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Vincent Farenga

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INTRODUCTION



PERFORMING CITIZENSHIP AND ITS SCRIPTS IN DEMOCRATIC ATHENS

A new field has emerged over the past fifteen years out of the perennial interest ancient historians and classicists have shown in the Athenian democracy of 508–322 BC; we might call it “Athenian democracy studies.”¹ Reasons for its popularity are not hard to identify in an era devoted to the ideal of interdisciplinary research, but its developing contours already demonstrate how complex a topic democratic society can be, especially if we inquire into ways human subjects experience it through democratic citizenship. And so not surprisingly Athenian democracy studies are expanding rapidly right now, propelled by variety in evidence and eclecticism in methodology as scholars seek out Athenian cultural practices and beliefs peculiar to the democracy – and devise new ways to scrutinize them. For one manifestation of this variety and eclecticism we need only look to the “smorgasbord” essay collections by multiple authors that proliferate in so many fields today: major collections on Athenian democracy keep multiplying, at least in English.² One effect of these collections is to suggest that scholars find it difficult to forge a single, interdisciplinary approach to the Athenian democracy. They may also encourage readers to believe – mistakenly, I

¹ All dates in this study referring to developments in Greek history are BC. All translations from languages ancient and modern are mine unless otherwise noted.

² See Rhodes 2004, Goldhill and Osborne 1999, Cartledge, Millett, and von Reden 1998, Morris and Raaflaub 1998, Boedeker and Raaflaub 1998, Ober and Hedrick 1996, Euben, Wallach, and Ober 1994, Boegehold and Scafuro 1994, and Osborne and Goldhill 1994. For multilingual essay collections see David Cohen 2002, Kinzl and Raaflaub 1995, and Eder 1994.

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think – that democratic community and citizenship are too multiform and confusing to accommodate a single line of inquiry.

About a decade ago a neat bifurcation distinguished old and new paradigms for studying Athenian democracy and citizenship. Older studies were grounded in a constitutional sense of legal status and participation in political institutions, while more recent studies emphasized ideological questions of social behavior, values, and attitudes affecting citizens and noncitizens alike.³ Today, however, the dynamism of Athenian democracy studies has caused that bifurcation to ramify into an array of options. One is methodological, a version of the “theory question” many classical scholars and ancient historians face these days: “Should my approach be cross-fertilized by contemporary political, social, and cultural theory, or should it remain ‘empirically’ based in traditional senses of ‘what life was like in democratic Athens?’”⁴

Scholars who choose a theoretically informed approach also face the Pandora’s box of eclecticism: “Should I draw on a mix of thinkers and theories or stay grounded in one primary approach?”⁵ The choice of

³ Scafuro discusses this bifurcation (1994: 2–8); Manville proclaims the “new paradigm” (1994 and 1990); Ober’s work is most representative of the focus on ideology (1998, 1996, 1994 and 1989).

⁴ Studies using cross-fertilization include Ober 1998, 1996 and 1989, Hunter 1994 and Euben 1990. Equally valuable empirically based contributions include Hansen 1987 and 1991, Stockton 1990, Sinclair 1988, and Ostwald 1986. M. I. Finley practically created the field of contemporary Athenian democracy studies, serving as both an inspiration and bridge for scholars of both approaches (e.g., 1983, 1985a, and 1985b). Rhodes divides the methodological possibilities of this field into eight neat categories (2003a: 70–71).

⁵ Typical ingredients for the theory mix include Foucault, Bourdieu, and Searle. Sagan (1991) examines Athenian democracy and paranoia through a classically psychoanalytic lens; Saxonhouse (1992) uses gender theory to assess the democracy; McClure (1999) and Lape (2004) do also for Athenian democracy and drama, with Lape combining ideologies of gender and race (2003). Loraux’s work eclectically draws on multiple models (Foucault, structuralism, poststructuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis, etc.) (e.g., 2002a, 2002b, 1998).

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how widely to gather evidence also presents an option: “If my study is empirically grounded, do I draw on a wealth of evidence for democratic life in Athenian politics, law, religion, warfare, economy, gender relations, philosophy, and so on, or do I limit myself to a single cultural practice?”⁶ More materially based research might focus solely on artistic or archaeological evidence for democratic practices or on interpretive models grounded in archaeology and visual theories.⁷ Yet another option, pursued only sporadically, combines the questions of methodology and evidence, asking, “Should I set Athenian democracy and citizenship into dialogue with contemporary studies of democratic theory and practice in fields such as political science, sociology, policy and planning, and law?” To put it more bluntly, “Can the realities and theories of ancient, modern, and postmodern democracies inform one another?”⁸ This last project might prompt some scholars self-consciously to wonder to what degree their own nationalist traditions influence the ways they approach and evaluate ancient democracy.⁹

⁶ The approaches featured in the 1996 Ober and Hedrick anthology draw on a wide spectrum of evidence; one popular choice for a single cultural practice has been litigation in Athens’ democratic courts, as in studies by Allen 2000, Johnstone 1999, Christ 1998, and the essays in Hunter and Edmonson 2000, and Cartledge, Millett, and Todd (1990).

⁷ Studies in art history and Athenian democracy include Neer 2002, Hurwit 1999, and Castriota 1992; see also the majority of essays in Boedeker and Raaflaub 1998. See the archaeological evidence covered in the essays edited by Coulson (1994), where Brenne’s study of *ostraka* is a good example. For interpretive models see the discussion by Small and Morris in the Morris and Raaflaub collection (1998: 217–46).

⁸ Rhodes tackles this broad methodological question, providing partial answers (2003a). Recent studies include Colaico 2002, Wallach 2001, Villa 2001, and Mara 1997 on Socrates and/or Plato; for more limited attempts see contributions in Ober and Hedrick 1996, Ober 1996: 161–87, Wolin 1994, and passages in McAfee 2000 (1–18), and Farrar 1988 (e.g., 3–14 and 273–78). But see now Samons 2004 and Ober 2005.

⁹ Rhodes misleads us when he characterizes all modern scholars as epigones locked into their respective national democratic traditions (2003a: 34–53). This pigeonholing ignores individuals whose personal and educational histories are multinational and

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These options within Athenian democracy studies create the false impression that ancient democracy and its citizenship are not amenable to a unified set of questions, definitions, or concepts. The polyphony of issues concerning methodology and evidence might even discourage us from asking what democratic citizenship (ancient, modern, and postmodern) is, and encourage us to conclude that there couldn't be a fundamental nature behind the heterogeneous ways subjects experienced it in antiquity and after. However, one recent development in Athenian democracy studies has taken a step toward a more conceptually unified approach, one employing a mix of theories to study an array of cultural practices in Athens. Its key innovative strategy links democratic citizenship in Athens to what we call today "performance studies." In a helpful introduction to the essay collection *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Goldhill and Osborne 1999), Simon Goldhill offers a detailed explanation for this link. A quick look at his enthusiastic "Programme Notes" (1999) provides an Ariadne's thread to lead us past the variety, eclecticism, and apparent confusion surrounding ancient democratic citizenship.

According to Goldhill, performance theory, springing about thirty years ago from such fields as ethnography and theater studies, then migrating to gender studies, and finally infiltrating classics, constitutes a sort of royal road to understanding democratic citizenship in Athens.¹⁰ He "maps" the "intellectual space" of performance as a "heuristic category" to connect such varia of Athenian life as theatrical spectacle, law court debate, deliberation in the citizen assembly, civic religious festival, gatherings at symposia and gymnasias, social rituals

multicultural; it also flirts with a subjective indulgence in national stereotypes (54–69). On Athenian democracy and modern nationalism and nation building, see Anderson 2003.

¹⁰ See Goldhill's survey of theoretical approaches in performance studies, with bibliography (1999: 10–20); for performance and Greek culture, see Mackie 2004, Faulkner, Felson, and Konstan 1999, Bassi 1998, Edmunds and Wallace 1997, and Martin 1994.

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like homoerotic courtship, and the use of inscriptions both public and private. From the unifying perspective of performance, then, Goldhill implies that these multiple practices derive their coherence from some sort of key social action at the core of citizenship. While he never says so, we're invited to envision citizenship as a kind of performance *tout court*. He grounds Athens' performance culture in a single social scenario of actions by individuals who make competitive displays of self-presentation so that their social standing (*timê*) can then be collectively evaluated (4, 5) and judged (5, 6, 8) by others. This "dynamic of self-presentation" or "self-promotion" occurs in four master citizen actions of Greek social life: *agôn* or competition; *epideixis* or display; *schêma* or appearance (also "posture," "pose") and *theôria* or "spectating" (2–8).

This abstract, synthetic description of four citizen actions implies that Athenians sustained their democratic citizenship performatively – and it further suggests that, to understand the nature of that citizenship, we need a unified theory of citizen action. But this action, though unified, could not be a simple one because its multiple practices contribute to the "construction" of "the public discourse of democracy. . . ." (8). In other words this action must be composite and at least in part linguistic (I prefer to call it "communicative"). In it Goldhill sees another dimension too, offering nothing less than the key to Athenian subjectivity itself, or "the construction of the [democratic] self" and "self-consciousness" (1–10). For it is through the four master citizen actions that the "self" or "political subject of democracy" is somehow "constructed" (9) or "negotiated" (4). So, in addition to action and language, citizenship somehow contributes to forming individual subjects, and this justifies an impressive scope of theoretical resources on which performance studies can draw.¹¹ "Performance" thus seems poised to

¹¹ Among others, Goldhill suggests Bakhtin, Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, Austin and Searle, Freudian-Lacanian "gaze theory," Foucault, new historicism, and Clifford's poststructural anthropology. On performance and gender see Butler 1990.

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display for classicists the aura of those overarching, master concepts in contemporary cultural theory, such as “violence” in the seventies, “power” in the eighties, and “the body” in the nineties.

But like these blockbuster concepts, performance seems to me fuzzy and a little crude as a theoretical *passe-partout*. Goldhill acknowledges that it owes some of its allure to a heavily composite nature: as he puts it, “Indeed, for all the claims of ‘performance studies’ to be a discipline, it remains a bricolage” (15). As an amalgamated methodology, performance studies and its object, the amalgamated activity of citizenship, are therefore congruent; and this goes a long way toward answering the question of whether Athenian democracy studies should be eclectic in both evidence and methodology with an emphatic “Yes, they must!” But how should we refine the concept of performance so that classicists and ancient historians, when using performance studies to illuminate Athens’ “performance culture” (8, 10), might understand more clearly the relation between citizenship and performance? Goldhill for the most part sees performance as an instrument or vehicle for enacting citizenship, or as one element in a mix that constitutes citizenship: it’s “part of the exercise of citizenship” (1); through it the “public discourse” of Athenian democracy is in part “constructed, articulated and reflected on” (8); and the democracy’s development has had at least one “focus” in “performative elements” (10).

But we can relate performance to citizenship in a more fundamental way – a way that will also enable us to benefit from a wide spectrum of contemporary theoretical work on citizenship and democratic community. I propose going farther than Goldhill, for whom the Athenian democracy “might *depend* on performance in specific and special ways” (1; my emphasis). I’d like to entertain the more radical possibility that performance and democratic citizenship are one, that citizenship actually *is* performance.

What might this mean? Performance studies employ the term “performance” in a wide range of culturally defined contexts embracing, for

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example, ethnographic observations of rituals and genealogical recitations, theatrical presentations in Western or non-Western societies, and the sociology of encounters (e.g., through role-playing) in everyday modern life. What's essential is that someone enact some sort of "script," within a specific framework of time, space and agency, which guides speaker and listeners to interpret a shared sense of its possible meanings.¹² Applied to Athens, this should prompt us to think of democratic citizenship as the know-how to perform a repertoire of significant actions before others who possess similar knowledge, or as a shared understanding between people about how to behave, communicate, and respond to one another at various times and places in the public and private spheres. It shouldn't matter whether the script in question is played out formally in a courtroom, in the citizen assembly, while participating in a religious procession, or more informally while at the theater, performing a ritual at one's family hearth, or conversing at a symposium with fellow members of one's phratry (a local political, social and religious organization of citizens).¹³

The ability to perform citizen scripts as "rules of engagement," I maintain, was not invented wholesale in the early years of the democracy; instead Athenians developed these scripts piecemeal from a cultural storehouse of prescribed behavior inherited from earlier stages

¹² For a folklorist and anthropological notion of "script," see Bauman 1977: 9.

¹³ On the various citizen organizations in the democracy, see Jones 1999. How distinctive were citizen scripts compared to scripts played out by noncitizens? E. Cohen challenges long-standing assumptions that: (1) Athenian citizens saw themselves as markedly different from noncitizen metics (resident aliens) and slaves; (2) inhabitants of Attica (the territory of Athens) regularly distinguished citizens from noncitizens in daily encounters; (3) citizens' relations to others were fundamentally power relationships; (4) citizens and noncitizens in daily life pursued significantly different goals (2000). Despite Cohen's at times persuasive arguments, Athenians did distinguish citizens from noncitizens in scripts played out in the political and cultural spheres, especially when deliberating and deciding questions of justice and public policy, verifying membership in the citizen body, and practicing certain cults and civic performances.

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of political life. In recent years a few classicists have begun connecting research in cognitive psychology and discourse analysis to early Greek poetry with the goal of understanding how the early Greeks stored cultural knowledge in narrative “scripts” that enabled them to retrieve and express that knowledge in stereotypical bits and chunks.¹⁴ The terminology these scholars use can at times be confusing, for they speak of “frames,” “scripts,” “scenarios,” “schemas,” “plans,” etc., to describe the “shared seeing” of a world between performer and audience. I’ll adopt their use of “script” to designate a fixed, stereotypical representation of knowledge incorporating a sequence of actions, speech acts and situations. For example, today a static stereotype such as the “automobile” can be scripted various ways into “at the auto show,” “at the carwash,” “buying a new car,” “buying a second-hand car,” or “fatal automobile accident.” Or, in Homer, scripts take the form of narrative themes that transform a stereotype such as “weapon” into “a hero arms for battle,” or “meal” into “a meal of hospitality shared by host and guest.”¹⁵ From these scholars’ perspective, we might then want to know, for example, whether Goldhill’s four master citizen actions constitute “citizen scripts” of this sort.¹⁶

PERFORMING SELFHOOD

The notion of citizenship as the ability or privilege to perform certain roles in citizen scripts accounts well for the collective identity citizens share. But if we recall Goldhill’s suggestion that performing citizenship led Athenians to a “construction of the self” as “the

¹⁴ I have in mind Minchin 2001 and 1992, Russo 1999, Bakker 1997a, 1997b, 1993, and Rubin 1995.

¹⁵ See Minchin 1992: 233–35, esp. 235, n. 29, adapting the term from Schank and Abelson 1977. See also Brown and Yule 1983: 241–43.

¹⁶ I use “script” to include the more complex organization of what some discourse analysts and classicists call a “schema” (Russo 1999; Brown and Yule 1983) or a “scenario” (Sanford and Garrod 1981).

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political subject of democracy" (9), we'll want to know whether performance can also serve as a royal road to understanding how Athenians experienced their individuality. And by this I mean not just bringing an idiosyncratic style to playing a certain role but enacting a selfhood distinct from others who might share that same role.¹⁷ To achieve this, performance needs to account for the similarities and differences between ancient and modern conceptions of selfhood. This gap, Goldhill realizes, has become problematic today because we are increasingly sensitive to ways in which classicists of previous generations anachronistically evaluated the Greek self through Cartesian and Kantian models of subjectivity, but the remedy he proposes sidesteps the most important issues.¹⁸ Because of work bridging classics and moral philosophy by scholars such as Nussbaum (1986), B. Williams (1993), Gill (1996), and others, it's become clear that contemporary theories of the self influence our capacity to appreciate whether or not the Greeks, from Homer to the Classical period, could achieve selfhood in the modern sense, or genuinely deliberate and exercise a will, or possess any degree of individual moral autonomy, or, to our mind, be held morally responsible for their actions. These scholars show us, in other words, the need to theorize about the self comparatively if we wish to determine how close or distant Greek selves are from our

¹⁷ On the various meanings of our modern notion of the self, see Gill 1996: 1, with his discussion of the methodological problems we face when we apply these meanings to the Greeks (2ff.). See also the typology of modern individuals and its application to the Greek city-state in Gribble 1999: 7–23, and the essays in Pelling 1990.

¹⁸ Goldhill thinks we can avoid projecting modern notions of "inwardness, privacy and individual personality" onto Athenians if we provide a "historically specific and nuanced account of the constitution of the citizen as a political subject across and through a range of particular social practices and discourses" (1999: 9–10); cf. Rhodes' warnings on scholarly "subjectivity" (2003a: 9–17). For discussion of increased scholarly sensitivity to confusing ancient and modern notions of self, Goldhill cites Pelling 1990 and Gill 1996.

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own – and somehow performance would have to accommodate this theorizing.¹⁹

We've seen, for example, effective criticisms of Snell's contentions that Homeric individuals lack a true self in the sense of a self-conscious agent possessing psychic unity and a true will, and that they are therefore "deficient" in moral autonomy.²⁰ It's also harder now to uphold M. I. Finley's contention that nowhere in Homer do we find "rational discussion" and deliberation in the form of "a sustained, disciplined consideration of circumstances and their implications" (1979 [1954]), whether by individuals or groups.²¹ We've learned as well to recognize in the practical conflicts faced by tragic characters, such as Aeschylus' Agamemnon, moral dilemmas consistent with a modern understanding of this term, and appreciate how individual characters, such as Homer's Penelope and the female protagonists of Athenian tragedy, function as moral agents in senses both ancient and modern.²² And Gill has recently facilitated this effort to shuttle between ancient and modern selves by devising a classificatory scheme to distinguish Cartesian- and Kantian-inspired types of self, which he calls "subjective-individualist" because they are centered around the "I" as the subject of

¹⁹ Alford's *The Self in Social Theory* (1991) offers a comparative, psychoanalytic approach to theorizing about the self from Homer and Plato to Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and John Rawls. Villa (2001) reconstructs Socrates' notion of the citizen as an individual center of moral and intellectual agency and then relates this ideal to modern notions of citizenship in J. S. Mill, Nietzsche, Weber, Arendt, and L. Strauss.

²⁰ See, e.g., Sharples 1983, Gaskin 1990, B. Williams 1993: 21–49, Gill 1996: 29–41, and Hammer 1998. Vernant's has been the most influential recent argument for the Greeks' lack of a true will and moral decision-making in the modern sense (1988).

²¹ On rational deliberation and decision making in Homer, see in particular Schofield 1986, in addition to Sharples 1983, Gaskins 1990, B. Williams 1993: 35–36, Teffeteller 2003, and Barnouw 2004: 7–120.

²² On conflicts like Agamemnon's, see Nussbaum 1986: 25–50; for Penelope and female tragic protagonists, see Foley 1995 and 2001: 107ff.