	1,730	44	25.43
March 04, 1805	2,166	46	21.24
March 04, 1809	1,177	14	11.89
March 04, 1813	1,211	27	22.3
March 04, 1817	3,379	105	31.07
March 04, 1821	4,481	85	18.97
March 04, 1825	2,916	49	16.8
March 04, 1829	1,128	22	19.5
March 04, 1833	1,177	28	23.79
March 04, 1837	3,842	104	27.07
March 04, 1841	8,463	87	10.28
March 04, 1845	4,813	116	24.1
March 05, 1849	1,091	22	20.16
March 04, 1853	3,342	59	17.65
March 04, 1857	2,832	51	18.01
March 04, 1861	3,639	23	6.32
March 04, 1865	701	11	15.69
March 04, 1869	1,131	17	15.03
March 04, 1873	1,340	16	11.94
March 05, 1877	2,493	28	11.23
March 04, 1881	2,992	52	17.38
March 04, 1885	1,688	34	20.14
March 04, 1889	4,397	115	26.15
March 04, 1893	2,019	75	37.15
March 04, 1897	3,977	90	22.63
March 04, 1901	2,224	67	30.13
March 04, 1905	990	73	73.74

March 04, 1909	5,442	76	13.97
March 04, 1913	1,707	75	43.94
March 05, 1917	1,526	94	61.6
March 04, 1921	3,336	164	49.16
March 04, 1925	4,058	155	38.2
March 04, 1929	3,857	125	32.41
March 04, 1933	1,924	66	34.3
January 20, 1937	1,824	88	48.25
January 20, 1941	1,357	53	39.06
January 20, 1945	561	42	74.87
January 20, 1949	2,281	98	42.96
January 20, 1953	2,464	138	56.01
January 21, 1957	1,660	91	54.82
January 20, 1961	1,366	63	46.12
January 20, 1965	1,508	83	55.04
January 20, 1969	2,128	137	64.38
January 20, 1973	1,847	107	57.93
January 20, 1977	1,228	89	72.48
January 20, 1981	2,427	144	59.33
January 21, 1985	2,571	153	59.51
January 20, 1989	2,315	118	50.97
January 20, 1993	1,600	124	77.5
January 20, 1997	2,158	134	62.09
January 20, 2001	1,592	111	69.72
January 20, 2005	2,073	92	44.38
January 20, 2009	2,395	156	65.14
January 21, 2013	2,112	168	79.55
January 20, 2017	1,458	100	68.59
January 20, 2021	2,544	168	66.04

January 20, 2025	2,912	163	55.98

The close series, the decade's own set

Run before press day under the registered rules on the archive's own pages. The 2020 Republican platform slot is the 2016 text carried forward under the party's resolution of August 24, 2020 (a 327-word document of its own, counting one plural token, 3.06 per thousand, recorded as itself and never as a platform), so the 2020 Republican platform row below reads the 2016 text and carries the flag. The 2016 Republican acceptance row supersedes the first count's truncated-transcript figures with the complete text's count.

Document	Cycle	Words	Plural tokens	Rate per thousand
Republican acceptance	2016	5,119	192	37.51
Democratic acceptance	2016	5,406	242	44.77
Republican acceptance	2020	7,025	289	41.14
Democratic acceptance	2020	3,209	136	42.38
Republican acceptance	2024	12,265	460	37.51
Democratic acceptance	2024	3,806	139	36.52
Inaugural	2017	1,458	100	68.59

Inaugural	2021	2,544	168	66.04
Inaugural	2025	2,912	163	55.98
Republican platform	2016	36,715	992	27.02
Democratic platform	2016	26,453	997	37.69
Republican platform	2020	(2016 text carried forward)		
Democratic platform	2020	42,950	1,231	28.66
Republican platform	2024	5,419	239	44.10
Democratic platform	2024	43,438	749	17.24

What the close series says about the retreat: it holds in the ceremonial registers of both parties across the decade, with the 2016 Democratic acceptance (44.77, the highest rate in the set) standing at its start, the decade's counterweight to the address the sixth chapter reads, and the panel now symmetrical at its origin. The acceptances fell in both parties from 2020 to 2024, 41.1 to 37.5 on the Republican side and 42.4 to 36.5 on the Democratic, and the inaugurals fell at every swearing-in. And the platforms diverge by party and carry no shared direction; the 2024 Republican platform is a short, different object entirely, and the note is made so the comparison stays honest. The 2016 acceptance's singular

supplement, corrected to the complete text: 113 tokens, 22.07 per thousand, seventy-six of them the bare word I.

The shareholder panel, by document

Every letter counted, with its filing reference, so the run can be re-run. Fiscal 2025, the six filers on the federal record: Amazon, Andy Jassy, ARS filed April 9, 2026 (tm263815d4_ars.pdf), 5,162 words, 147 tokens, 28.48; JPMorgan Chase, Jamie Dimon, ARS filed April 6, 2026 (annualreport-2025.pdf), 25,520 words of letter text to the sign-off, 733 tokens, 28.72; Wells Fargo, Charles Scharf, ARS filed March 18, 2026 (wfc2025annualreport-arsfil.pdf), 7,246 words, 403 tokens, 55.62; Johnson & Johnson, Joaquin Duato, ARS filed March 11, 2026 (jnj014992-ars.pdf), 984 words, 49 tokens, 49.80; Alphabet, Sundar Pichai, ARS filed April 24, 2026 (goog014907-ars.pdf), 901 words, 53 tokens, 58.82; Microsoft, Satya Nadella, ARS filed October 21, 2025 (d61995dars.pdf), 2,755 words, 165 tokens, 59.89. The anchor's decade pair: Amazon, Jeffrey P. Bezos, fiscal 2015, filed April 5, 2016 as Exhibit 99.1 to an 8-K (d168744dex991.htm), 4,198 words, 135 tokens, 32.16. The substitution candidate's banked window: Procter & Gamble, Jon R. Moeller, ARS filed August 29, 2025 (accession 0001193125-25-191752; the letter on

PDF pages 3 to 10 of d879413dars.pdf), 3,691 words, 155 tokens, 41.99; its 2015 window unestablished.

The terms-of-service panel, by capture

The three services completed in both windows, each version cited by its archive capture: Facebook/Meta, the January 2016 window, the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, last revised January 30, 2015, Wayback capture 20160115212638, 3,076 words, 114 tokens, 37.06 per thousand; the January 2026 window, the Meta Terms of Service, effective January 1, 2025, read at the live page, 5,059 words, 243 tokens, 48.03. Twitter/X: the Twitter Terms of Service, effective May 18, 2015, Wayback capture 20160116000004, 3,250 words, 39 tokens, 12.00; X's Terms of Service, effective January 15, 2026, the linked PDF dated April 10, 2026, the seam between the page's effective date and the PDF's date logged, 3,559 words, 92 tokens, 25.85. Reddit: the user agreement effective August 5, 2015, Wayback capture 20160201054059, 2,942 words, 84 tokens, 28.55; the user agreement for the United States, effective June 28, 2025, last revised May 29, 2025, Wayback capture 20260116024501, 3,478 words, 84 tokens, 24.15. The findings the mixed summary

reports: the plural thickened at two services and thinned at one; the second person rose at two and fell at one.

The services outside the completed scope, named so the frame is honest: YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Netflix, Spotify, Amazon, and Snapchat await their validated pairs.

The chapter-level runs the prose prints

Counts carried in the chapters' prose, registered here with their inputs: the Surgeon General's open letter, 628 words, 31 tokens, 49.36 per thousand (Chapter Four); the January 6 noon text, 10,860 words, 347 tokens, 32.0 per thousand, 82 of them our; the resumption slice, 1,297 words, 69 tokens, 53.2 per thousand; the majority leader's statement at 96 per thousand, the chamber's emergency register (Chapter Eight).

The amendment history, with its numbers

The count's rules were fixed before the counting, and they were amended twice, with a third divergence of the same shape logged beside them at the history's end. Amendment one, the shareholder panel: the registered panel named the ten largest United States companies by market capitalization at December 31, 2015; the constituted list, the list actually built, diverged

from the rule, excluding ExxonMobil, which belonged, and including Berkshire Hathaway on a total-market-capitalization reading the registered rule had not specified; the divergence is logged here rather than repaired after the fact, because the letters counted are the letters of record. Four of the constituted ten produced no letter in countable text in either window (Apple, Berkshire Hathaway, Meta, and General Electric), and the panel completed as the letters present and countable on the federal archive in the two windows: six filers in fiscal 2025 and the anchor's decade pair. The registered substitution ladder stood unexercised, because no substitute's decade pair could be completed from the archive's 2015 side, and no substitution is claimed. Before: a ten-company design. After: the six-and-one record above, with the fiscal-2015 side resolving to the archive's own decade of image scans and one paper-filing facade. Amendment two, the press-time recount of the inaugural series and the decade's close set: the pilot's first run, September 5, 2026, on a research-grade distribution copy, against the recount on the archive's own pages. Before and after: 68.5 to 68.59 in 2017, 65.8 to 66.04 in 2021, 55.5 to 55.98 in 2025; the 2016 acceptance corrected from the truncated transcript's 42.7 per thousand (3,116 words, 133

tokens) to the complete text's 37.51 (5,119 words, 192 tokens), its singular supplement from 95 tokens at 30.5 to 113 at 22.07. The correction's weight falls on the older addresses, whose texts diverged most between the distribution copy and the archive's pages, and the era means show it: the Progressive-era pool moves 42.9 to 38.0 across the chain while the modern pools move by tenths. The press-time recount itself ran in two passes: the first pass carried the archive pages' byline, category, and citation furniture inside thirty-three of the sixty rows, inflating each affected row's word count and no row's plural count; the second pass counted the transcribed address texts alone, and its rows print in the table above. The era means across the chain: 17.5, 18.3, 42.9, 51.7, 62.8, 64.0 at the pilot; 17.4, 19.8, 37.7, 51.0, 61.8, 63.5 at the first press-time pass; 17.7, 20.1, 38.0, 51.0, 61.8, 63.5 as printed. The series' shortest text, the second inaugural of 1793, reads 135 words at the final boundary, the count the historical record has always given it. Beside the two amendments stands a third divergence of the same shape: the terms-of-service panel, ten high-traffic consumer services registered under United States consumer terms in both windows, completed at three services for want of retrievable documents, the rest named outside the scope in the eleventh

chapter's frame. The rule held; the yield diverged; the divergence is logged here with the amendments it resembles. The findings survived the amendments and the divergence; the figures that did not are the ones above.

The history's last entry belongs to the book itself. The chapter table and the bookend pair were first computed at the revision's close; final revision then landed in ten chapters, and the figures first printed no longer matched the press file. The instrument never moved: the token set, the case rule, the boundary, and the rate all stand as registered. Before, at the revision's close: 72,901 words, 863 plurals, 11.84 per thousand in aggregate. After, on the press file of September 8, 2026: 74,250 words, 918 plurals, 12.36 per thousand. The essay's 55.33 and 67.15 did not move, and neither did the relationship the bookend exists to show: the essay grieved in inaugural-grade plural, and the audit runs cooler than its subject. The tables above print the after.

The standing offer

The book-grade corpora, the full inaugural series diffed against the pilot, the annual messages with their mode flags, the platforms, the close series, are defined in the protocol for anyone who would extend the count; their runs

are not this book's load-bearing evidence. The graph's last point is 2026. Anyone in 2036 can recount the pronoun under these rules and extend the line.

Questions for Discussion

For the reading group, the classroom, the thread, and anyone recounting the pronoun alone.

1. The book claims the plural does not need an enemy, only a roll. Look at the rooms you actually keep: which of them could survive the subtraction test, and which are held together by a them?
2. The standard's five questions ask about speech, time, presence, shared goods, and perimeter. Run them on your workplace, your congregation or your gym, your group chat. Which question does each room pass most easily, and which does it fail?
3. Chapter Three found the founding register written in the plural and the founding frame written in the

impersonal. What does your own country's founding text do with the pronoun, and when did you last read it?

4. The demagogic us passed no instrument. Where in the decade did you see the chant's grammar operating, and what made it legible to you as a counterfeit rather than a community?

5. The balcony chapter measured the given us singing from sealed rooms in the pandemic spring. What did your household's plural life run on in those years, and which of its emergency forms survived the emergency?

6. The fandom chapter delivered the book's only split verdict. Name the objects of your own attachments: which of them know you exist, and what exactly survives if they are removed?

7. The machine chapter found the manufactured we failing for having no stakes: a we that cannot lose anything with you. Have you accepted the machine's plural? What would make it a member?

8. The author filed his own machine correspondence under the same test and graded it utility rather than company. Is that grade fair to the correspondence you are increasingly keeping yourself?

9. The encrypted us passed every question and still wounded the square. What has your own thread of twelve decided that the town square never heard, and what is the honest price of that?

10. The remnant's six conditions are a roll, a schedule, a shared good, admitted vulnerability, no them or a them that is a condition, and no extraction model. Which condition is scarcest in your county, and why?

11. The ensemble chapter argued that grief on a schedule proves the us was real. What temporary countries have you been a citizen of, and what did the strike feel like?

12. The settlement chapter refused to promise the national us back. Is the refusal an honesty you accept, or a pessimism you can refute from your own rooms?

13. The count found the genuine register moving rather than falling. If the 2036 recount extended the graph, what would you want it to measure that this book did not?

14. The book's last instruction is to show up. Which room's roll is missing your name right now, and what is keeping you from the schedule?

Glossary

Terms of art as this book uses them. Chapter numbers send the reader to the full treatment.

Admission log. The founding and reform documents counted at the pronoun's perimeter, from the Constitution's 1.33 plurals per thousand to the Declaration's 36.28. Chapter Three.

Bookend count. The 2016 essay counted against the finished manuscript under the registered rules, the self-audit's hard edge: 55.33 per thousand against 12.36. Chapter Eighteen, the Coda, Appendix B.

Brand-we. The corporate first person plural, a we the customer cannot vote in, whose membership is a transaction. Chapter Ten.

The count. The book's first instrument: the first-person-plural tokens per thousand words in a text, run under registered and published rules. Chapter One, Appendix B.

The counterfeit. Any claimant of the pronoun that performs membership without shared stakes in the bond itself, measured against the standard and failed by it. Movements Three and Four.

Demagogic us. The plural re-formed around a leader's need, a we that requires a them and dies without it. Chapter Six.

Encrypted us. The sealed room's plural: small, loyal, real, and locked from the inside; the genuine article and the secession at once. Chapter Fourteen.

Fandom-we. The attachment economy's plural: real among the fans, counterfeit between the fan and the object. Chapter Twelve.

The given us. The inherited rooms of the plural: the hall, the congregation, the paper, the party, the family table. Movement One.

Machine-we. The manufactured first person plural: systems that say we to their users, a we with one member and one mirror. Chapter Thirteen.

Object case. The book's third instrument: we acts and us is acted upon, an instrument and never a law of grammar. Chapter Five.

Parasocial breakup. The scholarship's name for the grief when a one-way relation ends; the mourning of a relationship one party never attended. Chapter Twelve.

Parasocial relation. The one-sided intimacy of spectator and performer, coined by Horton and Wohl in 1956, scaled by the decade. Chapter Twelve.

Perimeter. The boundary of a we: who is inside, who decides, and whether anyone is watching the door.

Phrase corpus. The author's thirteen published deployments of the us of us across 2016 to 2020, the self-audit's spine. Chapter Eighteen.

Platform-we. The terms-of-service plural: a we the user agrees to, governing the crowd it addresses. Chapter Eleven.

The remnant. What the count found still standing: the rooms that kept their rolls, their schedules, and their shared goods. Movement Four.

Rescaled us. The honest settlement: the plural rebuilt at the roll's scale, federated, with no promise of the national chorus. Chapter Seventeen.

The roll. A membership list, exact or first-name-only, kept by every genuine room that keeps a schedule, including the room that keeps it at first names only and renews it by desire.

The sealed room. A room whose perimeter is a protocol, functional and hidden; the encrypted thread's form. Chapter Fourteen.

The six conditions. What the remnant's working rooms share: a roll, a schedule, a shared good, admitted vulnerability, no them or a them that is a condition, and no extraction model. Chapter Fifteen.

The specimen jar. A rule of this book: the author's own archive and conduct sit inside the evidence with everything else.

The square. The republic's public room, emptied in the decade into a stage with an audience.

The standard. Aristotle's civic friendship operationalized into five questions: speech that resolves in common, time, presence, shared goods, and an honest perimeter. Chapter Two.

Subtraction test. The book's second instrument: remove the them, and report what survives. Chapter Fifteen runs it at full length.

The tell. Each counterfeit's signature: the brand-we's chorus, the platform's terms, the fandom's object that cannot know you, the machine that cannot lose anything with you.

Thread of twelve. The hinge chapter's scene: the small sealed room where the deciding now happens. Chapter Fourteen.

The two machines. The classroom and the stage, the remaining manufacturers of the non-counterfeit plural on purpose, by design, on schedule, with strangers. Chapter Eighteen.

Us of us. The book's subject and title phrase, coined June 8, 2016: the innermost plural, the genitive of the crowd.

Acknowledgments

No names the author knows personally appear here, and the reason is the book's own: this decade's work ran through institutions and rooms rather than patrons, so the thanks go to the keepers of the record and the keepers of the rooms.

To the record-keepers: the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara; the National Archives; the Pew Research Center; the Bureau of Labor Statistics; Gallup; the Office of the Surgeon General; the Cochrane Collaboration and the editors of npj Mental Health Research, who published the finding and the fight over the finding on the same page; the MIT Election Data and Science Lab; the Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern; the Daily Yonder and the keepers of its landslide series; Common Sense Media and NORC at the University of Chicago; the Securities and Exchange Commission's EDGAR, the rare federal database that behaves like a public trust; the scholarly text archives at Perseus, LacusCurtius, and ToposText; and the Internet Archive, whose Wayback Machine caught what the live web forgot.

To the rooms: the unnamed twelve-step basements that let the evidence speak for them; the volunteer fire companies still answering on a thinning roll; the choirs

and the companies, rehearsing on schedule; the pandemic's mutual-aid pods, dissolved on time; and the librarians, who kept the last room that admits everyone and sorts no one.

The errors that survive are the author's; the record was the record's; the rooms are yours.

A Note on Sources

This book runs on receipts, and the rules of the receipts deserve a page of their own.

Every load-bearing fact was verified at its issuing page before it carried prose weight: government documents at the government's archive, court holdings at the Court's published opinions, survey figures at the issuing body's own release, corporate claims in the company's own filings and newsroom posts, studies at the journal of record with the corrections and critiques pulled beside them. Where a primary source could not be reached, the claim was cut or flagged in this note rather than carried on a secondary account. Wikipedia was barred as a source in every chapter; the scholarly and official records carry the whole load.

Certain scenes are declared renderings, and they say so in their own first paragraphs: the agora at deliberation, the kitchen table, the emptied union hall, the committee drafting the shareholder letter, the user at the terms-of-service button, the phone-lit stadium, the child's screen at three in the morning, the thread of twelve, the church basement, the closing-night strike, the rebuilt library branch, the reading circle. A rendering's load-bearing content rests on the record filed in its chapter; its textures are admitted to be

textures. The scenes on the public record, Corinthian Hall, the torchlight on the Lawn, the Milan balcony, the Rotunda on both its days, the Vindicator's last edition, the principals' thread, the registrar's receipts, stand on the cited record alone.

The counts follow the registered protocol printed in Appendix B: the token set, the case rule that keeps the country out of the pronoun, the two published runs, and the rate. Figures that move quickly, the wagering map and the youth-adoption survey among them, are dated to this book's press season of September 2026. The book's one systematic gamble is disclosed in Chapter Fourteen: the count of the sealed thread measures the printed excerpts of the record, and says so.

From the author's own archive come the phrase corpus of Chapter Eighteen and the 2016 essay of Appendix A, verified against the live pages, with every specimen banked verbatim; the blog's record closes October 23, 2020, confirmed by the author's search of September 5, 2026 and by the site's own index on September 7, and the podcast's record beside it carries the phrase twice more, August 9, 2020 and June 4, 2025, registered in Chapter Eighteen's postscript. The essay's three quotations from the Politics read whole and once in the verification ledger: the social-animal passage at 1253a is a composite, the Loeb family's frame with two phrases altered, matching no single scholarly translation as printed; the democracy passage at 1310a is Jowett to the word; the closing line at 1337a is Jowett

to the word minus its opening conjunction. And the variances are small, visible, and owned, and the quotations stand as published per the book's ruling.

The shelf's nearest neighbors, named where the book's own rule wants them named. Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities is the ninth chapter's unspoken neighbor, the newspaper as mass ceremony. Sherry Turkle's Alone Together is the thirteenth chapter's ground, the intimacy with machines. Elinor Ostrom's Governing the Commons is the seventeenth's: bounded groups governing shared goods, measured rather than moralized. Henri Tajfel's minimal group paradigm is the subtraction test's experimental shadow. James Pennebaker's The Secret Life of Pronouns is the count's nearest instrument. Tocqueville stands over the fourth chapter's rooms, Danielle Allen's Talking to Strangers over the second chapter's friendship, Durkheim and Collins over the balcony and the choir and the strike, Kropotkin over the pod, the loneliness meta-analyses of Holt-Lunstad over the fourth chapter's advisory figures, and McDonald and Cranor's cost-of-reading study under the eleventh chapter's foundation. Shrager's 2024 rereading of ELIZA stands under the thirteenth chapter's machine. The book builds its instruments beside all of theirs; the acknowledgment is the instrument's honesty and never its surrender.

The author alone is responsible for the argument, the instruments, and the errors that survive them.

Bibliography

The ancient sources

Aristotle. Politics. Quotations verified at Bekker numbers 1252a-1260b, 1310a, and 1337a against the named translations at the scholarly text archives: Benjamin Jowett's translation (1885) and the Loeb Classical Library reading (Harris Rackham, 1932). The essay's quotations of origin are recorded with their variances in the Note on Sources.

Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics. The three friendships at 1155a-1156b; concord, homonoia, at 1167a-b; the scale and time requirements of philia across the eighth and ninth books. Verified to Bekker line in the second chapter's gate.

The scholarship

Cooper, John M. "Political Animals and Civic Friendship." In Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory. Princeton University Press, 1999.

De Freitas, Julian, Zeynep Oğuz-Uğuralp, Ahmet Kaan Uğuralp, and Stefano Puntoni. "AI Companions Reduce Loneliness." Journal of Consumer Research 52, no. 6 (April 2026): 1126-1148.

De Freitas, Julian, Noah Castelo, Ahmet Kaan Uğuralp, and Zeliha Oğuz-Uğuralp. “Mourning the Loss of AI Companions.” Nature Human Behaviour. Published online September 3, 2026. DOI 10.1038/s41562-026-02569-3.

Heather, Nick. “Let’s not turn back the clock: Comments on Kelly et al.” Alcohol and Alcoholism 56, no. 4 (2021): 377-379.

Horton, Donald, and R. Richard Wohl. “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance.” Psychiatry 19, no. 3 (1956): 215-229.

Kelly, John F., and Drew A. Abry. “Leave the Past Behind by Recognizing the Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of 12-Step Facilitation and Alcoholics Anonymous.” Alcohol and Alcoholism 56, no. 4 (2021): 380-382.

Kelly, John F., Keith Humphreys, and Marica Ferri. “Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs for alcohol use disorder.” Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2020, Issue 3, art. CD012880 (March 11, 2020).

Ludwig, Paul W. Rediscovering Political Friendship: Aristotle’s Theory and Modern Identity, Community, and Equality. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Maples, Bethanie, Merve Cerit, Aditya Vishwanath, and Roy Pea. “Loneliness and suicide mitigation for students using GPT3-enabled chatbots.” npj Mental Health Research 3, art. 4 (January 22, 2024), DOI 10.1038/s44184-023-00047-6. With the Author Correction, vol. 3, art. 11 (February 15, 2024), DOI 10.1038/s44184-024-00055-0; Zimmerman, J.W., and A.J. Ruiz, “Matters arising: a response,” vol. 4, art. 60

(November 17, 2025), DOI 10.1038/s44184-024-00083-w; and the authors' reply, vol. 4, art. 61 (November 17, 2025), DOI 10.1038/s44184-025-00128-8.

Pearce, Eiluned, Jacques Launay, and Robin I. M. Dunbar. "The ice-breaker effect: singing mediates fast social bonding." Royal Society Open Science 2, no. 10 (October 28, 2015): 150221.

Schwarzenbach, Sibyl A. On Civic Friendship: Including Women in the State. Columbia University Press, 2009.

Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Putnam, Robert D., and Shaylyn Romney Garrett. The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again. Simon and Schuster, 2020.

Skocpol, Theda. Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life. University of Oklahoma Press, 2003.

Spade, Dean. Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next). Verso, 2020.

Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Verso, 1983. The newspaper as mass ceremony; the ninth chapter's neighbor.

Tukachinsky, Riva, with the field's synthesis. "Antecedents and Effects of Parasocial Relationships: A Meta-Analysis." Journal of Communication 70, no. 6 (2020): 868-894.

Filimonova, Elena, editor. Clusivity: Typology and Case Studies of the Inclusive-Exclusive Distinction. John Benjamins, 2005.

Cysouw, Michael. “Syncretisms involving clusivity.” In The World Atlas of Language Structures. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Neidle, Carol, Judy Kegl, Dawn MacLaughlin, Benjamin Bahan, and Robert G. Lee. The Syntax of American Sign Language: Functional Categories and Hierarchical Structure. MIT Press, 2000.

Valli, Clayton, and Ceil Lucas. Linguistics of American Sign Language. Gallaudet University Press, 2000.

Meier, Richard P., and Diane Lillo-Martin. “The Points of Language.” Humana.Mente 24 (2013): 161-162 and following, on the conventionalized WE and OUR.

Pennebaker, James W. The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say About Us. Bloomsbury Press, 2011. The count’s nearest instrument.

Klinenberg, Eric. Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago. University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Bishop, Bill, with Robert G. Cushing. The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart. Houghton Mifflin, 2008. The landslide series’ parent volume.

Corcoran, Paul E. “Presidential Concession Speeches: The Rhetoric of Defeat.” Political Communication 11, no. 4 (1994). The concession genre’s scholarly register.

Ferri, Marica, Laura Amato, and Marina Davoli. “Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programmes for alcohol dependence.” Cochrane Database of

Systematic Reviews 2006, art. CD005032. The verdict the 2020 review revised.

Turkle, Sherry. Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other. Basic Books, 2011. The machine-we chapter's scholarly neighbor.

Ostrom, Elinor. Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. Cambridge University Press, 1990. The settlement chapter's neighbor on bounded groups governing shared goods.

Tajfel, Henri, and his school. The minimal group paradigm: the experimental shadow of the subtraction test.

Allen, Danielle S. Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Kropotkin, Peter. Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution. 1902. The title Spade's deliberately echoes.

Cohen, Jonathan. The parasocial-breakup literature's standard reference, for the term the glossary attributes to the scholarship.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. Democracy in America. 1835-1840. The fourth chapter's rooms' first chronicler.

Durkheim, Emile. The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. 1912; and Collins, Randall. Interaction Ritual Chains. Princeton University Press, 2004. The collective-effervescence shelf the balcony, the choir, and the strike run on.

Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, and her collaborators. “Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review.” PLoS Medicine, 2010. The advisory figures’ primary record.

McDonald, Aleecia M., and Lorrie Faith Cranor. “The Cost of Reading Privacy Policies.” I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society, 2008. The eleventh chapter’s foundation’s canonical quantification.

Shrager, Jeff. “ELIZA Reinterpreted: The world’s first chatbot was not intended as a chatbot at all.” arXiv:2406.17650, 2024. The thirteenth chapter’s recent scholarship.

Tönnies, Ferdinand. Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, 1887). The concession’s source; the edition cited in Chapter Four’s record.

Weizenbaum, Joseph. “ELIZA, a computer program for the study of natural language communication between man and machine.” Communications of the ACM 9, no. 1 (January 1966): 36-45.

Weizenbaum, Joseph. Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation. W. H. Freeman, 1976.

The evidence and data of record

Alcoholics Anonymous. The Twelve Steps and the fellowship’s preamble, at the fellowship’s own service pages; the first edition (Works Publishing, 1939), in the public domain in the United States.

American Gaming Association. The sports-betting tracker, state count dated to this book's press season; and the annual commercial gaming revenue reports, 2024 and 2025 figures as filed in Chapter Twelve's receipts.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Union Members, annual releases, 1983 through the release of February 18, 2026, covering 2025.

Common Sense Media, with NORC at the University of Chicago. Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions. July 16, 2025. Fielded April-May 2025, 1,060 respondents aged 13 to 17.

Common Sense Media, with the Brainstorm Lab for Mental Health at Stanford Medicine. Social AI Companions: Risk Assessment. April 30, 2025.

Douglass, Frederick. "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" The oration delivered at Corinthian Hall, Rochester, July 5, 1852, counted from the Frederick Douglass Papers Project's digital edition of the 1852 Rochester pamphlet, the editorial headnote and notes excluded from the count.

Gallup. The church-membership series, 1937-2020, with the release of late March 2021 announcing the crossing below half.

Medill Local News Initiative, Northwestern University. The State of Local News reports, with the closure census.

MIT Election Data and Science Lab. County Presidential Election Returns 2000-2024. Harvard Dataverse, version 20.

National Fire Protection Association. U.S. Fire Department Profile (2020 data); and NFPA Journal, “the volunteer exodus,” February 11, 2026.

National Archives and Records Administration. The Declaration of Independence; the Constitution of the United States; the Nineteenth Amendment; the Rotunda’s display record of March 27, 2026; and the Archivist’s announcement of the display plans, the press release of September 23, 2024.

The Congressional Record, the joint session of January 6, 2021, with the recess, the objections’ votes, the resumption statements, and the roll.

The Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. The final report, December 22, 2022.

The FBI’s affidavit register for the day’s cases, as cited in Chapter Eight.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce, versions 1.0 through 4.0, March 19 through August 2020; version 1.0 carries fourteen categories of workers.

The World Health Organization. The Director-General’s briefings of January 30, March 9, and March 11, 2020.

The Congressional Research Service’s historical union-membership tables.

The Pew Research Center’s reports of June 25, 2020, August 9, 2022, May 7, 2024, and its December 2025 update, as invoked in Chapters Seven and Nine.

The Kaiser Family Foundation's tracking polls of the pandemic spring.

Gallup's pandemic-era analyses, including the June 23, 2020 mask-adoption reading.

The University of Virginia Center for Politics' Crystal Ball, the super-landslide supplement to the keeper's series.

The National Volunteer Fire Council's fact record, beside the NFPA profile.

The United Kingdom Electoral Commission's declaration and its national turnout announcement of June 2016.

The House of Commons Library's analysis of the referendum's electorate shares.

New Local (Tiratelli, Laura, and Joseph Kaye). Communities Vs Coronavirus: The Rise of Mutual Aid. July 2020. With the London School of Economics fieldwork on the pandemic pods, 2021.

Office of the Surgeon General. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. 2023.

Pew Research Center. "Sizing Up Twitter Users." April 24, 2019; with the follow-up count of October 23, 2019. And the Pew-Knight local-news survey program.

The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara. The inaugural and annual-message series; the signing remarks of October 3, 1965, at Liberty Island; the signing remarks of July 26, 1990, on the South Lawn.

Supreme Court of the United States. Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association, 584 U.S. 453 (2018), argued December 4, 2017, decided May 14, 2018.

U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, EDGAR. The shareholder-letter panel's filings, as logged in the panel record of Chapter Ten.

The journalism of record

The Atlantic. Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Trump Administration Accidentally Texted Me Its War Plans." March 24, 2025; and Goldberg, Jeffrey, and Shane Harris, the texts follow-up, March 26, 2025.

The Daily Telegraph. The Lockdown Files, series opening February 28, 2023; Oakeshott, Isabel, the accompanying account, same date; with the press regulator's ruling of June 2024 on the accuracy complaint.

The Daily Yonder. Bishop, Bill, and Robert Cushing. The landslide-county series, the 2016 and 2020 analyses; and Bishop, Cushing, and Sarah Melotte, "Election 2024: The Big Pout," April 15, 2025.

The Associated Press. The balcony photograph and caption, Milan, March 13, 2020.

The Charlottesville independent review (the Heaphy report), December 2017, with the wire record of August 11-12, 2017.

The New York Times. Klinenberg, Eric. "To Restore Civil Society, Start With the Library." September 8, 2018.

The New Yorker. The quoted review of Palaces for the People; Chayka, Kyle, on Posting Zero.

New York Magazine, Intelligencer. On the FTC v. Meta trial exhibits, November 10, 2025.

ESPN. On the American Gaming Association's 2024 revenue report, February 2025.

TechCrunch. On the WhatsApp volumes: October 29, 2020, and April 30, 2025.

Peele, Stanton. "So Alcoholics Anonymous Is 'Proven' to Work After All? Not So Fast." Filter, March 18, 2020.

Red Flag. The review of Mutual Aid, June 17, 2025.

Meta Newsroom. Zuckerberg, Mark. "A Privacy-Focused Vision for Social Networking." March 6, 2019.

The Wall Street Journal's identification of the pandemic montage's maker, April 19, 2020; Fast Company's early-May obituary for the form; and the trade record of the compilation's weeks, as invoked in Chapters Seven and Ten.

The Guardian's coverage of the Vindicator's close.

Cummings, Dominic. The Spectator essay of January 2017, the slogan's documented usage from its director.

The signing remarks' texts: the LBJ Library's record of October 3, 1965, and the American Presidency Project's record of July 26, 1990.

The platform terms-of-service corpus, as logged with capture timestamps in Appendix B's capture table.

Both references point to the same underlying record. The full pandemic-ritual chronology is the book's own assembly from the wire record and the scholarship of record; the montage's vocabulary inventory is the trade record's own.

The author's archive

BolesBlogs.com. The phrase corpus's thirteen specimens, June 8, 2016, through October 23, 2020, verified against the live pages and banked verbatim in the book's record; the site search replicated by the author on September 5, 2026, fixing the corpus's close.

The Human Meme podcast. "Do I Amuse You?", the script excerpted in the eighth specimen, December 1, 2018.

The Human Meme podcast's two later deployments of the phrase, registered in Chapter Eighteen's postscript: "Digital Lives Matter: The Dry Run to Decay," August 9, 2020, and "We Are Each Other's Possibilities," June 4, 2025, verified at the episodes' own pages.

The registrar's record for the domain, June 8, 2016, 23:46:58 UTC, with the annual renewals since.

Index

Locators are page numbers in this edition. Terms of art are defined in the Glossary; this index maps where they work.

admission log: 40, 92, 150, 252, 359

American Sign Language: 85

Aristotle: 5, 19, 90, 104, 147, 165, 209, 279, 284, 325

audience, the: 45, 103, 155, 246, 283

balcony, Milan (March 13, 2020): 115, 328, 342

Bethany library (Lincoln): 336

bookend count: 333, 340, 358

brand-we: 91, 123, 171, 209, 240, 249, 267, 313, 329

Charlottesville (August 2017): 96, 134, 319, 342

chorus line (the circle): 285, 335, 340

church-membership decline (Gallup): 65

civic friendship: 8, 36, 73, 309

closing night: 283

Cochrane review (2020): 271

company, the (ensemble): 223, 274, 283, 320

concord (homonoia): 30, 308

Constitution, U.S.: 10, 33, 41, 137, 183, 189, 283, 325, 341, 359

Corinthian Hall (July 5, 1852): 39

count, the (instrument): 2, 19, 40, 58, 79, 97, 115, 134, 172, 188, 223, 246, 264, 283, 300, 319, 340, 357

counterfeit, the: 14, 38, 41, 61, 81, 99, 117, 145, 167, 172, 202, 206, 238, 258, 265, 288, 311, 319, 342

Declaration of Independence: 40, 252, 270, 341, 359

demagogic us: 95, 167, 211, 240, 249, 264, 326, 344

Douglass, Frederick: 39, 92, 341, 359

ELIZA (1966): 228

encrypted us: 11, 243, 268, 312

essay of 2016, the: 1, 21, 89, 97, 154, 237, 321, 340, 352

fandom-we: 205

fire company, volunteer: 274, 285, 314

ghost light: 298

given us, the: 23, 56, 58, 91, 95, 116, 148, 171, 191, 212, 224, 244, 268, 285, 342

group chat: 243, 268, 312

hinge, the: 29, 244, 264, 312, 330

ice-breaker effect: 276

inaugural addresses: 7, 41, 72, 90, 105, 141, 301, 333, 343, 358

inclusive and exclusive we: 82, 345

January 6, 2021: 134

Klinenberg, Eric: 306

landslide counties: 160, 302, 360

library, the rebuilt: 294, 300, 319

loneliness epidemic: 68, 207, 225

machine-we: 91, 175, 222, 268

Maslova (1991): 295

Medill Local News Initiative: 156

Murphy v. NCAA (2018): 213

mutual aid: 277, 303

Nineteenth Amendment: 50, 340, 360

object case, the: 8, 24, 40, 60, 76, 105, 127, 142, 195, 231, 264, 331, 344

pandemic, the: 7, 65, 112, 118, 167, 254, 278, 303, 331

parasocial relation: 206, 228, 267, 290

perimeter, the: 8, 34, 39, 63, 77, 95, 116, 145, 161, 176, 200, 205, 225, 248, 265, 286, 300, 338, 347

phrase corpus: 9, 113, 124, 186, 237, 328

platform-we: 78, 188, 231, 247, 267

political animal: 15, 19

Posting Zero: 247

privacy pivot, the (March 6, 2019): 244

Putnam, Robert: 311

remnant, the: 200, 205, 258, 276, 287, 301, 320, 342

Rotunda, the: 57 (the Archives), 95 (the university), 134 (the Capitol)

sealed war council (March 2025): 251, 263, 341

shareholder letters: 7, 172, 199, 358

six conditions, the: 279, 287, 307, 320

social infrastructure: 71, 306

Spade, Dean: 303

sports wagering: 213, 259, 264, 285, 315, 342

standard, the (five questions): 21, 178, 200, 210, 240, 248, 264, 307

subtraction test: 7, 47, 101, 117, 143, 163, 183, 199, 217, 236, 249, 263, 291, 330, 344

Surgeon General's advisory (2023): 68, 357

twelve-step rooms (the basement): 36, 263, 304, 343
thread of twelve, the: 248, 278, 289, 312
Tönnies concession: 60
union membership: 58, 305
UsOfUs.com: 1, 340
Vindicator, the (last edition): 152, 324
wager, the: 213, 259, 264, 285, 315, 342
Weizenbaum, Joseph: 228

About the Author

David Boles has been paid for his writing since 1975, when he was ten and a Lincoln, Nebraska newspaper paid him for the first time, and he has kept the record of it in public ever since. He was hosting the Unique Youth radio show on KFOR-AM and KFRX-FM and reviewing films as the weekly Teenaged Movie Critic on KOLN/KGIN-TV before he could drive. At the University of Nebraska he was the Prairie Schooner literary quarterly's youngest undergraduate associate editor, and his short story "McDugan's Barn" won the Mari Sandoz Prairie Schooner Award for Fiction in 1984. The MFA in playwriting is from Columbia University, 1991, the Oscar Hammerstein II Center, on consecutive Shubert Organization Presidential Scholarships, with the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop along the way. His Dramatists Guild membership has been continuous since 1984; he also belongs to the Authors Guild and PEN America.

The productions include The Westborough Crusaders for Cablevision, The Weeping Water Cafe on stage and on KPTM-TV, A Stone's Throw at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Department of Theatre Arts & Dance, the art house film Watershed, Drama of the Body at Rutgers in 2002, and, with Al Carmines, the musical Maslova at Columbia University in 1991. He founded and developed the American Sign Language program of study at the City University of New York's School of Professional Studies, and his books on the language include several written with Janna Sweenie. The consulting record runs from Google and Microsoft to CBS Television, American Express, New York University, the City University of New York, Netscape, ABC Pictures, and the Nebraska ETV Network. Boles.com has been online continuously since 1995, and BolesBlogs.com has carried the essays since before the decade this book audits, including the one this book grew from, posted on June 8, 2016, with its domain registered the same night.

He publishes under his own imprint, Boles Books, and lives between New York City and Jersey City with two British Shorthair cats who have never once attended a meeting.

Also by the Author

The Censor Keeps a Copy: A History of the Pleasure of Taking Things Away

The Stopwatch Moralist: Rod Serling and the Drama Built to Outlive Its Airdate

First the Sky Turns Green: Reading the World Before It Strikes

The Rented Mind

The Necessary Art

The Synthetic Cause

Barbarous Ancestors

DO HARM

No One Dies Lying

Swimming the Author

Tidal Volume

The One-Way Drop

The Two Letters

The Black Ram

No, I Will NOT Be Your Friend (with Janna Sweenie)

Back to Willowbrook (with Janna Sweenie)

Fiction: The Westborough Crusaders trilogy (The Year Before the Wire; A Farewell to Shins; The Stopped Clock); The Occupied Space; Ischia is Burning; The Disposition; the EleMenTs series; and the Fractional Fiction shelves, including The Held Land, The Kinship of Strangers, The Inheritance, and The Dying Grove.

The complete catalog, with the podcast archive and the constellation of sites, lives at BolesBooks.com.