HANNAH ARENDT

LIFE IS A NARRATIVE

JULIA KRISTEVA

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PREFACE

First of all I would like to thank Professor Nesselroth, who invited me to the Centre for Comparative Literature and gave me the chance to get to know and to appreciate the high quality of University of Toronto students and faculty. My gratitude goes very specifically to Professor Paul Perron of University College, who took the initiative to invite me to give these prestigious Alexander Lectures, and to Professor Frank Collins, who translated them.

In these lectures, I deal with some philosophical aspects of Hannah Arendt's work – her understanding of such concepts as language, self, body, political space, and life. I do not comment extensively on her already well known and very seriously discussed political writings such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism, Eichmann in Jerusalem,* or *Crises of the Republic.* But I have them permanently in mind, and I would invite you to have them in mind, too, while listening to my argument. I hope that my more philosophical than political considerations will help – indirectly – to clarify some Arendtian contradictions as well as some misapprehensions of her positions.

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CHAPTER ONE

Life Is a Story

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Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) writes the following: 'It seems as if certain people are so exposed in their own lives (and only their lives, not as persons!), that they become, as it were, junction points and concrete objectifications of *life*.'[1] These lines anticipate her own fate, when she was only twenty-four years old. She had already met and loved Heidegger, a fascinating presence throughout her whole life, and had defended her doctoral thesis, *The Concept of Love in Saint Augustine*,[2] under the direction of Karl Jaspers, to whom she is confiding here. From the outset, she knew herself to be 'exposed,' to the point of being fixed as 'a junction and objectification of *life*.'

Having thought about becoming a theologian, then devoting herself to studying and 'dismantling' metaphysics, *life* came instead to be the essential domain of the young philosopher's thought. In the first instance, *simply life itself*: since Hannah Arendt, in order to survive, had to leave Germany in 1933, thus escaping the Shoah by choosing exile. She fled across a ravaged Europe, stayed in Paris at first, and finally left for New York in 1941, where she obtained American citizenship ten years later. She became a political commentator and produced a major study on the history of anti-Semitism and the origins of totalitarianism, before triumphantly coming back to her fundamental meditation on the life of the mind.

Caught up from the outset by this passion in which *life* and *thought* are one and the same, her varied yet profoundly coherent intellectual odyssey never ceased to place *life* – in and of itself, and as a concept to be elucidated – at the centre. For, far from being a 'professional thinker,' Hannah Arendt puts her thought into action in her life: in this specifically Arendtian trait, we might be tempted also to see something unique to women, since 'repression' (in the Freudian sense) is said to be 'problematic' for women and thus they are prevented from isolating themselves in the obsessive fortresses of pure thought, where men compete so successfully, and are anchored instead in the reality of their bodies and in relationships with others.[3]

But even more, throughout her writings, the *theme of life* guides her thought as she discusses political history and metaphysics, to the point that in the course of its multiple occurrences, this theme becomes ever more refined and sharpened. It subtends Arendt's thought when she establishes, with great intellectual courage (and meeting such resistance!), that Nazism and Stalinism are two faces of one and the same horror, *totalitarianism*, because they converge in *the same denial of human life*.

Her grave tone, in which anger is tinged with irony, betrays a concern that sometimes reaches apocalyptic accents, as when Arendt's diagnosis declares that a 'radical evil' resides in the 'perverse will,' in the Kantian sense, to render 'men superfluous': in other words, the totalitarian man, both past and latent, destroys human *life* after having abolished the *meaning* of all lives, including his own. Even worse, this 'superfluity' of human life, whose presence Arendt notes with emphasis in the rise of imperialism, does not disappear – on the contrary – in modern democracies that are dominated by automation:

> ... we may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally

> superfluous. The manipulators of this system believe in their own superfluousness as much as in that of all the others, and the totalitarian murderers are all the more dangerous because they do not care if they themselves are *alive or dead*, if they ever *lived* or never were *born*. The danger of the corpse factories and holes of oblivion is that today, with populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous if we continue to think of our world in utilitarian terms. Political, social, and economic events everywhere are in a silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous.[4]

In the face of this threat, Arendt constructs a vehement defence of life in *The Human Condition*. At the opposite extreme to life that is just routinely reproduced in the spirit of the vitalist determination of consumerism and modern technology's commitment to the 'vital process,' Arendt raises a hymn to the uniqueness of each and any birth that might inaugurate what she does not hesitate to call 'the miracle of life':

> The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether ... It is this faith

> in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their 'glad tidings': 'A child has been born unto us.'[5]

Today, it is rather difficult for us to accept that *life*, a value sacred to Christian and post-Christian democracies, is the recent product of an historical evolution, and to envisage the possibility of its being threatened. It is, precisely, the inquiry into this fundamental value, into the way it has been constructed within Christian eschatology, and into the dangers it faces in the modern world that can be traced throughout Arendt's work – from her 'dissertation' on Saint Augustine to the unfinished manuscript on the capacity to judge – and perhaps, indeed, this very inquiry structures, in its own secret way, her entire oeuvre.

A fervent admirer of the 'narrated life,' of *bios-graphie*, Hannah Arendt nonetheless wrote neither an autobiography nor any novels. Just one text from her youth, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*,[6] comes close to that kind of narration to which this philosopher and student of politics granted, along with Aristotle, the privileged status of giving the finishing touches to life, according to the dignity of 'action.' The work was finished in 1933, after the thesis on Saint Augustine and before Arendt left Berlin, that same year, all except, that is, the last two chapters, which were added later, in 1938. It was not published until 1958.

Relying on intellectual life, all the while criticizing the metaphysical tradition that grants privileged status to the contemplative life to the detriment of active life, Arendt sets out to assign greater value, to 'valorize,' the active life, arguing that activity means life. Nonetheless, *The Human Condition* also leads her to an unprecedented rejection of the notion of 'life' as the nihilistic value par excellence. Vitalist activism – which brings *homo faber* to an apotheosis, but which also imprisons him within the robotization of a kind of knowledge that 'calculates' without 'thinking' – is strongly denounced. Thus, echoing Augustine's thoughts on the 'negligible' life, a life not engaged in *beate vivere* and *summum esse*, Arendt vituperates against a consumerism that swallows up human life, when that life has lost sight of what is lasting.[7] She denounces the cult of 'individual life,' and even more the 'life of the species' which tries to impose itself as the supreme modern good, but without having recourse to any aspiration to immortality. The vital 'process' replaces the search for immortality: this notion is raised up as a fundamental nihilistic value. In the course of this long drawn-out paradigmatic change (from immortality to vital process) grounded in technology and science, Arendt takes a stab in particular at Marx, who 'naturalizes' man by stipulating that 'the process of thought is itself a natural process.'[8] This is done without sparing the determination of scientists who ensure the triumph of *animal laborans* behind the mask of a sacralizing of life in and of itself, devoid of any sacred dynamic.

In opposition to those currents of thought, Arendt offers a life that is 'specifically human': the expression designates the 'moment between birth and death,' as long as it can be represented by a *narrative*, and shared with *other men*. This is a superb recasting of her earlier reading of Augustine and is supported by her later political experience as a woman-philosopher. It is enunciated as follows:

> The chief characteristic of this specifically human life, whose appearance and disappearance constitute worldly events, is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography; it is of this life, *bios* as distinguished from mere *zōē*, that Aristotle said that it 'somehow is a kind of *praxis*.'[9]

Thus, the possibility of representing birth and death, to conceive of them in time and to explain them to others – that is, *the possibility of narrating* – grounds human life in what is specific to it, in what is non-animal about it, non-physiological. While implicitly evoking Nietzsche, who sees 'the will to power' as a normal desire in life, and also invoking implicitly Heidegger, who steers Nietzsche's biologism toward the 'serenity' of poetic expression, Arendt rehabilitates the *praxis* of the narrative. Challenging the remoteness of the poetic work, only action as narration, and narration as action, can fulfil life in terms of what is 'specifically human' about it. This concept, whose Aristotelian provenance is obvious, links the destinies of *life, narrative,* and *politics*: narrative conditions the duration and the immortality of the work of art; but it also accompanies, as historical narrative, the life of the *polis*, making it a political life, in the best sense of the word (one that, ever since the Greeks, has been under threat).

Finally, Hannah Arendt's thought moves on to a third stage: without being abandoned, her meditation on the *vita activa* recedes into the implicit, to become anchored at the heart of her thinking of 'the life of the mind,'[10] a thinking that Arendt clarifies by dismantling its three components: *thought, will,* and *judgment.* But this work had already begun in *The Human Condition.* Although it is true that one cannot with impunity overturn the hierarchy of human activities (*work, oeuvre, action; vita activa/ vita contemplativa*), and also true that such an overturning simultaneously threatens thought and life by destroying both, it is of the utmost urgency to save life by coming back to the ongoing exploration of the various forms it takes, its manner of becoming other, and the complex figures that result from all of this. Having inherited the interlacing of life and thought that is part of Christian eschatology, and of philosophy too, Arendt makes History resonate with the deconstruction of the Mind, in order to show that life is not a 'value' in and of itself, as is believed by humanist ideologies. Life does not fulfil itself unless it never ceases to *inquire into* both meaning and action: 'the revelatory character of action as well as the ability to produce stories and become historical, which together form the very source from which meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence.'[11]

1 Letter no. 15, 24 March 1939, in *Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers Correspondence, 1926–1969,* ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. from the German by Roberta and Rita Kimber (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. 11.

2 Springer Verlag, 1929.

3 Many publications, colloquia, and special issues of journals have

been devoted to studying the work of Hannah Arendt. We might take special note of the following: *Social Research* 6, 44 (1977); *Esprit* (June 1980); *Les Etudes phénoménologiques* 2 (1985); *Les Cahiers du Grif* (Fall 1986); *Les Cahiers de philosophie* 4 (1987); Colloque de l'Institut italien des études philosophiques de Naples, 1987; *Politique et pensée,* Actes du colloque du Collège international de philosophie 1988 (Editions Tierce, 1989; Payot-Rivages, 1996); 'Hannah Arendt et la modernité,' *Annales de l'Institut de philosophie de l'Université de Bruxelles* (Vrin, 1992).

4 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 459. The italics are Professor Kristeva's emphasis.

5 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 247.

6 Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess,* ed. Liliane Weissberg, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

7 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* pp. 96–101.

8 Karl Marx, letter to Kugelmann, July 1868, quoted in *The Human Condition,* p. 321.

9 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 97.

10 See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978).

11 Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 324.

CHAPTER TWO

Arendt and Aristotle: An Apologia for Narration

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The missing link connecting the texts from her youth (her dissertation on Saint Augustine and *Rahel Varnhagen*) with the famous works on totalitarianism appears to be Arendt's concept of human life as a political action revealed in the language of a narration (*story* and *history*). Therefore, we now must deal with what seems to us to be an apologia for narration in Hannah Arendt's work, one that cuts across all of her research, before reading the political works of her maturity. In the light of the context of narrative according to Arendt, those works will better demonstrate their philosophical and ethical ambitions, and the difficulties and ambiguities that people have taken pleasure in identifying in them should then, I hope and this is my wager, be dissipated.

Arendtian criticism today opposes Arendt's Aristotelianism and Kantism to Heidegger's Platonism – that is, when it is not attributing Arendt's alleged political irrationality to Heidegger's political thought! I shall attempt to discuss these two opposed and equally schematic readings:[1] indeed, Arendt adopts the Heideggerian strategy of deconstruction (*Abbau*) of metaphysics, as well as the Heideggerian themes of disclosure (*Erschlossenheit*), unhiddenness (*Unverborgenheit*), and publicness (*Offentlichkeit*) – translations by Stambauch – and his insistence on finitude, contingency, and the worldlessness as internal structures of human freedom, etc.; but she separates them from their existential context and transposes them into a political context. Nonetheless, this is precisely a *re-reading* of Aristotle and of Kant that comes after her familiarizing herself with Nietzsche and Heidegger, a perspective that guides Arendt in this act of appropriation and transposition.

Her reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics* leads her to distinguish, in *The Human Condition*, *poiēsis*, an activity of *production*, from *praxis*, an activity of *action*. Arendt alerts us to the internal limitations in the production of works: labour and 'works' or 'products' 'reify' the fluidity of human experience within 'objects' which we 'use' as 'means' with a view to a given 'end'; the seeds of the reification and utilitarianism to which the human condition succumbs are already within *poiēsis* understood in this way. On the other hand and conversely, within the *polis*, seen as a 'space of appearance' or 'public space,' there develops an *action* (*praxis*) that is not construction (*fabrication*), but rather 'the possibility of the human being.' Conceptualized within the notion of *energeia* (actuality) by Aristotle,[2] *praxis* includes activities that are not oriented toward a specific goal (*ateleis*) and leave behind no created work (*par'autas erga*), but instead 'are exhausted within an action that is itself full of meaning.'

The *polis*, whose model Arendt looks for in Homer's Trojans, in Herodotus, and in Thucydides, is the optimal locus for that action. This *polis* is no more than a physical localizing, as will be the case for the Roman City founded upon a law, but with it an 'organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together,'[3] and which can manifest itself 'anywhere and any time,' if 'I appear to others as they appear to me.'[4] A locus, therefore, of the *inter-esse*, of the 'between-two,' such a political model is founded on nothing else but 'action and speech,' but never is there one without the other. What speech?

Faithful to Heidegger's teaching, Arendt emphasizes that poetry, whose substance is language, is by that very fact 'the most human art,' and is close to the thought that inspires it. Poetry therefore is not reified, does not become a utilitarian object. Being 'condensed,' oriented toward 'remembrances,' it actualizes the essence of language. On the other hand, however, it is also the least-worldly, remaining in the background with respect to inter-being. How does this poetic speech manifest itself within the *polis* in order to reveal the virtuosity of its heroes?

It is *phronēsis*, a practical wisdom or prudence, or even a judging sagacity – to be distinguished from *sophia*, theoretical wisdom – that props up and supports speech within the 'network of human relations.' We need to find a discourse, a *lexis*, that can answer the question 'Who are you?' – a question that is implicitly addressed to all newcomers, concerning their actions and their speech. *Narrative* will fulfil this role, the invented story that accompanies history. In interpreting Aristotle, Arendt proposes a way of articulating these two narrations (story/history), a way that differs, in its originality, from both the formalist theories of narrativity and the theories of Paul Ricoeur.

The discordant relation between true history and invented story is implicitly recognized, and our theoretician first places special value on the uniqueness of heroic exploits in her Greek models of the City. Without being a 'demi-god,' the Homeric *hērōs* manifests his own distinction. But that distinction is in no way exclusive since 'all free men are capable of it.'[5] The space of appearance of the *polis* is such that it calls upon everyone to show an 'original courage' which is nothing else but a 'consenting to act and speak,' to leave one's safe shelter and expose one's self to others and, with them, 'be ready to risk disclosure.' This would be the first political condition for 'revelation': demonstrating *who* I am, and not *what* I am. Next, in the agonistic test of competition, the *who* (I am) is measured against others and, in that rivalry, demonstrates its excellence. Excellence is not to be found in victory, any more than it is measured according to its motivations or the results of its actions. It is in 'greatness' (*megethos*).[6] This is a matter of political appreciation, since it is within the network of human relations that what stands out from all ordinariness, what is extraordinary, will define itself.

We note that the *actor* himself, the actor alone, however heroic his exploit, does not constitute heroic action. Heroic action is such only if it becomes memorable. Where do we find this memory? It is *spectators* who complete the story in question, and they do so through *thought*, thought that follows upon the *act*. This is a completion that takes place through *evoked memory,* without which there is nothing to tell. It is not the actors, but the spectators, if they are capable of thought and memory, who turn the *polis* into an organization that is creative of memory and/or history/histories.

This is at the very heart of Arendtian thought: for a true history to become a narrated history, there are two inseparable conditions. First, the existence of an *inter-esse* within which and through which the second condition is realized. The fate of the narrative depends on an 'in between' where we eventually see the resolving logic of memorization as detachment from the lived *ex post facto*.

On these conditions alone, the 'fact' can be revealed in 'shareable thought' through the verbalizing of a 'plot.'

Arendt comes back to this 'dimension of the depths of human existence' represented by the *memory* that underlies narrative when she stigmatizes the crisis in modern culture by deeming it a 'danger of oblivion':

> The tragedy began ... when it turned out that there was no mind to inherit and to question, to think about and to remember. The point of the matter is that the '*completion,' which indeed every enacted event must have in the minds of those who then are to tell the story and to convey its meaning,* eluded them; and without *this thinking completion after the act,* without *the articulation accomplished by remembrance,* there simply was no story left that could be told.[7]

Thus, having noted the discordance between lived history and narrated history, Arendt does not think that what is essential in narration is to be found in the construction of a cohesion, internal to the story, in narrative art. She is fully aware of this 'formal' or 'formalist' aspect of Aristotelian theory: the beautiful requires the union of various parts (*taxis*) as much as it does greatness (*megethos*). But she spends little time on the technical aspects of narrative and sticks more closely to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to that text, what is especially important for eyewitness narrative is firstly to recognize the 'moment of ending or closure,' and secondly to 'identify the agent' of the story. The art of narrative resides in the ability to condense the action into an exemplary moment, to extract it from the continuous flow of time, and reveal a *who*: this is

Achilles, and his exploit is brief – that is what a good story tells. The brevity of a narrative itself takes on the value of revelation, for the demonstration of a *who* works in an oracular manner, as Heraclitus says: oracles 'do not speak nor do they hide, but they make a sign.' That sign is a condensed one, incomplete, fragmentary: it launches an infinite action of interpretation.

Such a narrative, formulated within the network of human relations and destined for a political *inter-esse*, is fundamentally integrated into action and can demonstrate this essential logic only by itself becoming action: by manifesting itself and acting as 'drama,' as 'theatre,' by 'playing' itself. Only in this way can *muthos* remain *energeia*. For it to remain revelation, too, and not be frozen by reification, it must be played out. Against static *mimēsis*, Arendt calls upon theatrical gestural action as the *modus operandi* of optimal narration.

From ancient times right up to Catholic liturgy, this *acted narrative* – often called *living word* – has haunted Western civilization's project for a political space made up of shareable particularities. But we have to credit Hannah Arendt for rehabilitating the idea with a political purpose in mind, at the heart of the contemporary cultural crisis:

> ... the specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of acting and speaking that it can be represented and 'reified' only through a kind of repetition, the imitation or *mimēsis*, which according to Aristotle prevails in all arts but is actually appro-

> priate only to the *drama*, whose very name (from the Greek verb *dran*, 'to act') indicates that play-acting actually is an imitation of acting.[8]

To act, see, remember, complete memory through narrative: that seems to be the royal road to the revelation of the *who* that constitutes, in Arendt, a truly political narration.

Neither *bios theōrētikos* of pure thought, nor solitary revelation of pure poetry, it is instead a contemplation of the spoken actions of the City. In an oft-discussed and very obscure passage of Aristotle, Arendt finds a community space made up of political perspectives that are in a way pre- or post-theoretical, a space that admires neither man in himself nor what is mortal, but rather the ability of narrated action to immortalize living beings. Arendt comments:

> The famous passage in Aristotle, 'Considering human affairs, one must not ... consider man as he is and not consider what is mortal in mortal things, but think about them [only] to the extent that they have the possibility of immortalizing,'[9] occurs very properly in his political writings. For the polis was for the Greeks, as the *res publica* was for the Romans, first of all their guarantee against the futility of individual life, the space protected against this futility and reserved for the relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals.[10]

'One' immortalizes one's self by becoming a '*who*' that acts within political space, thus giving rise only to a memorable narrative.

Why would speech that recounts action enjoy this privileged status? First because it is in action, as an ability to launch a *beginning*, that the human condition of individuation is actualized.[11] The 'living flux of action and speech' is demonstrated in *mimēsis* – which, according to Aristotle, Arendt emphasizes, does not indicate the imitation of an isolated character, but rather an 'imitation of action' – through 'plot.' While for Plato *mimēsis* allows itself to be caught like a slave to appearances, and while *The Sophist* rejects 'plot' or *muthos* as childish,[12] Aristotle, studying tragedy, discovers in plot a *mimēsis praxeōs* that is something else again. Characters here are not reified 'as such,' for the chorus, 'that does not imitate,' offers a commentary on them that is an answer to *hubris* (lack of moderation) through *phronēsis* (wisdom). Further, the 'composition or writing of the play' effects an imitation that is realized only when it is represented on stage, therefore acted. So it goes for actions that give language the movement of life and public wisdom. Aristotle writes:

> Tragedy is essentially an imitation, not of persons, but of action and life (*bios*), of a *eudaimonia*. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities by virtue of their character (*ethos*), but it is by virtue of their *praxis* that they are *eudaimones*, or the inverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it, i.e. its plot, that is the end and purpose of the tragedy, and the end is everywhere the chief thing.[13]

The prototype of this revelation by spoken action is, as we have seen, *drama* as it speaks action. Arendt sums up her implicit Aristotle in terms already cited above: 'That is also why the theater is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art. By the same token, it is the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationship with others.'[14]

This concept rejects the vision of a revelatory power for poetic speech that Arendt had found in Heidegger: 'However, thinking is poetizing ... Thinking says what the truth of Being dictates; it is the original *dictare*. Thinking is primordial poetry.'[15]

Nonetheless, Arendt is not undertaking a naïve return to Aristotle, in order to re-establish his hypothetical purity. As a reader of Nietzsche and Heidegger, and being attentive to their successive dismantlings of metaphysics, she comes back to *phronēsis* and to *narrated action* only to echo and develop the questions already asked by Nietzsche and Heidegger with respect to action, freedom of action, and its pragmatic impasses – in order to try to establish, after her predecessors and herself, little islands of a shareable world.

This reference by Arendt to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Poetics* has to be read in the awareness that an earlier reading of Aristotle had led Heidegger to his 1924 course on *The Sophist*, attended by Arendt. It has often been shown that reading Aristotle allowed Heidegger to oppose Husserl's primacy of consciousness with practical existence, and establish existential analytics (the first part of fundamental ontology). It has not as often been shown that this Heideggerian reading effects metamorphoses, hardenings, as well as obliterations of certain essential features of Aristotle's thought. Thus Heidegger seems to take into account the Aristotelian distinction *poiēsis/praxis* (fabrication/action). The difference that he establishes between *Umwelt* and *Welt* can be seen as echoing the Aristotelian separation. Nonetheless, wisdom, added to *praxis*, is for Aristotle a *phronēsis* (discernment), prudence or judging perspicacity. It is precisely here that we find a Heideggerian modification: the *phronēsis* is replaced by *sophia*, in the sense of an orientation toward Being, rather than toward the 'network of human relations.'

Indeed, for Aristotle, engaged in debate with Plato, *sophia* cannot be applied to the fragility of human affairs: these, since they cannot be grasped by a stable knowing, require an aptitude that is at the same time intellectual, affective, and moral, and possessed by all, not just specialists. *Phronēsis* is developed within a plural deliberation that is internal to the space of appearance that we know the *polis* to be. While emphasizing the pre-eminence of the contemplative life, for it alone demonstrates 'something divine present in' us all,[16] Aristotle distinguishes *sophia*, theoretical wisdom, from *prudence*, which is concerned with 'things human and things about which it is possible to deliberate.'[17] *Phronēsis* has as object not just universals, but also particulars, for it is 'concerned with action' and 'with the ultimate particular, which is the object not of knowledge, but of perception.'[18] We can at this point ask: is this not the same *phronēsis*, judging perspicacity, that Arendt scrutinizes through Kant's 'aesthetic judgment' – Kant, whom, toward the end of her life, she makes the basis of her political philosophy,[19] and whom I shall discuss in my fourth lecture?

Indeed, in *Was ist Metaphysik?* (1929), and right up to his texts from the Rectorate period, Heidegger embraces Plato's *Republic.* He abandons the conflictuality and plurality of *praxis* as seen by Aristotle, as well as the discursive modes that are particular to myth, history, and tragedy. This produces not only a solipsistic unification of action within thought alone, but also a transposition of that solipsism of *sophia* that replaces *phronēsis,* even in the public domain. Therefore, the public domain itself will be considered by Heidegger no longer as a provisional plurality that must always be adjusted, but rather as a unanimous and mystical passion: that of the single man, and that of the people considered as a single man. Even more, as soon as you identify the Being's thought with *praxis,* we are led to a cohesive, 'scientific' engagement, and to an action of voluntary control over the people. The absolute negligence of plurality, of moderation, and of the provisional that characterizes such a radicalization makes it necessarily a tyrannical thought and, in the extreme, a dictatorial action and a totalitarian regime.[20] Even after the *Kehre,* and seeing the philosophical, if not political, consequences of his errors, notably, even abandoning metaphysical 'science,' Heidegger continues to assimilate action to thought to the extent that thought 'initially corresponds' to language: 'Thought is action in its innermost distinctiveness'; and, faithful to a Platonism that is nonetheless somewhat dismantled in his *Nietzsche,* he persists in ignoring Aristotelian plurality. We have to question here the very nature of the 'distinctiveness' in question. On the contrary, throughout her philosophical and political work, Arendt emphasizes an opposition between, on the one hand, the power of Platonic Ideas and of their tyrannical latency that is unfailingly realized when the thinker applies them in political action, and, on the other, the opening of 'authority' that Aristotle – that other philosopher of the 'modes of life' (*bioi*) and 'one of the most coherent and least contradictory of the great thinkers' – was the first to think: an 'authority' based not upon the notion of domination, but rather upon that of a 'nature' made up of 'differences.'[21] We cannot forget that the discourse that is proper to this *other* authority that Arendt seeks to restore, beyond modern secularism, is quite simply *narrative*.

This quick return to Aristotle *via* Heidegger was necessary in order to appreciate the discussion Arendt leads, implicitly, with her former professor from Marburg, often without naming him and in a manner that can be qualified as 'ironic,' but indeed in the Platonic sense of a *dialogue* and a *displacement*, and in no way a Voltairian mocking or with the devalorization of a caricature. Arendt – who bitterly deplored Heidegger's refusal to read and comment upon her books – could have said of him, however, what she often said of Plato, quoting Cicero: 'I prefer before heaven to go astray with Plato rather than hold true views with his opponents.'[22]

Along with this rereading of Aristotle, Arendt turns to Saint Augustine in order to formulate an indissoluble link between act *and* word, that would be – beyond and in addition to the poetic word – the supreme 'revelation' of the 'unique individuality' which makes human plurality a paradoxical plurality of 'unique beings.' 'With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance.'[23] Thus, the gravity of being-for-death that, according to Heidegger, purifies the asceticism of the Self in the disclosure of language, will be transformed by Arendt into a succession, less desolate than shining, of *ephemeral strangers* who disappear only when dislodged by the surprising birth of newcomers:

> Human action, like all strictly political phenomena, is bound up with human plurality, which is one of the fundamental conditions of human life insofar as it rests on the fact of natality, through which the human world is constantly invaded by strangers, newcomers whose actions and reactions cannot be foreseen by those who are already there and are going to leave in a short while.[24]

Now we can better understand why *historical account* in its dual nature (human plurality's memory, in Herodotus and Thucydides, and personal confession in Saint Augustine), since it links 'act and word,' is seen as such a noble concept by Arendt: it is because a story is a memory of an action that is itself a birth and a foreignness that endlessly begin anew in the public space, and whose ontological possibilities are established in the initial fact of our birth. On the contrary, *Being and Time* only once evokes a later myth, the fable of Cura[25] (of Caius Julius Hyginus, written in Rome in the time of Augustus and sent by Herder to Goethe, who was inspired by it in the writing of the second *Faust*). *Being and Time* deems Thucidydes to be superficial. Having noted that not only *words* but, above all, *grammar* lacks the ability to grasp being in its Being, Heidegger believes that only the 'complexity of concepts' and the 'firmness of expression' can be the remedy. The philosopher notes them in Plato's and Aristotle's 'ontological passages,' which he compares with 'Thucidydes' narrative passages,' to the detriment of the latter.

Here, unlike her teacher, Arendt bases herself upon the 'famous words of Pericles in the Funeral Oration,' as reported by Thucidydes,[26] to praise the 'theatre' and 'witnessing' whereby the *polis* creates the glory of the hero, through memorable *narrative*, so that 'those who forced every sea and land to become the scene of their daring' have no need of either 'Homer nor anyone else who knows how to turn words':

> ... men's life together in the form of the *polis* seemed to assure that the most futile of human activities, action and speech, and the least tangible and most ephemeral of man-made 'products,' the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable.[27]

We can almost hear the implicit dialogue that Arendt carries on with the passage from Heidegger in 'The Turning,' where he assimilates thought, action, and poetic language. If thought is a *sophia*, Arendt says in essence, political action accompanies it, but above all modifies it into a *phronēsis* that is able to share in the plurality of living beings. *It is through narrative, and not in language in* *and of itself (which nonetheless is the means and the vehicle in play here), that essentially political thought is realized.* Through this narrated action that story represents, man corresponds to life or belongs to life to the extent that human life is unavoidably a political life. Narrative is the initial dimension in which man lives, the dimension of a *bios* – and not of a *zōē* – a political life and/or an action recounted to others. The initial man-life correspondence is narrative; narrative is the most immediately shared action and, in that sense, the most initially political action. Finally, and because of narrative, the 'initial' itself is dismantled, is dispersed into 'strangenesses' within the infinity of narrations. Thus Arendt's conception of narrative is a radical response to Heidegger's attempt to essentialize – initialize – rationalize Being. In short, Arendt's notion of narrative is a careful deconstruction of Heidegger's Being and its poetic language.

1 See, notably, Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), who scrupulously establishes Arendt's debt to Heideggerian philosophy while showing that she incorporates it in a personal manner and within the context of a specific politics.

2 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1094a 1–5), in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:1729, and other texts. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 206.

3 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., p. 186n.

6 Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* (1450b.24), quoted in Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 205n.

7 Hannah Arendt, 'The Gap between Past and Future,' Preface to *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1968), p. 6. Emphasis added.
8 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 187.
9 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1177b.31), in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2:1862.
10 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 56.
11 Ibid., pp. 175–81.
12 'They have the air of treating us like children to whom each of them has his own story to tell' (Plato, *The Sophist* [242c], trans. A.E. Taylor [London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961], p. 135).
13 Aristotle, *Poetics* (1450a.15), in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2:2320.
14 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 188.
15 Martin Heidegger, 'The Anaximander Fragment,' in *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 19.
16 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1177b.27ff), in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2:1861.
17 Ibid., 1141b.8–9, 2:1803.
18 Ibid., 1142a.27ff, 2:1803. Aristotle nonetheless specifies that the perception he is concerned with is not of 'qualities peculiar to one sense but a perception akin to that by which we perceive that the particular figure before us is a triangle.'
19 See Hanna Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
20 On the continuity between the solipsistic thought of the *Dasein* and Heidegger's political implication in the Rectorship affair, see Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*, trans. Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 41–53: 'But [Heidegger] radically removes himself from Aristotle's views, or if one prefers he metamorphoses Aristotle *in toto*, when to this thought of Being he assigns the role not of being dissociated from *praxis* and *phronēsis*, but of compounding these very notions, which is to say, of compounding the finite movement of a mortal resolute existence in his effort to found it ontologically. To think Being, henceforth, means

to think the finite time of *praxis*. From which there results the fact that the thinker on Being is in the end the true judge on human affairs' (ibid., pp. 44–5).

21 See Hannah Arendt 'What Is Authority?' in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, pp. 115–20.

22 Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance,' in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, p. 224. We think of Arendt when she describes Lessing: 'Lessing's thought is not ... polemical' ('On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing,' in *Men in Dark Times* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968] p. 10).

23 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 176–7.

24 Hannah Arendt, 'The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,' in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, p. 61.

25 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM, 1962), p. 242.

26 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* II.41, ed. T.E. Wick (New York: The Modern Library, 1982), pp. 110–11.

27 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 197–8.

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CHAPTER THREE

Narrating the Twentieth Century

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More concretely, and among writers from the twentieth century, Arendt chooses its novelists who, through their fictions, are observers of historical action, whose meaning, hidden to their contemporaries, they reveal. The poets so often quoted in her texts (her friends Randall Jarrell and Robert Lowell, as well as Rilke, Yeats, Emily Dickinson, W.H. Auden, Mandelstam, Valéry, or René Char) are quoted not because of the virtuosity of their expression, but rather for the wisdom of their blazing stories. Neither the narrative prowess of some of them nor the stylistic uniqueness of others is the focus of Arendt's attention. She is more interested in 'narrathemes': in brief narrative sequences that condense or metaphorically express the eyewitness account of an historical experience.

Marcel Proust, read with patience and passion, paints, *through* Swann, Charlus, and the Guermantes, the picture of the intrinsically anti-Semitic philosemitism typical of French salons before and after the Dreyfus affair. The Arendtian art of quotation finds in *The Remembrance of Things Past* one of those 'superimpressions' that Proust effects and which define the assimilated Jew – but also other 'clans,' indeed the whole of French society – conferring everlasting fame. 'The question is not as for Hamlet, to be or not to be, but to belong or not to belong.'[1] Arendt interprets by showing that the secularizing process by which 'Judaism' becomes 'jewishness' demonstrates an abandonment of 'identity' (or 'being') in the name instead of 'belonging' (or 'being one of them'), and demonstrates also that this secularizing process has sinister consequences, even to the Shoah, for European Jews in the twentieth century: 'Jewish origin, without religious and political connotation, became everywhere a psychological quality, was changed into "jewishness," and from then on could be considered only in the categories of virtue or vice.'[2]

Kafka – a huge photo of whom decorated Arendt and Blücher's apartment at 95 Morningside Drive in New York – weighs in with a parable, *Er*, that describes 'the time sensation of the thinking ego,' 'a battlefield where past and future confront each other.' Arendt comments on 'the extreme parsimony of Kafka's language,' likening it initially to an allegory of Nietzsche's on the instant (*Augenblick*), represented by a portico under which two roads meet, then likening it to Heidegger's interpretation of that metaphor: the instant will be given, not as something the spectator *sees*, but rather will be seen by 'the one who *himself is* the now.'[3] Arendt's reading is constructed as a veritable literary mosaic that includes narratives by Kafka, Nietzsche, Heidegger ... and Arendt herself, so that she becomes the 'battlefield' for the thoughts and the history of her century in her language.

In an earlier study of Kafka (1944),[4] Arendt rejoices, initially, in the 'absence of style [*sic*]' in that author, the absence 'of the love of words as such [*sic*], even to the point of stiffness.'[5] Visibly, our critic abhors 'all experimentation and all mannerism,' but that does not stop her from making two observations whose relevance stands out in this schematic study of Kafka's writing. She affirms that 'the meanness of the world in which Kafka's heroes find themselves trapped, consists precisely in exposing its divinization, its sufficiency, its divine necessity.'[6] Is this 'meanness,' then, 'divine'? But, above all, and more in keeping with the literary, she does not interpret the 'abstract character devoid of human qualities' in Kafka as being the simple reflection of a bureaucratic universe in which the world functions like a machine that the hero seeks to destroy. According to Arendt, Kafka does not present realistic characters – as we know them in bourgeois novels – but rather 'models': it is not their 'reality' that interests the writer, but their 'truth,' this last being 'much more the result of a process of thought than of a felt experience.'[7] More thinker than naturalist novelist, because he thinks what he feels, Kafka traces schema of thought where we would have expected to find characters.

In the 'Autobiography' of Stefan Sweig, Arendt notes – as in the life of Rahel – the drama of the assimilated Jew who nonetheless hopes to distinguish himself by becoming a celebrity in Viennese society – before being rejected by it, to his great humiliation. He has run into what is the reality of the Jewish people, but, being incapable of political engagement, this 'expelled-from-paradise' person – as he himself defines himself – can only espouse the calm despair of suicide. This is an unmatchable demonstration that 'shame and honour are political concepts.'[8]

Hermann Broch, for the 'terrestrial absolute' and the 'abstract' musical composition that marks his style, Walter Benjamin for his 'bad luck' and his 'gift of thinking poetically' with paradoxes that lead him right up to suicide, and Isak Dinesen, alias Karen Blixen, one of the rare women – with Natalie Sarraute and Rosa Luxemburg – to be granted grace by Arendt during her 'black times,'[9] complete the Arendtian pantheon of contemporary writers of fiction.

Isak Dinesen, in effect, hides Karen Blixen under a male name – we remember the photo of Arendt with her boyish look in the 1950s – Karen Blixen, whose life is not without resemblances to that of her commentator. Daughter of an emancipated mother who was a suffragette, which Martha was not (but did she not know Rosa Luxemburg?), and of a father who dies too young (Karen was ten years old, whereas Hannah was seven when Paul Arendt died), the novelist married a syphilitic man (like Hannah's father) and suffered within her own body the awful consequences of that disease (no relationship to Hannah's case here). Karen-Tania, called Titania, finds that the glare of public life does not suit a woman; she detests the trap of writing and above all the trap of taking one's self seriously – like Hannah, she adores laughing to the point of adopting as pseudonym not only a male first name, Isak, but also a word signifying 'he who laughs' in Hebrew. Analogies between the two women become a matter of real twinning when Arendt recalls that it is the 'great passion' (as with Rahel? as with Hannah?) for the uncontrollable and impossible Denys Finch-Hatton that decided the course of Titania's life, of her desire to tell stories, then write; and Arendt reminds us that she was able to put her life together only after having lost everything, in order to be able to recount everything. Our clever reader, however, discovers that her Scheherazade is in love with, if we are to believe Shakespeare, an ass! Reader beware: it is not recommended that you push this comparison of the two women too far. Who is the ass for Arendt? But the twinning is justified when Arendt emphasizes this essence of the thought of Isak Dinesen, which she shares: 'Without repeating life in imagination you can never be fully alive, "lack of imagination" prevents people from "existing."'[10] Hannah comments: 'If it is true, as [Titania-Isak's] "philosophy" suggests, that no one has a life worth thinking about whose life story cannot be told, does it not then follow that life could be, even ought to be, lived as a story, that what one has to do in life is to make the story come true?'[11] The epigraph to the chapter titled 'Action' of *The Human Condition* is borrowed from Dinesen: 'All cares are bearable if you make a story out of them and tell that story.' From Rahel to Titania, the circle is closed, and Hannah already knows (the article is written in 1968) that her own life is from now on a true history, as much as it is a told story.

Blixen-Dinesen's lover was one of those men who cannot accept the world: extremists, Arendt says, be they revolutionaries or conservatives, and also the thinker or the criminal, are of the same stripe when it comes to their rejection of the world; the reader is thinking of her philosophy teacher, ex-Nazi and solitary poet. While an anti-conformist woman storyteller neither accepts nor refuses political life: she settles for action through speech. But there are so many traps in this active narration! Those traps fascinate our philosopher, who sets out volubly to reconstitute Isak Dinesen's narratives in the form of a rather long conclusion to her study of that novelist.[12] Also, Arendt even seems ready to devote herself to teaching literature: 'If I were a literary critic, I [would speak] of the all-important part the sky plays in Brecht's poems, and especially in his few, very beautiful love poems.'[13] But she is not Scheherazade, nor is she a literary critic: 'nothing but' a vigilant political observer who takes interest in ... Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Long before the rest of the world!

Indeed, Arendt was one of the first commentators of Céline,[14] for in her eyes this author illustrates the 'compromise of the elites with the mob.' 'Ideological imagination was needed in order to complete the rationalistic anti-Semitism of the French,' she writes, quoting the anti-Semitic pamphlets that are such a sinister memory.[15] She deepens this analysis and completes it by suggesting that the formalism of elite artists, of the avant-gardes such as *Bauhaus*, was expressing a cult of the technical and of anonymity. These elites scorned the 'grandeur of man' that Robespierre had spoken of, and were ready to 'destroy civilization' along with 'respectability.' To the 'desire for the unmasking of hypocrisy [that] was [irresistible] among the elite,' there was added, she says, an 'aversion against the philosemitism of the liberals': from this one can create a 'fictitious world' common to the rootless masses and caused by 'a lack of a sense of reality' on the part of the elite.[16] This is a summary interpretation, of course, but not without pertinence as far as 'human affairs' are concerned.

Kipling and the legend of origins, Lawrence of Arabia and his English ego, Barrès, Maurras, and others,[17] with Péguy in an oft-evoked counterpoint,[18] round out this narrative universe that is her reference, and are at the ultimate 'origin' of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Nathalie Sarraute is the only contemporary author to whom Arendt devotes a study.[19] Seduced by a narration that contravenes the canons of the classical novel in order to 'fracture the "smooth and hard" surface of characters' and adopt a 'psychological vivisection,' Arendt recognizes that she prefers the tropisms of this 'inner life,' described by Sarraute, over the upheavals that the psychoanalyst's couch brings on. She takes pleasure in the cruelty and irony with which Sarraute explores the catastrophic interiority of the selfish *I*, each word becoming a 'weapon,' when it is not commonplace or cliché, while the family and society come apart and sink into the inanities of those 'they' of whom the most insignificant are none other than ... self-appointed 'intellectuals.' Once more, Arendtian analysis appropriates narrative to shape its technique in such a way as to give privileged status to a revelation of social mechanisms; and, here, a revelation of the psychosocial comedy. The 'moment of truth' in Sarraute, where the clashing of two sub-conversations produces a 'metamorphosis' – that is the fleeting perception of an unsustainable revolt – seems to her to be a dramatic quality that is unique to contemporary literature. However, although this 'ère du soupçon' amuses her a lot, Arendt stops short of espousing its radical disenchantment; she prefers to save the 'common world,' 'natural kinship,' despite the falsity of those concepts that Sarraute's bitter stories demonstrate. Ten or so years before her book *Judging*, inspired by her reading of Kant, Arendt notes Sarraute's sarcasms with respect to 'taste,' which is presumed to be at the basis of the social bond, but prefers to conclude on an optimistic and Kantian note: against the false 'they,' there is nonetheless a possible 'us,' the respectable community of reader and author, a community at the same time so fragile and so strong ...

Finally, Arendt espouses Brecht, whose melancholic genius she appreciates while at the same time warning that we must not expect any political relevance from the endogenous irresponsibility of poets (philosophers too?). They are good *thinkers,* but they are incapable of judging. What she calls the 'chronic misconduct of poets and artists' is however sanctioned within their own activity, and general opinion need add nothing. Although they deserve our help as well as our forgiveness, they 'can sin so gravely that they must bear their full load of guilt and responsibility.'[20] The heaviest burden, one that Brecht bore dramatically, is nothing other than the death of talent itself ...

One could reproach Arendt for not having understood that the poetic language of a narrator – see Proust – is able to conjugate the 'thinking ego' and the 'ego that appears and moves through the world' in order to translate a perceptible *nunc stans* and breathe it into recovered time much better than can any philosophical concept or mystical vision.[21] We can only be consternated by her Lukács-type sociologism that declares with facility, with regard to Kafka, that 'any style, by its own magic, is a kind of flight from truth'; or that decrees that the complicated fate of the classical novel simply 'corresponds to the slow decline of the citizen' in the sense of the French Revolution and of Kant;[22] and that, in the face of a world controlled by secret powers, Kafka wanted nothing more than 'to be a fellow citizen,' a 'member of the community.'[23] Dear Kafka, who is supposed to 'make us afraid' to the point of arousing Kabbalistic interpretations of his works, if not a satanic theology,[24] when all he wanted was to become a 'fellow citizen.'

We can lament the fact that Arendt does not appreciate the intrapsychic but also historical need for *revolt* that led the avant-gardes of this century to re-evaluate without precedent the structures of narrative, of the word, and of the Self – to the domain not only of melancholy and 'desolation,' as she says, but also of psychosis; and that these limit-conditions, shown by individuals as well as by the 'populace' (*mob*), found in Céline, for example, the most symptomatic, if not the most prudent or lucid, expression. Art, and in particular the art of narrative as genre, has a history that repeats neither past stakes nor former solutions, and that today contends more with a clinical protocol than it does with moral judgment. It is up to us to discern the causes and fate of that history, but not to stigmatize it.

But this is not Arendt's preoccupation. She seeks an optimal solution to the 'fragility of human affairs,' and, according to this political perspective, narrative art is subordinate to just action, although it is narrative art that makes it possible, or not, to highlight just action. In fact, narrative art is devoured by just action; no aesthetic privilege, no excellence of the Oeuvre can obliterate the Aristotelian ideal of *hou heneka*: a design for a beautiful and good life.

The artiste, and in particular the modern artist, is to her the quintessence of *homo faber*, that very mediocre variant of humanity, according to Arendt, and artists push to the extreme the modern tendencies to commercialization and consumerism with respect to contemporary works. In the extreme, would THE major work, for Arendt, not be a non-work, an unwritten work, which has not become 'reified' into 'product'? Socrates will devote himself to an infinite search for true judgment within a perpetual interrogation of himself and of others, without ignoring a *polis* within which differing opinions and lives clashed. Socrates, the anti-Plato, provocative gadfly, birthing midwife, torpedo-fish that paralyses, cannot, for Arendt, be credited with having established 'a truth/opinion opposition ..., the most antisocratic conclusion that Plato got from Socrates' trial.'[25] Far from being a benefactor of the City, although he thought that virtue could be taught,[26] Socrates leaves to Arendt the historian the example of a thought that is in movement, a *bios theōrētikos* whose unending questioning should never cease to be of concern to 'public affairs' themselves: 'The meaning of what Socrates was doing lay in the *activity itself*. Or to put it differently: To think and to be fully alive are the same, and this implies that thinking must always begin afresh.'[27]

Throughout the *life of the narrative* seen as a 'quest' for shareable meaning, it is therefore not a total and totalizing work that Arendt seeks. But neither does she seek the creation of a political space that would be in itself a 'work of art.' To see the essence of politics as a welcoming phenomenality, a locus of pure appearance that has been freed from the schema of domination, seems to represent an aestheticization that does not correspond to Arendt's thought.[28] The aestheticizing reification of politics that we can see in National Socialism does not reveal the non-political essence of the political, as was once said, but rather its death. For Arendt, if political life is inseparable from its story, which demonstrates to all (*dokei moi*) its conflicts, it is uniquely to the extent that that political life resists its own aestheticization, sees itself as an 'activity' (*praxis*) that cannot be reduced to its simple 'product' (*poiēsis*), and allows itself to be shared by the irreducible plurality of those who are living.

In other words, art is not necessarily the essence of national-aestheticism, reputed in turn to be the essence of the political in the West. If it is true that a certain cult of poetry and myth, which deploys the genius of national expression, leads inevitably to national-aestheticism, Arendt 'dismantles' that thesis. In her attention to story and the novel, she shows how narration participates in another politics, that of open memory, a renewed and shared memory that she calls the *life* of a *who*. That the narrator (Céline or Brecht) can sometimes be mistaken and at other times see clearly is another problem that leaves intact the structural potentialities of narration as wide-open and infinite political action, offered to the judging perspicacity of *inter-esse*.

Also, though she remained a fervent reader of poetry throughout her life,[29] it is story that stirs her to action, through plot and its role in action – in the last instance, political action. We have to remember that Hannah Arendt herself wrote poetry, especially during the difficult times of her youth, when suffering the torments of romantic passion and the depression that followed. That poetic experience was undoubtedly for her in part a support, in part a shutting up of herself in that very 'desolation' that she denounces and of which she tries to rid herself both by criticizing the solipsist writing of Rahel Varnhagen and later by turning irony upon the 'melancholy' that is typical of the 'philosophical tribe.' However, her kindness for narrative was in no way a rejection of poetic expression, which, although she does not study its stylistic or prosodic phenomena, she considers to be intrinsic to narrative expression: how, indeed, could you separate poetry and narration since the 'prototypical' 'expression of exploits' is found in none other, for Arendt, than Homer?

Thus, it seems to us that she should not have espoused this well-known position of Adorno: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'[30] – and this was not at all part of her aversion to the person Adorno himself.[31] On the contrary, for Arendt, what we call the imaginary, including the deployment of poetry in narration, is the only thing that can *think* horror. Also, it seems that she could not, with Primo Levi, adopt a position opposite to Adorno's, a position according to which only poetry is able to describe the horror of prison.[32] This writer's cry so clearly betrays his own tragic desolation and irremediable disenchantment with human plurality, which led him to suicide, that Arendt, herself subject to melancholy and always fighting the temptation to suicide, could not argue against him by suggesting a possible transformation of *hubris* and an obsession with death into, instead, the *phronēsis* of a narrated action, constantly being reborn, foreign, and, for that very reason, resurrectional.[33]

Finally, if *narrative* – myth, tragedy, or history – were to have a chance of not falling into the traps set by the wisdom of professional philosophers, and a chance to escape the utilitarianism of constructors of objects of art, it would be only to the extent that it could maintain the tension between *bios theōrētikos* and *bios politikos*: without taking refuge in some purified speculation, without happily settling into the banality of the vital process, and also without joining the two of them. Where are they, these provocative-gadfly-birthing stories? Maybe they are nothing but ... Arendtian experience itself: plurality and the paradoxes of an action that has not stopped interrogating itself.

Now it is to *narrative* itself, and not to some kind of understanding, analysis, or rationalism, that Arendt assigns the capacity to think horror and the Shoah. The only 'thinking' about hell that is possible is the 'terrified imagination' of those who were able to recount their memories of Auschwitz. Far from any irrationalism, it is the extended rationality of narrative, beyond the limits of ratiocinating reason, that defends our thinker Arendt.

'I have never, since a child, doubted that God exists,' she admits to one of her friends, Alfred Kazin,[34] who recommended the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Harcourt Brace. However, this emphasis on *narrated action* and *acting narration* reveals, in the final analysis, a rare atheism, without nihilism, that Arendt subtly proposes, with a wink for Aristotle and his valorization of *logos-phronēsis*, domain of human *praxis* beyond *nous*, which would be a complete retreat from the realms of the gods. '*Logos* as distinguished from *nous* is not divine.'[35] It is indeed to this non-divine, a living speech that deploys the life of the mind in political life, that Hannah Arendt devotes herself.

Heidegger's preoccupation is entirely different. Whereas the 'official' version of his philosophy, in 1938, affirms, 'With Being, you have nothing,' the *Contributions to Philosophy* (written between 1936 and 1938 with no aim to publication) confess: 'Let us dare say it outright: Being is the rumbling of the Gods (the noise that precedes the Gods' decision as to their Gods).'[36] While still close to her teacher, the student keeps a certain distance.

And woman? With or without Isak-Titiana Dinesen-Blixen? Another mythic narrative, taken from the long list offered by Arendt, tells the well-known story of Orpheus and Eurydice: the man of imagination, musician-poet-thinker, cannot snatch his dead lover from Hades because, once he arrives in the world of the living and turns back to look at her, she disappears into thin air. Arendt's analysis of this: to think up, but also to create, the 'imaginary characters of a novel,' you have to *de-sensorialize.* Creative imagination manipulates the elements of the visible world, but succeeds in this only after having de-sensorialized them, volatilized them, killed them, just like the perceptible-visible body of Eurydice.[37]

Does Arendt-Orpheus turn Hannah-Eurydice into thin air? Reading this commentary, one does not get the impression that our author is identifying herself with the sacrificed Eurydice, nor that she mourns the defeat of Orpheus's 'productive imagination.' It may be because the only way to save 'perceptible elements,' and the feminine initially, consists in making Eurydice an Orpheus who is capable of recounting the *story of de-sensorializa-*

tion. Only in this way, from the fact of this narration, does the story of de-sensorialization become perceivable by all participants in action. To accomplish this eminently political act, one would have to be on both sides, and possess, of course, a good dose of contemplative wisdom, but also and above all of political *phronēsis*.

Thus Eurydice, who incarnates the perceptible and the feminine, is not volatilized by our political narrator, Arendt's pen. The perceptible and the feminine instead return, less as 'concepts' than as frequent metaphors that organize her thought and represent its strong points, its decisive links: *origin, condition, birth* show, in Arendt, traces of the tension between the 'contemplative life' and 'active life,' but also of that sensorialization–de-sensorialization that makes a woman a genius thinker.

However, since no label can do justice to Arendt's energy and her anxiety that never ceases to deconstruct, the term 'genius' is not suitable either. She indeed rejected it: unknown to the ancients, invented by the Renaissance, the phenomenon of genius is, according to her, the supreme justification of *homo faber*. Frustrated at having disappeared completely into his own creations that obliterate the who, modern man seeks something that might transcend craft and object; and presto, he further reifies that very transcendence by creating 'genius': '... the idolization of genius harbors the same degradation of the human person as the other tenets prevalent in commercial society.'[38] *Exit* 'genius'! We are left with Arendt's energy, which never ceases to tell how 'the essence of who somebody is cannot be reified by himself.'[39]

Nietzsche had invoked a philosophy for a life that might be fully lived: 'I allow only beautifully developed men to philosophize on life'; 'You have to want *to live* the great problems through your body and mind.'[40] Hannah Arendt is in her own way, maybe, the only philosopher of the twentieth century to realize and enact that philosophy of life in terms of a specifically political philosophy, lived by her as 'beautifully developed' woman and Jew. Her work as politician is proof, just as is her meditation on the recounted life, or on narrative as indispensable to life, at the same time its necessary condition and its double: since (Arendt, with Aristotle, is convinced) there is no life (*bios*) except the political life; and since (Arendt, along with Saint Augustine is convinced) there is no life except in and through narrative rebirth.

1 Marcel Proust, 'Cities of the Plain,' Part 2, chapter 3, in *Remembrance of Things Past,* quoted in Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Part 1, 'Antisemitism,' p. 84. See also Julia Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 190–203.
2 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Part 1, 'Antisemitism,' pp. 83–4.
3 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking,* pp. 203–4.
4 Hannah Arendt, 'Franz Kafka,' in *La Tradition cachée: le Juif comme paria* (Paris: C. Bourgois, 1987), pp. 96–121.
5 Ibid., p. 97.
6 Ibid., p. 103.
7 Ibid., p. 114.
8 Hannah Arendt, 'Les Juifs dans le monde d'hier,' in *La Tradition cachée: le Juif comme paria,* pp. 77–95.
9 Hannah Arendt, 'Isak Dinesen: 1885–1963,' in *Men in Dark Times,* pp. 95–109.
10 Ibid., p. 97.
11 Ibid., p. 105.

12 Ibid., pp. 101–9.
13 Hannah Arendt, 'Bertolt Brecht: 1898–1956,' in *Men in Dark Times*, p. 231.
14 Céline's correspondence with the American professor Milton Hindus is dated July and August 1948. At this time, Arendt was working on what would become in 1951 'Antisemitism.'
15 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part 1, 'Antisemitism.' We should not forget that Céline returned to France on 1 July 1951. Gallimard would re-edit his works, except for the pamphlets, in 1952.
16 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part 3, 'Totalitarianism,' p. 335.
17 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part 2, 'Imperialism,' pp. 178–9, 208–10, 226.
18 See, in particular, Arendt, *La Tradition cachée: le Juif comme paria*, p. 108.
19 Hannah Arendt, 'Nathalie Sarraute,' *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* 18 (1964): 785–93.
20 Arendt, 'Bertolt Brecht: 1898-1956,' in *Men in Dark Times*, p. 218.
21 Cf. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, pp. 80–1.
22 Arendt, *La Tradition cachée: le Juif comme paria*, p. 98.
23 Ibid., p. 118.
24 Ibid., p. 120.
25 Hannah Arendt, 'Philosophie et politique' (1954), in *Social Research* 57, 1 (1990): 75.
26 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, pp. 166ff.
27 Ibid., p. 178. Emphasis added.
28 Cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's theses in *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990): the total work of art as a culmination of the political.
29 Very symptomatically, the only text that she wrote with a collaborator is a study signed with her first husband, Günther Stern Anders, on the 'Elegies of Duino' by Rilke (*Neue Schweizer Rundschau* 23 [1930]: 855–71), which accentuates the loss of the divine, the self-destruction of the lover, and the vanity that founds elegiac poetry.

30 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society,' in *Prisms*, trans Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), p. 34; these words will be relativized by Adorno himself, notably in 'After Auschwitz,' in *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 362: 'Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems.'

31 Arendt had no respect for the Marxists of the Frankfurt School, and expressed a peremptory rejection especially of Adorno: an unsatisfied reader of her first husband's Günther Stern's, thesis, on music, and then a suspicious if not hostile 'friend' of Walter Benjamin's, whom he deemed to be an unworthy Marxist. See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 80, 166. Well after *Totalitarianism* (1951) and *The Human Condition* (1958), in which she clarifies her views on narration, Arendt discovered in a Frankfurt student newspaper, in 1964, a polemic with Adorno revealing that he himself, who declared poetry to be impossible after Nazism, had in fact praised, in 1934, songs whose words had been taken from a collection dedicated to Hitler. Whereas Adorno says he 'regrets' this and defends himself by accusing Heidegger, and implies that in declaring poetry to be impossible, he was taking aim at Heidegger's apology of poetry, Arendt is indignant with Adorno and 'his vain attempt to align himself on the Nazis of 1933': 'He hoped to get out of it with the name of his mother who was of Italian origin (Adorno *versus* Wiesengrund)' (letter no. 399 to Karl Jaspers, in *Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers Correspondence, 1926–1969*). Later, Arendt returns explicitly to Adorno, defending Heidegger by stating that he had himself become aware of 'this foolishness' (*Dummheit*), after a brief moment, and then had taken many more risks than were then current in a German university. But one cannot say the same thing regarding innumerable intellectuals and so-called scholars. See Hannah Arendt, *Vies politiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 319; and Sylvie Courtine-Denamy, *Hannah Arendt* (Paris: Belfond, 1994), p. 83.

32 'In 1945–46 it seemed to me that poetry would be better suited than prose to explain what was weighing inside ... After Auschwitz, there can be no more poetry, except about Auschwitz' (Primo Levi, interview in *Corriere della serra*, 28 October 1984, quoted by Myriam Anissimov, *Primo Levi: Tragedy of an Optimist*, trans. Steve Cox [London: Aurum Press, 1998], p. 369).

33 Voice of hell or of 'animal sadness', *poetry* is also for Arendt praise of the world and acceptance – or denial? – of grief: '*O happy grief!*' ('Remembering W.H. Auden,' in *The New Yorker*, 20 January 1975, pp. 39ff and 45ff). This is different from the elaborative activity that characterizes *narrative* (*story-history*), but attests to 'the eternal glory of the English language' (ibid.).

34 Alfred Kazin, *New York Jew* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978), p. 199.

35 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, p. 137. We would add to Arendt's elliptic comment Aristotle's particular concept of God, which is quite different from Plato's or the Stoics'. Hence, Aristotle's fundamental intuition is that of an incommensurable *separation* or distance between God and men. Moreover, if the Aristotelian sage is autarchic, he still nonetheless has friends: 'but the Deity is his own well-being; ... with us welfare involves a something beyond us' (*Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 1245b.1 18–19).

36 'Wagen wir das unmittelbare wort: Das Seyn ist die Erzitterung des Götterns (des Vorklangs der Götterentscheidung über ihren Gott)' (Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 65. p. 239; quoted by Rüdiger Safranski, *Heidegger et son temps* [Paris: Grasset, 1996], p. 326).

37 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, p. 86.

38 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 211.

39 Ibid.

40 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), pp. 3–12 (1884 and 1885), p. 6 (1886).

CHAPTER FOUR

'Who' and the Body

We cannot grasp the originality of the Arendtian concept of *political action* without taking into account the fact that she sees it as an actualization – of a *who* that is hypothetical, dangerous, and dependent on hope rather than based on an improbable claim for its existence. Even though the realities of liberalism and of technique condemn to failure any action that might seek to modify alienation, objectification, or 'rationalization,' Arendt's personal and political experiences lead nonetheless to her adjusting her attention as well as her criticism to focus on the modern world, starting with an appropriation of a fundamental ontology that is centred on 'the essence of man.' Her experiences lead her also to catch glimpses of the beginnings of political actions that are vehicles for a *'who.' Thinking, willing,* and *judging* lead her to meditations that appear to be philosophical, meditations that dismantle philosophy just as they do politics themselves, and they go on to sketch out a new way of looking at freedom, a way that is specifically Arendtian. The aporia of this *'who'* and of the body will guide our entry into this ultimate deconstruction of metaphysics as envisioned by Arendt, a deconstruction that constitutes her recasting of the opposition philosophy/politics in *The Life of the Mind*.

Who are we? As opposed to *what* are we? That is the disclosure, the concern, that gives life to Arendt's political and philosophical work. The Heideggerian question '*Who* is the *Dasein*?' had come first for her. However, as opposed to solitary reflection, Arendt anchors the revelatory acts and words of *'who'* in the plurality of the world. Did she, in fact, reach the point of an anthropolization of fundamental ontology – symmetrical with her 'abusively sociological' reading of Kant,[1] as some have reproached her for doing?

Arendt's thought picks up and discusses the Heideggerian revolution: The '*who*' is extracted from the transcendental life of consciousness, where the Husserlian Ego is located; it opens itself up to others who are 'being' as well as to itself and attains its being in excess; it is through 'sight' (*Sicht*) that the *Dasein* appropriates Being for itself and, by abandoning intra-worldly preoccupations in order to locate itself within 'care' (*Sorge*), it orients itself toward its most intrinsic possibilities, its own finitude: the anguish of its being in the world reveals it, in its mortality, as being the most pertinent able-to-be. Far from being rejected by Arendt, this revelation subtends the whole of the distinction established, in *The Human Condition*, between '*who*' and '*that which.*' But she brings preoccupation into the political space: which is not a devaluation of the ontological, but the very – the only – modern accomplishment of the Christian heritage of incarnation. If the '*who*' is in the world, if he is incarnated, the who should inevitably be political. The distinction between '*who*' and '*that which*' is essential here.

The '*that which*' is reduced to social appearances and to biological attributes. Although 'qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings'[2] can make an individual unique, those particularities have to do with a '*that which,*' a specimen that becomes lost in the anonymity of the species, or in life, in the natural sense of the term – a biological life from which the human being must extricate himself in order to establish his uniqueness. The '*who*' would then precisely be that extrication, this *daimon* of the Greeks which 'appears so clearly and unmistakably to others,' but which 'remains hidden from the person himself.'[3]

Always in the grasp of sight, and acting in the space of appearance, '*who*' objectifies itself neither in life understood as *zōē* nor in social utilitarianism, and yet, in Arendt, it is not a solitary self. By tracing the movement that carries the being to Being, Heidegger was designating that transcendence as being an excess (*Überschuß*) that ends up a purification of the *Selbst* (the self), as an 'authentic being able to be one's self,' as an 'intimate knowledge.' It fused phenomenon and logos, and left no place for any other disposition than that of the anguish that is symptomatic of pure foreignness (*Unheimlich*), that radical forsaken aloneness that follows from being thrown into the world.[4] Without abandoning the excess of the '*who*' that reveals this to her being, Arendt sets up, instead, a transcendence in action and word with others. '*Who*' is a self that is hidden, but hidden more from the person than from the multitude, or rather from the temporality of the memory of others. '*Who*' as a 'life of someone' appears in fact essential, but in a particular way: an 'essence' that is actualized in the time of the plurality that is specific to others. If the 'strange young girl' that Hannah Arendt continues to be, ceaselessly, if not angrily, claims her uniqueness, it is in order to think, act, and live her strangeness at the heart of the diversity of human beings, in a 'mutual' reliance. For her, indeed, '*who*' does not manifest itself to the self in an 'intimate knowledge' that is separate from the *Mit-sein*, but rather in its dynamic exception that cannot fail to rise up before the multitude of others, those different others who are born as such, who receive and interpret the acts of each new arrival by addressing, implicitly, to him the question: '*who* are you?"

Neither life as simply a member of the species, nor solipsism: the 'who' extricates itself from nature and society – nature and society which objectify it as an element belonging either to the species, or to the 'managing' group of producers – while also extricating itself from the isolation of the appropriation of self. Being in a way disseminated among human plurality and in the infinite temporality of mankind's narratives, 'who' manifests itself as being a dynamic actuality, an *energeia* that transcends deeds and actions and is in opposition to any attempt at reification or objectification: '... its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a willful purpose, as though one possessed and could dispose of this "who" in the same manner he has and can dispose of his qualities.' 'Who' reveals itself only in 'action' (distinguished, we should remember, from 'work' and from 'oeuvre'), action to which 'who is attached.' If it were to 'transcend mere productive activity,'[5] action would have no meaning, in effect, without a 'who.' 'Who' seems to be a 'source' of the creative process, but one that remains exterior to the process of the oeuvre, and 'independent of *what* they [the others] may achieve.'[6]

In tackling the thorny problem of an 'essence' or 'nature' proper to man, Arendt engages in a recasting of the ideas of the 'Master of Marburg,' as well as of her reading of Aristotle and the Church Fathers. This is all nourished by her own political experience in the world.

The excess of the 'who' replaces, in her theory, this enigmatic 'essence.' Further, this excess is neither pure thought nor a pure language that reveals Being. This 'who' comes to be at the centre of the conditions of life, which are conditions of activity with others, conditions that do not determine in any absolute manner that 'who.' 'Who' as excess is reached through a constant tearing of one's self away from biological life, from metabolic symbiosis with nature, and from the reification of 'works' and 'products.' Although it can appear as a 'source,' 'who' creates itself above all in an indefinite way, and *after the fact*: 'who' can be deciphered, in the way of a Heraclitian sign, according to what many different witnesses recount when *quid* no longer exists:

> In other words, human essence – not human nature in general (which does not exist) nor the sum total of qualities and shortcomings in the individual, but the essence of who somebody is – can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story ... Even Achilles ... remains dependent upon the storyteller, poet, or historian, without whom everything he did remains futile ...[7]

Because he knows he is mortal and that he belongs not to the continuity of the species, but rather to the spoken memory of multiple and conflicting opinion, 'who' ceases to be *'that which'* (a *quid*) and seeks to transfigure 'work' as well as 'oeuvre' into 'action,' an action that is itself spoken, projected toward both past and future, and shared with others. Thus Arendt praises action as being revelatory of the oneness of any given person, quoting Dante: '... in every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image ... nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self.'[8]

The indicator of 'who' within the actuality of action is none other than the *extraordinary*, understood, however, not as some arrogant exclusivity, but in the sense of the definition of the Greek *hērōs* that all citizens are supposed to share, and that theological tradition after Augustine developed in terms of 'uniqueness.' The horror Arendt feels for totalitarian massification is expressed here in terms of her passion for the uniqueness of the 'who' as she discovered it in Duns Scotus, the 'subtle doctor,' according to whom 'only particular things (*res*), which are characterized by "thisness" (*haecceitas*) can be said to be real for man.'[9] Arendt also evokes his *Principium individuationis*, which makes man the unique being 'par excellence.' She passionately espouses these positions. Duns Scotus's valorizing of '*this* man' raises that man to a higher level than that of the species, but this is also a rank that is superior to the thought of all humanity preceding him, and superior to the universality of thought. Even more, in rejecting the primacy of intellect over will, Duns Scotus not only gives uniqueness to mental power, but also enfranchises the power of desire and reasoning and confers an unheard-of freedom upon unique man, going against all of the causality that condemns human affairs to contingency. Finally, since the intellect is ultimately rooted in intuition, when we apprehend something in terms of its 'this' quality (*haec-*

ceitas), that apprehension is always imperfect and defective. But through contemplation of the *summum bonum*, the 'supreme thing,' wanting is transformed into loving, thus realizing the way opened by Augustine. *Amo: volo ut sis*: 'Love is conceived as activity,' writes Arendt; but it is not just a mental activity, since the primacy of the *haecceitas* requires that 'its object [not be] absent from the senses' and remain 'imperfectly known by the intellect.' This coalescence of thought and sensorially perceived action, which Arendt had already looked for in Greek heroism, is realized here in Scotist beatitude, through the intervention of *haecceitas*: '... the full and perfect attainment of the object as it is in itself, and not merely as it is in the mind.'[10] Through his philosophy of freedom and through his preference for contingency, Duns Scotus offers Arendt the opportunity to deepen her meditation on the uniqueness of 'who,' as well as on the tension between thought and sensorial perception, at the frontiers of wanting and loving. In this spirit, she also gives a commentary on the work of Pierre Olieu, a thirteenth-century Franciscan: this philosopher of Will transcends the simple 'given' within this other version of the uniqueness of '*who*,' using the phrase *experimentum suitatis*, 'the experiment of the self with itself.'[11]

While seeking to reveal 'who' in the 'fragility of human affairs,' Arendt's questioning continues on two fronts. On the one hand, there is an anchoring of fundamental ontology in the agonistic bonds of public space, in order better to affirm and preserve, with its help, the dignity of 'who.' On the other hand, the political thought that flows from this operation can only be a dismantling of what is effected under the rubric of 'politics.' Arendt could write this to Judah Magnes: 'Politics in our century is almost a business of despair and I have always been tempted to run away from it.'[12] There follows, nonetheless, a precise and complete examination not only of politics but also of the anthropology it implicates.

As opposed to 'who,' the *body* is considered by Arendt as being the agent of the vital process, in two ways: fertility and work. Guaranteeing the metabolism of nature, the body realizes both the reproduction of the species and the satisfaction of needs. Women and slaves incarnate the body at work, here the degree zero of the human and a primary expression of biological life, or *zōē*. The body never transcends nature, and it withdraws from the world in order to act only in the sphere of the private. Confined to the species and its maintenance, this body by that very fact appears as 'the only thing that one cannot share,' and becomes the paradigm of *private property*. In withdrawal from the world, work and the body, which is its organ, are the 'least common' of human aspects, and become the object of a pathos the violence of which we cannot measure without recalling the *amor mundi* which Arendt offers in counterpoint.

Very significantly also, this body does not seem able to perceive sensations and perceptions. In the end, Arendt, remembering that men *are* only to the extent that they *appear*, insists on *sight* as subsuming all of the other senses and sensations, and she includes the perceived within the very structure of language, even though this is fundamentally metaphorical.[13] She also evokes Merleau-Ponty on the impossibility of dissipating the 'illusions of appearance' and of attaining any unique truth, if it is true that our universe is a chiasm of the visible and invisible.[14] But, in *The Human Condition*, our theoretician's ambition being to open the way for '*who*,' through reproduction and production, biology and labour, the body presents itself as a major target of that tearing away from the *zōē*, if not as sworn enemy – the principal paradigm of alienation. Thus, the only experience coming to it in this universe of 'burdens' is nothing other than pain. Pleasure is mentioned only so that it might be assimilated to pain. Both 'occur within the body,' appear not to have any external object, and appear to consume themselves completely in a kind of autistic closure: 'Nothing ... ejects one more radically from the world than exclusive concentration upon the body's life, a concentration forced upon man in slavery or in the extremity of unbearable pain.'[15] Arendt often takes up in her texts the theme of pain without object, an exclusively corporeal and incommunicable pain. Related more to melancholic experience, this pain is dissociated from any communicable eroticization, from any seductive eventuality that might insinuate itself in someone to the point of sadomasochism, for example. Parallel to this de-eroticized pain, Arendt adopts a Stoic vision of happiness, happiness being no more than the 'absence of pain,' attainable only in isolation: a concept that is proper to hedonism as well as to sensualism, and is a concept that Arendt considers both to be the most coherent possible, and to attest to the 'perfectly apolitical' character of corporeal sensations.[16]

Not content with being apolitical, the Arendtian body is also seen as being of the general order: a supplementary argument, if one were needed, that places it at the antipodes of the 'who.' Carried away by this argument, which is supported by Aristotle's *De Anima,* Arendt believes that organs and states of mind are 'identical,' individual differentiation intervening only because of enunciated discourse in the space of appearance. To sum up, if organs, like the soul, are hidden from sight and do not appear, what need would there be for individualization? Organs and souls can thus be said to belong in a way to a general order because, since they do not appear, they are fundamentally 'apolitical.'[17] One might argue with Arendt and say that the most hidden biological body, as in the case of DNA, is on the contrary very individualized, and that her ambition to save public space as a space of differences is certainly generous, albeit that the arguments she uses do not always stand up to examination.

We can simply note that relegating the body to an uninteresting generality, simply because it is biological and is an obstacle to the uniqueness of the 'who,' allows Arendt to do away with psychology and psychoanalysis. Compared to medicine and physiology, which are interested in what our organs have in common, as she believes – certainly that's true, but they study more than that! – Arendt condemns them together: 'Psychology, depth psychology or psychoanalysis, [reveals] no more than the ever-changing moods, the ups and downs of our psychic life, and its results and discoveries are neither particularly appealing nor very meaningful in themselves.'[18] The expression 'neither particularly appealing' is undoubtedly the most revealing here: not only is psychoanalysis 'not appealing,' it is frightening. It frightens *her.* And she goes further, talking about 'the monotonous sameness and pervasive ugliness so highly characteristic of the findings of modern psychology.' Monotony or ugliness? The 'urge is always the same,' and 'only disorder or abnormality can individualize them.'[19] Who is afraid of ugliness, of repetition and dysfunction? More importantly, it is not true, except from the point of view of a psychoanalytic vulgate that is unworthy of Arendt's usual rigour, that psychoanalysis sticks to the 'general,' to the detriment of 'discourse.' Quite the contrary, Freud's discovery showed that psychic life is a real life only if it succeeds in representing itself uniquely – in unique discourse, which is truly a poetics and maieutics of each subject. And it is to be represented even to the point of the 'ugliness' of the 'pulsion' or drive, necessarily sexual or deadly, which for the analyst exists only if someone has expressed or said it in a certain way.

Here we see Arendt's defences. Her store of personal and political experience had led her to a sublimating of 'the fragility of human affairs,' whose heterogeneity ('action *and* speech') and agonistic nature she notes. She calls this sublimation a *politics*, greatly enlarging the scope of this concept and practice, since she emphasizes the grammatical singular of the word, while at the same time also greatly extending the complex temporality of others, without, however, locking herself into the latter's solipsism. The scope of this project demands our respect, so much so that it would be unjust to ask its author what she failed to accomplish, or the reason for that lack, or for that caution.

We should remember that this refusal to envisage the uniquenesses of the body and psyche led Arendt to refuse to consider the role of sadomasochism in the experience of violence and, notably, in the political violence that is part of both totalitarianism and modern leftist movements.[20] Our political commentator and student of politics discerns the political causes of modern violence in the decline of political power, which leads to coercion in order to compensate for weakness and to consolidate one's forces, and to developing, to such a sophisticated degree, modern techniques of extermination such as nuclear weapons. Now the psychological factor – in particular, sadomasochism – enriches this analysis with a non-negligible element by which to fully grasp the 'conditions' or 'crystallization' of this phenomenon.

Arendt will touch upon the theme of sadomasochism when tackling the concept of *authority* in the Christian church, especially the fear of hell upon which that authority is founded. The interplay of reward and punishment, and the intense fear thereby awakened that becomes a substrate of faith appear to her, and rightly so, to constitute 'the sole political element in traditional religion.' But she doesn't deal with either the basic psychological foundations of this dynamic, nor with the necessary supporting arguments that she offers for the political connection as such. She does not analyse the specific fate of this alchemy of fear and authority at the heart of the modern, secularized world, a world that has certainly done away with the fear of hell, but which has not at all eliminated the sadomasochistic role in what Arendt calls 'the uncertainty of human affairs.'[21] This is an element that Arendt would rather do without, no doubt for reasons that one might call personal, but also in order to be able to maintain the coherence of her thought. It is especially important to her to save the freedom of the 'who' at the heart of an optimal political plurality, and to not hand it over to some uncontrollable unconscious. She also takes the risk of depriving the 'who of any given someone' of its body: an encumbrance maybe, but also what plasticity!

These defences and this modesty, for an instant, almost failed her, when Arendt analysed the genesis of judgment. This is an activity that is central to the political space because it is through judgment that thought leaves behind its solipsism in order to participate in 'extended mentality' and 'common meaning'; and to decide for or against the idea that plurality is 'good,' the ability to judge is, according to Kant, rooted in *taste*. Arendt follows this lead. This is the most intimate sense perception of all, mobilizing an oral taste and smell that are much more internal to us than the other senses (hearing and sight or touch). Taste has the unique quality of being, nonetheless, something that can be shared with others. Judgment uses it through imagination, and extends taste into political space. However, before being something that can be shared with others, taste is nothing more than the faculty of distinguishing, of discriminating between ... *pleasure and displeasure*. Here we are! Has Arendt now come face to face, in her last work, with the body and its ability to experience pleasure? Has our theoretician's pen now brought in pleasure as a criterion of judgment? We're not at that point yet. Arendt, with Kant, rapidly passes over this *pleasure*, which identifies things in order to be able to choose among them. This pleasure might be seen as the prototype for judgment, interested only in the extent to which it can be translated into 'approval/disapproval,' a stage that brings on a second 'pleasure.' 'It is the very act of approving that pleases, the act of disapproving that displeases.' What is the criterion for this 'second pleasure' and the choice it commands? Arendt states: nothing other than 'communicability,' 'the character of being public.'[22] Having quickly (too quickly?) set out on the path of that 'imagination' that prepares things for 'the operation of reflection,' Arendt ignored the first pleasure, the pleasure of the body that tastes, or enjoys. Nothing guarantees, however, that judgment, for its part, completely 'forgets' the body which enjoys and fails to enjoy. Freud, following Kant, concerned himself with the dynamics of this primary, oral-centred pleasure. Arendt would rather not know: this 'pre-political ugliness' is decidedly not 'attractive.'

In this context, the female body does not get any more attention from Arendt than any other. We would not be doing violence to her thought if we were to suppose that our philosopher would have situated that body – if she had accepted the risk of reflecting upon femininity – in the domain of the natural processes from which the human should withdraw in order to transform *zōē* into *bios*. Is not political space the only noble space there is, to be won over biological life, against women and slaves? Nonetheless, Arendt's thought becomes more complicated here, because what is 'given' (the body, for instance) is implicated in the 'who's' tensions and, in this sense, deserves in its own right both 'thanks' and 'acquiescence.' Thus Arendt considers her femininity, as she does her Jewishness, to be an irrefutable 'given' that she simply accepts as such. 'The truth is I have never pretended to be anything else or to be in any way other than I am, and I have never even felt tempted in that direction. It would have been like saying that I was a man and not a woman – that is to say, kind of insane.'[23] If in addition to this serenity of Arendt we evoke the attention she pays to the 'internal satisfaction' (*acquiescientia in seipso*) of Spinoza, and which is born of a Reason that is able to 'live in harmony,'[24] we can imagine, without going too wrong, that a kind of confidence, if not faith, underlies Arendt's acceptance of her body as such. Implicitly, and beyond the contradictions integral to her thought, she lets us understand that the body, while indeed being servile, is also a gift and a grace: a kind of 'individual,' of 'self' that is distinct from the 'thinking self' to which the consciousness and thought both acquiesce 'if and when you come home.'[25]

With the same elliptic and connotative discretion, Arendt offers the idea that the distinction between the *two sexes* is already enunciated in Genesis 1:27. God certainly created Adam, but the story of Creation also makes clear: 'He created them man and woman.' This text suggests, according to our philosopher, that human diversity is a necessary condition to action, the initial difference between man and woman constituting, from the outset, a plurality. Arendt adds that Jesus echoes Genesis 1:27, because his faith is linked to *action* and, as a result, he has to remind us that, from the beginning, 'He made them man *and* woman.' Saint Paul, on the other hand, whose faith is first linked to *salvation*, prefers often to repeat that woman was created 'of the' and 'for the man.'[26] Thus femininity is seen as being not only a given from our first origins, but also a difference that is intrinsic to the action which we know to be, for Arendt, the very essence of the political: femininity does not confine itself to the body as serf, but indeed constitutes the plurality of the world, a plurality in which it participates.

Arendt did not pursue this preliminary thinking on what might be the ultimate role and nature of femininity in *amor mundi*.[27] She settled for, we dare say, proclaiming each and everyone's difference, thus protecting herself against any possible assimilation into a movement or group that might have tried to neutralize her uniqueness as a 'who.' 'Plurality is a condition to human action because we are all the same, that is humans, though it is true that never has anyone been identical to any other man that has lived, is living or is yet to be born.'[28] What better lesson, indeed, can we get from totalitarianism? During the feminist years, I titled a text that was dedicated to the problem of being a woman 'Unes femmes': keeping the grammatical singular within the plural of a group. It was published by *Les Cahiers du Grif*, under the editorship of Françoise Collin, one of the first to become interested, with passion and finesse, in Hannah Arendt's work.[29]

1 Jean-François Lyotard, 'Le Survivant,' in *Ontologie et politique: actes du colloque Hannah Arendt*, ed. Michel Abensour et al. (Paris: Editions Tierce, 1989), p. 275. See also 'Sensus communis,' *Le Cahier du Collège international de philosophie* 3 (1987): 67–87.

2 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 179.
3 Ibid., p. 179.
4 Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*, pp. 64, 68–9, 76.
5 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 179–80.
6 Ibid., p. 211.
7 Ibid., pp. 193–4.
8 Dante, *De monarchia*, 1.13, in Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 175.
9 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 2. Willing*, p. 120.
10 John Duns Scotus, quoted by Arendt in *The Life of the Mind. 2. Willing*, p. 144.
11 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, p. 74.
12 Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, p. 233.
13 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, pp. 98ff.
14 Ibid., pp. 23, 33.
15 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 112.
16 Ibid.
17 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, pp. 33–4.
18 Ibid., p. 35.
19 Ibid.
20 'The chief reason warfare is still with us is neither a secret death wish of the human species, nor an irrepressible instinct of aggression ...' (*On Violence* [New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1970], p. 5).
21 Hannah Arendt, 'What Is Authority?' in *Between Past and Future*, p. 112.
22 Hannah Arendt, 'Judging,' in *The Life of the Mind. 2. Willing*, pp. 256–64.
23 See her response to G. Scholem, in *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), p. 246.
24 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, p. 191.
25 Ibid.
26 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 8 and note 1.
27 Cf. Linda M.G. Zerilli, 'The Arendtian Body,' in *Feminist Interpreta-*

tions of Hannah Arendt, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 167–93.

28 Ibid., pp. 167–93.

29 *Les Cahiers du Grif* 7 (1975): 22–7; and *Anthologies des 'Cahiers du Grif': le langage des femmes* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1992).

CHAPTER FIVE

Judgment

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Hannah Arendt's last and unfinished papers are devoted to judgment as a supreme political action. They include lectures on Kant's political philosophy, on New School, autumn 1970, and a seminar on the *Critique of Judgment* called 'Imagination,' and they offer a very challenging basis for a future political philosophy that neither Kant nor Arendt elaborated, a political philosophy about which we can only dream. I shall now comment on this political philosophy that Arendt apprehended but never systematized in its multiple trajectory, including the last text on judgment as well as some considerations on the *Human Condition* from 1958.

The 'judgment' that she offered – after Kant – as the basis for a political philosophy is not 'a cognitive judgment': being essentially an approval of taste by common sense, it defies understanding. It is also not at all a 'judgement by history,' in the manner of Hegel, for whom 'the history of the world is the tribunal of the world,' a concept that grants only to success the privilege of making the final choice. Kant must have been inspired not only by the 'view' of the French Revolution, but also by the many eighteenth-century treatises on taste,[1] texts that Arendt, from all evidence, seems not to have known, something we can only regret since it so condemns her to restricting her investigation of the interplay of sensations and of the pantomime of opinion. Nonetheless, Kant's text, recognizing man's sociability and the pleasure he gets from communicating, gives the philosopher Arendt 'the impression of having been written by one of the French moralists.'[2]

Because this line of thought is not carried through to the end, the reader can only speculate as to what a political community based on this kind of 'aesthetic judgment' might be, a judgment that itself is based on taste, immediately communicable taste that brings reasoned understanding into its service and cannot be learned, only exercised. Is this a realization of the French moralists' utopias – except for sexual pleasure? Or a realization of Nietzsche's 'innocent future'? Something that, like Nietzsche's concept, does not include 'moral facts,' yet moralizes intrinsically on Dionysian 'taste,' transfiguring it into a 'duty' through the intermediary of *sensus communis*? Might it, finally, be an aesthetic politics, but without the objectification of narrative action into 'works'?

These hypotheses are as attractive as they are paradoxical and unverifiable. What counts is this appetite for thought which, with Arendt, never ceases to seek the foundations of the link between the general and the particular, between individual and plurality, in order to justify a liveable human condition – as free as it is just.

Along with Gadamer's criticism of Kant's aesthetics, which Gadamer had accused of 'depoliticizing' the idea of *sensus communis* and of aestheticizing the faculty of taste, one might consider the following criticism that Habermas addresses to Arendt.[3] Habermas reproaches her for denying the cognitive status of judgment and for dissociating practical (political) discourse from rational discourse. For Arendt, assigning cognitive status to political convictions would place opinion in its fullness in peril. Her political experience of totalitarianism had made her understand that opinion proceeds by crystallization. Thus she can open a major breach in positive rationality by widening politics to include aesthetic judgment, taste, intuition, and imagination. Conversely, to the reading proposed by Gadamer and Habermas, I could require of Arendt's and Kant's view of judgment and its political incidences, not a closing, but a deepening of that 'intuitive' experience that others have marked out using a pre-predictive phenomenology and, even more radically, using theories of the unconscious.

The 'fourth critique,' a *Critique of Political Reason,* which Kant in fact did not write,[4] and which Arendt had undoubtedly thought of producing, was in the event only touched on through this lecture on judgment. In an even more radical way, and without abandoning this area of thought, Arendt the historian–political observer had already discovered the beginnings of an application of this thought: through the experience of 'forgiveness' and 'promise' as paradoxical modalities of judgment.

In other words, according to Arendt, judgment appears quite vulnerable[5] when freed from the hold of reasoned understanding, but nonetheless rendered possible within the precariousness of the human community made up of spectators who have their own unique yet communicable tastes. This, however, is the necessary condition, if it is to allow a place for the life of the mind, as a revelation of the *who,* and for it not to become fixed as a 'system' of potentially totalitarian values. We can easily then see, even if she had been able to finish her judging, that Arendt would not have proceeded to produce prescriptions for good judgments, nor would she have sought to show the way to arrive at them. Seduced and worried about the 'fragility of human affairs,' she lingers in her previous publication (*The Human Condition*) on the two stumbling blocks to judgment, stumbling blocks that appear to follow upon the linear experience of human time in the vital process and, by extension, in the modern practice of politics: *irreversibility* and *unpredictability*.

Lived time, as an irreversible phenomenon, binds men who, in their inability to undo it, slip into resentment and vengeance. Nietzsche had identified this 'human animal' that 'braces against the ever more crushing weight of the past' and that – like the symmetrical opposite of the natural, pure animal that does not suffer because it forgets everything – wears itself out suffering 'from the fact that it cannot learn to forget, but always clings to the past.'[6] Nietzsche called for, against this ruminating memory that feeds resentment and vengeance, nothing less than 'the power of forgetfulness,' 'a faculty of inhibition, the positive faculty of all faculties' that produces 'a tabula rasa in our conscience, making room for new phenomena.' And he associates the 'forgetting animal' with another faculty: *promise*. Nietzsche describes it as an 'active will' or 'memory of will,' before laying out its intimidating ambiguities: promise is a supreme sovereignty whereby man 'answers for himself as for the future,' but it is accompanied by harshness, by cruelty and pain, because it inherits the debts (*Schulden*) of an unfailingly guilty conscience (*Schuld*), like a debtor with regard to his creditor.[7]

Arendt is an attentive reader of Nietzsche who, in opposition to Nietzsche's violence that attacks the 'conscience' as well as the 'contract,' calmly wagers on the possible renascence of the *who*, possible as long as the relation to time is changed. She thus skirts the dark picture of a contractual and indebted conscience, struggling in the torment of a will to power, and keeps only what Nietzsche would have called its 'shaping power.'[8] The guilt feelings are resorbed, definitively, as a figure of powerlessness – that very figure of powerlessness that engenders linear time. Guilt, which appears to result from a violation of interdiction or morality, is dependent in fact, and more profoundly, on the very experience of temporality, when the latter is coextensive with the vital process. To disconnect them, an interruption is necessary: for Arendt it will be, not forgetting, but *forgiveness*. It is impossible to undo what has been done, and solitary forgetting is not feasible: maybe she thinks that oblivion would represent only an inhibition if it were lacking any element of appearance and the discourse of others. But it is acceptable for men, *between themselves* and at the heart of the fragility of their actions, to free themselves from their past deeds, deeds whose consequences they could not have foreseen, or of which they now disapprove.

In succinctly tackling the immense problematics of forgiveness, Arendt does not deny the existence of the unpardonable. There are actions that are 'radically evil' (she writes in 1958, quoting Kant, which is much earlier than the Eichmann trial of 1963),[9] and actions

> ... about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts on the public scene. All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offenses and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of

> human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance.[10]

Nonetheless, 'crime and willed evil are rare, even rarer perhaps than good deeds,' writes Arendt. They are just 'offenses' that we see and judge every day and that are the result of 'the very nature of the action' that continually establishes new relationships in this network of relations: as a consequence 'it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly.'[11]

To this caveat regarding the concept of forgiveness, Arendt adds another: forgiveness is addressed to the person, not the act. One cannot forgive murder or theft, only the murderer or thief. Aiming at *someone* and not at *something*, forgiveness reveals itself as an act of love; but, with or without love, it is in considering the person that we forgive. While justice requires that all be equal and while it weighs the acts committed, forgiveness emphasizes inequality and evaluates people. Differing in this respect, forgiveness and judgment are nonetheless 'the two sides of one and the same coin': 'every judgement is open to the possibility of forgiveness.'[12]

It is into this context that we should place the judgment that Arendt describes in her book on the Eichmann trial. She in no way forgives this criminal man precisely because, in 'taking into account the person,' she discovers a non-person, an absence of the *who* or of 'someone,' an automaton of a civil servant incapable of judging his acts and thereby excluding himself from the sphere of forgiveness. This argument appears to her to be no less radical than the argument that speaks of the 'unforgivable crime,' of 'deep-rooted evil,' committed by the *system* to which Eichmann gave himself and that as such, destroying any potential for human power, 'dispossesses us of all power, [so that] we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea."'[13] Far from settling this Christlike judgment, Arendt wishes nonetheless for the creation of an international jurisdiction by which to punish these 'crimes against humanity committed against the Jewish people.' Punishment, in her mind, does not contradict the suspensive logic of forgiveness: like forgiveness, punishment puts an end to something that, without it, might ceaselessly recur.[14]

On the other hand, if the person is susceptible of thinking and judging, whatever the modalities and limits of the questioning activity that always represents an attempt to begin again or be, indeed, reborn, Arendt approaches him with a judgment borne upon the wave of forgiveness. So it is with Brecht: did he not condemn himself first, by imposing the worst of all possible punishments for a man of talent, namely, quite simply, the death of talent? Arendt reveals, with passion and firmness, the melancholic beauty of Brecht's work, while at the same time severely judging the 'irresponsibility,' which she considers to be endemic to poets, as is attested to by the words that the 'wretched B.B.' wrote to the glory of Stalin. From this particular 'example,' she reaches a general observation: although Brecht never demonstrated even a whiff of self-pity, he nonetheless teaches us, all things taken into account, 'how difficult it is to be a poet in this century or at any other time.'[15]

Heidegger, it seems clear, more than anyone else deserved forgiveness, in Arendt's judgment. This is so not only by reason of that *love*, 'one of the rarest occurrences in human lives' that 'possesses an unequaled power of self-revelation and an unequaled clarity of vision for the disclosure of *who*,'[16] but also by reason, with the help of loving revelation, of the *consideration* that is awakened in her by Heidegger's thought, unique among all others, which she discusses and dismantles without ever abandoning, namely 'a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us.'[17]

It is Jesus to whom Arendt attributes the discovery of forgiveness, a wisdom unknown to the ancient Greeks and that only the Roman principle of sparing victims (*parcere subjectis*) anticipated in the distant past. While being expressed in religious terms, the Christlike precept of forgiveness is rooted, according to Arendt, in 'the life of the small, close-knit community of the disciples who were inclined to defy the political authorities of Israel.' Considering that this innovation of Jesus is eminently political, Arendt vigorously supports her own wider concept of an optimal politics and thus goes beyond the strictly religious domain. The connectives that Jesus brings to the scribes and Pharisees seem to her to be essential: not only is God not the only one to forgive, but it is because men are capable of forgiving each other *first* that God will, in the end, definitively forgive them. Thus she quotes, among others, the gospel according to Matthew: 'For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.'[18] Forgiveness, which can also be applied to the unconscious ('they know not what they do'), must be consistent, even infinite: 'And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.'[19]

This appropriation by Arendt of a religious practice invites us to extend its ethics to other modern acts of interpretation. Psychoanalytical listening, and the analyst's words within transference and counter-transference, can appear to us to be an act of forgiving: the giving of meaning, giving the effect of scansion and suspension of the narrative, beyond the insanity of the malaise, anguish, or symptom. Delinking the trauma, deconstructing interpretation, allows for the rebirth of the subject, who thereafter is capable of redrawing his psychic map and his links with others. Psychoanalytic interpretation is a for-giving that is as infinite as it is repetitive so far from the irreversibility of human time, and it is founded upon this desire for analysis and truth, which the subject who is entering into analysis manifests.[20]

On the other hand, and as a counterpoint, faced with the unpredictability of human actions, which is the uncertainty of the future, it is *promise* that stabilizes and offers help to humans by attenuating our need of security to which we sacrifice our security, a security that is based on self-domination and government by others. Promise attenuates the security-seeking domination of the self and of time. Promise is also ancient heritage, and it existed in the inviolate nature of the Romans' accords and treaties (*pacta sunt servanda*), but it really goes back to Abraham, 'whose whole story, as the Bible tells it, shows such a passionate drive toward making convenants' that we might believe he left his country with the sole intention of testing the power of mutual promise in the vast world![21] Arendt had denounced the pseudo-prophetic manipulations of totalitarian propaganda, made up of fantastic promises. She is prudent, then, with regard to promising tomorrows, which she sees as nothing more than 'certain islands of predictability' and which she concedes to fragile human affairs: these are, all in all, highly limited promises, notably a *mutual* and *contractual* commitment in which 'we can set certain milestones of security into the ground,' such as treaties and contracts. Legislation can come to our aid here: thanks to the Chaldean Ur man, and to Montesquieu!

Against the 'identical will' which forms the sovereignty of a group, Arendt proposes 'the concerted plan or design' of men linked by a mutual promise. By the promise they dispose of the future, then, as if this future were the present, and they live together in this miraculous expansion that Nietzsche called 'the memory of the will,' and the 'very distinction which marks off human from animal life.'[22] In referring to that victory, Arendt hears only the jubilant accents of Superman; she does not share Nietzsche's mockery.

With forgiveness and promise, Arendt is persuaded that she has revived two 'regulating mechanisms' of public life that are essential and unsurpassable. This to the extent that they are situated at the very heart of what is most specific about this life, and the most risky, too, that is, the faculty of endlessly setting off new, unpredictable, and irreversible processes. Faced with these inexorable mechanisms of daily life, forgiveness and promise bring, in effect, 'a kind of judgement' that might be, definitively, a kind of wager on the possibility of a new beginning. In politics, this would take the form of a judging that is not for the purpose of relegating men to their mortal condition, but rather to reveal in them their faculty as beings 'able to be born again.' This revelation is the miracle par excellence, called by Christianity 'The Glad Tidings,' and presented there as a narrative. The story is indeed a 'reflective example' and not a 'demonstrative' one, in the sense that it is an induction rather than a generalization. And the story is a serenity, calling up the succession of *whos*: 'A child has been born unto us.'[23]

Glad Tidings? Are they, in fact? But they are tidings whose consequence is to introduce love, by definition apolitical and foreign to the world, into the world. Love comes into the world precisely through the child, who causes his lover/parents to join the community from which their love had caused them to be expelled. So, is birth really Glad Tidings? That is what Arendt asks, never ceasing to wonder about it. It is not that hard. Because this belonging to the world is no less, in a sense, 'the end of love.'[24] One more paradox that Arendt confronts, explores, does not want to avoid. What is one to think?

Arendt is not done with the difficulties of 'human affairs.' Indeed, without these difficulties what else would there be to understand? For this is what the life of the mind is for Hannah Arendt: living while always thinking, understanding. Her single passion remains: 'What I want is to understand.'[25]

Among the many 'difficulties' raised by forgiveness and promise, not the least is the very question as to whether they are possible. The radical exteriority from which Christlike forgiveness and promise proceeded, in order to enter the 'political world,' was called Transcendence of Faith. While evoking love for forgiveness, and legislation for promise, Arendt does not spare herself the requirement of thinking according to 'Archimedes' fulcrum,' which is needed if one is to establish the certainty that the *who* exists. She calls the supporting fulcrum, not God nor transcendence, but 'human plurality,' appropriating Kant's notion of an enhanced communicability that reaches a peace inducing cosmopolitanism. She seems to find a political version here of Duns Scotus's *acquiescence*, Nietzsche's *amen*, Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*. A certainty that is thin, fragile, but still playable: with taste, and by observing and recounting.

In effect, neither forgiveness nor promise, she insists, is a solitary act: nobody can forgive himself or promise to himself anything all alone with any chance that it will stick. On the other hand, the modalities according to which others receive these acts represent the determining factors for forgiving or promising, involving only one's self. Not only do these two faculties 'depend on the presence of others,' but their interplay in politics is the very foundation of principles that are diametrically opposed to the classical moral precepts that flow from the Platonic notion of rule. The latter is based upon a relation established between me and myself – the just and the unjust are determined by the attitude held of me – so that the totality of the public domain is conceived of as an 'extended man.' On the other hand, the moral code that is derived from forgiveness and promise 'rests on experiences which nobody could ever have with himself, which, on the contrary, are entirely based on the presence of others.'[26]

Although humans can be mad, as our century so cruelly has demonstrated, this Humanity in which Arendt places – *after all* – if not her faith, at least all her confidence, this Humanity cannot be mad: must not be mad. Such is the transcendence – and the limits – of Arendt's thought. Since Humanity, as she understands it, consists of an aptitude to 'extended mentality,' to the communicability of a common sense, it can be identified with Language. Humanity and Language are Arendt's versions of Being. Language cannot be mad. That is what Arendt thinks, and when she is asked what remains for her of pre-Shoah Germany, she answers: 'There remains its language.' 'Even in the worst times?' we insist. 'Always. I used to say to myself: what can we do? It is after all not the German language that has gone mad!'[27] I resume: all in all, if I ask myself, 'What can we do?' I end up thinking that language, as the link of humanity, cannot go mad.

But is it really necessary to think that a language 'cannot be mad' in order to continue to 'do'? Let us imagine that I continue 'to do' while observing that the language itself is going mad: that the community link itself, the 'extended mentality,' the *sensus communis*, that of the

Germans or of any other people, even that of Humanity, can go mad, has been mad in the past, might again go mad. Then what? What can we do?

What will remain for us will be the duty to care for the language, the speech, of each one of us, and to protect the community bond itself. Not in order to re-establish them in an eternally fixed and not mad identity that would underpin our 'yes' or our 'amen,' but rather to make possible provisional revelations of *who* without forgetting the extent to which they are provisional. That presupposes that the wager on the revelation will be accompanied by, if not pessimism, at least a conviction that Language, Humanity, all Identity, and even Being itself are more than 'veiled,' 'in retreat,' 'forgetting,' or 'errant.' That presupposes that each *who* is carried along by its impossibility of being: nothingness, a crisis or a disease. From there, in this community that is indeed so fragile, there is the beginning of a *caring* that is not a relentlessness of will, the last example of the will to power, but which preserves nonetheless this miracle of rebirth.

Arendt was far from that. And yet so close, too. Recalling that the 'fact of natality' would be 'the miracle that saves the world,' she makes clear that this is for her 'the full experience of this capacity.'[28]

A *total experience of the fact of birth* necessarily 'includes': being born, giving life, acquiescing to the uniqueness of each birth, being reborn continually into the life of the mind, a mind that *is* because it begins anew in the plurality of others and in that condition alone can act as a living thought that surpasses all other activity.

But the 'miracle' is made real too, if only in the form of a single fragment of that 'total experience' that justifies it by the promise it holds out and by the forgiveness it articulates. Arendt had shared this, for she was incontestably one of those rare people of our time to attain that *felicity* in which *living is thinking*. Did she not write that, although the rapture of thought is ineffable, 'the only possible metaphor one may conceive of for the life of the mind is the sensation of being alive'?[29]

As for a political action that would be the equivalent of a birth and would offer shelter for our strangeness, Hannah Arendt, with few illusions, invites us to think about and live it in the present, of course, but always with forgiveness and promise that are the very basis of an optimal political action.

1 Thus Voltaire emphasizes that importance of society and its cohesiveness in the creation of what is perceived as a 'taste': 'When there is little society, the mind shrinks, it becomes soft, it no longer has the wherewithal with which to create *taste*.' He goes so far as to recognize taste as being possessed only by the peoples of Europe, others not having sufficiently 'perfected' their societies. (Cf. the article on 'taste' in the *Encyclopédie*.) With more nuance, Montesquieu puts taste after pleasure, thereby implicating the body as well as the soul: 'It is these various pleasures of our soul that form the objects of *taste* ... which is nothing other than the ability to discover, promptly and with finesse, the *measure of pleasure* [emphasis added] that any one thing can give to men.' He distinguishes *natural* pleasures and tastes from *acquired* pleasures and tastes: pleasures being essentially dependent upon the body, or upon such and such an 'organ' of our 'machine,' indeed dependent upon 'a different contexture of the same organs' and pro-

ceeding by 'a prompt and exquisite application of the very rules that we do not know or understand.' Even more subtly, the soul receives its pleasures through ideas and feelings, while at the same time keeping its autonomy as a specific function, because 'there are no things that are so intellectual ... that it cannot feel them' (*Essai sur le goût* [Geneva: Droz, 1967], pp. 61–2, 64–6).

2 Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 11.

3 Jürgen Habermas, 'Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power,' *Social Research* 44 (1977), quoted by Ronald Beiner, 'Hannah Arendt on Judging,' in Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 137.

4 Myriam Revault d'Allones, 'Le courage de juger,' in Hannah Arendt, *Juger*, trans. M. Revault d'Allones (Paris: Seuil, 1991), pp. 218–19, which establishes a parallel between Heidegger's interpretation – 'La problématique de la *Critique de la raison pure*, à savoir la question de la possibilité de l'ontologie, nous constraint en retour à faire du sol proprement dit un abîme' (Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger, *Débat sur le kantisme et la philosophie* [Paris: Beauchesne, 1972], p. 43) – along with the reinterpretation by Arendt of the *Critique of Judgment* and of its 'political slant' that seeks to overturn the foundations of political discourse since Plato, however much it represents a 'definitive avoiding of politics.' See also *Ontologie et politique: actes du colloque Hannah Arendt*, ed. Michel Abensour et al.; in particular, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 'La troisième critique d'Arendt,' pp. 209–25.

5 '... judgements are not arrived at by either deduction or induction ... We shall be in search of the "silent sense" which ... has always ... been thought of as "taste" and therefore as belonging to the realm of aesthetics' (Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, p. 215).

6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, ed. William Arrowsmith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 88.

7 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), pp. 194–6: 'even in Kant, whose categorical imperative smacks of cruelty' (p. 197).

8 Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations*, p. 90.

9 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 241.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 240.
12 Arendt, 'Bertolt Brecht: 1898–1956,' in *Men in Dark Times*, p. 248.
13 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 241.
14 Ibid.
15 Arendt, 'Bertolt Brecht: 1898–1956,' in *Men in Dark Times*, p. 249.
16 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 242.
17 Ibid., p. 243.
18 Matt. 6:14.
19 Luke 17:4.
20 Julia Kristeva, 'Dostoievsky, the Writing of Suffering, and Forgiveness,' in *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 214ff.
21 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 243.
22 Ibid., p. 245.
23 Ibid., p. 247.
24 Ibid., p. 242.
25 Hannah Arendt, 'Seule demeure la langue maternelle,' in *La Tradition cachée: le Juif comme paria*, p. 225.
26 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 238.
27 Arendt, 'Seule demeure la langue maternelle,' in *La Tradition cachée: le Juif comme paria*, p. 240.
28 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 247.
29 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. 1. Thinking*, p. 123.

THE ALEXANDER LECTURES

The Alexander lectureship was founded in honour of Professor W.J. Alexander, who held the Chair of English at University College, University of Toronto, from 1889 to 1926. The Lectureship brings to the university a distinguished scholar or critic to give a course of lectures on a subject related to English Literature.

1928–9
L.F. Cazamian (Sorbonne): 'Parallelism in the Recent Development of English and French Literature.' Included in *Criticism in the Making* (Macmillan 1929).

1929–30
H.W. Garrod (Oxford): 'The Study of Poetry.' Published as *The Study of Poetry* (Clarendon 1936).

1930–1
Irving Babbit (Harvard): 'Wordsworth and Modern Poetry.' Included in 'The Primitivism of Wordsworth' in *On Being Creative* (Houghton 1932).

1931–2
W.A. Craigie (Chicago): 'The Northern Element in English Literature.' Published as *The Northern Element in English Literature* (University of Toronto Press 1933).

1932–3
H.J.C. Grierson (Edinburgh): 'Sir Walter Scott.' Included in *Sir Walter Scott, Bart* (Constable 1938).

1933–4
G.G. Sedgewick (British Columbia): 'Of Irony, Especially in Drama.'

Published as *Of Irony, Especially in Drama* (University of Toronto Press 1934).

1934–5
E.F. Stoll (Minnesota): 'Shakespeare's Young Lovers.' Published as *Shakespeare's Young Lovers* (Oxford 1937).

1935–6
Franklin B. Snyder (Northwestern): 'Robert Burns.' Included in *Robert Burns, His Personality, His Reputation, and His Art* (University of Toronto Press 1936).

1936–7
D. Nichol Smith (Oxford): 'Some Observations on Eighteenth-Century Poetry.' Published as *Some Observations on Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (University of Toronto Press 1937).

1937–8
Carleton W. Stanley (Dalhousie): 'Matthew Arnold.' Published as *Matthew Arnold* (University of Toronto Press 1938).

1938–9
Douglas Bush (Harvard): 'The Renaissance and English Humanism.' Published as *The Renaissance and English Humanism* (University of Toronto Press 1939).

1939–41
C. Cestre (Paris): 'The Visage of France.' Lectures postponed because of the war and then cancelled.

1941–2
H.J. Davis (Smith): 'Swift and Stella.' Published as *Stella, A Gentlewoman of the Eighteenth Century* (Macmillan 1942).

1942–3
H. Granville-Barker (New York City): 'Coriolanus.' Included in *Prefaces to Shakespeare* volume II (Princeton 1947).

1943–4
F.P. Wilson (Smith): 'Elizabethan and Jacobean.' Published as *Elizabethan and Jacobean* (Clarendon 1945).

1944–5
F.O. Matthiessen (Harvard): 'Henry James: the Final Phase.' Published as *Henry James, the Major Phase* (Oxford 1944).

1945–6
Samuel C. Chew (Bryn Mawr): 'The Virtues Reconciled: A Comparison of Visual and Verbal Imagery.' Published as *The Virtues Reconciled, an Iconographical Study* (University of Toronto Press 1947).

1946–7
Marjorie Hope Nicolson (Columbia): 'Voyages to the Moon.' Published as *Voyages to the Moon* (Macmillan 1948).

1947–8
G.B. Harrison (Queen's): 'Shakespearean Tragedy.' Included in *Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1951).

1948–9
E.M.W. Tillyard (Cambridge): 'Shakespeare's Problem Plays.' Published as *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (University of Toronto Press 1949).

1949–50
E.K. Brown (Chicago): 'Rhythm in the Novel.' Published as *Rhythm in the Novel* (University of Toronto Press 1950).

1950–1
Malcolm W. Wallace (Toronto): 'English Character and the English Literary Tradition.' Published as *English Character and the English Literary Tradition* (University of Toronto Press 1952).

1951–2
R.S. Crane (Chicago): 'The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry.' Published as *The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (University of Toronto Press 1953).

1952–3
V.S. Pritchett. Lectures not given.

1953–4
F.M. Salter (Alberta): 'Mediaeval Drama in Chester.' Published as *Mediaeval Drama in Chester* (University of Toronto Press 1955).

1954–5
Alfred Harbage (Harvard): 'Theatre for Shakespeare.' Published as *Theatre for Shakespeare* (University of Toronto Press 1955).

1955–6
Leon Edel (New York): 'Literary Biography.' Published as *Literary Biography* (University of Toronto Press 1957).

1956–7
James Sutherland (London): 'On English Prose.' Published as *On English Prose* (University of Toronto Press 1957).

1957–8
Harry Levin (Harvard): 'The Question of Hamlet.' Published as *The Question of Hamlet* (Oxford 1959).

1958–9
Bertrand H. Bronson (California): 'In Search of Chaucer.' Published as *In Search of Chaucer* (University of Toronto Press 1960).

1959–60
Geoffrey Bullough (London): 'Mirror of Minds: Changing Psychological Assumptions as Reflected in English Poetry.' Published as *Mirror of Minds: Changing Psychological Beliefs in English Poetry* (University of Toronto Press 1962).

1960–1
Cecil Bald (Chicago): 'The Poetry of John Donne.' Included in *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford 1970).

1961–2
Helen Gardner (Oxford): 'Paradise Lost.' Published as *A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Oxford 1965).

1962–3
Maynard Mack (Yale): 'The Garden and The City: The Theme of Retirement in Pope.' Published as *The Garden and the City* (University of Toronto Press 1969).

1963–4
M.H. Abrams (Cornell): 'Natural Supernaturalism: Idea and Design in Romantic Poetry.' Published as *Natural Supernaturalism* (W.H. Norton 1971).

1964–5
Herschel Baker (Harvard): 'The Race of Time: Three Lectures on Renaissance Historiography.' Published as *The Race of Time* (University of Toronto Press 1967).

1965–6
Northrop Frye (Toronto): 'Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearian Tragedy.' Published as *Fools of Time* (University of Toronto Press 1967).

1967–8
Frank Kermode (Bristol): 'Criticism and English Studies.'

1967–8
Francis E. Mineka (Cornell): 'The Uses of Literature, 1750–1850.'

1968–9
H.D.F. Kitto (Bristol): 'What is Distinctively Hellenic in Greek Literature?'

1968–9
W.J. Bate (Harvard): '*The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1660–1840).' Published as *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Belknap 1970).

1970–1
J.A.W. Bennett (Cambridge): 'Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge.' Published as *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge* (University of Toronto Press 1974).

1971–2
Roy Daniels (British Columbia): 'Mannerism: An Inclusive Art Form.'

1972–3
Hugh Kenner (California): 'The Meaning of Rhyme.' Publication planned.

1973–4
Ian Watt (Stanford): 'Four Western Myths.' Publication planned.

1974–5
Richard Ellmann (Oxford): 'The Consciousness of Joyce.' Published as *The Consciousness of Joyce* (Oxford 1977).

1975–6
Henry Nash Smith (Berkeley): 'Other Dimensions: Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain.' Included in *Democracy and the Novel: Popular Resistance to Classic American Writers* (Oxford 1978).

1976–7
Kathleen Coburn (Toronto): 'Some Perspectives on Coleridge.' Published as *Experience into Thought: Perspectives in the Coleridge Notebooks* (University of Toronto Press 1979).

1977–8
E.P. Thompson (Worcester): 'William Blake: Tradition and Revolution 1789–1793.' Publication planned.

1978–9
Ronald Paulson (Yale): 'The Representation of Revolution 1789–1820.' Published as *The Representation of Revolution* (1789–1820) (Yale 1983).

1979–80
David Daiches (Edinburgh): 'Literature and Gentility in Scotland.' Published as *Literature and Gentility in Scotland.* (Edinburgh 1982).

1980–1
Walter J. Ong., SJ (St. Louis): 'Hopkins, the Self, and God.' Published as *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (University of Toronto Press 1986).

1982
Robertson Davies (Toronto): 'The Mirror of Nature.' Published as *The Mirror of Nature* (University of Toronto Press 1983).

1983
Anne Barton (Cambridge): 'Comedy and the Naming of Parts.' Published as *The Names of Comedy* (University of Toronto Press 1990).

1984
Guy Davenport (Kentucky): 'Objects on a Table: Still Life in Literature and Painting.'

1985
Richard Altick (Ohio): 'The Victorian Sense of the Present.'

1986
Jerome J. McGann (California): Various Subjects

1987
Inga-Stina Ewbank (London): 'The World and the Theatre: Strindberg, Ibsen and Shakespeare.'

1988
Christopher Ricks (Boston): 'Allusion and Inheritance 1784–1824.'

1989
John Burrow (Bristol): 'Langland's *Piers Plowman:* The Uses of Fiction.' Published as *Langland's Fictions* (Oxford 1993).

1990
John Fraser (Dalhousie): 'Nihilism, Modernism, and Value.'

1991
Mary Jacobus (Cornell): 'First Things: Reproductive Origins.'

1992
Peter Conrad (Oxford): 'To Be Continued ...'

1993
V.A. Kolve (California): 'The God-Denying Fool in Medieval Art and Drama.'

1994
Samuel Hynes (Princeton): 'The Soldiers' Tale: Narratives of War in the Twentieth Century.' Published as *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Lane 1997).

1995
Gillian Beer (Cambridge): 'Scaling the Island.'

1996
Paul Fussell (Pennsylvania): 'In Search of Modernism.'

1997
Carolyn G. Heilbrun (Columbia): 'Women's Lives: The View from the Threshold.' Published as *Women's Lives: The View from the Threshold* (University of Toronto Press 1999).

1999
Julia Kristeva (Paris): *Hannah Arendt: Life Is a Narrative* (University of Toronto Press 2000).