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**Foucault and Arendt:
The Tensions and Integrity of Critical
Thinking**

by

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology**

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September 2005

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Acknowledgements

When I began the Ph.D., I didn't know whether it was a challenge or an escape from the realities of my life. It is a relief that I have produced something.

I should first like to thank Dr. Mike Neary for giving me a chance to do what I want to do. It was his generosity that made this work possible. I should also like to thank Professor Robert Fine, who has been my principal source of support. His course, 'politics and social theory' was an inspiration to me. He taught me how to read those classics of political philosophy and social theory without being haunted by frozen images. He gave me crucially supportive comments at every stage of this work and his deep understanding of Foucault and Arendt was an example for my own different reading of them.

I have been blessed with wonderful family. I want to thank my grandmother, whose love has been constant and unstinting. I also want to thank my two brothers, Hanseung and Dongseung, for their understanding and support. I owe my deepest thanks to my sister, Jungeun, who has been on this self-tortured journey with me. Finally, I wish to thank my parents, who have unfailingly found room in their hearts for a sometimes difficult daughter. Above all, it is to my father that I owe whatever intellectual seriousness I have managed to infuse into this work.

I dedicate this work, with love, to my parents.

Abstract

In this work, I present an interpretation of two thinkers, Foucault and Arendt. I place these thinkers within a tradition of critical theory running from Kant to Nietzsche. The opposition between modernism and postmodernism, between its philosophical sources, Kant and Nietzsche, has been widely overstated, for example, in the polemical stance taken by Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987). I am concerned to show that this way of mapping does Foucault and Arendt an injustice. Foucault and Arendt accept Nietzsche's critique of reason and Western thought and attack Kant's official philosophy, an analytical philosophy of truth. Yet they also appropriate Kant's reflection on the Enlightenment and revolution (Foucault) and his aesthetic judgment (Arendt). More importantly, Foucault and Arendt embrace postmodern sensibility not as an absolute given but as an attitude that must be - at the risk of inviting Nietzschean scorn - constantly checked and examined. For them, critique is based as much on a serious and sustained interrogation of historical experience as it is on a deconstruction of metaphysical philosophy. Recognizing the problems of attaching labels to Foucault's work and that of Arendt, I focus on the tensions and complexity of their work. There are tensions in Foucault's thought between totalizing/detotalizing impulses, discursive/extra-discursive theorization, macro/micro perspectives, and domination/resistance relations as well as between ethical-political commitments and archaeological detachment. There are also tensions in Arendt's thought between creative rupture and exercise in retrieval, between agonism and consensus as well as between existential engagement and philosophical withdrawal. Critical thought, which is experiment as well as problematization, must constantly live within a field of tension. In this light, I argue that these tensions provide the elements for the uniqueness and coherence of their work and that viewing these tensions as a source of flagrant contradiction fundamentally distorts their intentions.

Chapter 1 Introduction: Why Foucault and Arendt?

1. Reading Foucault and Arendt Together

This work is about Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt. Foucault and Arendt, I feel, represent the most important contemporary effort to develop a method for the study of human beings, and to understand, to diagnose, to criticize the current situation of our society. Although some of their works now belong to the classics of the Western tradition of political thought and social theory, they have always remained outsiders who are difficult to classify. In fact, the originality of their ideas is itself not just a source of fascination but also of misunderstanding. Foucault and Arendt cannot be simply characterized in terms of the traditional categories of conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism. Nor can their thinking be placed in terms of a stark opposition between modernism and postmodernism.

Foucault and Arendt do not want to build a system of political philosophy or of social theory, which raises problems for the commentators. Furthermore, they have a kind of Nietzschean capacity to distance themselves from the unquestioned assumptions of the age. This ability is the source of embarrassment and frustration for those theorists, such as Walzer (1987), who believe that the first duty of social or political critics is to identify with the basic assumptions or values of their age.

But, Foucault and Arendt preserve this ability without abandoning active engagement in the concerns of the present.

In turning to a consideration of their ideas, I was faced with a problem: whether to accept the standpoint I saw being worked out in their writings, and to try to work within it; or to work from some other, explicitly critical standpoint. I did not want to do the former, for refutation in any normal sense seemed somehow impossible and pointless. To refute these writers one must presuppose the very canons of logic they attack, so that every refutation necessarily begs the question - an endless word play.

I hope that the reader will read this work in something like the same spirit in which I wrote it. I see it as a “sympathetic” response to the writings of Foucault and Arendt. In this work, I aim to present my reinterpretation of Foucault and Arendt, my direct dialogue with them rather than criticism, focusing on what they have tried to say rather than on what they should have said. Because it is my belief that many of the interpretations and criticisms of Foucault and Arendt previously advanced have been based on a general and uncomplicated understanding of their thought and have therefore missed the mark. Indeed, those interpretations and criticisms - whether sympathetic critiques or not - fail to

account for the complexity and the tensions of their writings.

Foucault and Arendt never have been properly read together probably because there is the seeming difference between a Foucauldian politics of everyday life and an Arendtian conception of the public sphere. In my view, however, Foucault and Arendt represent a strange case of non-penetrating between two similar types of thinking by that very similarity. Nothing hides the fact of a problem in common better than two similar ways of approaching it. I do not mean in any way that they are talking about same things. But when viewed in the light of the way in which the problem appears and develops, Foucault's mode of problematization and that of Arendt turn out to be more similar than often assumed.

Foucault and Arendt draw heavily on Nietzsche in order to produce "genealogies" of modern spirit. They both perform a new historiography, in their own ways, at the crossroad where philosophy and history, ideas and events, intersect. After all, one thing haunts Foucault and Arendt is thought. The question, "What does thinking mean?", is the arrow fired by Arendt and then again by Foucault. They write a history, but a history of thought as such. This is why they call their work "studies of history" not "the work of a historian" (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 9; Arendt, 1994: 403). Foucault and Arendt suspect the kind of "universal

intellectual” (Foucault, 1980: 126) who claims to speak with privilege for a universal historical agent, and they renounce grand ideological visions and a state-centered politics in favor of a more partial and localized “micro-politics”. And they are inspired by those who exist at the political margins of normal society.

Arendt’s *The Human Condition* can be read a number of ways, for example, as a phenomenology of action, or as a contribution to public realm theory. Yet such readings become misreadings if they try to detach what Arendt has to say about action or the public sphere from her narrative about the “loss”, “destruction”, and “disappearance” of the public world in modernity. When viewed in terms of the critique of modernity, Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, to some extent, prefigures Foucault’s basic theme in *Discipline and Punish*. Arendt’s critique of modernity points us to the peculiarly modern threat to the public sphere – the rise of social. With the emergence of this hybrid realm in the modern age, the possibility of either a genuine public or private realm is undermined. Moreover, the omnipresent functionalization that accompanies the rise of the social imposes its own constraints on political action. As Arendt puts it:

It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from

each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement (Arendt, 1958: 40, my emphasis).

It is here that Arendt’s concerns most nearly intersect with Foucault’s. Once we see Arendt’s public sphere as a space of spontaneous action denatured by the normalizing power of the social, we can make connections to the Foucauldian story about the take-off of disciplinary power in the modern age. Arendt hardly shares Foucault’s desire to develop a politics of everyday life. Nevertheless, they are both concerned to tell the story of how the premodern public sphere is colonized by a new form of disciplinary or socializing power, a power that substitutes an institutionally dispersed and normalizing regime of panoptic visibility for a space in which action is seen and heard by all. The logic of this transformation, for both Foucault and Arendt, is the better management of the state’s precious resource, its populace. There is a direct line to be drawn from Arendt’s conception of the state as “national household” to Foucault’s notion of biopower (Foucault, 1980: 140-143; 1988e: 47-85. cf. Agamben, 1998: 119-135).

Second, Foucault and Arendt are linked, moreover, by a concern to preserve forms

and space of popular, spontaneous action (counter-power) from bureaucratic structures. For example, Arendt's emphasis on the spontaneous, popular nature of revolutionary action in *On Revolution* is linked up with Foucault's defense of direct form of popular justice in *Power/ Knowledge* (Arendt, 1963, chap. 6; Foucault, 1980: 27-32). Reading in this manner suggests that they present complementary narratives about the closure of the space of action in the modern age. From this standpoint the Foucauldian concept of "resistance" – of local struggle against power/ knowledge regimes – can be seen as a kind of alternative concept to Arendt's notion of political action. Where the space of freedom is usurped – where action in strict sense is no longer possible – resistance becomes the primary vehicle of spontaneous political action.

Third, Arendt's approach to action and judgment decenters the political actor and the judging agent in a fashion parallel to Foucault's decentering of the subject. In other words, the meaning of action and judgment conceived by Arendt is predicated upon a twofold "death of the author". The disclosive quality of political action comes to depend on the audience, conceived as a group of deliberating agents exercising their capacity of judgment. Thus the actor does not create meaning as the artist does a work, or judging spectators cannot redeem this

meaning unless they are able, to some extent, to get free of themselves. This is not to say Arendt's conception of political action and judgment extinguishes the self. Rather, it is to say that self-coherence is achieved through a decentered process, for both actor and judge. Arendt's thought on judgment and Foucault's thought on the self culminate in *The Use of Pleasure's* searing phrase, "to get free of oneself" (Foucault, 1992: orig. 1984: 8). Foucault's path of the relation to oneself is different from that of Arendt, but Foucault's focus on the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject and self-mastery and Arendt's focus on the exercise of the capacity of independent, autonomous judgment converge to the point where the relation to oneself becomes a principle of internal regulation in relation to politics and the moral code. Far from ignoring individuality or subjectivity they assume this independent, internal dimension, but only as a derivative or the product of one's relation with others. As Foucault and Arendt show, it is not a projection of "I", on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the Other. It is not the emanation of an "I", but something that places in immanence an "Other". In a word, it is the other in me.

Finally, what Foucault shares with Arendt is the effort to link Kant and Nietzsche in order to overcome the analytics of truth without abandoning philosophical

seriousness. Foucault's turn to Kant in his later work enables him to identify the thread that connects Kant with Nietzsche within a trajectory of critical theory. The critical ontology of ourselves and of the present, which Foucault sees that Kant formulated by reflecting on the Enlightenment and revolution, is Foucault's Kantian version of Nietzsche's ontological support of the moment against the flux of time (cf. Beiner, 1982: 145). On the other hand, Arendt's turn to Kant's aesthetic judgment in her later work enables her to identify the thread to connect Kant with Nietzsche, the thread running from Kant's objectivity, the "objectivity" arises from being able to "think in the place of everybody else" (Arendt, 1968b: 241), to Nietzsche's perspectival objectivity, the objectivity born of using "more" and "different" eyes to judge and to interpret a thing (Nietzsche, 1989: 12; cf. Arendt, 1982: 43). The representative thinking made possible by disinterested judgment through a free play of imagination is Arendt's Kantian version of Nietzsche's perspectival objectivity. Their challenge to Kant and Nietzsche or rather their Nietzscheanism with a Kantian twist opens the possibility of perspectivism towards the reconstruction of critical theory.

Bearing their complementarity in mind, I wish to read Foucault and Arendt in terms of critical thought running from Kant to Nietzsche. In order to do so, in the

second part of this chapter, I examine various readings that have been made of Foucault and Arendt in terms of modernism and postmodernism, of its philosophical sources, Kant and Nietzsche. Then, I explicate their selective appropriation of Kant, and their idiosyncratic way of accepting modernity (and postmodernity) as an attitude, questioning the adequacy of the mapping of modernism/ postmodernism, of Kant/ Nietzsche. In the third part, I present the hermeneutic dilemma that I am faced with and the methodological strategy that I employ to understand Foucault and Arendt. In the fourth part, I explain briefly the contents of this work.

2. Drawing the Map

Modernism vs. Postmodernism

While Foucault never adopted the discourse of the postmodern, his critique of modernity and humanism made him a source of postmodern thought. Although Derrida points out that Foucault is trapped within “logocentrism”, within the general historical guilt borne by Western Language (Derrida, 1978: 35), Foucault is generally regarded as an exemplary representative of postmodern position in his thoroughgoing efforts to dismantle modern beliefs in unity and foundation, and his celebration of difference and multiplicity in theory, politics, and everyday life.

According to Habermas, the postmodern critique is inaugurated by Nietzsche who carries out a systematic assault on modernity, including the Enlightenment and reason. This irrational philosophical ethos was taken over in different ways by Heidegger, Bataille and the postmodernists. One tendency extends from Nietzsche to Bataille to Foucault, while another branches from Nietzsche to Heidegger to Derrida. In sum, Habermas criticizes postmodern theory for deserting reason and modernity (Habermas, 1981: 3-14; 1987). Habermas appreciates Foucault's critique of subjectivity and institutions of modernity, but believes that Foucault has no normative standpoint from which to criticize modern institutions and thus has no basis for an ethics and politics (Habermas, 1987: 238-293). Habermas also accuses Foucault of rejecting modernity and Enlightenment, at least in his earlier work, though Habermas sees that Foucault eventually came around to a qualified defence of Enlightenment values in a late essay on Kant (Habermas, 1989: 173-179). In this regard, Habermas asks: "How does such a singularly affirmative understanding of modern philosophizing, always directed to our own actuality and imprinted in the here-and-now, fit with Foucault's unyielding criticism of modernity?" (Habermas, 1986: 106).

Against Habermas' reading of Foucault, there are the efforts that have been made

to differentiate Foucault from the poststructuralist theorists who, in the name of post-enlightenment and postmodern discourse, question philosophical seriousness in general. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, 253-264; 1986:109-121) attempt to show that Foucault has been at pains to distance himself not only from the heirs of German philosophy such as Habermas, but from the French poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida in terms of the relation between society, reason and modernity.

While Foucault is generally located in the postmodern horizon, Arendt is read in various ways. First, the early and standard view of Arendt maintains that Arendt is a political philosopher of nostalgia, an anti-modernist for whom the Greek *polis* remained the quintessential political experience. It is easy then to conclude not only that Arendt's thought is irrelevant to contemporary concerns but also she is an elitist reactionary (Kateb, 1984: 39; O'Sullivan, 1976; Pitkin, 1981; Bakan, 1979: 59; Wolin, R., 2001; Canovan, 1978; Fuss, 1979).

A very different reading of Arendt has been performed by Habermas and others working within the tradition of Critical Theory. These theorists locate Arendt within the Kantian horizon, assimilating her to a broadly modernist or universalist position by emphasizing the deliberative and intersubjective elements of action

and judgment over the performative and agonistic ones (Habermas, 1983; Bernstein, 1984, 1986; Benhabib, 1987, 1992b). The advantage of this reading is clear. One is able not only to avoid the elitist baggage of her Grecophile theory raised by Canovan (1978) and Fuss (1979) but also to refute the charge of immoralism raised by Kateb (1984). This reading enables one to solve the problem of moral foundations.

However, many contemporary theorists are attracted by the postmodern side of Arendt's thought. The break with the paradigm structuring modern thought and practice and the sense of discontinuity of the past make it possible to locate Arendt within the postmodern horizon. (Bernauer, 1987: 10; Canovan, 1992: 278).

In the end skeptical, radical democrats attempt to locate Arendt's work within the Nietzschean horizon, assimilating Arendt to a broadly agonistic model of politics for a radical democratic agenda (Conolly, 1998; Honig, 1993; Wolin, S. 1993; Villa, 1992; 1996). Contemporary agonists are attracted by the fact that Arendt (1958) gives a central place to action in her conception of the political. This sets at odds with the liberal focus on institutions, procedures, interest, and negative freedom, the freedom from politics (cf. Barber, 1984). Also, they are attracted by Arendt's endorsement of the agonal spirit, which she sees as animating all

genuine political action. Arendt's political and democratic version of Nietzschean heroic individualism dovetails with what she calls "revolutionary spirit" (Arendt, 1963: 221) and the spirit of resistance (Arendt, 1963, chap. 6, 1968b, Preface). Her examples are not great statesmen, but the spontaneous heroic action manifest in the American Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, the 1905 Russian Revolution, the French Resistance during World War II, and the Hungarian revolt of 1956. On this ground, Honig assimilates Arendt to "an activist, democratic politics of contest, resistance, and amendment", emphasizing her passionate refusal of docility (Honig, 1933: 77). Radical democrats are also attracted by her anti-foundationalism, showing how the will to find a transcendent ground for politics can only be anti-political and anti-democratic. Arendt gives Nietzsche's anti-foundationalism a political and democratic twist by arguing for a groundless politics of "opinions" (Arendt, 1968b: 233). What makes Arendt's conception of agonistic public sphere so attractive to radical democrats is that the authoritativeness of the basic institutions is determined by the clash of conflicting interpretations. Therefore, the public sphere is, above all, an institutionally articulated site of perpetual debate and contestation. On this ground, Villa (1992) argues that Arendt's public realm theory is less concerned with the question of

legitimation and consensus than with the theorization of an agonistic political subjectivity. In addition, Isaac (1992) explores Arendt's postmodern position not in terms of the agonistic side but in terms of an illuminating lessons of human agency in an age of ideology (for another postmodern approach, see Hansen, 1993; Disch, 1994).

Let's return to Habermas' reading of Arendt, here. The distinction between action (*praxis*) and fabrication (*poiesis*) posed by Arendt's theory of action enabled Habermas to distinguish systematically between communicative and instrumental action and to identify their respective logics of rationalization. Moreover, Arendt's sketches of the form of intersubjectivity in the practice of speech supplied Habermas with a standard of ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1983: 174-175). Thanks to Arendt's theory of action, the way to a theory of communicative rationality was opened.

This makes it possible to say that, to some extent, Habermas is an Arendtian. But, on the contrary, Arendt has been read as if she were a Habermasian (Bernstein, 1983, 1986; Benhabib, 1987, 2003). In fact, the clear opposition between Arendt and Habermas on the one hand and postmodernism, including Foucault, on the other has been overstated thanks, in large part, to the polemical stance taken by

Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987). In that work, Habermas creates a stark opposition between communicative and subject-centered reason, between the paradigms of mutual understanding or intersubjectivity and that of the philosophy of consciousness (Chap. 11: 294-326). In his view, neither Hegel nor Marx succeeded in extricating themselves from the “horizon of the self-reference of the knowing and acting subject”. But then, neither do such critics of the philosophy of consciousness and the modern project as Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault. All remain, from the Habermasian perspective, either caught up in the metaphysics of subjectivity (Hegel and Marx with their demiurgic conceptions of self-externalizing subjects) or endlessly tracing the transcendental/empirical bounds of the “humanist” paradigm (Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault). According to Habermas, the postmoderns, like their predecessors, fail to effect the transition to “the paradigm of mutual understanding” and remain locked within an exhausted episteme (Habermas, 1987: 295-96, 310). This mapping of the world of modern/postmodern theory neatly locates Arendt’s work on the intersubjective side of the divide.

Critical Thinking in a Modernity-Crisis

The various readings of Foucault and Arendt described above have been

motivated by complex sets of sensibilities and concerns. Their criticisms and goals are diverse, but all read Foucault and Arendt seriously in their attempts to come to grips with the ills of modern society. Furthermore, whichever path is chosen, it is textually demonstrable. I shall not be directly concerned, therefore, with the question, who has got Foucault and Arendt right/ or wrong? I shall be concerned, however, with Habermas' reading of Foucault and Arendt, and the danger around it, though this will certainly not be evident on every page. This underlying intention is important because Habermas presents the one-sided (in my view) but equally powerful ways of reading Foucault and Arendt, and it would be foolish to ignore his influence on the contemporary Foucault scholarship as well as that of Arendt. I shall question the adequacy of Habermas' mapping, suggesting that the Arendtian project, a story of pathologies of modern Europe, harmonizes in unexpected ways with the writings of Foucault. This invites a rereading of Foucault and Arendt on their own terms and a rethinking the relation between them.

I think that there is nothing more dangerous than to reduce a philosophy, especially one so subtle and complex such as Foucault and Arendt, to a textbook formula. All too often such readings have wound up domesticating one's thought

or constricting one's thematic concerns. Furthermore, in order to read these independent thinkers together, to discover what is between them, what binds them together and draws them apart, we need to shake off a kind of mapping or labelling around them. As Fine puts it:

We should...leave space for reading books which might be productive of surprising discoveries. Social theory can never remain content with frozen images...Understanding is itself an activity which resists indoctrination and mindless obedience...and needs no further justification (Fine, 2001: 2, 3).

Habermas' way of framing issue reminds me of what Foucault calls "the blackmail of Enlightenment' (1984: 42) – the insistence that one takes a stand "for" or "against" bourgeois democracy, enlightenment rationality and so forth, before delivering the specifics of one's critique. I am concerned to show that a stark opposition between modernism and postmodernism does Foucault and Arendt an injustice.

Habermas has failed to appreciate the fact that Arendt's thought is not a criticism articulated from within a traditional framework, including a modernist one, but from without that frame. For Arendt, the break with the tradition is more than a theoretical background. Her experience of totalitarianism haunts her treatment of

the modernist framework as well as her thinking about modernity as a whole. Converting trauma into historical understanding, Arendt attempted to link totalitarianism to the spirit of modern age. In doing so her theoretical response was the same as Walter Benjamin's: to break the chain of narrative continuity, to shatter chronology as the natural structure of narrative, to stress fragmentariness, historical dead ends, failures, and ruptures (Arendt, 1968a: 193-206).

Even if, as Kateb notes, Arendt sees the story of modern Europe as a story of pathologies, with Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism as "the climactic pathology" (Kateb, 1984: 66), she does not see totalitarianism as a single metaphor or the ultimate culmination of modern age. For Arendt the potential disaster in the various formative modern projects is a recurrent one. In other words, only from a falsely transcendental perspective any specific crisis can be seen as the final one, the definitive historical turning point.

Throughout her work, from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* via *The Human Condition* to *The Life of the Mind* and the Kant Lectures, Arendt consistently emphasized the dissolution of modern Europe's moral groundwork, the "break in our tradition" and "the loss of common sense". The basic conditions of possibilities of thinking, action, and judgment have been destroyed by "the moral

and spiritual breakdown of occidental society” (Arendt, 1994: 315), on the one hand, and the rise of mass culture, on the other. Arendt writes about action, thinking, and judgment in a historical situation parallel to the one Socrates confronted in Athens (see Arendt, 1982; 1984; 1990). There, too, traditional morality had fragmented to yield a morality of success. The way out of this situation, for Arendt as well as Socrates, is no return to a shattered tradition, not a simple call to action, but a radical questioning of all the “yardsticks” (Arendt, 1994: 321) for action, thinking and judgment. What is called for in such a situation is not activism, but critical thinking and independent judgment, “thinking without a banister” (Arendt, 1979; 336). It is important to remember, in this regard, that Arendt wrote *The Human Condition*, her consideration of the *vita activa*, not in order to stimulate activism, but in order to help us “think what we are doing” (Arendt, 1958: 5), which is indeed “a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness” (Arendt, 1958: 5).

It is because of the modern crisis in action, thinking and judgment, of the staggering growth of stupidity and the inability to judge, that Arendt explicitly turns to Socrates as a model in ‘Philosophy and Politics’ (1990), ‘Thinking and Moral Consideration’ (1984), and in the *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*

(1982). In these texts, she poses Socrates as a model of “critical thinking”, emphasizing his purifying quality. Indeed, Socrates did not teach anything. Rather, he exposed unexamined prejudgments to the “wind of thought”, dissolving prejudices but putting no “truths” in their places (Arendt, 1990: 81; 1984: 23; 1982: 37-39). Hence “critical thinking” is an essentially destructive activity. It has a “destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics” (Arendt, 1984: 24). The Socratic dialogue can hardly be characterized as deliberation aiming at decision and action. Socratic thinking is a public exercise of reason, yet this kind of thinking suspends all “fixed habits of thought, ossified rule and standards”. As Arendt put it at a conference on her work in 1973:

I think that this “thinking”...- thinking in the Socratic sense – is a maieutic function, a midwifery. That is, you bring out all your opinions, prejudices, what have you; and you know that never, in any of the [Platonic] dialogues, did Socrates ever discover any child [of the mind] who was not a wind-egg. That you remain in a way empty after thinking... And once you are empty, then, in a way which is difficult to say, you are prepare to judge (Arendt in Young-Bruehl,

1982: 452).

The testing and examination of opinions that is the heart of critical thinking is not only practiced by Socrates but also articulated by Kant. As Arendt makes clear in the Kant Lectures, “representative thinking” and “enlarged mentality” are not just models for public deliberation. They are, rather, the necessary vehicles of critical thinking. They proceed imaginatively, drawing on the possible standpoints and opinions of others in order to “abstract from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment” (Kant in Arendt, 1982:43). As Arendt puts it in the Lectures:

The “enlargement of the mind” plays a crucial role in the *Critique of Judgment*.

It is accomplished by “comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man”. The faculty that makes possible is called imagination...Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from “all others”. To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides...To think with an enlarged mentality

means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting (Arendt, 1982: 42-43).

Dialogue in the agora, or the public use of one's reason, are good ways of "enlarging" one's mentality, of "training one's imagination to go visiting". But neither "representative" (Arendt, 1968b: 421) nor "enlarged" thought have decision or action as their *raison d'être*. The "abstraction from contingent limitations" enables the attainment of a "general standpoint", which Arendt characterizes as "a view point from which to look upon, to watch, to form judgment, or as Kant himself says, to reflect upon human affairs" (Arendt, 1982: 44). It "does not tell one how to act". Rather, it enables one to think critically, and to judge independently.

What links Socratic dialectic and Kantian enlarged thought for Arendt is the way both yield not the truth, but a more impartial, and hence more valid, each individual's opinion, *doxa*, his or her "it appears to me" (Arendt, 1990: 80-81; 1968b, 241-242; 1982: 37-40). Even if, as Beiner notes, there are two different accounts of judgment in Arendt, which correspond to two distinct phase of her thought about action and thinking, whose focus "shifts from the representative thought and enlarged mentality of political agents to the spectatorship and retrospective judgment of historians and storytellers" (Beiner, 1984: 91), when

viewed in the light of “thinking (and judgment) for oneself” (Arendt, 1982: 43; 71), her articulation of political (or representative) and critical (or Socratic) thinking turn out to be more closely related than often assumed. If we view Arendt’s thought in terms of broader perspectivism, the standpoint of the actor and spectator emerge not as two radically different kinds of thinking and judgment (engaged and political vs. detached and historical), but rather as two poles of “self-thinking [*selbstdenken*]” (Arendt, 1978: 250; 1982: 71), “autonomous” (Arendt, 1982: 55) “independent” (Arendt, 1978; 250) judgment. To be sure, the “general standpoint” of the impartial judge is different from seemingly more vigorous standpoint of the citizen’s *doxa*, “it appears to me”. Yet, as Kant’s great enemy Nietzsche reminds us, “the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of thing, our “objectivity”, be” (Nietzsche, 1989: 12). Impartial judgment, as conceived by Arendt, remains perspectival in character. It is opinion in its highest form.

Riley’s familiar portrait of Kant as a deontological theorist underlines the selectivity and idiosyncrasy of Arendt’s interpretation of Kant. Against Arendt, Riley argues that Kantian politics is not about opinion or judgment: “Kant himself

would never have said that moral opinion, however ‘general’ or ‘enlarged’, can replace moral truth” (Riley, 1987: 384). His point is that we cannot begin to understand Kant’s political philosophy unless we first acknowledge the fundamental place he reserved for *a priori* moral truth. It is only in light of such truth that we can make sense of Kant’s universal republicanism and his hope that a constitutional legal order would promote the achievement of moral ends.

Yet, this criticism manages to miss Arendt’s thrust. She does not deny that Kant begins with the moral law and justifies republican government in terms of it. Rather, her point is that this mode of proceeding brackets the realm of opinion, plurality, and appearance, therefore denatures the political. Arendt seeks an unwritten political philosophy in the third *Critique* not because Kant sought “a new moral and political doctrine in aesthetic judgment”, but because the world of aesthetic judgment is also the world of publicity, or politics (Arendt, 1968a: 27; 1968b: 219-220).

In order to appropriate Kant for politics, Arendt feels she must ignore the systematic intent that governs Kant’s political writings such as ‘Perpetual Peace’.

As Riley correctly observes, Kant’s “official” political philosophy gives pride of place to his practical philosophy, to the ideas of moral truth and a pure (rational)

will. There can be no doubt. Kant's "official" politics is a politics of truth, a politics derived, in deductive fashion, from an absolute. Yet it is for this reason that Arendt dismisses it and looks elsewhere. The necessity of this search flows from her judgment that Kant's practical philosophy is "inhuman", intrinsically destructive of the realm of human affairs and its essential plurality:

Kant argued that an absolute exists, the duty of the categorical imperative which stands above men, is decisive in all human affairs, and cannot be infringed even for the sake of humanity in every sense of that word. Critics of the Kantian ethic have frequently denounced this thesis as altogether inhuman and unmerciful. Whatever the merits of their arguments, the inhumanity of Kant's moral philosophy is undeniable. And this is so because the categorical imperative is postulated as absolute and in its absoluteness introduces into the interhuman realm – which by its nature consists of relationships – something that runs counter to its fundamental relativity. The inhumanity which is bound up with the concept of one single truth emerges with particular clarity in Kant's work precisely because he attempted to found truth on practical reason; it is as though he who had so inexorably pointed out man's cognitive limits could not bear to think that in action, too, man cannot behave like a god (Arendt, 1968a:

27).

The Kantian appeal to such an absolute tears apart the web of human relationships, degrading opinion and plurality. Such effects, however, are not confined to Kant. They follow any attempt to make an absolute the organizing principle of the realm of human affairs (see Arendt, 1968b: 91-141).

Like Arendt, Foucault also belongs to the generation of European intellectuals who experienced the traumas of the twentieth century – Nazism and Stalinism, and performs the critique of modernity and western thought. As Foucault understands it, modernity is not a specific historical event, but a historical conjuncture which has happened several times in our history, albeit with different form and content: for example, the breakdown of the traditional virtues in Athens at the time of Socrates, the decline of the Hellenistic world, the end of metaphysics at the time of Kant. This breakdown results in a specific attitude toward reality, which to differentiate it from a subjective state, Foucault calls “ethos” (Foucault, 1984: 39). In a modernity-crisis, a taken-for-granted understanding of reality ceases to function as a shared background in terms of which people can orient and justify their activity. Therefore the modernist response is lucidly to face up to the collapse of the old order. In Foucault’s view,

such was the attitude of the Sophists in Greece, and the Stoics in Alexandria and Kant, and, in my view, Arendt and Foucault in the post-totalitarian moment.

While Arendt's critique is developed in the form of fragmentary historiography for which Walter Benjamin was her prime example, Foucault's critique is developed in the form of archaeology and genealogy for which Nietzsche was his prime example. Unlike in modern historiography, discontinuity is seen as a positive working concept in Foucault as well as Arendt. While Arendt seeks to recover the meaning of the past outside of the framework of any tradition, Foucault attempts to rethink the nature of power and self in a non-totalizing, non-presentational, and anti-humanist scheme. In this regard, as Habermas shows (1987, chapters, 5 and 6), Foucault is not following in the philosophical tradition of using language to represent reality, nor is he using language as a vehicle for undistorted communication. But, pace Habermas, neither is he abandoning himself to the free play of self-referential signifiers. Foucault is not trying to construct a general theory, nor deconstruct the possibility of any metanarrative.

What Foucault is trying to do is to suggest an "Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life" in theory as well as in practice, that contains essential deindividualizing principles against totalization as well as individualization. Here what Foucault

means by fascism is “not only historical fascism of Hitler and Mussolini”, but also “the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour”, in “our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures”, buried deep “in body”, its trace brutally to expunge, “the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (Foucault, 1977b: xiii, in Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). This task to confront the question of totalitarianism leads Foucault to the problem between reason and power once again, the reciprocal and the inverse of the problem of Enlightenment: how is that rationalization leads to the disease of power such as Nazism and Stalinism? In Foucault’s words, “how is that the great movement of rationalization led us so much noise, so much rage, so much silence and dismal mechanism?” (Foucault, 1996: 390).

In several essays and interviews (Foucault, 1983a: 208-226; 1984: 32-50; 1993: 10-18; 1996: 382-398; 2000: 443-448), while still critical of Enlightenment reason, Foucault attempts to positively appropriate key aspects of the Enlightenment heritage – its acute historical sense of the present, its emphasis on rational autonomy over conformity and dogma, and its critical outlook. He now sees the uncritical acceptance of modern rationality and its complete rejection as equally hazardous: “if it is extremely dangerous to say that Reason is the enemy that

should be eliminated, it is just as dangerous to say that any critical questioning of this rationality risks sending us into irrationality (Foucault, 1984: 239). Beyond “being for or against the Enlightenment” (Foucault, 1984: 45), he argues, critical thought must constantly live within a field of tension: “If philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is...to accept this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers” (Foucault, 1984: 249).

Foucault holds that our modernity begins with Kant’s attempt to make reason critical, i.e., to establish limits and legitimate use of reason. But Kant’s attempt to show that this critical use of reason is its true universal nature is not what is original and important for Foucault. Foucault does not deny that Kant is attempting to preserve the normative role of reason in the face of the collapse of metaphysics. But rather than seeing Kant as announcing a universal solution, Foucault uses Kant’s essay as a diagnostic of a particular conjuncture. What Foucault finds most distinctive and insightful in Kant’s essay is a philosopher qua philosopher realizing for the first time that his thinking arises out of and is an attempt to respond to his historical situation: “How and in what respect someone who speaks as a thinker, as a savant, as a philosopher forms a part of

this...process, and furthermore, how he has a certain role to play in this process, figuring in it to say at once as an element and as an actor” (Foucault, 1993: 11).

Foucault interprets Kant’s linking of the historical moment, critical reason and society as a challenge to develop a radically new version of what it means to lead a philosophical life:

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, not even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at once and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Foucault, 1984: 50).

This critical ontology has two separate but related components, that is, work on oneself and responding to one’s time: “Modernity...is not simply a form of relationship to the present; it is also a mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself” (Foucault, 1984: 41).

Furthermore, Foucault suggests approaching the problem of Enlightenment “in a meaningful enough proximity with the work of the Frankfurt School” (Foucault, 1996: 389). He understands the problem of Enlightenment as a still existing

historico-critical outlook on the present and on ourselves, which makes Foucault “brothers with the Frankfurt School” (Foucault, 1996: 391). Foucault sees in Kant’s answer to the question ‘What is Enlightenment?’ (Kant, 1970; orig. 1784) and ‘What is Revolution?’ (Kant, ‘The Contest of Faculties’, 1970; orig. 1789) the origin of a critical ontology leading through Hegel, Nietzsche, and Weber to Horkheimer and Adorno. Foucault adds himself to this tradition:

Kant seems...to have founded the two great critical traditions between which modern philosophy has been divided....One can opt for a critical philosophy which is framed as an analytical philosophy of truth in general, or one can opt for a critical thought which has the form of an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the present; it is this latter form of philosophy which, from Hegel to the Frankfurt School by way of Nietzsche and Max Weber, has founded a form of reflection within which I have tried to work (Foucault, 1993: 17-18).

Foucault and Arendt evade easy classification. They seem to occupy the anonymous place, which classical treaties in philosophy reserved for substance, without location, or boundaries, they are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. There is no doubt, however, that Foucault and Arendt, in their respective ways, embrace postmodern sensibility like never-ending pulsations. I believe that

postmodern sensibility, what Lyotard calls “incredulity” (1984: xxiii), is necessary to keep us honest as thinkers. But it is true that, for many contemporary postmodern theorists, this sensibility is not simply an inescapable element of our historical experience but a terminus of critical inquiry. In this regard, I value Foucault and Arendt because they accept postmodern sensibility not as an absolute given but as an “attitude” (see Foucault, 1984: 39; 1996: 383) that must be - at the risk of inviting Nietzschean scorn – constantly checked and examined. They offer us a critical theory without comfort, without the guarantee that modern ideologies have typically purported to provide. Like postmodernist, both thinkers criticize the Enlightenment faith that the transcendental power of science and reason could be saved and preserved. Yet, for Arendt and Foucault, this critique is based on a serious and sustained interrogation of historical experience as much as it is on a deconstruction of metaphysical philosophy. This is why Foucault and Arendt cannot be wholly understood by a stark opposition between modernism and postmodernism.

3. Methodological Observations

Foucault and Arendt are fascinated by history and the relationship between personal experience and those events of which they are a part. I believe this is the

nucleus of their theoretical desires. Particularly, the experience of totalitarianism and Stalinism, which they see as a disease of modern power, haunts their critique of modernity as a whole. This is not to say their writings on history are only concerned with actual experiences, whether contemporary or historical. Because their writings on history are intertwined with “an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought” (Foucault, 1992; orig., 1984: 9), which opens up the space of possible transformation. Indeed, for them, thinking itself, as Arendt argues in *The Life of the Mind*, is like “Penelope’s web” (Arendt, 1971: 88), constantly undoing its own construction. Furthermore, a tension between their profound commitment to political reality and the sense of detachment from the subject matter continually complicates their work. However, these tensions in theory as well as in practice, in the technique of life as well as in the political choices provide the elements for the unique work.

As we shall see, the historical-philosophical approach performed by Foucault and Arendt is neither subjective nor objective. Rather, it is an unusual combination of imagination, analysis and commitment. But equally, Foucault was very wary of the analytic link between a “philosophical conception” and the “concrete political attitude”, between “what one is thinking and saying” and “what one is doing”

(Foucault, 1984: 374). Like Foucault, Arendt remained intensely skeptical of the ideal of a unity of thought and action, or theory and practice. In Arendt's view, this ideal is a chimera and a dangerous one, because it grows out of and enforces an instrumental configuration of theory and practice. As she once said, "I think that commitment can easily carry you to a point where you no longer think" (Arendt, 1979: 308). Bearing these questions in mind, we should read Foucault and Arendt not only through their ideas, but also through Foucault's ethos and Arendt's moral taste. We should perform the two readings, which are, on the one hand, a scientific analysis of their work, the ability to decipher Foucault's "ethos" and Arendt's "judgment", on the other. This is in my view, the only spirit that can take us along their paths in such a way that we can understand them, then can indeed go beyond them.

Foucault did not think of writing as an aim or an end itself. He regarded his work as "tool boxes" (in Eribon, 1991: 237) and challenged the notion of author, as he was fond of quoting Beckett, "what matter who's speaking?" (Foucault, 1977: 138). Nevertheless, he was inclined to see his own work as, to some extent, "a fragmentary of autobiography" (Foucault, 2000: 458). Regarding the autobiographical elements of his work, it is important to acknowledge that he is

talking about not just his phenomenology in the vulgar sense of the terms, but his attempt to link “the historical and theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critiques, and experiences that call them into questions in reality” (Foucault, 1984: 374). His primary concern is always a historical problem that he formulates as always by using historical records. And yet, it is a problem that he feels very closely linked to what he is experiencing. If Foucault’s interviews form an integral part of his work, furthermore, if Foucault’s life, in itself, composes an intertextual space of his work, it is because Foucault extends the problematization of each of his books into the construction of the present problem, i.e., madness, punishment or sexuality. After all, it is the question of the present and of ourselves: what do we know? what can we do, “what are we?” (Foucault, 1983a: 216), which obviously stem from three dimensions of his thought: “knowledge, power and self” (Deleuze, 1988: 114). At the very heart of his analysis, it is critique, whose focus is “the relationship between truth, power, and the self” (Foucault, 1988b: 15).

For Foucault, in a deeper sense, “writing” involves a double meaning. On the one hand, in “What is an author?”, he defines the writing subject, i.e., the author, as a derivative, a function derived from the discourse. To awaken thought from its

humanist sleep, Foucault argues, “the subject must be...analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse” (Foucault, 1977: 138). On the other hand, in *The Care of the Self* (Foucault, 1990b; orig. 1984), Foucault sees writing as the relation with oneself, i.e. “subjectivation” (Deleuze, 1988: 101). In Foucault’s reading of Roman culture, writing connects up with ethics and the self because writing is the technique or professional skill which can be acquired only through exercise just as one cannot learn the art of living without a training oneself by oneself. Writing is “not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice” (Foucault, 1990b; orig. 1984: 51), which means that it is not a psychological form but an ontological form of the constitution of the self as well as communication with others. Also, writing is political practice because the question of writing and the self converge into the goal of “the perfect government of the self – a sort of political relationship between self and self” (Foucault, 1983b: 246). As Deleuze understands it, “I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me” (Deleuze, 1988: 98). The process of subjectivation is accompanied by writing, or rather, writing is the real name of the relation with oneself, i.e., subjectivation. Far from ignoring individuality or subjectivity, Foucault revisits the subject, but only as “a derivative or the product of a subjectivation” (Deleuze, 1988: 101). The

return of the “subject” (Foucault, 1983a: 209) in Foucault, therefore, is not a return to a humanist or phenomenological concept of the subject endowed with an inner essence or original will that proceeds and stands from the social. The subject is still discursively and socially conditioned for Foucault, and still theorized as situated within power relations. As Foucault says:

If I am interested...in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practice of self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group (Foucault, 1988a: 11).

For Arendt, writing about totalitarianism and about something with the breakdown of tradition presented profound historical dilemmas. Historiography originates with the human desire to overcome oblivion and nothingness. It is the attempt to save, in the face of the frailty of human affairs, something “which is even more than remembrance” (Arendt, 1994: 402). Although the structure of traditional historiography described as it is in chronological sequence, serves to “preserve” what has happened by making it seem inevitable, necessary and justifiable, for Arendt, the first dilemma posed by the historiography of

totalitarianism was the impulse to destroy rather than to preserve: “Thus my first problem was how to write historically about something – totalitarianism – which I did not want to conserve but on the contrary felt engaged to destroy” (Arendt, 1994: 402).

Her response to this dilemma was the fragmentary historiography embodying a discontinuity between past and present, which Arendt is indebted to Benjamin’s notion of “profane illumination”. This historiography is compared by Arendt to the activity of the pearl diver who brings to the surface the pearls and corals hidden in the depths of the sea. Just as the pearl diver recovers these treasures by extracting them forcibly from their surroundings, so this new historian delves into the depths of the past, not to resuscitate it the way it was or to glorify past ages, but to recover from forgetfulness those thought fragments that are still able to illuminate our present (Arendt, 1968a: 205-206). This method of fragmentary historiography is the way of discovering the past without being enslaved by it, in particular without having one’s historical imagination suffocated by argument of historical necessity.

Arendt maintained that there was a special relationship between historical understanding and what Kant had called imagination (Arendt, 1994: 404). Both

were exercise in reproductive imagination. In each case, one had to re-create from the evidence a new concept, a new narrative, a new perspective. For historical understanding could never be the mere reproduction of past historical actors. To pretend that historical understanding was complete empathy was an act of bad faith that served to disguise the standpoint of the narrator or the historian. Arendt painstakingly distinguished “judgement” from empathy (Arendt, 1968b: 220-221). The historical narrator was no less than the moral actor and had to engage in acts of judgment, for understanding is a form of judging – certainly not in the juridical or moralistic sense of the delivery of a value perspective but in the sense of re-creating a reality from the standpoint of all involved and concerned. Historical judgment revealed the perspectival nature of the world by representing its plurality in narrative form. It is the ability “to take the standpoint of the other” (Arendt, 1968b: 241), which does not mean emphasizing or even sympathizing with the other but re-creating the world as it appears through the eyes of others in me.

In re-creating this plural and perspectival quality of the world, the historian could accomplish his or her task only so far as his or her faculty of imagination was not limited to one of these viewpoints. Arendt draws a fine line between the practice

of judgment by the historian on the one hand and the moral dilemmas of objectivism and relativism on the other. The commitment to represent in narrative form every perspective may appear as the equivalent of God's eye view of the universe. It may feed the illusion of total objectivity. Equally, the more pluralized and fragmentary social and historical reality appears, the more one can gain the conviction that there is no shared right or wrong at all but that all our moral concepts are smoke screens for our perspectives and preferences. It is a consequence of Nietzsche, whose perspectivalist epistemology certainly inspired Arendt.

Arendt's critic had praised her work as passionate and denounced it as sentimental (Arendt, 1994: 403). Arendt's response to this was that she had parted quite consciously "with the tradition of *sine ira et studio*" (without passion and study) in her analysis of totalitarianism, for not to express moral indignation when writing about totalitarianism would have been equivalent to moral complicity:

To describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be "objective", but to condone them: and such condoning cannot be changed by a condemnation which the author may feel duty bound to add but which remains unrelated to the description itself...I think that a description of the camps as Hell on earth is

more “objective”, that is, more adequate to their essence than statements of a purely sociological or psychological nature (Arendt, 1994: 404).

Arendt faced this historiographical dilemma when reflecting upon totalitarianism, but there is little question that this method of writing history in defiance of the traditional canons of historical narrative is also what guided her controversial account in the Eichmann book, her account of the French and American Revolutions in *On Revolution*, and an archaeology of modernity in *The Human Condition*.

4. Contents

Recognizing the problems of attaching labels to Foucault’s work and that of Arendt, firstly, I wish to examine how and to what extent they develop their critique of modernity and humanism. Secondly, I wish to examine their response to the dangers incurred by modernity, namely, the development of new forms of subjectivity (Foucault) and the exercise of independent judgment (Arendt).

I do not read Foucault as a postmodernist *tout court*, but rather as a theorist who combines premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives. I see Foucault as a profoundly subtle, sophisticated but not well-conceptualized thinker whose thought is in tensions between totalizing/detotalizing impulses, discursive/extra-

discursive theorization, macro/micro perspectives, and domination/resistance relations as well as in tensions between ethical-political commitments and archaeological detachment. Yet, I do not think that there is a flagrant contradiction in Foucault's thought. Of course, as Habermas ironically points out, "only a complex thinking produces instructive contradictions (1986: 107), but "the force of this contradiction" (1986: 108), as Habermas calls it, provides the elements for a coherent work. When viewed in terms of a three-fold circular (i.e., non-totalizing) reciprocity between knowledge, power and self, his thinking about power and his thinking about self, i.e., subjectivation, turn out to be more closely related than often assumed. In the course of this work, I step back and examine Foucault's work in context, and relate the earlier work (in the 1960s and 1970s) to the later (in the 1980s), and show the underlying continuity in his thought on knowledge, power and self.

Like Foucault, Arendt was an 'antifoundationalist' long before the term came into use, doing her thinking "without a bannister" (Arendt, 1979: 336). However, Arendt is neither a 'deconstructionist' *per se*, intent upon demolishing conceptual thought, nor a political 'rationalist' with a system of notions. I read Arendt as a postmodernist *avant a lettre* but also as a theorist who combines premodern,

modern, and postmodern perspectives. I see Arendt as appropriating classical philosophers, Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger, in particular, in a highly agonistic manner, as twisting, displacing, and reinterpreting their thought. Indeed, Arendt's originality resides in her ability to see the political implications of a body of work in a way that goes against the grain of authorial intent. I see Arendt as a complicated thinker whose thought is in tension between creative rupture and exercise in retrieval, between agonism and consensus as well as in tension between existential engagement and philosophical withdrawal. But again, when viewed in terms of a three-fold circular (i.e., non-totalizing) reciprocity between action, thinking and judgment, her consideration of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, her articulations of political thinking in her earlier work (in the 1950s and 1960s) and critical (or Socratic) thinking in her later work (in the 1970s) turn out to be more closely related than often assumed. Indeed, interpretations of political (or representative) thinking as a method of public deliberation and decision-making (Habermas, 1983; Bernstein, 1984, 1986; Benhabib, 1987, 1992b) fundamentally distort Arendt's intention. In the course of this work, I step back and examine Arendt's work in context, and relate the earlier work to the later and show the underlying continuity in her thought on action,

thinking and judgment.

In this work, the tensions of their work I describe above are not the target of criticism but the positive working concept. What Foucault and Arendt teach us is that critical thinking must live in a field of tension. Viewing these tensions as the source of flagrant contradiction distorts their intentions. In this horizon, far from vindicating one against the other, this work is also situated in the force field created by these interpretive tensions which run deep in my work.

This work is composed of two parts, three chapters on Foucault, two chapters on Arendt. Two parts are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another. It is my intention that someone interested in either Foucault or Arendt should be able to go to the relevant part and read it, with considerable understanding. Yet, the two parts do reinforce one another. Consequently, important aspects of the treatment of each will only be fully understood if the reader has read the work as a whole.

In Chapter 2, I begin with a discussion of Foucault's critique of modernity. His critique is developed in the form of new historical approaches which he terms 'archaeology' and 'genealogy'. I then explicate Foucault's postmodern perspectives on the nature of modern power and his argument that the modern subject is a construct of domination. After analyzing the political implications of

Foucault's genealogical method and his later studies of ethics and techniques of the self, I conclude with some remarks on the tensions in his work as a whole. In Chapter 3, I begin with some critical remarks on criticisms that have been made of Foucault's work. Against those critiques that fail to account for the complexity of Foucault's work (not only the tensions but also the continuity behind them), I step back, and relate his earlier studies of knowledge and power to the later studies of the self, and show the underlying continuity in his work. In Chapter 4, I examine the conception of critique in Foucault's work. Then I relate Foucault's work with his life to show how his entire work as a form of critique is intertwined with his ethics as an intellectual. In Chapter 5, I examine Arendt's conception of modernity and her critique of modern forms of social and political life. I begin with the hermeneutic strategy that Arendt employs to understand the past. This includes the method of fragmentary historiography and that of deconstructive reading of the Western philosophical tradition. Then I examine the key features of Arendt's conception of modernity: world alienation, earth alienation, the rise of the social, and the victory of *animal laborans*. I conclude with some remarks on the tensions in her critique of modernity and on criticisms that have been made of her critique. In Chapter 6, I reconstruct Arendt's unfinished work on judgement. I

begin with an examination of the attempt made by Arendt to connect the activity of thinking to that of judging. Then I provide an account of Arendt's appropriation of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment. After examining two different accounts of judgment, one from the standpoint of the *vita activa*, the other from the standpoint of the *vita contemplativa*, I step back and relate the earlier theory to the later, and show the underlying continuity in her thought on judgment. I conclude by briefly considering her historical understanding of totalitarianism, of the Eichmann trial, in particular, as an example of independent judgment. In Chapter 7, I conclude with a reflection on the relation between their life and work, between their political commitments and theoretical detachment, reviewing the overall theoretical tensions in the point of the pariah they distinctively hold.

Chapter 2

Foucault: Archaeology, Genealogy, and the Critique of Modernity

Foucault's critique of modernity and humanism, along with his proclamation of the 'death of man' and development of new perspective on society, knowledge, discourse, and power, has made him a major source of postmodern thought.

Foucault draws upon an anti-Enlightenment tradition that rejects the equation of reason, emancipation, and progress, arguing that an interface between modern forms of power and knowledge has served to create new forms of domination. In a series of historico-philosophical studies, he has attempted to develop and substantiate this theme from various perspectives: psychiatry, medicine, punishment and criminology, the emergence of the human science, the formation of various disciplinary apparatus, and the constitution of the subject. Foucault's project has been to write a "critique of our historical era" (Foucault, 1984: 42) which problematizes modern forms of knowledge, rationality, social institutions, and subjectivity that seem given and natural but in fact are contingent sociohistorical constructs of power and domination.

While Foucault has decisively influenced postmodern theory, he cannot be wholly assimilated to that rubric. He is a complex thinker who draws multiple sources

and problematics while aligning himself with no single one. If there are privileged figures in his work, they are critics of reason and Western thought such as Nietzsche. Nietzsche provided Foucault with the impetus and ideas to attack Hegelian and Marxist philosophies. In addition to initiating a postmetaphysical, posthumanist mode of thought, Nietzsche taught Foucault that one could write a 'genealogical' history of unconventional topics such as reason, madness, and the subject which locate their emergence within sites of domination. Nietzsche demonstrated that the will to truth and knowledge is indissociable from the will to power, and Foucault developed these claims in his critique of liberal humanism, the human sciences, and in his later work on ethics. While Foucault gave Nietzsche a political democratic twist, he did accept Nietzsche's claim that systematizing methods produce reductive social and historical analyses, and that knowledge is perspectival in nature, requiring multiple viewpoints to interpret a heterogeneous reality.

Recognizing the problems of attaching labels to Foucault's work, I should like to examine the extent to which he develops certain postmodern positions. I do not read Foucault as a postmodernist *tout court*, but rather as a theorist who combines premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives. I see Foucault as a profoundly

subtle and complex thinker whose thought is in tensions between discursive/extra-discursive theorization, macro/ micro perspectives, and domination/resistance relations as well as in tensions between ethical-political commitments and archaeological detachment. I begin with a discussion of his critique of modernity. This critique is developed in the form of new historiographical approaches which he terms 'archaeology' and 'genealogy'. I shall then explicate Foucault's postmodern perspectives on the nature of modern power and his argument that the modern subject is a construct of domination. After analyzing the political implications of ethics and techniques of the self, I shall conclude some remarks on the tensions in his work as a whole.

1. Archaeology and Genealogy

Archaeology and Discontinuity

In his initial books, Foucault characterizes his position as an archaeology of knowledge. In *Madness and Civilization* (1989; orig. 1961), his first major work, Foucault attempts to write the 'archaeology of that silence' whereby madness is historically constituted as the other reason. He shows classical and modern discourses construct oppositions between sane and insane, normal and abnormal that work to enforce norms of reason and truth. In his next book, *The Birth of the*

Clinic (1975; orig. 1963), subtitled 'An Archaeology of Medical Perception', Foucault analyzes the shift from a premodern speculatively-based medicine to a modern empirically-based medicine rooted in the rationality of the scientific gaze.

Then, in *The Order of Things* (1994; orig. 1966), subtitled 'An Archaeology of the Human Sciences', Foucault describes the emergence of the human sciences. In his analysis, Foucault uncovers the birth of 'man' as a discursive construct. 'Man', the object of philosophy as the human sciences (psychology, sociology and literature), emerges when the classical field of representation dissolves and the human being for the first time becomes not only an aloof representing subject, but also the object of modern scientific investigation, a finite and historically determined being to be studied in its living, labouring, and speaking capacities. Having analyzed the birth of 'man', *The Order of Things* concludes by anticipating the 'death of man' as an epistemological subject in the emerging posthumanist, postmodern epistemic space.

In this book, Foucault provides a grid for the varieties of modern humanism by identifying three forms of Man doublet (1994; orig. 1966: 318-335). First, there is the transcendental/ empirical double, in which Man both constitutes the world of empirical objects and is constituted himself, an empirical object like any other in

the world. Second, there is the cogito/ unthought double, in which Man is both determined by forces unknown to him and aware that he is so determined; he is thus charged with the task of thinking his own unthought and thereby freeing himself. Finally, there is the return-and-retreat-of-the-origin double, in which Man is both the originary opening from which history unfolds and an object with a history that antedates him.

Each of these three doubles contains a subject pole that suggests the autonomy, rationality, and infinite value of Man. As the one who transcendently constitutes the world, Man is a meaning giver and lawmaker. As thinker of his own unthought, he becomes self-transparent, unalienated, and free. And as enabling horizon of history, he is its measure and destiny. But no sooner does this subject pole endow Man with this privilege and value than it defines the opposing object pole that denies them. As empirical object, Man is subject to prediction and control. Unknown to himself, he is determined by alien forces. And as a being with a history that antedates him, he is encumbered with a destiny not properly his own.

Foucault's initial critique of the human sciences is that they are premised on an impossible attempt to reconcile irreconcilable poles of thought and posit a constituting subject. However, it is only in his genealogical works, as we shall see,

that this critique assumes its full importance as Foucault becomes clear on the political implications of humanism as epistemological basis of a disciplinary society.

Finally, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972a; orig. 1969), Foucault gives us on account of the methodology underlying his various researches. Drawing from the work of French historians of science, Foucault announces that “this new form of history is trying to develop its own theory” (1972a: 5). From within this new conceptual space the modern themes of continuity, teleology, genesis, totality, and subject are no longer self-evident and are reconstructed or abandoned.

Unlike modern historiography, Foucault adopts discontinuity as a positive working concept. He opposes his concept of general history to the concept of a total history that he attributes to figures such as Hegel and Marx. He summarizes the difference in this way: “A total description draws all phenomena around a single center – a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion” (1972a: 19).

The task of archaeology is not just “to attain a plurality of histories juxtaposed and independent of one another”, but also “to determine what form of relation may be

legitimately described between ...different series [of things]" (1972a: 10) In addition, he rejects the interpretation of his work as simply a "philosophy of discontinuity" (Foucault, 1988e: 99-100), instead, he claims that he sometimes exaggerated the degree of historical breaks "for pedagogical purposes", that is, to counter the hegemony of the traditional theories of historical progress and continuity (see also Foucault 1980: 111-112) Historical breaks always include some "overlapping, interaction, and echoes" (1990a; orig. 1976: 149), hence, what Foucault employ is not a philosophy of discontinuity but a spiral process of continuity and discontinuity.

The Archaeology of Knowledge was the last work Foucault explicitly identified as an archaeology and it marks the end of his focus on the unconscious rules of discourse and the historical shifts within each discursive field.

Nietzsche and Genealogy

In 1970 Foucault began to make the transition from archaeology to genealogy and thereby to a more adequate theorization of material institutions and forms of power. In his essay, 'The Discourse of Language', he speaks of employing a new genealogical analysis of "the effective formation of discourse, whether within the limits of control, or outside them" (1972b; orig. 1971: 233) In a summary of a

discourse he gave in the Collège de France (1970-1), he stated that his earlier archaeological studies should now be conducted “in relation to the will to knowledge” (1977: 201) and the power effects this creates. In his essay ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History’, he analyzes the central Nietzschean themes that will inform his new historical method, which appears in mature form in his next major book, *Discipline and Punish* (1991; orig. 1975). In this book, he characterized this study as “a correlative history of the modern soul and of a new power to judge; a genealogy of the present scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications and rules, from which it extends its effects and by which it masks its exorbitant singularity” (1991: 23)

Foucault articulates, in ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History’, the notion of an historiography that “disturbs what was previously considered immobile;...fragments what was thought unified;...shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (1977: 147). In so doing, it affirms knowledge “as perspective”, aiming not at “objective” truth but rather at a particular impact on its readers. It thus functions as “effective history”, breaking up a present order that has enjoyed the advantage of a historical legitimacy. As Foucault puts it, history becomes “effective” when it “introduces discontinuity into our very being”, when

it “deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature” (1977: 154).

Such a history is in all respects opposed to the extant order; it is “parodic, directed against reality, dissociative, directed against identity,...sacrificial, directed against truth” (1977: 160)

With regard to this final, sacrificial function, Foucault insists particularly on the notion of a “will to knowledge” that arbitrarily establishes its own “truth”. Such a “truth” is violent and coercive in character. In Foucault’s words, “knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason;...rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence” (1977, 162-4)

While genealogy signals a new shift in focus, it is not a break in his work, but rather a widening of the scope of analysis. Foucault characterizes genealogy as a new mode of historical writing, calling the genealogist “the new historian” (1977: 160) Both methodologies attempt to re-examine the social field from a micrological standpoint that enables one to identify discursive discontinuity and dispersion instead of continuity and identity, and to grasp historical events in their real complexity.

In the transition to his genealogical stage, however, Foucault places more

emphasis on the material conditions of discourse, which he defines in terms of “institutions, political events, economic practices and processes” (1972a: 49), and on analyzing the relations between discursive and non-discursive domains. Consequently, he thematizes the operations of power, particularly as they target the body to produce knowledge and subjectivity. This transition is not then a break between the idealist archaeological Foucault and the materialist genealogical Foucault, but rather marks a more adequate thematization of social practices and power relations.

Archaeology and genealogy now combine in the form of theory/ practice where theory is immediately practical in character. As Foucault states (1980: 85), “ “archaeology” would be the appropriate methodology of the analysis of local discursivities, and “genealogy” would be the tactics whereby on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play”. Theoretical activity, then, is seen as having an entirely practical significance. In other words, theory does not simply ‘analyze’ or ‘describe’ reality, more importantly, it seems to articulate strategies by which what is extant may perpetually be overcome. This shift toward a notion of discourse as praxis can be linked to the events of 1968 in France, and to the

reaction that those events occasioned intellectual community. But at the same time, the shift was, in view of positions that Foucault had taken up in *Madness and civilization*, that is, his claims to be resurrecting the silent language of an oppressed madness, a logical one.

In order to theorize the birth of modern disciplinary and normalizing practices, genealogy politicizes all facets of culture and everyday life. Following Nietzsche, Foucault tries to write the history of unknown, forgotten, excluded, and marginal discourses. He sees the discourses of madness, medicine, punishment and sexuality to have independent histories and institutional bases, irreducible to macrophenomena such as the modern state and economy. Hence, against “the tyranny of globalizing discourses” (Foucault, 1980: 83), he calls for “an insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (1980: 81), of those “disqualified” discourses that positivistic science and Marxism delegitimize because they are deemed marginal or non-formalizable. Genealogies are therefore ‘anti-sciences’, not because they seek to “vindicate a lyrical right to ignorance or non-knowledge” and attack the concepts and methods of science per se, but rather because they contest “the [coercive] effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the institutions and functioning of an organized scientific discourse” (1980: 84).

In relation to Foucault's historiographical project, it can be said that Foucault has always written with the aim of changing the present: as early as *History of Madness*, he had this obvious present end in view. But there was a tendency, in his earlier archaeological work, for much of this to be obscured. This is because, as Best and Kellner point out, "Foucault's archaeologies privileged analysis of theory and knowledge over practices and institutions". (1991: 45) With the genealogical turn, however, Foucault is concerned not with the portrayal of a dead past but rather with the active play of forces in the present. Thereafter, he emphasizes the total insertion of his works into the context of a present struggle:

" Writing interests me only insofar as it enlists itself into the reality of a contest, as an instrument of tactics, of illumination. I would like my books to be, as it were, lancets, or Molotov cocktails, or minefields; I would like them to self-destruct after use, like fireworks." It is necessary, Foucault asserts, for historical analysis to be a part of "political struggle" – not that it attempts to give such struggles a "guiding thread" or a "theoretical apparatus," but rather that it "constitutes" their "possible strategies." (Foucault in Megill, 1985: 243) It is in *Discipline and Punish* that this concern first comes fully into play. He tells us in this work that "I have learnt not so much from history as from the present' that "punishment in

general and the prison in particular belong to a political technology of the body.”

He goes on to say that it is of the prison in its actuality “that I would like to write the history,” an enterprise that he characterizes not as “writing a history of the past in terms of the present,” but “writing the history of the present” (1991; orig. 1975: 30-31). At this point, we arrive at the essential core of Foucault’s historiographical project, that is, he is more interested in changing the way things are rather than in logical or historical correctness. We can say that the object of Foucault’s genealogical critique is the status of the present. It is in this sense that Foucault characterizes his enterprise as the “history of the present”. In this regard, it must be said that Foucault’s genealogy is certainly not a masterscheme purporting to govern all possible forms of historical explanation though it may offer them a supplementary dimension of reflection. As Gordon has noted, “What it may possibly provide is a principle of intelligibility for some...of the historical relations covered by the category of power/ knowledge insofar as these are constituents of an effect of progressivity/ modernity”. (Gordon, 1980: 242)

Not only in his historical writings, Foucault’s theoretical tendency toward the present also appears in his interest in journalism, or rather precisely, in the relationship of philosophy to journalism. Indeed, journalism was nothing new for

Foucault. He had been closely involved in launching *Libération*, and he had long been a regular contributor to *Le Nouvel Observateur*. And he had conducted many ‘investigations’ during his leftist period, particularly in working with the Group d’Information sur les Prisons (GIP) (Eribon, 1991: 281). He describes his notion of reporting:

There are more ideas on earth than intellectuals imagine. And these ideas are more active, stronger, more resistant, more passionate than “politicians” think. We have to be there at the birth of ideas, the bursting outward of their force: not in books expressing them, but in events manifesting this force, in struggles carried on around ideas, for or against them...This is the direction we want these “journalistic report” to take. An analysis of thought will be linked to an analysis of what is happening. Intellectuals will work together with journalists at the point where ideas and events intersect (Ibid., 282).

Similarly, he sees Kant’s 1784 text on the question ‘What is Enlightenment?’ from this perspective. As he emphasizes it, “We must not forget that this is a newspaper article. A study is yet to be done of the relationship of philosophy to journalism beginning with the end of the eighteenth century” (Foucault, 1996: 386). He considers this text as “the question of the present as a philosophical event

incorporating within it the philosopher who speaks of it” (1993: 11), and links his concern for the historicization of the event in the present to the journalistic approach:

I believe this question is also the basis of the journalist’s occupation. The concern to say what is happening...is not so much prompted by the desire to know always and everywhere what makes this happening possible but, rather, by the desire to make out what is concealed under that precise, floating, mysterious, utterly simple word “today” (Foucault: 2000: 443).

2. Foucault’s Postmodern Analytics: Power/ Knowledge/ Subjectivity

Power/Knowledge

Beginning in the early 1970s, Foucault attempts to think the nature of modern power in a non-totalizing, non-representational, and anti-humanist scheme. While the bourgeois revolution decapitated the king in the sociopolitical realm, Foucault argues that many concepts and assumptions of the sovereign-juridical model continue to inform modern thought (for example, in liberal theory and repression theories of power in general). He therefore attempts ‘to cut off the head of the king’ in the realm of theory with a genealogical guillotine.

Against modern theories that see knowledge as neutral and objective (positivism)

or emancipatory (Marxism), Foucault emphasizes that knowledge is indissociable from regimes of power. His concept of 'power/ knowledge' is symptomatic of the postmodern suspicion of reason and the emancipatory schemes advanced in its name. The circular relationship between power and knowledge is established in Foucault's genealogical critiques of the human sciences. Having emerged within the context of relations of power, through practices and technologies of exclusion, confinement, surveillance, and objectification, disciplines such as psychiatry, sociology, and criminology in turn contributed to the development, refinement, and proliferation of new techniques of power. Institutions such as asylum, hospital, or prison functioned as laboratories for observation of individuals, experimentation with correctional techniques, and acquisition of knowledge for social control.

Foucault views all claims to knowledge as irremediably tied up with the exercise of power. There is no such thing as an "objective" knowledge, no possibility of retreating into the Cartesian pallium. Any claims to objective knowledge, to valid theory, are merely attempts to exercise power of one sort or another. The corollary of this is that theory has no status as theory; on the contrary, it is nothing other than practice. In a conversation with Deleuze, Foucault argues that after May

1968 [popularly known as the “events of May], the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge, and that intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power, and that the idea of their responsibility for “consciousness” and discourse forms part of the system. Foucault redefines the “general intellectual” as a “specific intellectual” (see Foucault, 1980: 109-133) in this way:

The intellectual’s role is no longer to place himself “somewhat ahead and to the side” in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of “knowledge”, “truth”, “consciousness”, and “discourse” In this sense theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and regional...and not totalizing. This is a struggle against power, a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious. It is not to “awaken consciousness” that we struggle...but to sap power, to take power...A “theory” is the regional system of this struggle (Foucault, 1977: 207-208).

On this ground, one might expect Foucault to engage in a “theoretical practice” designed to advance the interests of some particular class or group within society.

But he does not do so. His failure to adopt, generally, Marxist strategy derives ultimately from his rejection of theory itself. In an interview with a group of radical lycéens, he advises: “Reject all theory and all forms of general discourse. This need for theory is still part of the system we reject” (Ibid.: 231).

He perhaps best defines this radically critical position in ‘A Preface to Transgression’. Evoking Bataille, he here speaks of a “philosophy of nonpositive affirmation” whose sole aim is to “contest” the existing order. “Contestation”, according to Foucault, “does not imply a generalized negation, but an affirmation that affirms nothing, a radical break of transitivity;...to contest is to proceed until one reaches the empty core where being achieved its limit and where the limit defines being” (Ibid.: 35-6).

Foucault opposes the existing order of things, strategically attacking it at what he believes to be its weakest points. But he does so in the name of no other order that he intends or hopes will replace what exists. Order itself is brought before the bar. As Foucault says, “to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system” (Ibid.: 230). Or as he puts in the more authoritative *The Order of Things*, thought “cannot help but liberate and and enslave” (Foucault, 1994; orig. 1966: 328).

Subjectivity

According to Foucault, the modern individual became both an object and subject of knowledge, not “repressed”, but positively shaped and formed within the matrices of “scientifico-disciplinary mechanisms”, a moral/ legal/ psychological/ medical/ sexual being ‘carefully fabricated...according to a whole technique of force and bodies’ (Foucault, 1991; orig. 1975: 217). As Foucault understands it, the term ‘subject’ has a double meaning: one is both ‘subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to...(their) own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge’ (1982a: 212).

Against modern theories that posit a pre-given, unified subject or an unchanging human essence that precedes all social operations, Foucault calls for the destruction of the subject and sees this as a key political tactic. “One has to dispense with the constant subject, and to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework” (Foucault, 1980: 117). The notion of a constituent subject is a humanist mystification that occludes a critical examination of the various institutional sites where subjects are produced within power relations. Taking his cue from Nietzsche, Foucault’s task is to awaken thought from its humanist

slumbers and to destroy “all concrete forms of the anthropological prejudice”, a task which would allow us “to renew contact...with the project of a general critique of reason” (Foucault, 1994; orig. 1966: 342). To accomplish this, the subject must be “stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse” (Foucault, 1977: 138). Hence, Foucault rejects the active subject and welcomes the emerging postmodern era as a positive event where the denuding of agency occurs and new forms of thought can emerge (Foucault 1989; orig. 1961: 386).

As Dews (1987) notes, Foucault rejects the Enlightenment model which links consciousness, self-reflection, and freedom, and instead follows Nietzsche’s claim in *The Genealogy of Morals* that self-knowledge, particularly in the form of moral consciousness, is a strategy and effect of power whereby one internalizes social control. While his early critique of modernity are sharply negative, in his later work he sometimes adopts a more positive attitude, seeing a critical impulse in the modern will-to-knowledge which should be preserved. This leads him, as I shall show later, to modify his position that subjectivity is nothing but a construct of domination.

3. Foucault’s Political Fragments: Domination and Resistance

Resistance

In Foucault's description, power is diffused throughout the social world, constituting individual subjectivities and their knowledges and pleasures, colonizing the body itself, utilizing its forces while inducing obedience and conformity. Since the seventeenth century, individuals have been caught within a complex grid of disciplinary, normalizing, panoptic powers that survey, judge, measure, and correct their every move. Power is everywhere. "What I am attentive to is the fact that every human relation is to some degree a power relation. We move in a world of perpetual strategic relations." (Foucault 1988e: 168)

Considering this intense vision of oppression, I am not unsympathetic to the view that Foucault overly preoccupies with the question of power to the detriment of the question of resistance. However, the criticism outlined by Poulantzas (1978), namely that in Foucault's work there is no escape from domination since resistance is always inscribed within power, is predicted upon a clear misunderstanding. Ironically, Foucault addresses this very misunderstanding in the following rhetorical manner:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this

resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Should it be said that one is always 'inside' power, there is no 'escaping' it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner? (Foucault, 1990a; orig., 1976: 95).

The answer given is that to do so is to misunderstand the relational character of power, the power relationship being dependent upon the existence of a multiplicity of points of resistance. Thus Foucault argues that relations of force require opposition or resistance and that these are present throughout the network of power relations. In other words, there is no single necessary locus or source of opposition; rather there are plurality of resistances which can only exist in the strategic field of power relations:

Their existence [power relationships] depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance...These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 95-96).

Another misinterpretation of Foucault turns on a conflation between power as

omnipresent and as omnipotent. Fine (1984), for example, adds his critique in terms of omnipotence of power, that is, “power without people”:

Foucault was not wrong to take off from themes which represented a revival of left criticism about power and the state. However, around the kernel of truth contained in these observations he built an elaborate mystical shell...Power appeared as a self-sufficient entity, whose only purpose is the maintenance of its own mastery. This thesis was clearly apparent in his critique of prisons, where he described the prison as an ‘extreme form’ of disciplinary power...For Foucault, since the form of power is everything and power produces its own reality, there can be no obstacles to its apparent efficacy: the prison becomes the symbol of omnipotence (Fine, 1984: 191, 196).

I agree, to some extent, that Foucault has neglected analysis of forms of resistance and oppression, but it is a mistake to see Foucault as a fatalist with respect to social and political change for his work can be read another way. As the inevitable fate of class struggle and conflict is not institutionalization and neutralization, there is no warrant for attributing a fatalistic position to Foucault.

While power is everywhere, it is indissociable from contestation and struggle: “I am just saying: as soon as there is power relation, there is a possibility of

resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (Foucault 1988e: 123).

The common argument that Foucault presents subjects as helpless and passive victims of power fails to observe his emphasis on the contingency and vulnerability of power and the places in his work where he describes actual resistances to it. (see Foucault, 1991; orig. 1975: 273ff.; 1990a; orig. 1976: 101).

Admittedly, such passages are rare and the overriding emphasis of Foucault’s work is on the ways in which individuals are classified, excluded, objectified, individualized, disciplined, and normalized. Foucault himself became aware of this problem and shifted his emphasis from “technologies of domination” to “technologies of the self”, from the ways in which individuals are transformed by others to the ways in which they transform themselves.

In sum, the emphasis in Foucault’s work is on an unprejudiced examination of the complex mechanisms through which power has functioned. The exercise of power and the mechanisms through which it functions are conceptualized neither as autonomous of nor as subordinate to economic processes and relations of production. Foucault does not deny that local struggles against power may be related to struggles against economic exploitation (1977: 216), but argues that the

exercise of power and the mechanisms through which it is effective may not be theorized or accounted for in terms of capitalist exploitation and relations of production. An analysis of the mechanisms through which power is exercised, and of the relationships between struggle against power and against struggle against exploitation, may not simply be derived from an existing totalizing theoretical system. Such mechanisms and relationships need to be analyzed in their own right as “events”, rather than subordinated to existing conceptions of global historical processes which proves to be far from infallible.

Furthermore, Foucault’s own interventions into political struggles and debates would make little sense if he felt that the deadlock of power was unbreakable. One might even speak of Foucault’s optimism that issues from his belief in the contingency and vulnerability of power: “There’s an optimism that consists rather in saying that things couldn’t be better. My optimism would consist rather in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints” (Foucault 1988e: 156). Ultimately, this attitude proceeds on the belief that “Knowledge can transform us” (Foucault, 1988e: 14) –

hence the importance of archaeology and genealogy as historical methods that expose the beginnings and development of current subjectifying discourses and practices.

The political task of genealogy, then, is to recover the autonomous discourses, knowledges, and voices suppressed through totalizing narratives. As Marx attempted to break the spell of commodity fetishism in capitalist society, Foucault's genealogy problematizes the present as eternal and self-evident, exposing the operations of power and domination working behind neutral or beneficent facades. In Foucault's words (1974: 171): "It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them".

Therefore, we have to attempt to formulate some of these reservations as they arise from Foucault's discussion of power, strategy and resistance. As Gordon suggests it:

The contribution of the intellectual as historical analyst ends and gives way to the reflection and decisions, not of the managers and theoreticians of resistance

but of those who themselves choose to resist. For the recent eruptions of ‘popular knowledge’ and ‘insurrections of subjugated knowledges’ which he celebrates, what Foucault may have to offer is a set of possible tools, tools for the identification of the conditions of possibility which operate through the obviousnesses and enigmas of our present, tools perhaps also for the eventual modification of those conditions (Gordon, 1980: 258).

Power, Discourse and the Intellectual

In my reading, a Foucauldian micropolitics includes two key components: a discourse politics and a bio-politics. Here, I should like to limit my discussion to discourse politics. In discourse politics, marginal groups attempt to contest the hegemonic discourses. In any society, discourse is power because the rules determining discourse enforce norms of what is rational, sane, or true, and to speak from outside these rules is to risk marginalization and exclusion. All discourses are produced by power, but they are not wholly subservient to it and can be used as “a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 101). Counter-discourses provide a lever of political resistance by encapsulating a popular memory of previous forms of oppression and struggle and a means of articulating needs and demands.

At this point, let's relate Foucault's emphasis on discourse politics to the question of the political role of intellectual. There must be something obviously self-interested in raising the question of discourse over and over again. Let us consider Foucault's intellectual milieu – which is, in fact, the milieu of intellectuals, intellectuals who take it as self-evident that they have a crucially important political role to play. Descombes notes that the staking out of a political position has been so important to philosophers in France that the “definitive meaning” of even the most abstruse epistemological or metaphysical problems is not considered settled until its implications for the next elections, or for the attitude of the Communist Party, have been disclosed (Descombes, 1979: 7). In short, it is assumed that the intellectual has a political role to play as an intellectual, distinct from his status as person and citizen. And it is assumed, too, that all his intellectual work will have some sort of political significance. In Foucault's words:

The role of intellectual is not to tell others what to do. By what right could he do so? Remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions and programmes that intellectuals have formulated in the course of the last two centuries, the effects of which we can now see. The intellectual's task is not to shape the

political will of others: it is rather, by means of analyses in his own fields, to reinterrogate the obvious and the assumed; to unsettle habits and ways of thinking and doing; to dissipate accepted familiarities to re-evaluate rules and institutions, and, on the basis of this re-problematisation (in which he exercises his specific function as an intellectual), to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role to play as a citizen) (Foucault, 1988e: 265).

Given these assumptions, the question of the political role of the intellectual becomes a standing problem. Not surprisingly, it is a problem that Foucault has addressed on a number of occasions; one notes especially the long discussion of the issue in his 1977 interview with Fontana and Pasquino, and his 1972 conversation with Deleuze on the same subject (Foucault, 1980: 126-133; 1977: 205-217). Many French intellectuals of the generation prior to Foucault's considered the political role of the intellectual to be unambiguous: the intellectual was "the clear, individual figure of a universality whose obscure, collective form is embodied in the proletariat" (Foucault, 1980: 126). But for Foucault this peculiar form of Kantian theoretical universalism obviously will not do. We all know that intellectuals have a political role to play – but what is it? The advantage,

here, of a discursive redefinition of reality is clear. For discourse is a matter, finally, of words, and words are the peculiar concern of intellectuals. Hence, the political importance that Foucault attributes to Nietzsche (Foucault, 1980: 133).

Although politics is not all about a matter of discourse, discourse is a form of power, then intellectuals become important political agents:

The political involvement of the intellectual was traditionally the product of two different aspects of his activity: his position as an intellectual in bourgeois society, in the system of capitalist production and within the ideology it produces or imposes...; and his proper discourse to the extent that it revealed a particular truth, that it disclosed political relationships where they were unsuspected. These two forms of politicization did not exclude each other, but, being of a different order, neither did they coincide (Foucault, 1977: 207).

According to Foucault, as individuals, intellectuals may be specified in a variety of ways; for example, in relation to their class position - "whether as petty-bourgeois in the service of capitalism or 'organic' intellectual of the proletariat" (Foucault, 1980: 132) - or to the economic or scientific sector in which they work. Moreover, as individuals they may oppose relations of power, class and sex domination in all of these dimensions. However, Foucault argues since it is

through the regime of truth that their specific function as intellectuals connects with the global system of power, it is this which must constitute their primary political objective. It is at this point that they can practice an intellectual subversion with the potential to disrupt one essential level of the general structure and functioning of society:

There is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth' – it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted', but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true', it being understood also that it's not a matter of a battle 'on behalf' of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. It is necessary to think of the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of 'science' and 'ideology' but in terms of 'truth' and 'power' (Foucault, 1980: 132).

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) note that whereas in his writings of 1963-69 Foucault dwelt almost exclusively on linguistic practices, in his post - 1969 writings he dealt with the social practices that formed both institutions and discourse. It is true, in particular, much of *Discipline and Punish* suggests a focus

on actual social practices. Therefore, for Foucault in the 1970s, the essential political problem for the intellectual is “not changing people’s consciousnesses – or what’s in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (Foucault, 1980: 133). The shift to the focus on technologies of the self, ethics, and freedom in the 1980s leads Foucault to restate the position in an interview published shortly before his death:

My role...is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people – that’s the role of an intellectual (Foucault, 1988b: 10).

4. Ethics and Technologies of the Self

Foucault never provided any conception of human agency, and yet he did gesture towards a positive reconstruction of subjectivity in a posthumanist problematic. This move occurs in his later works – the second and third volumes of his history of sexuality and various essays and interviews from the 1980s – and it moves into the forefront of Foucault’s thought a concern with ethics and technologies of the self.

Explaining his motivations in an 'auto-critique', Foucault says: "If one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western Civilization, one has to take into account not only techniques of domination, but also techniques of the self. One has to show the interaction between these two types of self. When I was studying asylums, prison, and so on, I perhaps insisted too much on techniques of domination...I would like, in the years to come, to study power relations starting from techniques of the self" (Foucault and Sennet, 1982c: 10). Furthermore, Foucault situates his work as a whole in the context of "not power but the subject": "It has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My object...has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects...Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research". (1982a: 208-9)

Foucault defines technologies of the self as practices "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (1988c: 18) Given this new emphasis,

subjectivity is no longer described as a reified construct of power; the deterministic view of the subject is declined; impersonal explanations give way to a study of how individuals can transform their own subjectivities through techniques of the self. Discipline, in the form of these techniques, is no longer viewed as an instrument of domination. Furthermore, issues concerning the freedom and autonomy of individuals emerge as central concerns.

These changes in Foucault's work were influenced by his study of Greek and Roman cultures where techniques of the self, as practiced by free males (slaves and women were excluded from the ethical field) provided models of the practice of freedom. In *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984) and *The Care of the Self* (Foucault, 1990b; orig. 1984), Foucault analyzes how Greek and Roman citizens problematized desire as an area of intense moral concern and defined key domains of experience (diet, family relations, and sexuality) as areas requiring moderation and self-control. For the Greeks, especially, ethics was immediately bound up with "an aesthetics of existence".

Unlike Christian morality, Greek and Roman morality aimed not at abstinence per se, but at moderation and self-control; it was not a question of banishing or stigmatizing desire and pleasure, but of their proper use. Moreover, where in

Greek and Roman culture moral problematizations were ultimately the responsibility of each individual who wished to give style, beauty, and grace to his existence.

In Foucault's reading of Greco-Roman culture, ethics is the relation an individual has with itself. This is not to say that there is no social component to ethics, for mastery of and caring for the self is inscribed in a nexus of social and pedagogical relations and aims at developing oneself as a better ruler over oneself and other people. Whereas other forms of ethics such as Kantianism focus on the duties and obligations a self has to others, the Greco-Roman model holds that the freedom of individuals (defined not as free will or in opposition to determinism, but in relation to mastery of one's desires) was essential for overall good of the city and state, and that the person who could best rule himself could best rule other people. On this model, ethics is "the liberate form assumed by liberty" (1988a: 4), and the basis for a prolonged practice of the self whereby one seeks for a "constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects" (Foucault, 1984: 43).

However, Foucault is adamant that the Greeks do not offer an "alternative" (1983b: 231) for contemporary society, only an example of a non-normalizing morality which modern cultures will have to develop themselves:

In this regularly repeated return to the Greeks there is a sort of nostalgia, an attempt to retrieve an original form of thought and an effort to conceive the Greek world outside of Christian phenomena...Trying to rethink the Greeks today does not consist of setting off Greek morality as the domain of morality par excellence which one would need for self-reflection. The point rather is to see to it that European thinking can take up Greek thinking again as an experience which took place once and with regard to which one can be completely free (Foucault 1988e: 249).

Hence, the genealogical importance of Foucault's historical inquiries into ethics would seem to involve the valorization of a form of ethical practice that is non-universalizing and non-normalizing, attentive to individual differences, while emphasizing individual liberty and the larger social context of the freedom of the self. This is not to say that ethics is separated from politics for, the struggle against disciplinary institutions within each one of us is an important political act and on this account ethics can be seen as an extension of Foucault's earlier micropolitical concerns.

5. Concluding Remarks

There is the third shift in Foucault's work, from the archaeological focus on

systems of knowledge in the 1960s, to the genealogical focus on modalities of power in the 1970s, to the focus on technologies of the self, ethics, and freedom in the 1980s. Where earlier it could be said that Foucault privileged political issues relating to the theme of power, in his later work (in the 1980s) he states that “what interests me is much more morals than politics or, in any case, politics as an ethics” (1984: 375).

One important shift in Foucault’s later work involves a reevaluation of the Enlightenment in terms of its positive contributions to a critique of the present era and his identification of his own work with a trajectory of critical theory running from Kant to Nietzsche to the Frankfurt School. The second major difference involves a qualified turn to a problematic of the creative subject, which was previously rejected as a humanist fiction along with the use of the vocabulary of freedom, liberty, and autonomy, previously eschewed by the theorists of the death of man. Foucault’s concern is still a history of the organization of knowledge and subjectivity, but now the emphasis is on the knowledge relation a self has with itself.

Foucault begins to take up Kant’s task, the problem of Enlightenment “in a meaningful enough proximity with...the work of the Frankfurt School” (1996:

389) in the late 1970s, after *Discipline and Punish*. In several essays and interviews (Foucault, 1983a, 'The Subject and Power'; 1993, 'Kant on Enlightenment and revolution; 1996, 'What is Critique?'; 2000, 'For an Ethic of Discomfort'; 1984, 'What is Enlightenment?'), far from positing a radical rupture in history, he draws key continuities between our current era and the Enlightenment. While still critical of Enlightenment reason, Foucault attempts to positively appropriate key aspects of the Enlightenment heritage – its acute historical sense of the present, its emphasis on rational autonomy over conformity and dogma, and its critical outlook. He now sees the uncritical acceptance of modern rationality and its complete rejection as equally hazardous: "if it is extremely dangerous to say that its Reason is the enemy that should be eliminated, it is just as dangerous to say that any critical questioning risks sending us into irrationality" (1984: 249). Beyond "being for or against the Enlightenment" (Ibid.: 45), he argues, critical thought must constantly live within a field of tension: "if philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is...to accept this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers" (Ibid.: 249)

More importantly, Foucault uses Kant's essay as a diagnostic of a particular

historical conjuncture. What Foucault finds distinctive and insightful in Kant's essay is a philosopher qua philosopher realizing for the first time that his thinking arises out of and is an attempt to respond to his historical situation. In other words, Foucault reinterprets Kant's linking of the historical moment, critical reason and society as a challenge to develop a radically new version of what it means to lead a philosophical life.

Is there a flagrant contradiction in Foucault's work? I think not. While each stage signals a new shift in focus, it is not a rupture in his work but rather an overlapping and a widening of the scope of analysis. Thematically, his work has three axes whose specificity and whose interconnections have to be analyzed, "the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics". (Foucault, 1984: 48) Methodologically, his new mode of historical writing is a unique combination of archaeology and genealogy. "An archaeology of problematizations" and "a genealogy of practices" (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 13), he argues, are not the "successive levels" that develop on the basis of one another, but the "necessarily simultaneous dimensions of the same analysis" (Foucault, 1996: 397).

In this sense, the shift to ethics does not mean that Foucault abandons his past concepts and methods, for all three 'axes' of his studies overlap in his later works

on techniques of self: the archaeology of problematizations intersects with a genealogy of the ethical practices of the self. Nor is it to say that the turn to analysis of techniques of the self represents a rejection of his earlier political positions, since ethics for Foucault suggests the struggle of individuals against the forces that dominate, subjugate, and subjectify them.

Foucault still rejects essentialist liberation models that assume the self is an inner essence waiting to be liberated from its repression or alienation. He contrasts liberation with liberty, and defines the later as an ongoing ethical practice of self-mastery and care of the self. He sees liberty as “the ontological condition of ethics” and ethics as “the liberate form assumed by liberty” (1988a: 4). Similarly, for Foucault, ‘subject’ means both ‘subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge’ (1983a: 212). In this sense, the return of the ‘subject’ in Foucault is not a return to a pre-archaeological – i.e., humanist or phenomenological – concept of the subject endowed with an inner essence or originary will that precedes and stands apart from the social. The subject is still discursively and socially conditioned for Foucault, and still theorized as situated within power relations; the difference is that he now sees that individuals also have the power to define their own identity,

to master their body and desires, and to forge a practice of freedom through techniques of the self. What now Foucault suggests, therefore, is a tensional relation between an active and creative agent and a constraining social field where freedom is achieved to the extent that one can overcome socially imposed limitations and attain self-mastery and a stylized existence. As Foucault says: “if I am interested...in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture, his society and his social group” (1990b; orig. 1984: 11).

Chapter 3

The Tensions and Continuity of Foucault's Thought: Knowledge, Power, and the Self

1. Accusation? or Understanding?

Foucault was a committed philosopher who fought against racism, sexism and all the varieties of injustice, not only through his books and public manifestoes, but with his own physical person. In this regard, some readers complain that the work of this intensely political intellectual does not carry the equivalent signs of commitment. On the contrary, some are astonished because Foucault, who had spoken of the death of man, took part in political struggle. Then again, concerning Foucault's final works on the history of sexuality, particularly on the care of the self, some raise a question like "how is it possible that the thinker who worked so hard to convince us of the death of Man, of antihumanism throughout his career, would in the end champion these central tenets of the humanist tradition?" These general or even confused reactions arise from Foucault's deliberate refusal to adopt the discursive forms of adherence to a particular revolutionary tradition or political position. These also lie behind the criticism that Foucault was always shifting his interests and positions.

In this context, the heirs of German philosophy such as Habermas (1986; 1987; 1996) attack Foucault for being arbitrary and ungrounded, on the contrary, the French post-philosophers such as Derrida (1978), attack Foucault for not being arbitrary enough. Besides, the most often made criticism of his work is that he fails to define and defend the implicit normative assumptions of his analyses and politics and hence provides no theoretical basis for his vigorous critique of domination. (see Fraser, 1994; Rachjman, 1985; Taylor, 1986; Walzer, 1986; Dews, 1987; Habermas, 1986, 1987, 1996)

In his critique of *History of Madness*, Derrida points out that Foucault is trapped within “logocentrism,” within the general historical guilt borne by Western language. For whatever his claims to be resurrecting the silent language of an oppressed madness, Derrida argues, Foucault continues to speak the language of the very reason that carried out the oppression in the first place. In short, Foucault is still caught within the all-powerful order that he is seeking to evade. Thus, the radicalism of Foucault’s critique of psychiatry is called into question. (see Derrida, 1978: 35)

Habermas, on the other side, highlights Foucault’s seemingly arbitrary position. He points out what he takes to be an unresolved tension, “which resists easy

categorization, between the almost serene scientific reserve of the scholar striving for objectivity on the one hand, and, on the other, the political vitality of the vulnerable, subjectively excitable, morally sensitive intellectual” (Habermas, 1986: 103). Foucault’s subtle, sophisticated ironic stance towards the present is bound to look paradoxical to Habermas who agrees with Kant in identifying maturity with acceptance of limits on reason in order to preserve traditional philosophical seriousness. Habermas seizes on Foucault’s refusal to specify or justify the normative values that implicitly inform his critique of modern practices of domination. For Habermas, this is a problem which spoils Foucault’s political criticism. Habermas believes that Foucault has no standpoint from which to criticize modern institutions and thus has no basis for an ethics and politics. Furthermore, Habermas also accused Foucault of rejecting modernity and Enlightenment, at least in his earlier work, though Habermas sees that Foucault eventually came around to a qualified defence of Enlightenment values in a late essay on Kant. In relation to Foucault’s analysis on Enlightenment, Habermas asks: “how does such a singularly affirmative understanding of modern philosophizing, always directed to our own actuality and imprinted in the hear-and-now, fit with Foucault’s unyielding criticism of modernity?” (1986: 106).

In similar context, Fraser (1994) argues that without the introduction of normative notions Foucault cannot tell us why struggle is preferable to submission and why domination ought to be resisted and what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it: "Without a nonhumanist ethical paradigm, Foucault cannot make good his normative case against humanism. He cannot answer the question, Why should we oppose a fully panoptimized, autonomous society?" (Fraser, 1994: 208)

I shall not be directly concerned, however, with the question, who has got Foucault right/ or wrong? I believe that Foucault does not really have a fixed single position and that there is some textual evidence in favor of each reading. If we are only concerned with the sameness of the themes or the stillness of perspectives of his work, there is a contradiction in Foucault's work. However, when viewed in terms of a three-fold circular (i.e., non-totalizing) reciprocity between knowledge, power and the self, these dimensions are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another. If we step back and examine Foucault's work in context, and relate the earlier work to the later (in the 1980s), there is the underlying continuity in his thought on knowledge, power, and self.

It is not the seeming continuity or the comforting integrity in the close space of

description that matters. It is his perpetual concern for things and words, others and ourselves and the relations between them that put Foucault's work together. Foucault always seeks to harmonize any description with any kind of "virtual fracture which open up the space of freedom...of possible transformation" (Foucault, 1988e: 36), of course, but it does not mean that his work is done in disorder and contingency. He is unpredictable by reason that he is not seeking for an ahistorical (or metahistorical) universal normative rule, but, on the contrary, he is too systematic and rigid by reason that he maintains theoretical and practical coherence within a limit, and that he takes writing itself as a training of oneself by oneself, requiring a vigorous rigor. In this relation, it is important to remember that Foucault has chosen as the title of his chair at the College de France, Professor of the History of Systems of Thought. He always deals with systems of thought and practices and gives us the systems of categories for analyzing thoughts and practices. He knows very well that history of science doesn't develop in the same way as social sensibility and that thought must obey certain criteria in order to be recognized as scientific discourse.

More important, it is practice that constitutes the sole continuity between the historical analysis and the present problem, or, conversely, the way in which the

present explains the past. If Foucault's interviews form an integral part of his work, furthermore, if Foucault's life, in itself, composes an intertextual space of his work, it is because Foucault extends the problematization of each of his books into the construction of the present problem, i.e. madness, punishment or sexuality. What is our "truth" today? What powers must we confront, and what is our capacity for resistance today? And do we not bear witness and even participate in the production of a new subjectivity? This is the present triple root of the questions: What do we know, What can we do, "What are we?" (Foucault, 1982a: 216), which obviously stems from three dimensions of thought: knowledge, power and self. We should see through the systematicity and generality of Foucault's thought a bit beneath unpredictability and a bit behind discontinuity.

At bottom, what obsesses Foucault is always thought. Foucault fires an arrow, the question, "What does thinking mean?" He writes a history, but a history of thought. This is why he calls his work historical research and not the work of a historian. To think means to experiment, to problematize and to challenge. Knowledge, power and self are the triple root of a problematization of thought. He sets up his observatory on the regions of living being where the traditional distinctions between body and soul, between instinct and idea, seem absurd, i.e.

madness, crime and sexuality. He converts, or rather doubles the thought and the unthought, the outside and the inside, “the other” and “myself”, from the visible and the articulable (knowledge) via the thought of the outside (power) through the inside of thought (subjectivation). (see Deleuze, 1988). He shows that truth offers itself to knowledge only through a series of problematizations and that these problematizations are created only on the basis of practices, that is, practices of discourse involving statements, and practices of non-discourse such as institutions, political events, economic processes. He challenges Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger and the Frankfurt School, those who diagnose their own times in their own ways, that is, those who constitute the *Zeitgeist*. Foucault encounters with them in a blind zone, by following lines of fragility in the present, in managing to grasp “what are we today?” (Foucault, 1988d: 145), which is the permanent and ever-changing question in the activity of philosophizing since the end of the eighteenth century. He thinks the history of the past, but in order to free himself from what he thinks in the present and be able finally to “think differently” (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 9) in the future. This is the way in which Foucault brings the past and the future into confrontation at the limit of the living present in the breach between social history and the history of thought, at the cross road of

philosophy and history.

In Foucault, I suggest, there are three dimensions of thought: knowledge, power and self; and that there is a theme of double and doubling that transforms any dimension; and that everything is subject to variables and variations and polyvalence¹; and that at the very heart of his analysis, it is critique, whose focus is the relationships between truth, power, and the self; and finally that his philosophy is not just to be sought in his ideas, or to be deduced from them, but rather it should be found in his philosophy-as life, his philosophical life, his ethos. These are red threads that penetrate Foucault's work throughout. By way of my reaction to the misreading of Foucault's work, I shall try to show these veins more clearly and persuasively than I think Foucault has done.

2. How to read Foucault?

Everybody is free to do with Foucault's work what he/she pleases, and yet it does not mean in any way that one may say just anything within the order of theory.

Rather, a demanding and prudent attitude is required in order to recover the critical function. Since I began to read Foucault seriously, I have had the bitter

¹ Foucault presents, in a preliminary way, four rules of his work: Rules of immanence; Rules of continual variations; Rules of double conditioning; Rules of tactical polyvalence of discourses (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 98-102), and yet he adds that "These are not intended as methodological imperatives; at most they are cautionary prescriptions" (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 98).

feeling that Foucault had been ill-read and ill-understood. The point is that conventional Foucault critiques mostly devote their energies to the question of “what Foucault should have said” instead of seeking “what Foucault is trying to say”, for example, as Habermas accuses Foucault, whose entire oeuvre is a revolt against universal and normative thinking, of not propounding a normative theory. This is nothing more than the decline of the critical function. It seems to me that there is no longer any place where discussions, perhaps a rather lively debate among unconventional or different ideas can be expressed. To read or to understand an independent thinker should be an exercise one engages in somehow for oneself, for one’s profit to change – or at least to ready to change - oneself. Speaking well of a thinker that one do not like or trying to take enough distance in speaking of a thinker one likes a bit too much, might be one of the remedies for this impoverished situation. In a 1984 interview with Paul Rabinow, Foucault expressed his position about polemics as follows²:

A whole morality is at stake, the morality that concerns the search for the truth and the relation to the other. In the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person in some sense

² Foucault did not mention Habermas directly here. But this statement took aim at Habermas’s unilateral attack on Foucault (see Habermas, 1986; 1987; 1996) by implication.

immanent in discussion. They depend only on the dialogue situation.....The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking; the person he confronts is not a partner in the search for the truth, but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful and whose very existence constitutes a threat (Foucault, 1984: 381-382).

Although Foucault chose the “theory-as-tool-kit” approach, and challenged the notion of author by saying that “what matter who’s speaking?” (Foucault, 1977: 138), when I read Foucault it is his specific, individual voice and presence that make an impression on me over and above his argument because he is speaking out for his belief. There is no such thing as an isolated sparkling voice, but equally, Foucault cannot be mistaken for an anonymous author function. His writings, it seems to me that, carry profound emotional undercurrents unusual in scholarly analyses - bleakness in *the Use of Pleasure*, agony in *Discipline and Punish*, ridicule and hope in *The Order of Things*, fury and grief in *Madness and Civilization*. As Foucault once said, “Everytime I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience:

always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me...each time was partly a fragment of autobiography” (Foucault, 2000: 458).

I am talking about not just Foucault’s phenomenology in the vulgar sense of the terms, but his attempt to link the historical and theoretical analysis of power relations, institutions, and knowledge, to the movements, critiques, and experiences that call them into question in reality. Foucault’s philosophy is not just to be sought in his ideas, or to be deduced from them, but rather it should be found in his philosophy-as life, his philosophical life, what Foucault calls “an ethos” (Foucault, 1984: 39).

Foucault never thought of writing as an aim or an end in itself. This is what makes Foucault a great writer. In fact, he, on many occasions, challenged the notion of author. As he is fond of quoting Beckett – “what matter who’s speaking?” (Foucault, 1977: 115). In an indifference like this Foucault discovers one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing, that is, to look on writing not as “the finished project”, but as “an ongoing practice” (Ibid.: 116). It should be noted that Foucault is concerned here not with the discourse of individuals but with the discourse of entire periods, that is, the underlying meaning of the episteme itself. As he puts it, “the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of

its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse” (Ibid.: 138). Because in our societies the circulation of discourses have to yield to limited forms imposed by notions of author, work, and commentary. In this respect, Foucault could not isolate himself from the society in which he lived. He, like everyone else, was forced to fulfill the “functions” he described. Foucault has a clear position about the relationship between his work and himself as an author. He does not assume that there is the writing subject, the real author who gives meaning to one’s work, instead he tries to explore the possible condition within which the work is produced. For Foucault, this condition is an intertextual space which is already there before the author speaks.

The subject is constituted not only in a symbolic system, but in real practices, that is, historically analyzable practices. There is more. As Foucault puts it, “There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them” (Foucault, 1983b: 250). Indeed, one of the studies of *The Care of the Self* (Foucault, 1990; orig. 1984) concerns the role of writing in the formation of the self. In Foucault’s reading of Roman culture, writing connects up with ethics and the self because writing is technique or professional skill which can be acquired only through exercise just as one cannot learn the art of living

without a training oneself by oneself. This is not to say that there is no social component to writing, because in the activity of writing, the work of oneself on oneself and communication with others are linked together. Writing is “not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice” (Foucault, 1990b; orig. 1984: 51), that is, it is not a psychological but an ontological form of the constitution of the self. Also, writing is a political practice because the question of writing and the self converge into the goal of “the perfect government of the self – a sort of political relationship between self and self” (Foucault, 1983b: 246) – it being understood that only free man can dominate others. How could one claim to govern others if one could not govern oneself? The domination of others must be doubled by a domination of oneself. The relation with others must be doubled by a relation with others. In a citation from Plato, Foucault says, “How can the eye see itself?...One cannot simply look at oneself in a mirror. One has to look into another eye. That is, one *in* oneself, however in oneself in the shape of the eye of the other” (Foucault, 1983b: 249). The process of subjectivation is accompanied by writing of self, or rather, memory, contemplation or writing is the real name of the relation to oneself, the affect on self by self, i.e., subjectivation. It is here we obtain a certain theoretical understanding why to write is to resist and struggle and

why to write is to become while avoiding the philosophy of the meaning giving subject. We could even say that to write is to think, to find the others and the outside in oneself and that the thought of the other and the outside in oneself is the thought of resistance.

What I have said so far is the effort to find a path to Foucault, or rather to avoid obstacles that prevent us from grasping Foucault. In my reading, Foucault's thought presents not the philosophy of agreement but the philosophy of refusal. As Foucault puts it, "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind", which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures" (Foucault, 1982a: 216). Foucault decentralizes his own work with openness and evasiveness. I maintain that the very strengths of Foucault's method also breed the unpleasant consequences, though I think that it is not theoretical flaws but procedural problems in the circulation of discourse. In other words, Foucault's writings have a potential utility, helping us to see the world in ways that we might not have thought of otherwise. Without presenting a normative theory nor addressing a program of the future, they enable us to think and act by showing that we are freer

than we feel, and that the so-called truth, that we accept as truth, is not eternal and self-evident but can be criticized and destroyed. However, they also have a potential pitfall of misuse including sterile rhetoric or justification, whether it is intended or not. It is dangerous to reduce Foucault's philosophy, which is so subtle and complex, to a textbook formula. In this sense, work on Foucault today should be focused on the removal of margin for misunderstanding, however imperfectly, rather than on understanding itself. This is, in my view, the only spirit that can take us along Foucault's path in such a way that we can understand him, then can indeed go beyond him.

In Foucault's view, knowledge is not science and cannot be separated from even the experience of perception, the values of the imagination, the prevailing ideas or commonly held beliefs. Things and words designate the two poles of knowledge, and there are only practices, or positivities, which are constitutive of knowledge: the discursive practices of statements, or the non-discursive practices of visibilities. This is Foucault's positivism or pragmatism. He has never had any problem concerning the links between science and literature, or the imaginary and the scientific, or the known and the lived, because the conception of knowledge impregnated and mobilized perception, imagination and ideas. He poses a

complementarity between the rarity of statements (as a substitute for totality of statements) and the effective formation of discourse by non-discursive practices as follows:

Critical and genealogical description are to alternate, support and complete each other. The critical side of the analysis deals with the systems enveloping discourse; attempting to mark out and distinguish the principles of ordering, exclusion and rarity in discourse. We might, to play with our words, say it practises a kind of studied casualness. The genealogical side of discourse, by way of contrast, deals with series of effective formation of discourse: it attempts to grasp it in its power of affirmation, by which I do not mean a power opposed to that of negation, but the power of constituting domains of objects, in relation to which one can affirm or deny true or false propositions. Let us call these domains of objects positivists and, to play on words yet again, let us say that, if the critical style is one of studied casualness, then the genealogical mood is one of felicitous positivism (Foucault, 1972b; orig. 1971: 234).

On the other hand, as Habermas points out (Habermas, 1987: 238-265), it is true that he is not following in the philosophical tradition of using language to represent reality, nor is he using language as a vehicle for undistorted

communication. But, pace Habermas, neither is Foucault prepared to abandon himself to the free play of self-referential signifiers. Foucault has been at pains to criticize and distant himself from French anti-thinkers, those who in the name of post-enlightenment and postmodern discourse, question seriousness in general and understand nothing but the subversive role of language and desire. In this respect, Dreyfus and Rabinow remark that Foucault uses texts as clues to other social practices, rather than deconstructing texts to reveal their attempt to conceal their self-reference to their own textuality: "Like the pre-Platonic rhetoricians, Foucault uses language to articulate an understanding of our situation which moves us to action" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1986: 114). He positively embraces the effect of language "as a means for moving us to concerted action." (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1986: 115) This is why Foucault does not propound a normative theory, yet as Habermas points out (1986: 107), Foucault's work certainly has a normative thrust.

Foucault is not trying to construct a general theory, not deconstruct the possibility of any metanarrative, rather, he is offering us an analytic of our current situation. It is Foucault's unique combination of genealogy and archaeology that enables him to go beyond theory and yet to take problems seriously. The practitioner of

genealogy realizes that he himself is produced by what he is studying, consequently he can never stand outside. The genealogist sees that cultural practices are more basic than any theory and that the seriousness of theory can only be understood as part of a society's on-going history. The archaeological step back that Foucault takes does not mean that he considers these practices meaningless. Since we share cultural practices with others, and since these practices have made us what we are, we have some common footing from which to proceed, to understand, to act. But that foothold is no longer one which is universal, guaranteed, verified, or grounded.

Foucault's approach consists in identifying what he takes to be our current problem, describing with detachment how this situation arose and, at the same time, using his rhetorical skills to reflect and increase shared uneasiness in the face of the omnipresent danger. Thus the tension between Foucault's method and his insight into the impossibility and undesirability of offering a theory justifying his action only seems a contradiction, however, this very tension provides the elements for a unique work.

What I am trying to say is that Foucault's approach is not as subjective nor as objective. Rather, "it is an act of imagination, analysis, and commitment".

(Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 253) Although presented with detached objectivity (Foucault's happy positivism), the shifting boundary between reason and unreason, health and disease, science and pleasure could not be singled out as the basic issue of our time by any objective method. But equally, Foucault's interest in writing history from the perspective of these concerns could not be taken to express merely his personal situation.

The key to Foucault, therefore, is to grasp this subtle, sophisticated, but not well conceptualized ironic stance towards knowledge as well as practice, the techniques of life as well as political choices. Foucault should not be regarded as an authority, but as an animator or as a diagnostician of the relation of power, knowledge and the body in modern society. With a constant alertness in mind, we should read Foucault not only literally but ironically.

3. Foucault's Thought: Rupture or Continuity?

In several essays and interviews (Foucault, 1983a, 'The Subject and Power'; 1984, 'What is Enlightenment?'; 1988b, 'Truth, Power, Self'; 1992, *The Use of Pleasure*, 'Introduction'), Foucault reveals the structure of his work as a whole. On this ground, it is generally understood that there is the third shift in Foucault's work, from the archaeology of knowledge in the 1960s, through the genealogy of power

in the 1970s, to a hermeneutics of the subject in the 1980s. The axis of knowledge was studied in *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the axis of power was studied in *Discipline and Punish* and *The Will to Knowledge* and the axis of ethics was studied in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*. In *Madness and Civilization*, all three axes were present, albeit in a somewhat confused manner. If we compare the early, the middle, and the later, there are continuities and discontinuities on the surface. Then, the question arises: Is it a merely arbitrary shift in terms of his postmodernist sensibility, which manifests a disabused attitude toward any given order? Or, rather, is it both differentiation and integration of the same analysis, which are irreducible yet constantly imply one another? In a word, is it a real rupture or continuity?

Let me be clear about my purpose here. I am aware of the fact that once this kind of question is posed, it degenerates into slogans, as we have already witnessed in Marx's case. It is not the responsibility of any one person in particular, rather it is the slice of our reality that philosophical thought, or a sociological issue, becomes a consumer item. Nevertheless, it is important to confront this kind of question at any risk rather than avoiding or ignoring it. Also, it should be remembered that

this kind of challenge means added responsibility for people who speak and write.

In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1982; 1983, Second Edition), Dreyfus and Rabinow suggest that while Foucault in the 1960s was caught within “the illusion of autonomous discourse”, in the 1970s he worked himself free from this enclosure, turning to a “genealogy of the modern individual” that strives to articulate an “interpretive analytics of power, truth, and the body”. In Dreyfus and Rabinow’s view, whereas in his writings of 1963-69 Foucault dwelt almost exclusively on “linguistic practices”, in his post-1969 writings he deals with “the social practices that formed both institutions and discourse” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983: 101, viii). In the second edition of this book, they add “Foucault’s interpretive analytic of ethics” (Ibid.: ix), still they maintain that Foucault devoted the last decade of his life, from the 1970s to the 1980s, to rethinking and rectifying his earlier position in the 1960s.

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987), Habermas suggests that while Foucault focused on “the critique of reason as an unmasking of the human sciences” in the 1960s, in the 1970s he turned to “some questions concerning the theory of power” (Habermas, 1987: vi). Habermas sees that this conversion was caused by the very aporia immanent in Foucault’s problematic itself, and that each

attempt inevitably ended in failure. In addition, in his article, 'Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present' (Habermas, 1986), Habermas highlights a fundamental rupture between the earlier Foucault and the Foucault in the 1980s, particularly the incompatibility between *The Order of things* and 'What is Enlightenment?'

On the contrary, Deleuze (1988), Eribon (1991), Flynn (1988), and Negri and Hardt (2000) interpret Foucault otherwise. Seeing Foucault's work in continuity, they argue that while there is internal tension between each shift, each move is already anticipated and comprised in the earlier.

In *Foucault* (1988), Deleuze says cryptically that Foucault should be seen not as a historian, but as a new kind of "cartographer" (Deleuze, 1988: 44) – maps made for use not to mirror the terrain but to mirror the diagram of power. Seeing Foucault's work in continuity, Deleuze traces Foucault's thought from knowledge through power to subjectivation in terms of "the thought of the outside" (Ibid.: 43).

To think in the field of power involves a dice throw. What the dice-throw represents is that thinking always comes from the outside where the force belongs.

The dice-throw does in fact express chance, the simplest possible power relation.

Chances works only in the first dice-throw, while the second case operates under conditions that are partially determined by the first. This is the outside that

continues to link up random events in a mixture of chances and dependency.³

Obviously, the knowledge/ power relationship in Foucault's earlier work appears in the form of the thought of the outside. Then, how is it possible to explain his later work on subjectivation in the line of the thought of outside? The thought of the outside, Deleuze argues, should not be completed until the outside in itself constitutes a coextensive inside. A technique of knowledge and a politics of power can be led to an ontology of self only by folding outside to inside so as to be self-action, the affect of self by self. Therefore, subjectivation in his later work is not a refusal of the thought of the outside, rather it is the inside of the thought, i.e., the deepening and the final stage of the thought of the outside.

In 'Foucault as parrhesiast' (1988), Flynn argues that the power-knowledge relationship of his earlier work is not only focused upon but is in turn translated by the relation of subjectivation in his later writings. Here, he uses the term, "translation" rather than "mediation" considering Foucault's hostility to Hegelian dialectic. As Flynn understands it, Foucault intends his project to be a three-fold

³ "The world of effective history knows only one kingdom, without providence or final cause, where there is only "the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice box of chance". Chance is not simply the drawing of lots, but raising the stakes in every attempt to master chance through the will to power, and giving rise to the risk of an even greater chance. The world we know is not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of entangled events" (Foucault, 1977: 155, my emphasis).

circular (i.e. non-totalizing) reciprocity between truth, power and subjectivation, for it is the only way to escape the philosophy of the (meaning-giving) subject while charting the advent of the modern subject.

In *Empire* (2000), Negri and Hardt suggest that Foucault did not reverse his earlier position in his work of the ethical care of the self, rather that he was always so insistent about the continuity of his discourse. As Negri and Hardt see it, Foucault raises in his final work a paradoxical and urgent question: What is humanism after the death of Man? Or rather, what is an antihumanist (or posthuman) humanism? In addition, they point out that misunderstanding about Foucault derives at least in part from a terminological confusion between two distinct notions of humanism.⁴

If we are to conceive Man as separate from nature, this recognition is precisely the death of Man. On the other hand, if we consider an antihumanist (or posthuman) humanism and the revolutionary spirit of Renaissance humanism in terms of an attack on transcendence, there is a strict continuity between both projects. In other words, the religious thought that accords a power above nature to God is simply transferred to the modern secular thought that accords the same power above nature to Man. The refusal of transcendence, for Foucault, is the condition of

⁴ For more detailed notions of humanism in Foucault, see Fraser (1994). She examined Foucault's refusal of humanism on three grounds: on conceptual and philosophical grounds; on strategic grounds; on normative grounds.

possibility of thinking this immanent power, a sort of anarchic basis of philosophy: neither God, nor master, nor Man.

The humanism of Foucault's final works, then, should not be seen as contradictory to or even as a departure from the death of Man that he proclaimed earlier. Foucault's attempt in his final work is, Negri and Hardt argue, not about the refusal of the death of man but about humanism after the death of man, the continuous constituent project to create and re-create ourselves and our world.

In what follows, I should like to develop a sort of anatomy pursuing the naked skeleton of Foucault's thought. What interests me is the way in which the problematic appears and develops in each particular theoretical formation.

Knowledge

Foucault continued to be enchanted by what he saw as much as what he heard or read. He enjoyed articulating statements, only because he also had a passion for seeing. It is knowledge that is made from things and words, from seeing and speaking, from the visible and the sayable. In other words, "words and things" (Foucault, 1972a; orig. 1969: 49) are terms with which to designate the two poles of knowledge. Foucault defines knowledge in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as follows:

This group of elements, formed in a regular manner by a discursive practice, and which are indispensable to the constitution of a science, although they are not necessarily destined to give rise to one, can be called *knowledge*.

Knowledge is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice, and which is specified by that fact: the domain constituted by the different objects that will or will not acquire a scientific status...Discursive practice does not coincide with the scientific development that it may give rise to; and the knowledge that it forms is neither an unfinished prototype nor the by-product to be found in daily life of a constituted science (1972a; orig. 1969: 181, 182, 184).

Knowledge is not science and cannot be separated from the various thresholds including “the threshold of positivity”, that of “epistemologization”, that of “scientificity”, and that of “formalization” (1972a; orig. 1969: 186-187). Ideology is not exclusive of scientificity, rather “the hold of ideology over scientific discourse and the ideological functioning of the science” are articulated “where science is articulated upon knowledge” (1972a; orig. 1969: 185). In fact, there is nothing prior to, and behind knowledge, for knowledge is defined by the combination of things and words that are unique to each historical formation. Knowledge is a practical assemblage, a mechanism of statements and visibilities,

and exists only according to certain widely varying thresholds. There are only practices, or positivities, which are constitutive of knowledge: the discursive practices, or the non-discursive practices. Foucault puts forward a distinction between two types of practical formation: the one "discursive" involving statements, the other "non-discursive", involving environment. Here, "non-discursive" environment includes "an institutional field, a set of events, practices, and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes...demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance, manpower needs, different levels of unemployment" (Foucault, 1972a; orig. 1969: 157). Naturally, environments also produce statements, just as statements determine environments. But the fact remains that the two formations are heterogeneous, even though they may overlap.

The history of knowledge, in Foucault's view, is neither a history of mentality, nor of behavior. It is a history of the conditions governing everything that has a mental existence, i.e., the system of language and a history of the conditions governing that has a visual existence, like asylum and prison. Speaking and seeing, or rather statements and visibilities, are pure elements, a priori conditions under which all ideas are formulated and behaviors displayed, at some moment or other.

Moreover, from the beginning, one of Foucault's fundamental theses is that there

is a difference in nature between the visible and the articulable although they continually overlap.

With this epistemological framework in mind, what is Foucault trying to show in the field of knowledge? He attempts to seek, in the first place, the whole picture of the relationships we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to truth games, in the second place, the vague draft of the relationships we have to others through strategies and power relationships in the sense that power is presupposed cause of knowledge. A series of questions for knowledge constitute the problem of truth. Moreover, the process to pose those questions constitute “games of truth” (Foucault, 1988b; 15). Throughout his work, Foucault shows that truth offers itself to knowledge only through a series of problematizations and that these problematizations are created only on the basis of practices, practices of seeing and speaking, of things and words, of non-discourse and discourse. These practices, the process and method, constitute the procedures for truth, “a history of truth”. *The Use of Pleasure* draws out the conclusions of all his earlier books as follows:

I seem to have gained a better perspective on the way I worked...on this project, whose goal is a history of truth. It was a matter of analyzing, not behaviours or

ideas, nor societies and their “ideologies,” but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought – and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed. The archaeological dimension of the analysis made it possible to examine the forms themselves; its genealogical dimension enabled me to analyze their formation out of the practices and the modifications undergone by the latter (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 11-12).

In *Madness and Civilization*, there is a problematization of madness and illness in social and medical practices that define a certain pattern of “normalization”. In *The Order of Things*, there is a problematization of life, language, and labour in discursive practices that conform to certain “epistemic” rules. In *Discipline and Punish*, there is a problematization of crime and criminal behaviour in certain punitive practices that conform to a “disciplinary” model. In *The Use of Pleasure*, there is a problematization of sexual activity and sexual pleasure in practices of the self that bring into play the criteria of an “aesthetics of existence”.

Now, it is necessary to point out some theses about the relation between knowledge and power so as to move from knowledge to power, from epistemology in the field of knowledge to strategy in the social field. Firstly, it

should be noted that knowledge does not merge with power and that knowledge is not a simple mask of power. In a word, knowledge is not power. As Foucault says it: "Having made them [power and knowledge] identical, I don't see why I would have taken the trouble to show the different relations between them. What I set out to show was how certain forms of power that were extremely different both in their object and in their structure...Those who say that for me knowledge is the mask of power seem to be quite incapable of understanding" (Foucault, 1988e: 264-265).

Secondly, it should be noted that knowledge relations presuppose power relations, and that power relations imply knowledge relations. Power is presupposed cause of knowledge, but conversely, power implies knowledge in order to become an act. As Foucault puts it: "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1991; orig. 1975: 27).

Thirdly, however, it should be noted that knowledge is not equivalent to power, that is, there is a primacy of power over knowledge, or of power relations over knowledge relations. If we consider in the abstract, no doubt power neither sees nor speaks. Rather precisely, it does not itself speak and see, it makes us speak

and see. “Power produces knowledge” (Foucault, 1991; orig. 1975: 27), which means that in relation to knowledge, power produces truth, in so far as it makes us see and speak. In a word, power produces truth as a problem.

Power

What is power? Foucault’s definition is a very simple one that power is “the multiplicity of force relations” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 92). Naturally, force is never singular but essentially exists in relation with other forces, that is, force is already a relation. In this sense, power is a relation between forces, therefore power is nothing but “power relation” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 94).⁵

⁵ Foucault does not adequately specify the meaning of the terms force, power, force relation, power-relation, and resistance. He defines power (power relation) as “a relation between forces”. He also characterizes resistance not as exteriority but as immanence in relation to power. For Foucault, each force has the power to affect and to be affected such that each force implies power relations. These power relations, which are simultaneously local, unstable, and diffuse, do not emanate from a central point or unique locus of sovereignty, but at each moment move “from one point to another” in a field of forces, making resistances, twists, and turns. In a word, it is the instability of power relations which provokes a certain capacity for resistance. In order to understand what a “microphysics of power” is about, we should investigate a relational concept of power.

The text in which Foucault first presents a “microphysics of power” is *Discipline and Punish* (1991a; orig. 1975: 23-31; 195-228). In this work, power is not conceptualized as a possession or a privilege; rather it is considered to be exercised through dispositions, tactics, and techniques. Power relations are not localized in confrontations between social classes or between citizens and the state; rather they are conceptualized as existing at the most elemental level of the social domain. Reductionist analyses, which locate the origin of power and its effects within a structure or an institution, at a center, are rejected, and instead it is proposed that power relations should be conceptualized in terms of innumerable points of confrontation or instability, each of which constitutes an irreducible event. Such a “microphysics of power” reveals the poverty of political analyses which assume the possibility of overthrowing an existing power, either by seizing or by destroying the apparatuses through which power, conceptualized as a possession, is exercised. Foucault’s conception addresses the presence of power relations in the thresholds of social order; indeed, its limit point is considered to be equivalence of power relations with sociality itself. A “microphysics of power” is developed further in *The Will to Knowledge* (1990a; orig. 1976: 92-102). Where a positive conception is advanced it takes the form of a description as a multiplicity of force relations, as a process, and as a strategy. Power is presented as the appropriate term for the unstable state which emerge from the inequalities inherent in the highly mobile field of force

In addition, it is important to understand that power is not a form, such as the state-form, and that the power relation does not lie between two forms, as knowledge lies between the discursive form and the non-discursive form. Foucault's argument on power develop under following headings (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 94-96):

- Power is a relation between forces.
- Power is exercised from innumerable points.
- Power is exercised in the interplay of relations.
- Power comes from below, that is, there is no binary opposition, rather there are the manifold relationships of forces.

In terms of the relational character of power, resistance is not exterior to power,

relation; or put the matter more simply, power as a property located in institutions, social positions, or within a social class is comprehended as the effect of mobile force relations, of the emergent multiplicity of force relations.

The further characteristic of Foucault's conception of power should be noted. The very existence of power relations presupposes forms of resistance, not as an external effect or consequence of the exercise of power, but as an inherent feature of the power relation. If we accept the view that where there is power there is resistance, then it follows that just as power is present everywhere in the social field so is resistance. Thus broad cleavages in the social order, massive binary divisions, constitute at best possible fleeting moments in the history of a society in the heart of plurality of irregular resistances.

While Foucault argues that power breeds resistance and on occasion points to tactics of resistance, there is no specific description of resistance, the scope, detail, and rigor. To put it another way, a genealogy of resistance remains to be written as a full-scale study and historical perspective in its own right. Interestingly, in his later essay 'Subject and Power' (1983a; orig. 1982), Foucault proposes an alternative methods of studying power relations from the perspective of resistance to power rather than the exercise of power. However, Foucault never carried through this proposal. In his later work, he might have theorized political resistance as a form of technologies of the self, as a creative response to coercive practices, but he couldn't make it.

but it is immanent in, and is related to power. In other words, power relation exists in relation to “a multiplicity of points of resistance” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 95). As Foucault puts it:

These points of resistance present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances...Just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities. And it is doubtless the strategic codification of these points of resistance that makes a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relationships (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 95-96).

In order to grasp what power relations are about, it is necessary to investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations.⁶ Moreover,

⁶ In ‘The Subject and Power’ (Foucault, 1983a; orig. 1982: 211-212), Foucault presents the six particular features displayed by contemporary forms of resistance. Especially, the ‘transversality’ of present struggles, seems an idea common to Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (see ‘Intellectuals and Power’, Foucault, 1977; Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; 1987; Guattari and Negri, 1990). In Foucault, there is an echo of the interpretation of ‘Italian New Left’ about Marxism. For example, it is similar to the proposal of Antonio Negri (1984) who analyzed class struggle from the perspective of the ‘self-valorization’ of workers against capital. For a critique of monolithic domination models of the Frankfurt School and the alternative

since power is decentered and plural, so in turn must be form of political struggle.

Now, two important questions remain to be thought in the field of power: the one, “discourse” and the other, the “bio-politics”. Because, in the first place, it is discourse that links power and knowledge together, in the second place, it is ‘bio-politics’ in which power clashes with life and struggles with it. Firstly, in discourse politics, marginal groups attempt to contest the hegemonic discourses that position individuals within the straitjacket of normal identities to liberate the free play of differences. In any society, discourse is “both an instrument and an effect of power” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 101) because the rules determining discourse enforce norms of what is rational, sane, or true, and to speak from outside these rules is to risk marginalization and exclusion. And yet, Foucault suggests considering discourse not as the divided one between the accepted and the excluded, or between the dominant and the dominated, but as a multiple discursive elements in various strategies, that is, as “tactical elements in the field of force relations” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 101-102). In this respect, it is an overstatement to say that Foucault identifies discourse with power, moreover that he denies the possibilities of counter-discourses. The point lies in a twofold

perspective of ‘Italian New Left’ theorists such as Negri and Tronti who focus on workers’ resistance to capital, see Cleaver, 1979.

operation of discourse, in other words, the appearance of a discourse of power also made possible the formation of a “reverse” discourse. As Foucault puts it, “We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also...a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 100-101).

This is to say that discourse is not wholly subservient to power or opposite to it.

Within this limit, counter discourses could provide a lever of political resistance by encapsulating a popular memory of previous forms of oppression and struggle and a means of articulating needs and demands.

Secondly, when the diagram of power becomes the ‘bio-power’ or ‘bio-politics’ of populations, controlling and administering of life, when it abandons the model of sovereignty in favour of a disciplinary model, it is indeed life that emerges as the new object of power. According to Foucault, “What was demanded and what served as an objective was life...It was life more than the law that became the issue of political struggles, even if the latter were formulated through affirmations concerning rights. The ‘right’ to life, to one’s body, to health, to happiness, to the

satisfaction of needs...this 'right' ...which the classical judicial system was utterly incapable of comprehending..." (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 145).

At this point, law renounces the symbol of sovereign privilege, the right to put someone to death (the death penalty), but allows itself to produce more hecatombs and genocides, not by returning to the old law of killing, but on the contrary in the name of race, territory, conditions of life, and the survival of a population. Now a population believes itself to be better than its enemy, and treats its enemy not as the juridical enemy of the old sovereign but as a toxic agent, a sort of biological danger. The death penalty tends to be abolished and holocausts grow for the same reasons. When power takes life as its object, in turn, life becomes resistance to power, to the system that controls life. In other words, when power becomes bio-power, resistance becomes the power of life. Because the power of life, this vital power cannot be confined within species and environment. In this sense, it is in man himself that we must liberate life, since man himself is a form of imprisonment for man. Life is, in the end, nothing but the capacity to resist against power, therefore, it is here that power is connected with subjectivation, since what resistance extracts from man is the force of a life.

In addition, it is this same change that Foucault is observing in the status of the

intellectual. Foucault explains that the intellectual could claim universality during a long period from the eighteenth century to the Second World War, for example, to Sartre, by way of Zola and so on.⁷ This was to the extent that the uniqueness of the writer coincided with the position of a 'jurist' or 'notable' who could produce an effect of universality. If the intellectual has changed the role including the function of writing, it is because his very position has changed and he now tends to move from one specific place or point to another producing effects not of universality but of transversality. In this way the intellectual or even the writer can - at least potentially - participate more in current struggles and resistance. Therefore, in Foucault's view, questions of life should be considered more important than a reference to man's universal rights, including in the realm of pure law. However, I think that speaking the language of law is as important as speaking of language of life, and that the point should lie not in resistance of transversality but in resistance that connects universality with the local, the minor, the here and now. Struggles for universal right is still efficacious, indeed doubly, because there are, on the one hand, still-extant forms of premodern domination, the forms of administratively rationalized domination described in *Discipline of*

⁷ On the 'universal' intellectual and the 'specific' intellectual, see 'Truth and Power' (Foucault, 1980: 109-133).

Punish, on the other (see Habermas, 1987; Fraser, 1994).

Self

Up until now, we have encountered two dimensions: the one, knowledge, the forms of discursive practices; the other, power, the relations between forces. Now, we shall see how Foucault surfaces a new axis, different from the axes of both knowledge and power. I think that this third axis was present from the beginning Foucault just as power was present from the beginning in knowledge. Foucault felt it necessary to carry out a general reorganization in order to elucidate this path which was so tangled up in the others that it remained hidden. It is this reconstruction which Foucault puts forward in the general introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*:

To speak of 'sexuality' as a historically singular experience also presupposed the availability of tools capable of analyzing the peculiar characteristics and interrelations of the three axes that constitute it: (1) the formation of sciences (*savoirs*) that refers to it, (2) the systems of power that regulate its practice, (3) the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognized themselves as subjects of this sexuality (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 4).

In order to analyze the advancement of knowledge, Foucault examined the form

of discursive practices, while escaping the dilemma of science versus ideology. Then, in order to analyze the manifestations of power, Foucault examined the manifold relations, the open strategies, and the rational techniques, while escaping the alternative of power recognized as domination or exposed as an illusion. Finally, in order to analyze what is termed the subject, Foucault examines the forms of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself qua subject, while escaping a relapse into 'the philosophy of subject' such as Sartrean existentialism. According to Foucault:

I think that from the theoretical point of view, Sartre avoids the idea of the self as something which is given to us...From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequences: we have to create ourselves as a work of art...I would like to say exactly the contrary: we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity (Foucault, 1983b: 237).

Although Foucault increased the focus on the subject in his last work, it is a mistake to understand that Foucault was growing soft on subjectivism. There is no indication that this was the case. As Deleuze (1988) has shown, he maintains the

thought of the outside throughout his career by reason that subjectivation, i.e., the theme of the inside is not something other than the theme of the outside, more precisely, that of the inside of the outside, which is converged into the theme of the double. The ground work was already in place for a genealogy of the modern subject, only at this stage, the relation of subjectivation comes to the surface through a power-knowledge interlocking. In his 1980 Howison Lectures at the University of California, Berkeley, he insists that “if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western societies, one has to take into account...the interaction between those two techniques of domination and of the self.” Earlier in the same talk he reminds us that “all the practices by which the subject is defined and transformed are accompanied by the formation of certain types of knowledge.” (Foucault, ‘Truth and Subjectivity’, Howison Lecture, Berkeley, California, October 20, 1980).

Here, I must quote *Madness and Civilization* and *The Order of Things* because I feel each book involves something that concerns Foucault’s trajectory (of whole life as well as) of whole thought. On the subject of Renaissance madman who is put to sea in his boat, Foucault wrote:

Navigation delivers man to the uncertainty of fate; on water, each of us is in the

hands of his own destiny; every embarkation is, potentially, the last...The madman's voyage is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage. In one sense, it simply develops, across a half-real, half-imaginary geography, the madman's *liminal* position on the horizon of medieval concern – a position symbolized and made real at the same time by the madman's privilege of being *confined* within the city *gates*: his exclusion must enclose him; if he cannot and must not have another *prison* than the *threshold* itself, he is kept at the point of passage. He is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely...He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of the passage. And the land he will come to is unknown – as is, once he disembarks the land from which he comes. He has his truth and his homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him (Foucault, 1989; orig. 1961: 11).

In this description, the madman's passage is no other than the odyssey of Foucault's work, which started from 'knowledge' – a half real, half imaginary geography, i.e. the strata of the archives - and passed through 'power' – the uncertainty of fate on water, i.e., the contingency of power – and finally

culminated in 'self', in *The Use of Pleasure's* phrase, "to get free of oneself" (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 11) – being a master of one's boat as interior of the exterior, i.e., subjectivation.

In all his work, Foucault seems to stick to the theme of an inside which is merely "the hollow of ... [the] fold" (Foucault, 1994; orig. 1966: 341) of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea. In this regard, although Foucault surfaces the theme of an inside in his last work, this inside should be seen as an operation of the outside. In other words, the ship controls herself not to be wrecked only by following the movement of the sea, and yet, the sea is not a fixed thing but a moving thing animated by movements, folds and the ship, consequently the ship, this mad man in the ship, i.e., the inside, is not external to the sea, i.e., the outside, but lies at the very heart of the sea which doubles or hollows out the outside. In a word, as Deleuze interprets (1988), the question of subjectivation in Foucault constitutes the inside of thought of the outside.

Foucault continued to pursue the theme of inside/ outside, and developed it into the theme of double. In *The Order of Things*, he wrote, " It [the analytic of finitude] is always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same" (Foucault, 1994; orig. 1966: 339). Foucault describes how

modern philosophy constructs 'Man' – both object and subject of knowledge – within a series of unstable 'doublets'. First, there is the cogito/ unthought doublet, in which Man is determined by external forces yet aware of this determination and able to free himself from it. Second, there is the retreat-and-return-of-the-origin doublet, in which history precedes Man but he is the phenomenological source from which history unfolds. Finally, there is the transcental/ empirical doublet, in which Man both constitutes and is constituted by the external world. In each of these doublets, humanist thought attempts to recover the primacy and autonomy of the thinking subject and to master all that is other to it. Here, Foucault's initial critique of the human sciences is that they, like philosophy, are premised on an impossible attempt to reconcile irreconcilable poles of thought and posit a constituting subject.

In fact, since Kant, as Foucault properly points out, "the whole of modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought – of reflecting the contents of the *In-itself* in the form of the *For-itself*" (Foucault, 1994; orig. 1996: 327).

Then, we should think about whether Foucault is free from these doubles and thus provides a genuine alternative to the science of man. I think that, although beyond talk of man, Foucault's attempt runs into problems similar to those Foucault so

clearly sees in the science of man, that is, an interminable drift of a double system, however through an opposite detour. And yet, it is utterly important to acknowledge what the theme of double implies in Foucault and thus to what extent he detaches himself from those very difficulties Foucault criticizes.

According to Deleuze:

The theme which has always haunted Foucault is that of the double. But the double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different.

It is not the emanation of an 'I', but something that places in immanence an always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me (Deleuze, 1988: 97-98).

As we have seen, Foucault prefers to show the limits of the present by juxtaposition with a different and strange past, not with an ideal. Perhaps this is why he had to go back to the Greeks. Foucault seems to be attracted to the fact that Greek (and Roman) cultures inspire contemporary individuals to retrieve an original form of freedom, that is, a sort of nostalgia for a lost world or a past

experience to reproduce in the present. In other words, Foucault seems to use the Greek experience for a path “to promote new forms of subjectivity” (Foucault, 1983a: 216) without inventing the subject. However, Foucault claims firmly that the Greeks do not offer an “alternative” (Foucault, 1983b: 231) for contemporary society, only an example of a non-normalizing morality which modern cultures will have to develop themselves:

Trying to rethink the Greeks today does not consist of setting off Greek morality as the domain of morality par excellence which one would need self-reflection. The point is rather to see to it that European thinking can take up Greek thinking again as an experience which took place once and with regard to which one can be completely free... All of Greek experience can be taken up in nearly the same manner by each time taking into account differences of context and by indicating those aspects of the experience which could be salvaged and those which could, on the contrary, be abandoned (Foucault, 1988e: 249).

For Foucault, the novelty of the Greeks emerges through a double “differentiation” (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 77) when the “exercises that enabled one to govern oneself” (Ibid.) become detached both from power such as a

relation with others, and from knowledge such as code of virtue. On the one hand there is a “relation with oneself” (Ibid.: 63) that consciously derives from one’s relation with others. On the other hand there is equally “the art of the self” (Ibid.:77), i.e. “the constitution of oneself” (Foucault, 1983b: 247) that consciously derives from the moral code as a rule of knowledge.

The relation with oneself, what is called “enkrateia” (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 63), is an attitude which is necessary to the ethics of pleasure and desire, therefore, it is characterized by self-mastery resisting, struggling, and achieving domination in the area of desires and pleasures. In addition, this self-mastery and the mastery of others are considered as having the same form: “Governing oneself, managing one’s estate, and participating in the administration of the city were three practices of the same type.” (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 76)

More importantly, self-mastery is related to, and is identified with the notion of freedom. This freedom that is more than a nonslavement and an emancipation, is “a power that one brought to bear on oneself *in* the power that one exercised over others” (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 80, my emphasis) to the point where the relation with oneself becomes a “principle of internal regulation” (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 81) in relation to the constituent power of politics, the family, and even

virtue. This is a Foucauldian version of the Greeks, his interpretation of the doubling - a differentiation that leads to a reflection. While other forms of ethics such as Kantianism focus on the duties and obligations the self has to others, the Greek model defines freedom not as free will or in opposition to determinism, but in relation to mastery of one's desires and pleasures. In this regard, the use of the vocabulary of freedom, liberty, and autonomy, along with the creative subject should be regarded not as a turn to Renaissance humanism but as a pursuit of "humanism after the death of man" or rather, "antihumanist or posthuman humanism" (Negri and Hardt, 2000: 91).

In the Greek model, the relation to self that constitutes the final goal of all practices of the self belongs to an ethics of control, which is governed by "relations of forces – the force against which one must struggle and over which the subject is expected to establish his domination" (Foucault, 1990b; orig. 1984: 67). In this sense, the care of self – to transform, to develop, and to rejoin oneself – is not an exercise in solitude but appears as "an intensification of social relations" (Foucault, 1990b; orig. 1984: 53). What the Greeks did is therefore to bend the outside, through a series of practical exercises which include writing, reading, abstinences, memorizations, examinations of conscience, meditations,

silence, and listening to others. The Greeks are the first doubling. Force is what belongs to outside, since it is essentially a relation between other forces. It is inseparable in itself from the power to affect other forces (spontaneity) and to be affected by others (receptivity). But what comes about as a result is a relation which force has with itself, a power of self on self. Following the Greek model, only free men can dominate others, thus free agents and the “agonistic relation” (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 65) in and between them are its characteristics. But how could they dominate others if they could not dominate themselves? The domination of others must be doubled by a domination of oneself. The relation with others must be doubled by a relation with oneself.

This is what the Greeks did. They folded forces from the outside into the inside. They made it relate to back to itself. Far from ignoring interiority, individuality or subjectivity they invented subject, but only as a derivative or the product of a subjectivation. They discovered the aesthetic existence – the doubling or relation with oneself, the facultative rule of free man. Indeed, if we do not regard this subject as a derivation, and especially if we look for it on the level of obligatory rules, then we must say that there is no sense of subjectivity in the Greeks. Foucault’s fundamental idea is that of a dimension of subjectivity derived from

power and knowledge without being dependent on them.

What is Foucault ultimately trying to say? How can we transform the classical self into the modern subject that is unique to our own social field? What can we say about our own contemporary modes and our modern relation to oneself from it? Here, it should be noted that what interests Foucault has been always not “I, as a unique but universal and unhistorical subject” (Foucault, 1983a: 216) in the Cartesian term, but I, “in a very precise moment of history” (Ibid.) for the self is determined by the process of subjectivation which is itself based on particular features that vary according to each age. Foucault does go back to the Greek, yet this is not a return in a strict sense, since there never is a return in his lexicon. He clarifies this point that the struggle for a modern subjectivity passes through a resistance to the two present forms of subjection, the one consisting of individualizing ourselves on the basis of constraints of power, the other of attracting each individual to a known and recognized identity, fixed once and for all: “On the one hand, they assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his

own identity in a constraining way” (Foucault, 1983a: 211-212). The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to difference. It is not exactly for or against the individual but against both the “government of individualization” (Ibid.) and government of totalization. Because in the modern power structures, there is such a tricky combination of individualization techniques, and of totalization procedures: “Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could get rid of this kind of political “double binds,” which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures” (Foucault, 1983a: 216).

In *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, Foucault does not discover the subject. In fact, he had already defined it as a derivative, a function derived from the discourse. To awaken thought from its humanist sleep, Foucault argues, “the subject must be...analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse” (Foucault, 1977: 138). But he defines the subject now as “a derivative of the outside” (Deleuze, 1988: 106) giving it - this relation to oneself - a new irreducible dimension that is neither knowledge nor power. As Foucault understands it, the term “subject” has a double meaning: one is both “subject to

someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (Foucault, 1983a: 212). According to Dews (1987:144-170), Foucault rejects the Enlightenment model which links consciousness, self-reflection, and freedom, and instead follows Nietzsche’s claim in *The genealogy of Morals* that self-knowledge, particularly in the form of moral consciousness, is a strategy and effect of power by which one internalizes social control. Although, in this book (1987), Dews only deals with Foucault in the 1960s and the 1970s, from *The Madness and Civilization* to *The Will to Knowledge*, his view is valuable for understanding Foucault’s whole project, since Foucault’s concern is always a history of the organization of knowledge and subjectivity, only in the 1980s, the emphasis is on the knowledge relation a self has with itself. With regard to Enlightenment value, however, I should like to point out that Foucault does not see Enlightenment or modernity as a specific historical event, but as a historical conjuncture which has happened several times in history, albeit with different form and content. Therefore, for Foucault, vocabularies like freedom and self-reflection are not a legacy which belongs to the end of metaphysics at the time of Kant, but components of both relationship with oneself and to the present in each age. In other words, for Foucault, freedom and

self-reflection are understood in terms of the relation with oneself, and are connected with a specific attitude or practice to imagine and to transform toward reality, which is, for example, the attitude of the Sophists in Greece, the Stoics in Alexandria, of course, Kant.

In my reading, in all Foucault's work, there is primacy of relation over substance. No doubt nothing in Foucault is really closed off. Furthermore, the whole group of relations appears in the form of 'the thought of the outside'. According to Deleuze, "Foucault's general principle is that every form is a compound of relations between forces. Given these forces, our first question is with what forces from the outside they enter into a relation. And then what form is created as a result" (Deleuze, 1988: 124). Hence, with this relational character in mind, we should approach delicate questions such as resistance, subjectivity, and freedom. In a word, every relation is connected from one point to another, thus, there is no power relation that does not include certain relatively free or unbound points, point of creativity, changes, and resistance.

"What I am attentive to is the fact that every human relation is to some degree a power relation. We move in a world of perpetual strategic relations" (Foucault, 1988e: 168). It may sound like the intense vision of oppression, but it is a mistake

to see that Foucault is a fatalist with respect to social and political change or that Foucault presents subjects as helpless and passive victims of power. We should not forget at any moment that, for Foucault, human relation is made up of not only the relation with others but the relation with oneself. Similarly, there is a misinterpretation (see Fine, 1979; 1984) that starts from a conflation between power as omnipresent and as omnipotent. While power is everywhere, it is indissociable from contestation and struggle, resistance and freedom: “I am just saying: as soon as there is power relation, there is possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy” (Foucault, 1988e: 123). As resistance is not exterior to power, freedom is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. In order to define freedom more clearly, Foucault also distinguishes between power and domination, seeing domination as the solidification of power relations such that they become relatively fixed in asymmetrical forms and spaces of liberty and resistance thus become limited (Foucault, 1988a: 12). According to Foucault:

Where the determining factors saturate the whole there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains. (In this case it

is a question of a physical relationship of constraint)...The relationship between power and freedom's refusal to submit cannot therefore be separated. The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude (how could we seek to be slaves?). At the very heart of the relationship, and constantly provoking it, are calcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an "agonism" – of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation (Foucault, 1983a: 221-222).

Foucault's perspective to see power not in terms of a binary antagonism but in terms of a "multiplicity of force relations" (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 92) certainly allows him to elucidate the enormous richness and complexity of power relations in contemporary society and, more important, the richness and complexity of resistance to power. However, the richness and complexity remains the richness of a still photograph, or of a painting. It is as if Foucault were a painter who blends in with the splendid style and the political content without assuming a single center of movement or a unity in the relations of power. If *Waiting for Godot* is an allegory of Samuel Beckett, then one can imagine an

allegory of Foucault's project entitled *Running after Godot* – it being understood that Godot will not allow himself to be caught, if he exists at all. In Foucault's analysis, there are a host of resistances which are integral to power, but there is no intention of emancipation. While resistance is central to Foucault's approach, particularly in his later work, the notion of emancipation is ruled out as being absurd, thus he only describes vigorously an endlessly shifting constellation of power-and-resistance. Foucault believes that it is necessary for the analysis of power and resistance to be a real part of political struggle – not that it attempts to give such struggles a guiding thread or a theoretical apparatus, but rather that it constitutes their possible strategies, and enables us to think and act.

Chapter 4 Foucault: Exile, Engagement, and Critique

1. Exile, Engagement, and Ethos

Foucault has written three kinds of books, those concern scientific thought such as *The Order of Things*, those concern social principles and institutions such as *Discipline and Punish*, those concern private life such as *The Use of Pleasure*.

The theoretical has become the material and the political, and the material and the political have become the personal. A cipher has been deciphered, then once again has been enciphered. It is as if Foucault were a modern version of Penelope, unraveling by night what he weaves by day, or rather, raveling and unraveling at the same time, as he waits for a modern version of Ulysses who might never come home.

An irony penetrates Foucault's work throughout. In the study of irony, Kierkegaard notes that the ironist "must always be understood at a distance" (Kierkegaard, 1965: 85). In other words, we must not allow ourselves to become too caught up in the individual brushstrokes. We must rather step back. We must open ourselves up to the effect of the canvas as a whole. To be sure, each brushstroke contributes to this effect, but only through our 'reading' it in relation to something larger. It is the same with Foucault. In addition, and more important,

we must not cage ourselves in a space where the traditional distinctions between the personal and the political, between despair and hope, between passion and intellect, between exile and engagement, seem clear. We must allow ourselves to accept anything except that of coming to rest at an orthodoxy. In a word, we must free ourselves from the intellectual blackmail of being for or against, of being in or out.

I believe that what is true for life and for a love relationship is true also for writing. The intellectual work is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end. Besides, to make sense of it, or to make fun of it, is not the task of an original author, but that of commentators, afterwards. I dare to say that to produce a book is a rather minute event as against an endless play of repetitions, imitations, interpretations and reinterpretations. Each reading gives a book a unique body that varies according to each age. The book changes. Therefore, an author doesn't have to prescribe the correct direction of a book too much to readers as well as to oneself. To read means to be embedded in the present-time. What can we see and what can we say about it today? But, to read also involves thinking of the past as it is caught up by an author. There is Foucault in me as the past, as a memory, or Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Arendt and so on. We read the past against the

present and resist the present not in favour of a return but in order to free oneself from what one thinks and finally to think differently. In a word, reading, thinking and writing enable us to bring the past and the future into confrontation with the present.

One of the difficulties in reading Foucault is not the absence of focuses or positions but their variation or differentiation. The point, therefore, should not be their rapid succession but their specificity and their interconnections. Although his seemingly arbitrary position, in an extreme sense, rejects the notion of coherence, his whole project embodies a coherent perspective. From a theoretical point of view, unlike theorists such as Baudrillard, Lyotard or Derrida, Foucault does not dissolve all forms of structure, coherence, and intelligibility into an endless flow of signification. Having cleared the ground, he attempts to grasp what forms of regularities, relations, continuities really *do* exist. In addition, Foucault presents a cautious discontinuity of discourse. While he appropriates the continuous shift to attack the traditional way of being a good academic, he rejects the interpretation of his work as simply a “philosophy of discontinuity” (Foucault, 1988e: 99-100). For Foucault, discontinuity always includes some “overlapping, interaction, and echoes” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 149) between the earlier and the later,

between the old and the new. He pursues an open series of questions from knowledge through power to self, which are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another. Foucault's project is to write a "permanent critique of our historical era" (Foucault, 1984: 42) which problematizes modern forms of knowledge, social institutions, and subjectivity, in search of "the art of not being governed" (Foucault, 1996: 384).

About the criticism that he was always shifting his interests and positions, Foucault replies in 1969: "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order" (Foucault, 1972a; orig. 1969: 17). This statement is typical Foucault and resonates throughout his work. It is important to recognize that this statement conveys not just a personal pleasure in being different but also a caution of the danger posed to intellectual life by any subordination to a professional bureaucracy or even to one's own project. The attempt to balance both his own selfhood and the demand of publishing and speaking out in his professionalized activity brings him to the question of redefining the relation of the self to the self, of getting away from the self, and finally to a more explicit understanding of what it means to lead an intellectual life: "After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge

it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not...in the knower's straying afield of himself?" (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 8). The nucleus of this "straying afield of himself" is indeed 'wise madness', which involves 'the will not to be governed' beyond 'the will to knowledge'.

A kind of intellectual nomadism motivates Foucault's personal intellectual ethic.

Or, conversely, his personal intellectual ethic provides a rationale for the shifts of emphasis and mode of analysis which characterize his whole work. The opposite of a dogmatic persistence in one's position should not be reduced to an unconditional refusal of intellectual tradition, or to a subordination to intellectual trend. It is rather a consequence of the concern to address always present problems and it requires "a studious, slow and arduous modification, governed by a constant concern for the truth" (Foucault, 1988e: 264). The work of modifying one's own thought and that of others, Foucault suggests, should be seen to constitute "the intellectual's *raison d'être*" (Foucault, 1988e: 264).

Let's go back to Foucault's first major book, *Madness and Civilization*, here. In this book, Foucault follows the images of woe-begotten yet holy lepers with equally compelling description of the Ship of Fools, *Narrenschiff*. During the Renaissance the mad were loaded onto the ship and sent off to sail down Europe's

rivers in search of their sanity. On this subject, Foucault wrote: “He [the madman] is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely...He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger par excellence: that is, the prisoner of the passage” (Foucault, 1989; orig. 1961: 11). As I said before, in this description, the madman’s passage is no other than the odyssey of Foucault’s thought, from the sea to the ship of the sea, or rather precisely, from ‘the thought of the outside’ (power) to ‘the inside of thought’ (subjectivation) (see Deleuze, 1988). But, there is more. It is, to some extent, an analogy of his life as an exile.

I see Foucault as an exile not only because of his sexuality but also because of his ethos, his philosophical life. According to Young-Bruehl, “a self-conscious pariah” is not only the theme of Arendt’s book, *Rahel Varnhagen*, but also the theme of her exile years (Young-Bruehl in Hill, 1979: 3). I would rather suggest that for Arendt the pariah or the exile consciousness is the theme of her work and life throughout. What is more, “in Hannah Arendt’s lexicon...real people were pariahs” (Young-Bruehl, 1982: xv). This is the same with Foucault. I think that the exile or the pariah consciousness is not limited to an actual condition - a Jew or a homosexual and so on - but linked to the philosophical question, i.e. the ontology

of human beings. In this context, for Arendt and Foucault, the exile conscience is no other than the ethics of an intellectual.

It is possible to see that Foucault had to give sexuality a central position in his work, since it was central in his life, or that his last books in some ways constitute the personal ethics he imposed upon himself by force of will. Nevertheless, one cannot pretend that Foucault's entire work is explained by his homosexuality, as certain American academics do (see Miller, 1993; Lila, 2001), imagining, moreover, that this would be enough to discredit it. Of course Foucault is a homosexual, but not all homosexuals are Foucault. It is interesting to see how an intellectual project is born in an experience that should perhaps be described as primary. However, it is much more important to see how an intellectual adventure is created in the struggle of individual and social life, not to remain stuck in them, but to think them through, to go beyond them, to problematize them. In doing so, Foucault ironically turns the question back on those who level it. Do you really know who you are? Are you so sure of your reason, of your scientific concept, of your categories of your conception?

Foucault tries to perform the philosophical task as an exile by taking the double detour of literature and theory. On the one hand, there is his fascination with

writers who deal with 'transgression', the 'limit experience'. By reading Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Klossowski, Foucault seeks to discover the possibility of a mad philosopher (see Foucault, 1977a, 'A Preface to Transgression'). On the other hand, there is his examination at a historical level of the scientific status of psychological disciplines, the medical gaze, and then the established human sciences as a whole. "Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work", he said in 1981, "it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me...each time was partly a fragment of autobiography" (Foucault, 2000: 458).

Exile is one of the saddest fates. In premodern times, banishment was a particularly dreadful punishment. There has always been an association between the idea of exile and the terrors of being a leper or a madman, a social and moral untouchable. And yet, it is true that in the idea of exile, there is, in a self-tortured way, the irresistible temptation of not following the prescribed path. Originally, exile is an actual condition, but it is also a metaphorical condition. In other words, the condition of exile is produced not only by the social and political trimming but also by the censorship of conscience. As Foucault describes, the exile is put "across a half-real, half-imaginary geography", from "a visible fortress of order"

to the “castle of our conscience” (Foucault, 1989; orig. 1961: 11).

In *Presentations of the Intellectual* (1994), Edward Said explores the role of the intellectual. He sees intellectual as an exile, whose spirit is “in opposition, rather than in accommodation” (Said, 1994: xvii), whose challenge is to be found in “dissent against the status quo” (Said, 1994: xvii). His diagnosis of the intellectual in exile is derived from the social and political history of dislocation and migration, for example, the widespread territorial rearrangements of the post-World War Two period, but his observation is not limited to it. Said argues that even intellectuals who are lifelong members of a society can be divided into insiders and outsiders: those, on the one hand, who belong fully to society as it is, those who can be called yea-sayers; and on the other hand, the nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges and power are concerned (Said, 1994: 52-53).

In this book, Said does not deal with Foucault as an example, but his diagnosis of the intellectual in exile explains Foucault very well. It is a matter of thinking of the intellectual vocation as maintaining a state of constant alertness, of a perpetual willingness not to let the one and only truth or accepted ideas dominate. It also involves a sense of the present, an almost athletic rational energy, and a

complicated struggle to balance the problems of one's own selfhood against the public demands, an everlasting effort, constitutionally unfinished and necessarily imperfect. The exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation. Also, the exile intellectual does not respond to the logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still. In a very Deleuzian passage, Foucault speaks for himself: "I dream of the intellectual who destroys evidence and generalities, the one who, in the inertias constraints of the present time, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of force, who is incessantly on the move, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he will think tomorrow for he is too attentive to the present" (Foucault, 1988e: 124).

On this subject, however, there are a couple of potential pitfalls, which should be pointed out. Politics is everywhere. There can be no escape into the realms of pure art and thought or, into the realm of disinterested objectivity or transcendental theory. There is no real escape, even for the exile who tries to remain suspended, since the state of inbetweenness can itself become a rigid ideological position. Furthermore, there is a fine line between escape and challenge. For the intellectual

in exile, there is a danger of being irresponsible and flippant under the disguise of marginality. In any case, intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability, consequently, work on intellectuals always involves a dilemma, not to be removed but to be embraced, and it requires a constant checking to balance on the edge of a judgement.

2. Intellectual and Critique

The intellectual, in my sense of the word, is someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or orthodox party line, or fixed dogma, or the smooth confirmations of what the powerful or conventional say and do. I am against belief in a theoretical god or a political god of any sort. In my mind, there are no rules by which intellectuals can know what to say or do, nor are there any gods to be worshiped for unwavering guidance. Of course, we have convictions and we make judgements, but what strikes me as much more important is how to keep a space in the mind open for doubt and for the part of an alert, skeptical irony, also self-irony. It is “the ethics of discomfort” that consists in revising certainties without renouncing convictions, in managing to change one’s opinion and at the same time to remain faithful to oneself. It is Foucault’s urging that one “never to

consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions” (Foucault, 2000: 448).

It is in a novel or a drama not the raw material for a sociological monograph that we can most readily see and understand what a critical sense means for intellectuals. For example, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce explores the young modern intellectual, Stephen Dedalus, whose entire early career is a seesaw between the blandishments of institutions like the church, the profession of teaching, Irish nationalism, and his slowly emerging and stubborn selfhood as an intellectual whose motto is the Luciferian *non serviam* [I will not serve]. The spirit of ‘I will not serve’, the rigorous concern for not being governed, I believe, is the nucleus of critical desires for intellectuals.

Theoretically, though Kantian in its modern origin, critique is the term that Marx had made his own, fashioning ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy’ (Marx, 1970; orig. 1859). For both Marx and Kant, the purpose of critique is to make explicit what otherwise remain implicit, bringing to light buried assumptions to public examination. In Kant’s work, critique reveals the limits of reason, as well as the indomitable urge of the human spirit to pass beyond those limits. In Marx’s case, on the other hand, critique reveals how the

categories of modern economics correspond to the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production.

Despite its archaeological step back, Foucault's work is imprinted by engagement through the style and choice of words. Critical gesture controls the theory as much as the self-description of the entire work as a form of critique. Thereby Foucault distinguishes himself, as Habermas points out, on the one hand, from the engaged positivism of Max Weber, who wanted to separate a value basis from an analysis carried out in a value-free way. On the other hand, Foucault also distinguishes himself from the ideology critique of Marx, who unmasked the humanistic self-understanding of modernity by suing for the normative content of bourgeois ideals (Habermas, 1987: 282).

Foucault describes genealogy as research directed towards a resurrection of "local", "popular", and "disqualified" (Foucault, 1980: 82) knowledges through the production of critical discourses. The function of such discourses is to interrupt the smooth passage of regimes of truth, to disrupt those forms of knowledge which assume a self-evident quality, and to produce a state of uncertainty in those responsible for servicing the network of power/ knowledge relations. Therefore, at the very heart of genealogical analysis, there is the activity

of critique, rather than, for example, the provision of programs, prophecies, or policies. As Foucault observes: “Critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, “this, then, is what needs to be done.” It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn’t have to lay down the law for law. It isn’t a stage in a programming. It is a challenge directed to what is” (Foucault, 2000: 236). Foucault intends his work to enlist itself into the reality of a contest, as an instrument of tactics, of illumination. It is necessary, Foucault believes, for critical historical analysis to be a real part of political struggle – not that it attempts to give such struggles a guiding thread or a theoretical apparatus, but rather that it constitutes their possible strategies. “Theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice; it is practice” (Foucault, 1977a: 208), which means that theory is not a totalizing instrument, but one that multiplies potentialities.

In this light, the objective of Foucault’s analysis is not the construction or preservation of a particular truth within theory, or a formulation of the process by which theory might be realized in practice, or an elevation of theory as the final refuge of resistance. Rather, the objective is an analysis of the interrelationship

between the formation of domains and objects (e.g. madness, sexuality, etc.) and their articulation within discourse - itself subject to rules and procedures of verification and falsification – and the effects of this complex relationship in the real. In brief, it is the politics of truth with which Foucault has been concerned: “(1) What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those ‘truth games’ which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and object? (2) What are the relationship we have to others through those strange strategies and power relationships? And (3) what are the relationships between truth, power, and self?” (Foucault, 1888b: 15).

While the Frankfurt School theorists, who have remained broadly within the Young Hegelian Marxist tradition, treat “all dominant and socially ratified forms of knowledge as masks and instruments of oppression” (Gordon, 1979: 28), Foucault’s analyses are situated beyond good and evil, in a concern with the historical interconnections between relations of power (positive and productive rather than repressive) and knowledge. On this ground, Gordon (1979: 28) argues that the interpretation of Foucault’s analysis of power and knowledge relations as a form of ideology critique comparable to the work of the Frankfurt School is misleading. Thus, Gordon concludes, Foucault’s conception of the relationship

between power and knowledge is the very antithesis of that to be found in the work of critical theorists. I agree to the view that Foucault's conception and analysis of power-knowledge relations is not equivalent, or reducible, to the conception which informs the work of the critical theorists, i.e. the work of a relationship between knowledge and ideology. However, I argue, the concept of critique has at least two different meanings in the work of the critical theorists, and while one of these undoubtedly signifies a process of reflection on humanly produced illusions, distortions, and systems of constraints, i.e. 'critique of ideology', another, deeper sense, derived from the Enlightenment, is present in critical theory, i.e. the work of critique as oppositional thinking against transcendence. It is this latter sense of critique, I believe, which constitutes the least common denominator between Foucault and the Frankfurt School.

In his essay, 'What is Critique?', Foucault suggests approaching the problem of Enlightenment "in a meaningful enough proximity with the work of the Frankfurt School" (Foucault, 1996: 389). He understands the problem of Enlightenment as a still existing historico-critical outlook on the present and on ourselves, which makes Foucault "brothers with the Frankfurt School" (Foucault, 1996: 391). Foucault sees in Kant's answer to the question 'What is Enlightenment?' (Kant,

1970; orig. 1784) and 'What is the Revolution?' (Kant, 'The Contest of Faculties', 1970; orig. 1798) the origin of a critical ontology leading through Hegel, Nietzsche, and Max Weber to Horkheimer and Adorno. Foucault adds himself to this tradition:

Kant seems...to have founded the two great critical traditions between which modern philosophy has been divided...One can opt for a critical philosophy which is framed as an analytical philosophy of truth in general, or one can opt for a critical thought which has the form of an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of the present; it is this latter form of philosophy which, from Hegel to the Frankfurt school by way of Nietzsche and Max Weber, has founded a form of reflection within which I have tried to work (Foucault, 1993: 17-18).

What makes Foucault's own concept of critique distinctive is that he approaches critique not as an instrument, but rather as an "attitude", or a "virtue in general" (Foucault, 1996: 383), defining it as "the art of not being governed" (Foucault, 1993: 384). As Foucault understands it, the question 'how not to be governed' cannot be dissociated from the question of governmentalization. It is on this note that Foucault suggests: "if it is necessary to pose the question of knowledge in its relation to domination, it would be first and foremost on the basis of a certain

decisive will not to be governed” (Foucault, 1996: 398). Thus the point lies in the game of governmentalization and critique, that is, the relations between power, truth and the subject:

If governmentalization is...this movement concerned with subjugating individuals in the very reality of a social practice by mechanisms of power that appeal to a truth...critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourse of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary inservitude, of reflective indocility. The essential function of critique would be that of desubjectification in the game of...the politics of truth (Foucault, 1996: 386).

Foucault claims that the two dominant models for theorizing modern power, “the juridical, liberal” model and the economic, “Marxist” model (Foucault, 1980: 88), are flawed by outmoded and erroneous assumptions. The economic model, as maintained by Marxists, is rejected as a reductionistic subordination of power to class domination and economic imperatives. The judicial model, his primary target, analyzes power in terms of law, legal and moral rights, and political sovereignty. While the bourgeois revolution beheaded the king in the

sociopolitical realm, Foucault argues that many concepts and assumptions of the sovereign-judicial model continue to inform modern thought. He therefore attempts to cut off the head of the king in the realm of theory with a genealogical guillotine.

Foucault attempts to rethink the nature of modern power in a non-totalizing and non-presentational scheme. He rejects all modern theories that see power to be anchored in macrostructures or ruling classes and to be repressive in nature. He continues to hold that all social relations are characterized by power and resistance (Foucault, 1988a: 11-12), but, in the later work, he distinguishes between power and domination, seeing domination as the solidification of power relations such that they become relatively fixed in asymmetrical forms and the spaces of liberty and resistance thus become limited (Foucault, 1988a: 12). Considering the restricted sense of domination, it could be said that power relations have been elaborated, rationalized, and centralized, that is, governmentalized in the form of state institutions. Domination is a part of power structure, at the same time it is a strategic situation. In this regard, Foucault approaches to the question of the state not in terms of the unity of power but in terms of the tactics of government, which is at once internal and external to the

state. As he observes:

The state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think. Maybe what is really important for our modernity – that is, for our present – is not so much the *étatisation* [nationalization] of society, as the ‘governmentalization’ of the state...The state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality (Foucault, 1991b: 103).

What Foucault calls “governmentality” indicates his interest not only in the political aspects of government, but also in its pedagogical, spiritual, and religious dimensions. Trying to understand how we have been trapped in our own history, Foucault began to explore such questions like how to govern oneself, how not to be governed, how to govern others, etc. (see Foucault, 1988e; 1991b). Early modern theorists of government, Foucault argues, began to combine two disparate ways of thinking. On the one hand, secular philosophers had approached the art of government in worldly terms alone. Theologians, on the other hand, had approached the art of government in terms that were explicitly otherworldly. It was in the sixteenth century that these two ways of thinking came together in practice for the first time. In this process, political rationality took its stand on the

idea of “pastoral” power, then on that of “reason of state”, correspondingly, the form of power appeared as an “administrative”, or “police state” (Foucault, 1988e: 77, 82, 85; 1991b: 103; 1983a: 214), which is organized through new technique of pedagogy and political science. The result was a hybrid new art of government, concerned with “both individualization and totalization” (Foucault, 1988e: 85), regulating and monitoring the outward and inward life of each and every citizen. Through the development of political rationality, finally, the “governmental” or “modern” state (Foucault, 1991b: 103; 1983a: 214) came in the eighteenth century, which is the regime of power that Foucault tried to define in terms of bio-politics in *the Will to Knowledge*.

Foucault rejects the view that the state is a kind of political power which ignores individuals, representing the totality of a class, or a group among the citizens. Instead, he argues, right from the start, the state has been a kind of political power which is “both individualizing and totalitarian” (Foucault, 1988e: 84), and has been developing to “a modern matrix of individualization, or a new form of pastoral power” (Foucault, 1983a: 215). This form of power applies itself to everyday life and makes individuals subjects. In other word, individuals become subjects by both individualizing and totalizing power. Here, the term “subject” has

a double meaning: one is both “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to...[their] own identity by a conscience or self knowledge” (Foucault, 1983a: 212). Therefore, liberation can be achieved by attacking, not individualization or totalization separately, but political rationality’s very roots. As Foucault suggests: “The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (Foucault, 1983a: 216).

Foucault’s argument on governmentality delivers a certain irony of power effect between totalization and individualization. On one side stands an almost omnipotent machine of government, while on the other side stands the solitary human being, its instinct for freedom pushed back, incarcerated. Foucault’s intention is not just to expose the totalitarian effect of governmentality but to link it with the idea of liberalism. Furthermore it leads us to the problem between reason and power once again, the reciprocal and the inverse of the problem of Enlightenment: how is that rationalization leads to the disease of power such as

fascism and Stalinism? In Foucault's word, "how is that the great movement of rationalization led us to so much noise, so much rage, so much silence and dismal mechanism?" (Foucault, 1996: 390). In the end, what Foucault is trying to do is to suggest an "Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life", that contains essential deindividualizing principles. Here what Foucault means by fascism is "not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini," but also "the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior," in "our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures," buried deep in "the body," its traces brutally difficult to expunge, "the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us." (Foucault, 1977b: xiii, in Deleuze and Guattari, 1977).

In *Madness and Civilization*, and *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault evokes the totalitarian implications of institutions that aim to rationalize the technique of government by detailing the horrors of Pinel's model asylum and Bentham's model prison. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault argue, the utopian effort to forge communities of "ethical uniformity" (Foucault, 1989; orig. 1961: 257) trapped any human being who didn't conform into "a relation to himself that was of the order of transgression, and in a nonrelation to others that was of the order of

shame” (Foucault, 1989: 261). In *Discipline and Punish*, the whole notion of a visual and spatial metaphor is subjected to a penetrating examination. Visibility itself, in the form of Bentham’s project for a “panoptic” prison, is brought into question. According to Foucault, the “major effect” of the Panopticon was “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”. The aim was “so to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effect, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercise it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (Foucault, 1991a; orig. 1975: 201)

Foucault’s argument is not confined to the prison. On the contrary, it is his contention that we are all caught within disciplinary systems, systems of micro-power. These systems, he asserts, exist throughout bourgeois society and control our behavior without our knowing it. Their functioning is dependent on a regime of observation, surveillance, and inspection similar to Bentham’s Panopticon, even though less obvious in its working. The whole exercise of discipline within

modern society presupposes, according to Foucault, “a mechanism that coerces by means of observation” (Foucault, 1991a; orig. 1975: 170). This disciplinary power “is exercised through its visibility”, yet, at the same time, it “imposes on those whom its subjects a principle of compulsory visibility” (Foucault, 1991a; orig. 1975: 187). Interestingly, in an interview, Foucault goes on to link the Bentham’s project with Rousseau’s dream “of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts”, the dream “of there no longer existing any zones of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogative of some corporation” (Foucault, 1980: 152). Foucault sees the Panopticon as a combination of “Rousseau’s lyricism and Bentham’s obsession” (Foucault, 1980: 152), that is, Rousseau’s lyrical note of the Revolution, a dream of a republic of virtue, to be untrammelled exercise of popular sovereignty, and Bentham’s obsession, the technical idea of the exercise of an all-seeing power. In an important sense, Foucault engages in a reversal of Rousseau, viewing as insidious and threatening what Rousseau saw as desirable.

According to Machiavellian principle of “raison d’État” [reason of state] in *The Prince*, the state constituted an end itself, regulated only by its internal structure, and enjoying its own justification in terms of its success in increasing the scope

and power of its rule. Liberalism, by contrast, is a new principle and method for rationalizing the exercise of government. In 'Governmentality', Foucault analyzes that the novelty of liberalism lies in its break with the rival modern principle of reason of state. In other words, if the Machiavellian maxim is that one governs too little, the liberal maxim is that one always governs too much, or at least to suspect that one governs too much. As a consequence of this liberal principle, governmentality cannot be exercised without a critique. Foucault turns his attention to modern liberalism, analyzing its character with sympathy. Still, Foucault considers the positive freedom secured by law and institutions as suspicious. What Foucault has in mind is an alternative idea, of a negative freedom, expressed in the demand "not to be governed". To some extent, it reminds me of Isaiah Berlin's notion of freedom. To be free, in this negative sense, means, as he once put it, "not being interfered with by others". "The wider the area of noninterference", Berlin suggested, "the wider my freedom" (Berlin, 1969:123). Or, in Foucauldian terms, the less discipline and bio-power imposed from above, the larger the scope left open for the individual's enigmatic, but decisive will.

I think that Foucault's position towards liberalism is not simple, particularly in

connection with his wary, complicated, and intelligent attempt to get philosophy and politics together. I am arguing, therefore, against naïve reading about it. Theoretically, Foucault does not commit himself to any conventional understanding of liberalism. He does not identify himself with the liberal jurist or the Kantian philosopher, struggling to see things impartially, from the perspective of a universal subject. The idea of right, he cannot help but regard as a kind of political fiction. As he puts it, “all the forms of established or demanded freedom, all the rights that one asserts” find in revolt “a last anchor point”, which is “more solid and closer to experience than natural rights” (Foucault, 2000: 449). Nevertheless, Foucault’s political pronouncements on human rights are often appealingly modest, open, and undocourinaire. He spoke on behalf of prison reform, and the rights of homosexuals. He involved in efforts to improve the plight of refugees and to safeguard the rights of dissidents around the world. The social critic and political commitment must always proceed with caution and humility at the point where ideas and reality intersect. In this sense, he considers that to defend the rights of the individual against the power of government is a useful and worthy try, however incomplete it may seem to him. From the Foucauldian perspective, political action is a matter not of “engagement in” but

rather of “experience with” (Foucault, 2000: 445).

It is possible to see his political commitment to human rights is basically tactical.

Or, it is possible to see that it only involves an act of will rather than a reasoned argument. In fact, throughout his work, archaeology and genealogy are well combined tactically in the form of theory/practice where theory is immediately practical in character. However, I argue, his political commitment is not tactical but antistrategic, and beyond the confines of a theory/practice combination. As Foucault freely admitted, “my theoretical ethic...is antistrategic: to be respectful when singularity revolts, intransigent as soon as power violates the universal. A simple choice, a difficult job” (Foucault, 2000: 453). What is necessary and important for Foucault is unrelenting practice of critique. Faced with any form of government, whether liberal or totalitarian, it is the vocation of the intellectual to exercise a “decisive will not to be governed”, voicing concerns in public about whatever appears intolerable. By withholding consent, the intellectual could remind others of their, what Kant calls, “self-incurred immaturity” (Kant, 1970a: 54), and also of their ability to emerge from this immaturity. This is the reason why Foucault took up Kant’s task two centuries later (see Foucault, 1983a, ‘Subject and Power’; 1993, ‘Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution’; 1996,

‘What is Critique?’; 2000, ‘For an Ethic of Discomfort’), and why this task of Enlightenment returns to us over and over again. We must be joined in an ongoing effort to challenge every abuse of power, in theory as well as practice. If we are all governed, one way and another, then, as such, we are in solidarity.

It is also Foucault’s conviction that phenomenon of revolt is itself inherently mysterious and inscrutable. As he puts it, “the man who rebels is finally inexplicable; it takes a wrenching away that interrupt the flow of history, and its long chains of reasons” (Foucault, 2000:449). Therefore, the rationale for rebellion or resistance cannot lie with outcomes, or with the achievement of a final desirable state. Rebellion or resistance, whether a single cry or a collective one, is not means to an end, but rather an end in itself. His faith in revolt comes out very clearly in his writings on the Iranian Revolution in 1978. As Foucault puts it, “people do revolt; that is a fact. And that is how subjectivity (not that of great men, but that of anyone) is brought into history, breathing life into it...A question of ethics? Perhaps. A question of reality, without a doubt” (Foucault, 2000: 452). The generosity of Foucault’s response to the Iranian revolution brings to mind one of Kant’s most famous remarks about the French Revolution, and Camus’s remarks about the French Resistance.

The revolution which we have seen taking place in our own times in a nation of gifted people may succeed, or it may fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such a price, even if he could hope to carry it out successfully at the second attempt. But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a sympathy which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger. It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race (Kant, 1970b: 182).

What matters in the Revolution is not the revolutionary process, nor its special content, nor its result whether it succeeds or fails. What, on the contrary, does have meaning is the fact that, as Kant expresses it, the Revolution is surrounded by “a sympathy which borders almost on enthusiasm”. What matters in the Revolution is not the Revolution itself, but what takes place in the heads of the people who witness this revolution as an *event*. Enthusiasm for the Revolution is, according to Kant, the sign of “a moral disposition” of humanity. The Revolution is an event which can never be forgotten because such a phenomenon is “too

momentous, too intimately interwoven with the interests of humanity and too widespread in its influence upon all parts of the worlds for nations not to be reminded of it when favourable circumstances present themselves, and to rise up and make renewed attempts of the same kind as before” (Kant, 1970b; 185). In a word, it is the very existence of the Revolution that attests to a permanent virtuality which cannot be ignored.

An experience of the French Resistance, Camus recollected, left a “nasty wound” that “men discovered...that one can be right and still be beaten, that force can overcome spirit, that there are times when courage is not its own recompense” (Camus, 1946, in Wilkinson, 1981: 5). “Whatever our personal failings maybe”, Camus added later, “the nobility of our calling will always grounded in two obligations that are difficult to fulfill: the refusal to lie about what one knows, and resistance against oppression” (Camus, 1957, in Wilkinson, 1981: 261).

For Kant, enthusiasm for the Revolution is the sign of “a moral disposition” of humanity, which can be called freedom, for Camus, rebellion, or resistance constitutes something like an existential act, for Foucault, it is “the will not to be governed”, an expression of the human potential which escapes every abuse of power including the disciplinary techniques of reason.

3. Is it Useless to Resist?

Foucault identifies himself as a “skeptical thinker” (Foucault, 1988e: 254). His analysis manifests grim pessimism and despair penetrating history. As Foucault puts it, “the fear of ridicule or the bitterness of history prevents most of us from putting side by side: revolution and happiness...or indeed, revolution and pleasure” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 7). And yet, at the same time, Foucault adopts an activist stance affirming his faith in revolt. As he puts it, “revolts belong to history. But, in a certain way, they escape from it. The impulse by which a single individual, a group, a minority, or an entire people says, “I will not obey”, and throws the risk of their life in the face of an authority they consider unjust seems to me to be something irreducible. Because no authority is capable of making it utterly impossible” (Foucault, 2000: 449).

The despair arises from the “bitterness of history”, but if there is no resistance to that bitterness, the one-dimensional despair leads only to political depression and theoretical closure. Similarly, if the hope is not grounded firmly in that same bitterness of history, it becomes just a one-dimensional and naive expression of optimism. Precisely such a separation of despair and hope, of pessimism and optimism is expressed in Romain Rolland’s maxim, “pessimism of the

intelligence, optimism of the will”, which is made by Gramsci into something of a programmatic slogan (Gramsci, 1971: 175, fn. 75). For Foucault, “pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will” is the matter not of separation but rather of differentiation or doubling. It is Foucault’s optimism inside of pessimism that issues from his belief in the contingency and vulnerability of power: “There’s an optimism that consists rather in saying that things couldn’t be better. My optimism would consist rather in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints” (Foucault 1988e: 156).

I am against a separation of optimism and pessimism, for despair and hope are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another. Critical thought must constantly live in a field of tension and its function is to accept and theorize a kind of revolving door of despair and hope, and to show “how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same” (Foucault, 1994; orig. 1966: 339). As Arendt argues, “progress and doom are two sides of the same medal” and “both are articles of superstitions, not of faith” (Arendt, 1951: vii). Furthermore, as Ernst Bloch puts it in the foreword to his *Principle of Hope*, written largely during his exile from

Nazi Germany, it is precisely in such a fearsome world that “it is a question of learning hope” (Bloch, 1986: 3).

We can't have a perfect world, therefore, to some extent, intellectuals are “men in dark times” (Arendt, 1968a) as well as dreamers. To live in a threatening world that have to change, that have to lead to another world, for better or worse, means to spend one's life in the night, waiting for dawn. Whether it is passively subdued, or actively expressed in public, every intellectual has a kind of dream of Apocalypse, however different it may be. Confronted by ongoing crisis, intellectuals could end in a quietism, in an attitude of letting beings be, or could adopt an activist stance, engaging in what seems to be an unending critique of the world as it is. Foucault seems to choose the latter. From a slightly different point of view, intellectuals in the crisis tend toward an ideal past, the nostalgic side, or seek to invent a myth of the future, the imaginative side. Of course, this division between the imaginative and the nostalgic is by no means absolute, for the ideal past and the ideal future have in common a critical sense towards the present. In Foucault's case, the nostalgic side appears in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* by returning to the Greek, while the imaginative side appears in *The Order of Things* by anticipating a “future thought” (Foucault, 1994; orig. 1966:

386). What fascinates Foucault most, however, is not the past nor the future but the question of today. Foucault tells us that “I have learnt not so much from history as from the present” and that “I would like to write the history” not as “writing a history of the past in terms of the present”, but as “writing the history of the present” (Foucault, 1991; orig. 1975: 30-31). As Deleuze understands it, Foucault “frees a sense of time that fits the past into the inside, brings about the future in the outside, and brings the two into confrontation at the limit of living present” (Deleuze, 1988: 119).

Foucault sees the job of the intellectual as one of identifying the specific forms and specific interrelationships which truth and power have taken in our history. His aim has never been to destroy every form of power nor to undermine every truth claim but to use his analysis to throw light on the specific dangers that each specific type of power/ knowledge produces. He has been at pains to criticize and distance himself from those who speak the truth against power as if truth and power were self-evidently external to each other, and from those who, in the name of post-enlightenment and postmodern discourse, question philosophical seriousness in general. Foucault has never taken this position. Foucault wants to change our world. But he never mourned the default of god, nor looked for a new

one, nor considered his main task to offer alternatives. He was trying to diagnose the contemporary danger, and in his last works, to provide the elements of a modern ethics. If everything is dangerous, as Foucault asserts, then we always have something to do. At every moment, step by step, we have something to fight against the present, for the firing line is not somewhere over there but where we stand here and now. As Foucault once said, “my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper-and pessimistic activism” (Foucault, 1983b: 232).¹

Although Foucault is adamant that he does not intend to offer an “alternative” (Foucault, 1983b: 231), I strongly believe that he presents his own dream of Apocalypse. But equally, I believe that it is not that important whether the dream of Apocalypse that Foucault puts before us is really one what we want to make our own. Rather, I am interested in the fact that he offers us the possibility of a new way of thinking and acting as the intellectual. What Foucault means by irony and maturity (see Foucault, 1984, ‘What is Enlightenment?’, Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1986, ‘What is Maturity?’) suggests that there is no such thing as a

¹ In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault describes the Greek virtue of *sophrosyne* as a general state that ensures the individual will be moderate and will do “what is fitting as regards both god and men”. While the Greek virtue includes moderation and prefers insensitivity to excess, Foucault chooses a “hyper- and pessimistic activism” rather than “apathy”.

“The former [*sophrosyne*] is characterized in the *Nicomachean Ethics* by the fact that the subject deliberately chooses reasonable principles of action, that he is capable of following and applying them, that he holds to the ‘right mean’ between insensitivity and excess (a middle course that is not equidistant between the two, because moderation is actually much further away from excess than from insensitivity), and that he derives pleasure from the moderation he displays” (Foucault,

private intellectual, nor is there only a public intellectual; and that the intellectual cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless functionary, nor a careful bureaucrat, nor a professional politician, nor a strategic revolutionary; and finally that the role of the intellectual entails a difficult interplay between being a spectator and being a principal actor. As Foucault showed us in his books and in his life, there is a kind of ethical and intellectual integrity, which seeks to produce a new ethical form of life of the intellectual. It is an abandonment of traditional seriousness and of postmodern frivolity, while preserving active engagement in the concerns of the present. It is a refusal of justifications of one's actions in terms of religion, law, science, or philosophical grounding, while maintaining imagination, lucidity, humour, disciplined thought and practical wisdom.

1992; orig. 1984: 64-65).

Chapter 5

Arendt: Fragmentary Historiography and the Critique of Modernity

1. Introduction

Hannah Arendt is one of the great outsiders of twentieth-century political thought, at once original and unorthodox. Indeed, the exceptional originality of her ideas is itself a constant source of misunderstanding. Rejected by the Left because of its problematic analogies between Stalinism and National Socialism, denounced by the Right for its irreverence toward the polarizing thinking of Cold War camp, and ridiculed by empirical political scientists for its journalistic, literary, and philosophical generalizations, Arendt became one of the most controversial political thinkers in the twentieth century. Three decades after her death on December 4, 1975, the interest in Arendt's work shows no signs of diminishing. One can even note "a contemporary Arendt renaissance" (Benhabib, 2003: xxxvii) beyond disciplinary boundaries. In part this has to do with the fact that her work always defied categorization, at least in terms of the usual Left/ Right or liberal/ conservative labels. But it also has to do with the end of the Cold War, the demise of authoritarian communism and the worldwide retreat of Marxist theory. Arendt's

thought has emerged, on the one hand, as the alternative critical political theory toward Kantian bent, on the other hand, as the politics of resistance toward Nietzschean bent. It is in this context that so many have turned to Arendt's work, making her, in Seyla Benhabib's felicitous phrase, the thinker of "the post-totalitarian moment" (2003: 198).

This current has been motivated by complex sets of sensibilities and concerns. First, for the participatory democrat, it is Arendt's identification of action and politics, and her reconceptualization of citizenship, that open new prospect to contemporary theory. As Sheldon Wolin (1960) and Barber (1984) point out, Arendt's theory of action reformulates politics in terms of continuous and direct civic involvement. She thereby challenges our liberal preconceptions about the nature of politics. Arendt (1958) asserts that the essence of politics is action. Laws and institutions, which to the liberal mind are the stuff of politics, for Arendt supply the framework for action. The activities of debate, deliberation, and participation in decision making come to occupy central stage. Moreover, since politics is action, we need to recast our notion of citizenship in a participatory mode. Also, by dramatically distinguishing the political realm from the economic, Arendt (1958: 22-78) restores to politics an integrity and dignity, that is denied by

the liberal tradition. Because the liberal tradition, according to Barber, views politics as, “the conduct of public affairs for private advantage” (Barber, 2003: 4), that is, the chambermaid of private interests.

Second, a very different, but equally influential, appropriation of Arendt has been performed by Habermas and others working within the tradition of Critical Theory (Habermas, 1973; 1984; Bernstein, 1984; Benhabib, 1987). These theorists, like their Frankfurt School predecessors, have been concerned with the threat posed by the universalization of technical rationality, in particular its extension to the political sphere. As areas of social existence are subjected to the dictates of instrumental reason and rational administration, the space left for the exercise of citizenship gradually disappears. Enlightenment ideals of freedom, autonomy, and a rational democratic political order are undermined and extinguished by the process of economic and bureaucratic rationalization, in Weber’s words, the “iron cage” (1976: 181). Indeed, for an earlier generation of critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno, the “dialectic of enlightenment” offered nothing but irony. The emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment was revealed as a mask for a reason whose essence was domination on a global scale (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972: 3-42).

While agreeing with Horkheimer and Adorno, and of course, Weber, that the process of rationalization has been far more ambiguous than Marx ever imagined, Habermas and others of his generation have been unable to accept their totalizing critique of reason with its accompanying retreat to the aesthetic realm. In reaction to Horkheimer and Adorno's negative dialectic, Habermas has struggled to show that "rationalization" does not inevitably mean domination. The imperialism of purposive rationality needs to be combated, and this can be done effectively only in the name of an alternative rationality, the rationality that aims at consensus. Habermas thinks that such a dialogical rationality is perhaps the central component of our identity as moderns. And while this rationality may be covered over by technocratic doctrines of decisionism, it remains implicit in the very structure of communicative action (Habermas, 1984; 1987, chaps. 11 and 12).

For Habermas, then, the important thing is to bring to light the consensual rationality implicit in speech, to show the progress of this rationality toward autonomy throughout the modern period, and to remind us of the claim that this rationality still exercises upon our political lives. However, this project cannot even be formulated using only the conceptual resources of Marxism or Weberian social science. Marx's notion of labor as praxis conflates acting and making,

blinding him to the specificity of the political realm and the peculiar structure of practical discourse. Weber's conception of rationalization explicitly denies the possibility of a disenchanted, yet substantively rational, form of social action. Critical Theory thus found itself at an impasse, but it escaped, according to Habermas, thanks largely to Hannah Arendt (Habermas, 1983; 1973: 42, 286; Benhabib, 1987: 243-245).

The rigorous distinction between action (*praxis*) and fabrication (*poiesis*) posed by Arendt's theory of action enabled Habermas to distinguish systematically between communicative and instrumental action and to identify their respective logics of rationalization. Whereas rationalization in the economic sphere implies greater order, efficiency, and system coherence, the rationalization of communicative action means increasing acceptance of the principle. That is, validity claims should be redeemed discursively through a process of rational argumentation. Moreover, Arendt's sketches of the form of intersubjectivity engendered in the practice of speech supplied Habermas with a standard of ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1983: 174-175). Thanks to Arendt's theory of action, the way to a comprehensive theory of communicative rationality was opened.

Third, Arendt's theory has been appropriated by communitarian critics of liberal

theories of justice. Sandel (1982; 1984), Taylor (1989), and MacIntyre (1981) have all questioned the Enlightenment effort to derive principles of political right and practical judgement independent of any concrete, particular vision of the good. Such a question is to be found in Arendt's theory of political action. Arendt's theory identifies freedom not with an individual's choice of life-style, but with "acting together" for the sake of the community (Arendt, 1958: 200-201; 1951: 474; 1972: 142-143). Her account stresses how such acting together – "the sharing of words and deeds" – is in fact the medium through which the self is defined. A community, a shared world, a common space of appearance, is the fundamental condition for the achievement of selfhood. Further, it is by "acting together" that our sense of the world is developed. That is to say, it is through political action that our sense of justice – of what we owe to our fellow citizens and to those who come after us – is both articulated and preserved. Without a "community sense", justice becomes mere legality (Arendt: 1951: 465; 1963: chap. 3). Therefore, the communitarians see Arendt as placing community at the heart of politics, making it the cornerstone of selfhood, freedom, and justice. Arendt's theory of action frees us from the anomie of the "procedural republic" and gives us a taste of the "good in common" that only a healthy political life can deliver (Sandel, 1982:

183).

Finally, many contemporary political theorists (Wolin, S. 1996; Conolly, 1998; Mouffe, 1996; Honig, 1993; Villa, 1992; 1996) have turned to a broadly agonistic model of politics articulated by Nietzsche, Foucault, and Arendt for a radical democracy agenda. These theorists worry that modern democracies are hardly democratic at all and that the bureaucratic edifice of the state has seized the space of political, making citizens the passive recipient of policy decisions. They also worry that liberal theory seeks to diminish or eradicate the contest and debate that is the lifeblood of democratic politics by promoting a conception of politics which is judicial/ administrative.

Contemporary agonists remind us that public sphere is as much a stage for conflict and expression as it is a set of procedures or institutions designed to preserve peace, fairness, or consensus. They also insist that ultimate values are always in play and that the content of basic rights and the purpose of political association are not the objects of a consensus but are contested everyday. Therefore political agonism provides a return to the repressed essence of democratic politics, that is, conflict.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche addresses

the problem of a modern, democratic culture that has inherited the prejudice of slave morality against heroic or individualizing action. Given Nietzsche's coupling of the "herd animal" (Nietzsche, 2000: 113) with democracy, and his aristocratic conception of the agonistic virtues, it is hardly surprising that his agonism fell on deaf ears for so long. As Conolly (1991) and Butler (1990) have demonstrated, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* changed all that by showing how the modern state produced "docile" (Foucault, 1991a: 135) subjects through the proliferation of "micro-physics of power" (Foucault, 1991a: 26). Quite self-consciously, Foucault provided a *Genealogy of Morals* for the democratic age by demonstrating that rights and disciplines are two sides of the same coin (see Foucault, 1991a). From a Foucauldian point of view, our seemingly greater freedom masks a more profound internalization of norms. Indeed, it is possible only on the basis of our becoming self-surveilling subjects.

Foucault's analysis provides an essential touchstone for most contemporary agonists. Their call for resistance presupposes that liberal democracy has been too successful in domesticating its citizens, diminishing or diverting their potentially political energies. Foucault's unique contribution to this thematic was to suggest not only that power permeated everyday life in the form of the discipline, but that

the very process of producing docile subjects created resistance and multiple sites of struggle in the margins of political life such as hospitals, factories, and prisons. Thus, when the agon seemed like the most ancient of history, it reemerged in the interstices of the welfare state itself (see Foucault, 1983a). Nietzsche's agonistic subjectivity returned in the democratized form of the politics of resistance.

But Foucault's updating Nietzsche remained insufficient from the standpoint of the radical democratic project. While generating a politics of everyday life, its center of gravity was, in fact, ethical rather than political. Its foremost concern is to resist the imposition of identities on groups and individuals. And for this reason the radical democrats have turned to Arendt's expressly political reformulation of Nietzsche's agonism.

First, they are attracted by the fact that Arendt (1958) gives a central place to action in her conception of the political. This sets Arendt at odds with the liberal focus on institutions, procedures, interests, and negative freedom, the freedom from politics (see Barber, 1984). Like Nietzsche, she affirms the initiatory dimension of all genuine action, and the contingency of human affairs (Arendt, 1968b: 151; 1958: 177; 1963: 21). Unlike Nietzsche, however, she insists action properly occurs only in public sphere characterized by relations of equality. Citing

Greek *polis*, she identifies freedom with (political) equality. (Arendt, 1963: 30-31).

Human plurality – the existence of diverse equals – is for her the *sine qua non* of political action. Indeed, all genuinely political action is, in fact, an acting together (Arendt, 1958: 188-189). *Contra* Nietzsche, rulership signals the end of political action, its dissolution into the instrumental and fundamentally unfree activity of command and obedience.

Second, radical democrats are attracted by Arendt's endorsement of the agonal spirit, which she sees as animating all genuine political action. Like Nietzsche, Arendt turns to Greek in order to isolate the passion for "greatness" as the specially political action. But while Nietzsche's agonistic stance culminates in a heroic individualism, Arendt's expressly political version combines with what she calls "revolutionary spirit" (Arendt, 1963: 221) and the spirit of resistance (Arendt, 1963, chap. 6, 1968b, Preface). Her examples are not great statesmen, but the spontaneous heroic action manifest in the American Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, the 1905 Russian Revolution, the French Resistance during World War II, and the Hungarian revolt of 1956. This makes it possible and plausible for contemporary agonists to assimilate her to "an activist, democratic politics of contest, resistance, and amendment" (Honig, 1993: 77).

Third, radical democrats are attracted by the fact that Arendt draws out the specifically political consequence of Nietzsche's anti-foundationalism, showing how the will to an extrapolitical ground in the modern age can only be nihilistic, anti-political, and antidemocratic. The will to find a transcendent ground for politics is a will to escape the irreducible relativity of human agreements and opinions. It is the will to discover an immovable authority which will put an end to the debate and contestation that is democratic politics. Arendt gives Nietzsche a political and democratic twist by arguing for a groundless politics of "opinion" (Arendt, 1968b: 233). What makes Arendt's conception of an agonistic public sphere so attractive to radical democrats is that the authoritativeness of the basic institutions are determined by the clash of conflicting interpretations. Therefore, the public sphere is, above all, an institutionally articulated site of perpetual debate and contestation.

This is not to say, however, that radical democrats believe that Arendt succeeds in stripping agonism of its aristocratic trapping. On the contrary, Sheldon Wolin (1994), Connolly (1998) and Honig (1993) take her to task for maintaining distinctions which they view as either unjustifiably elitist or essentialist. Thus, Wolin attacks Arendt's distinction between the social and the political, charging

that her desire for a “pure politics” unsoiled by economic concerns and the needs of the “masses” is, at base, deeply antidemocratic. An Arendtian politics of memorable deeds performed by virtuosic actors is, according to Wolin, scarcely compatible with democratic politics. Because the primary thrust of democratic politics is to “extend the broad egalitarianism of ordinary lives into public life” (Wolin, S. 1994: 290). Similarly, Conolly charges her with maintaining a “political purism” parallel to Kant’s moral purism. Because it purges “the social question and body” from the public realm. The result is “bleached and aristocratic” version of plurality to deprive important “dimensions of diversity which might otherwise enrich and fortify it” (Conolly, 1998: 170).

From a somewhat different angle, Honig attacks Arendt’s distinction between public and private, which she views as both arbitrary and self-defending (Honig, 1993: 118-123, see Pitkin, 1994). Arendt’s conception of the public sphere, according to Honig, overly formalistic. It is also deeply conservative insofar as it naturalizes the public/ private distinction. It thereby seals off inherited race, class, gender, and ethnic identities from contest and reformulation. While Wolin sees Arendt’s conception of agonistic action as entailing the social/ political distinction, Honig suggests that action as theorized by Arendt is essentially destabilizing,

boundless, and unpredictable.

The four main projects occupying the Hannah Arendt renaissance described above, all draw heavily upon Arendt's theory of action in their attempt to come to grips with the ills of modern politics. Their criticism and goals are diverse, but the former three readings of Arendt that they sketch are remarkably similar. They locate Arendt's work within the Aristotelian horizon viewing it as "the systematic renewal of the Aristotelian concept of praxis" (Habermas, 1983: 174). The latter reading, on the other hand, locates Arendt's work within the Nietzschean horizon.

The Aristotelian reading has transformed into a more Kantian reading of her political theory. The hope is that Kant –after Aristotle, the greatest traditional influence upon Arendt – provides an alternative way of reading Arendt to put Arendt's Nietzschean sensibility in perspective. Benhabib and Habermas have explored this vein, assimilating Arendt to a broadly modernist or universalist position by emphasizing the deliberative elements of her theories of action and judgement over the performative and agonistic ones (Benhabib, 1992b; Habermas, 1983).¹ The Nietzschean reading, on the other hand, has attempted to assimilate Arendt to a broadly postmodernist position, seeing her as a postmodernist *avant la*

¹ Benhabib (2003) characterizes Arendt as a "reluctant" modernist in her book of the same name.

lettre. According to Villa, for example, Arendt becomes a “high modernist” who insists “on politics for the sake of politic” (Villa, 1996: 55).²

Bearing this theoretical current in mind, I shall begin with methodological observations to clarify Arendt’s philosophical intentions. I shall then explicate Arendt’s critique of modernity to show how she has sharpened her critical insight into modern society and its discontent.

2. The Fragmentary Historiography

Arendt did not want to build a system of political philosophy, and did not engage in methodological reflections. On the infrequent occasions when she made statements about her approach to her work she emphasized its tentativeness and flexibility (Arendt, 1979: 338). More importantly, Arendt is not concerned to establish some inevitable continuity between the past and the present that compels us to see what happens as what had to happen. She objects to this trap of historical understanding and maintains that the future is radically underdetermined, and that more importantly, to place the present in inevitable continuity with the past will result in a failure to recognize the novelty of what has taken place.

² From a different angle, a number of recent interpretations have attempted to push Arendt’s thought toward a more postmodern bent. Isaac (1992, 227-259), for example, has explored Arendt’s affinities with Albert Camus in relation to postmodern politics. But he has indicated his disagreement with any reading of Arendt in terms of “agonistic democracy” (1992: 229). See also

As Arendt understands it, there is a dilemma in historiography. Historiography originates with the human desire to overcome oblivion and nothingness. It is the attempt to save, in the face of the frailty of human affairs and the inescapability of death, something “which is even more than remembrance” (Arendt, 1994: 402). Although the structure of traditional historiography described as it is in chronological sequence, serves to “preserve” what has happened by making it seem inevitable, necessary and justifiable, for Arendt, the first dilemma posed by the historiography of totalitarianism was the impulse to destroy rather than to preserve: “Thus my first problem was how to write historically about something – totalitarianism – which I did not want to conserve but on the contrary felt engaged to destroy” (Arendt, 1994: 402). Her response to this dilemma was the same as Walter Benjamin’s: to break the chain of narrative continuity, to shatter chronology as the natural structure of narrative, to stress fragmentariness, historical dead ends, failures, and ruptures (Arendt, 1968a: 193-206). This method of fragmentary historiography does justice to the memory of the dead by the telling the story of history in terms of their failed hopes and efforts. But also it is a way of preserving the past without being enslaved by it, in particular without

Honig (1991), ‘Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding Republic’.

having one's historical imagination suffocated by argument of historical necessity.

Relating historical understanding to imagination, Arendt said: "Understanding is closely related to that faculty of imagination which Kant called *Einbildungskraft* and which has nothing in common with fictional ability. The spiritual exercises are exercises of imagination and they may be more relevant to method in the historical sciences than academic training realizes" (Arendt, 1994: 404).

Arendt understands that historical understanding is exercises in reproductive imagination and that one has to recreate from the evidence a new perspective. Since historical understanding cannot be the mere reproduction of the standpoint of the past historical actors, and to pretend to be objective only serves to disguise the standpoint of the narrator or the historian. That is, historical understanding is perspectival in nature, and only reveals its plurality in narrative forms.

Arendt's work has been seen as primarily an exercise in remembrance, as the recovery of traditional concepts and the recollection of political events. However, in my reading, the Arendtian term 'remembrance' has a double meaning. One is the brief memory that comes afterwards and is the opposite of oblivion. The other is the absolute memory, beyond the brief memory, which aims to intensify our sense of "the gap between past and future" (Arendt, 1968b: 13). This radical form

of remembrance brings the fragmented past and the future into a whole at the present time, since it is endlessly forgotten and reconstituted. Then, all historical writing is implicitly a history of the present. According to Deleuze:

Memory is the real name of the relation to oneself, or the affect on self by self. According to Kant, time was the form in which the mind affected itself, just as space was the form in which the mind was affected by something else: time was therefore 'auto-affection' and made up the essential structure of subjectivity. But time as subject...is called memory. Not that brief memory that...is opposite of forgetting, but the 'absolute memory' which doubles the present...and is one with forgetting...Time...forces every present into forgetting, but preserves the whole of the past within [the absolute] memory. Forgetting is the impossibility of return, and [the absolute] memory is the necessity of renewal (Deleuze, 1988: 107-108).

Only if we are sensitive to the specific twist she gives this term, then, Arendt's historiography can be seen as part of a larger project of 'remembrance'. 'Remembrance' as Arendt practices it, does not just seek to revive concepts or events, but to "distill from them anew their original spirit", to arrive at the "underlying phenomenal reality" concealed by such "empty shells" (Arendt,

1968b: 15). The irreparable break in tradition requires, in Walter Benjamin's phrase, "a tiger's leap into the past" (Benjamin, 1999: 253). This fragmentary approach eschews the comfort to be gained by recasting the tradition in the form of dialogue, such as Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1975). It takes the gap or break in tradition as its starting point, as the "non-time-space" (Arendt, 1968b: 13), which is, in Arendt's view, the contemporary conditions of thought.

Arendt faced up this historical dilemma when reflecting upon totalitarianism, but this method of writing history in defiance of the traditional canons is also what guided her controversial account of the Eichmann trial as well as her account of the French and American Revolution. Furthermore, this fragmentary historiography is also the unifying thread of Arendt's political and philosophical analyses from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to the alternative archaeology of modernity in *The Human Condition* and to *The Life of the Mind* on 'thinking'. In the closing statements of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt wrote:

I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today. Such dismantling is possible only on the assumption that the thread of tradition is

broken and that we shall not be able to renew it. Historically speaking, what actually has broken down is the Roman trinity that for thousands of years united religion, authority, and tradition... What has been lost is the continuity of the past as it seemed to be handed down from generation to generation, developing in the process its own consistency... What you then are left with is still the past, but a fragmented past, which has lost its certainty of evaluation (Arendt, 1971: 212).

The fragmentation of the past and the loss of its relevance for the present have created gap between past and future. For a very long time this gap was bridged by tradition, which “selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is” (Arendt, 1968b: 5). But with the breakdown of tradition we must move within this gap without any secure sense of direction, without the help of any established principle. Each new generation “must discover and ploddingly pave it anew” (Arendt, 1968b: 13), since no precedent, no testament, no authoritative instructions have been bequeathed to us from tradition. In this situation, where, as Arendt says, “without testament...without tradition” (Arendt, 1968b: 5), her thinking seeks to preserve the meaning of the past outside the framework of any tradition. The break in our

tradition has, in fact, become complete after the terrible events of the twentieth century and the triumph of totalitarian movements in East and West. In the form of Stalinism and Fascism, totalitarianism has exploded the established categories of political thought and the accepted standard of moral judgement, and has thereby broken the continuity of our history. These events have brought us to the point where, in Arendt's words:

We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain (Arendt, 1951: ix).

Faced with the reality of the Holocaust, we cannot go back to traditional concepts and values, so as to explain the unprecedented by means of precedents or understand the monstrous by means of the familiar. "Comprehension", Arendt says, "does not mean denying the outrageous...It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither

denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be” (Arendt, 1951: viii).

The burden of our time must, therefore, be faced without the aid of tradition, or, as Arendt once declared, “without a bannister” (Arendt, 1979: 336). Our inheritance has been dissolved under the impact of modern political events, and the task now is to re-establish the meaning of the past outside the framework of any tradition, since none has retained its original validity. It is the past, then not tradition that Arendt attempts to redeem from the rupture in modern time-consciousness. Only through such a redemption of the past, we can hope to restore meaning to our lives and throw some light on the contemporary situation. In Arendt’s words:

The undeniable loss of tradition in the modern world does not all entail a loss of the past, for tradition and past are not the same, as the believers in tradition on one side and the believers in progress on the other would have us believe – whereby it makes little difference that the former deplore this state of affairs while the latter extend their congratulations. With the loss of tradition we have lost the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but this thread was also the chain fettering each successive generation to a

predetermined aspect of the past. It could be that only now will the past open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet had ears to hear. But it cannot be denied that without a securely anchored tradition...the whole dimension of the past has also been endangered. We are in danger of forgetting, and such an oblivion...would mean that, humanly speaking, we would deprive ourselves of one dimension, the dimension of depth in human existence. For memory and depth are the same, or rather, depth cannot be reached by man except through remembrance (Arendt, 1968b: 94).

This exercise in remembrance, without the aid of tradition, embodying a continuity between past and present now irrevocably lost, is compared by Arendt to the activity of the pearl diver who brings to the surface the pearls and corals hidden in the depths of the sea. Just as the pearl diver recovers these treasures by extracting them forcibly from their surroundings, so anamnestic thinking delves into the depths of the past, not to resuscitate it the way it was or to glorify past ages, but to recover and save from forgetfulness those fragments that are still able to illuminate our situation. Arendt's indebtedness to Benjamin's notion of "profane illumination" is made clear in the following passage:

Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the

bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths and to carry them to the surface, this thinking [of Benjamin] delves into the depths of the past – but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which it sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things “suffer a sea-change” and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living – as “thought fragments,” as something “rich and strange,” and perhaps as everlasting Urphänomene (Arendt, 1968a: 205-206).

For Arendt, these thought fragments have to be preserved against the collapse of tradition and against the obliteration of memory. In her view, it is no longer possible, after the breakdown of tradition, to save the past as a whole. We are faced, rather, with the task of redeeming from oblivion those elements of the past that are relevant to our present. To re-establish a linkage with the past is not, for Arendt, an antiquarian exercise. On the contrary, without the critical

reappropriation of the past our temporal horizon becomes disrupted, our experience precarious, and our identity less and less secure. In Arendt's view, therefore, it is necessary to redeem from the past those moments worth preserving, to save those fragments from the past treasures that are significant for us. Only by means of this selective reappropriation we can discover the past anew, endow it the source of inspiration for a future yet to come.

Arendt's hermeneutic strategy is also indebted to Heidegger's deconstruction of Western metaphysics, the uncovering and subsequent displacement of our philosophical categories by a mode of thinking that identifies and recovers their ontological determinations (see Bakan, 1985: 224-247; 1987: 71-98). Heidegger called this mode of thinking a "destruction" (Heidegger, 1962: 44), since in order to recover the original meaning of our categories we had to violence to the philosophical tradition in which they were embedded; the Western metaphysical tradition, in his view, no longer to be trusted as a valid source of insight (see Heidegger, 1962: 43-44). In an essay written on the occasion of Heidegger's eightieth birthday, Arendt claimed that Heidegger's thinking has a peculiar "digging quality":

He penetrates to the depths, but not to discover, let alone bring to light, some

ultimate, secure foundations which one could say had been undiscovered earlier in this manner. Rather, he persistently remains there, ungrounded, in order to lay down pathways and fix “trail marks”...On this deep plane, dug up and cleared, as it were, by his own thinking, Heidegger has laid down a vast network of thought-paths; and this single immediate result...is that he has caused the edifice of traditional metaphysics...to collapse, just as underground tunnels and subversing burrowings cause the collapse of structures whose foundations are not deeply enough secured (Arendt, 1978a: 296).

The undermining of the categories of the Western metaphysical tradition is not, however, a purely destructive enterprise. As Heidegger himself remarked, the aim is to “stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition” by recovering those “primordial experiences” out of which it originated (Heidegger, 1962: 44). Once liberated from the artificial and distorting incrustations of the tradition, the original meaning of our metaphysical categories could be discovered anew. It is in this redemptive sense that we must do violence to the tradition, so as to recover for the present the forgotten phenomenon. Arendt herself made an interesting comparison between Heidegger and Benjamin on this point: “Without realizing it, Benjamin actually had more in common with Heidegger’s remarkable sense for

living bones that had sea-changed into pearls and coral, and as such could be saved and lifted into the present only by doing violence to their context in interpreting them with “the ‘deadly impact’ of new thoughts, than he did with the dialectical subtleties of his Marxist friends” (Arendt, 1968a: 201).

The “deadly impact” of new thoughts can thus re-establish our links with the past in fresh and novel ways, endowing it with an authority that issues from a critical reappropriation of its meaning. As Arendt put, “The cultural treasures of the past, believed to be dead, are being made to speak, in the course of which it turns out that they propose things altogether different from the familiar, worn-out trivialities they had been presumed to say” (Arendt, 1978a: 295).

As we shall see shortly, Arendt’s writings on modernity have a disturbing capacity to unsettle our fixed categories, to shake our inherited conceptual habits, and to let us see phenomena in a new light. And what enables her to do this is the loss of tradition, the loss of the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but which also constrained our understanding of it. Arendt herself maintains that only after the rupture introduced by modernity the past can “open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet had ears to hear” (Arendt, 1968b: 94). Indeed, the loss of authority in the modern age may

signal “the great chance to look upon the past with eyes undistorted by any tradition, with a directness which has disappeared from Occidental reading and hearing ever since Roman civilization submitted to the authority of Greek thought” (Arendt, 1968b: 28-9).³

It is possible to see that Arendt’s claims are, to some extent, hermeneutically naïve. To look upon the past with eyes undistorted by any tradition, or in Arendt’s words, “to read past authors as though nobody had ever read them before” (1968b: 204), goes against the hermeneutic principle that we are always already situated in a tradition, so that our appreciation of the past is always mediated by our present standpoint, with its forestructure of understanding and prejudgments. The understanding and reappropriation of the past can, in this view, be achieved only by an effective historical consciousness that links past and present (or text and interpreter), in what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons”. Any direct, unmediated return to the past would be excluded on methodological and ontological grounds (Gadamer, 1975). Arendt’s intent, however, is not to do away with the notion of tradition *per se*, but to make us aware that the extant traditions of thought and

³ Also see, Arendt, 1968b: 204.

“The task of preserving the past without the help of tradition, and often even against traditional standards and interpretations, is the same for the whole Western Civilization. Intellectually, though not socially, America and Europe are in the same situation: the thread of tradition is broken, and we must discover the past for ourselves – that is, read its authors as though nobody had ever read them before”.

interpretation have been dissolved under the impact of the tragic events of the twentieth century, so that we are left in the unprecedented situation of having to reconstitute our hermeneutic standpoint.⁴

Therefore I argue that Arendt's return to the original experience of the Greek *polis* in *The Human Condition* represents an attempt to break the fetters of a worn-out tradition and to rediscover a past over which tradition has no longer a claim. Against tradition Arendt sets the criterion of genuineness, against the authoritative, that which is forgotten, concealed, or displaced at the margins of history.⁵ Only in this way the past can be made meaningful again, provide sources of illumination for the present, and yield its treasures to those who search for them with "new

⁴ In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt provides some insights to show how this standpoint could be reconstituted. In her view, the activity of thought and the exercise of judgement can re-establish a link between the past and the future, the former by operating in the *nunc stans* of the present, the latter by reconciling us to time and, retrospectively, to tragedy.

"It [the thought train] remains bound to and is rooted in the present – an entirely human present though it is fully actualized only in the thinking process and last no longer than this process lasts. It is the quite of the Now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man; it is somehow, to change the metaphor, the quiet in the center of a storm... In this gap between past and future, we find our place in time we think, that is, when we are sufficiently removed from past and future to be relied on to find out their meaning, to assume the position of "umpire", of arbiter and judge over the manifold, never-ending affairs of human existence in the world, never arriving at a final solution to their riddles but ready with ever-new answers to the question of what it may be all about... The gap [between past and future] ... as a *nunc stans*, the "standing now" ... is not a historical datum; it seems to be coeval with the existence of man on earth. Using a different metaphor, we call it the region of the spirit, but it is perhaps rather the path paced by thinking, the small inconspicuous track of non-time beaten by the activity of thought within the time-space given the natal and mortal men. Following that course, the thought-trains, remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they tough from the ruin of historical and biographical time. This small non-time space in the very heart of time ... cannot be inherited and handed down by tradition" (Arendt, 1971: 209-210). See, Arendt, 1968b: 262; 1982.

⁵ Genuineness is established by the "deadly impact of new thoughts" which liberate phenomena from the incrustation of tradition. The lost or forgotten treasures are redeemed by the saving power of remembrance and by the retrospective judgement of the historian. See Arendt, 1968a: 198-201; 1971:216; 1982: 77; Luban, 1994.

thoughts” and saving acts of remembrance.

3. The Critique of Modernity

The Human Condition presents Arendt’s phenomenology of human activity. This analysis, however, is interwoven with a narrative about the decline of action and the public realm throughout the modern age. “The purpose of the historical analysis”, she tells us, “is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self” (Arendt, 1958: 6). The story she unfolds is not an optimistic one. The modern “rise of the social” promotes the absorption of the public realm by household concerns, while *homo faber*’s utilitarianism result in “the instrumentalization of the whole world and the earth” (Arendt, 1958: 157). In addition, the developments of modern science provoke the tendency to view the earth, which Arendt calls “the very quintessence of the human condition” (Arendt, 1958:2), as merely one more object, and technological automation leads to the transformation of work into a form of labor. The overall result is pervasive and radical world alienation.

Worldlessness, a loss of the world, is “always a form of barbarism” (Arendt, 1968a: 13), and the forces released by modernity are, according to Arendt, directly responsible for this state of affairs. In other words, the forces of capitalist

expropriation and accumulation of wealth, of modern science, and of technology have contributed intensively to the undermining of the world, then eventually to an alienation from the world.

For Arendt, the modern project of technological mastery has an ironic outcome. Freedom is not enhanced by the extension of control and the overcoming of necessity. Rather, it is gradually eliminated as it loses its place in the world. In this respect, Arendt seems very much on the terrain of the Frankfurt School. Her critical thrust, however, is different from that of Adorno and Horkheimer. While they emphasize the domination of nature and the ways it gets back on a subject who is also nature (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972: 54), Arendt stresses the fact that technology assimilates human existence to the natural. The problem is not merely the modern will to expunge otherness and subjugate nature. What concerns Arendt most is not the natural basis of the self but the “in-between” (Arendt, 1958: 52) of the world, the integrity of the world that stands between humanity and nature.

Moreover, Arendt believes that modernity rebels “against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere” (Arendt, 1958: 2-3). It is driven by a resentment of finitude and limitation, that is, by the desire to exchange the human

condition as a given for “something he has made himself” (Arendt, 1958: 3).

From the perspective of late modernity, the world seems to be a prison.

Technology presents itself as the means by which this prison can be removed.

However, technology reveals itself to be something much more than a means. It is a world-destroying power that makes the category of means and ends irrelevant through its focus on process.

The Human Condition provides an account of the modern project that focuses on “the decay of... [the] public realm” promoted by the energies of modernity. The decline of the public realm, of the world, in the modern age raises the possibility that “the survival of the species” will be secured at the cost of “humanity of extinction” (Arendt, 1958: 46), that is, at the cost of extinguishing the capacity for action that makes us human. The paradoxical logic of modern existential rebel is that “the modern age” that “began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity” may in fact end “in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known” (Arendt, 1958: 322).

In what follows, I shall examine Arendt’s critique of modernity in light of this fear. Leading themes of her critique include world alienation, earth alienation, the victory of *animal laborans*, the rise of the social.

World Alienation

The world and its correlative condition, worldliness, are part of what Arendt considered to be the human condition; In contradiction to nature, the world is the artificial environment of humanly created objects, institutions, and settings that provide us with an abode upon this earth, with a shelter from the natural elements, and in so far as it is relatively stable and permanent, with a sense of belonging, of being at home with our surroundings.

What happens then when this world is lost, when we find ourselves in that condition that Arendt calls “world alienation”? The first and most important consequence is that we lose our sense of being at home in the world and, with that, our identity, our sense of reality, and the possibility of endowing our existence with meaning (Arendt, 1958: 248-257). Kateb (1984: 158) has claimed that Arendt displays here a religious commitment to the notion that we exist to be at home in the world and that our identity depends on it. However valid, this claim must be complemented by another, namely, that in order to live meaningful lives our human environment must present certain features (e.g. relative familiarity, stability, permanence) that enable our expectations to be satisfied in a non-random manner. The fact that our sense of belonging, of rootedness, and of self may have

religious underpinnings does not therefore invalidate certain of our existential predicaments.

Another consequence of the condition of world alienation is that, lacking a world in common, the individual is thrown back upon himself, into the private sphere of introspection. Moreover, being thrown back upon ourselves means also losing ourselves, losing the faith in our senses and ultimately, in our reason, a condition well be defined as self-alienation. The result is that, alienated from ourselves and from others, we become doubtful of our experience and of the reality of the world (Arendt, 1958: 273-284). Such a situation is conducive, in Arendt eyes, to mass manipulation and totalitarian indoctrination, if only as a way of relieving individuals of their anxiety and their sense of isolation.

These extreme developments are also encouraged by another phenomenon arising from world alienation: the restriction or elimination of the public sphere, of the sphere of appearances, where the words and deeds of individuals can be preserved for posterity and identity of each disclosed and sustained. Being at home in the world is, in fact, one of the preconditions for the constitution of a public realm; with the loss of the world the framework for public activities can never come into being. What remains in common is then only the bare fact of life, the natural life-

cycle of the human species governed by sheer animal needs. Having lost the world, we are left with only nature in common.

Arendt identifies two main causes of world alienation: expropriation and wealth accumulation. Expropriation is a process that started with the Reformation and the concomitant separation of church and state. All stable forms of landed property, beginning with church property, were eliminated and replaced with an ever-increasing accumulation of social wealth. This, in turn, brought into existence a laboring class directly compelled by life's necessities, simulated an enormous increase of productivity, and generated more expropriation and further wealth accumulation. As she describes it:

Expropriation, the deprivation for certain groups of their place in the world and their naked exposure to the exigencies of life, created both the original accumulation of wealth and the possibility of transforming this wealth into capital through labor. These together constituted the conditions for the rise of a capitalist economy...What distinguishes this development at the beginning of the modern age from similar occurrence in the past is that expropriation and wealth accumulation did not simply result in new property or lead to a new redistribution of wealth, but were fed back into the process to generate further

expropriations, greater productivity, and more appropriation (Arendt, 1958: 254-255).

This remorseless dynamic of economic growth, which Arendt compares to a natural process in its compulsion and inexhaustibility, destroys all worldly stability and durability; everything becomes an object of production and consumption, of acquisition and exchange, and individuals are forced to concentrate on their purely biological needs, that is, on laboring to produce their condition of existence on an ever-expanding scale. All values attached the world – permanence, stability, durability – are sacrificed in favor of the values of labor – life, productivity, and abundance. The introduction of automation would only make matters worse, since “the rhythm of machines would magnify and intensify the natural rhythm of life enormously, but it would not change, only make more deadly, life’s chief character with respect to the world, which is to wear down durability” (Arendt, 1958: 132).

Arendt then sketches the later phases of this process of expropriation and wealth accumulation: having started with the uprooting of people from their land and their transformation into a class of wage-laborers, it then substituted membership in a social class and identity with the nation-state for their previous allegiances.

But with the decline of the nation-state and the integration of the world economy we have reached a stage where mankind as a whole replaces nationally bound societies, and the earth replaces the limited state territories. Far from representing a progressive development, this elimination of cultural specification in favor of a global and undifferentiated society is viewed with apprehension by Arendt, since in her view “men cannot become citizens of the world as they are citizens of their countries, and social men cannot own collectively as family and household men own their private property” (Arendt, 1958: 257).⁶

Earth Alienation

“Earth Alienation” represents an intensification of the trends identified with world alienation. It was partly induced by the discovery of America and the subsequent exploration of the whole earth, culminating in the invention of the airplane and in the conquest of space. This had the unintended effect of making the earth seem much smaller, to the point where modern man could see it as a mere ball. That is, man could detach himself and view the earth from a point in space. The more proximate cause, however, was the invention of the telescope. Beside destroying

⁶ It is important to remember that for Arendt property is opposed to wealth, and is thus not to be identified with the conventional meaning of the term. For her, property stands for location, for a privately held place. It is a privately owned share of a common world, the necessary counterpart to the public realm, enabling individuals to find refuge and shelter from the glare and the activity of the public sphere. In her view, without a proper establishment and protection of this private space

man's faith in the evidence of the senses, it established an Archimedean standpoint from which the earth could be viewed as part of an infinite universe. This cosmic standpoint not only displaced the geocentric worldview but enabled man to view the universe, including the earth, as subject to the same universe laws, so that nothing occurring in earthy nature was viewed any longer as a mere earthy happening. It also enabled a tremendous expansion in knowledge and mastery over nature, culminating in the ability of contemporary science to introduce cosmic processes into the earth – such as the splitting of the atom – and, in so doing, to endanger the survival not only of the human species but of the earth itself. In Arendt's view, then, while world alienation determined the course of modern society, earth alienation has been the hallmark of modern science. But as she notes: "Compared with the earth alienation underlying the whole development of natural science in the modern age, the withdrawal from terrestrial proximity contained in the discovery of the globe as a whole and the world alienation produced in the twofold process of expropriation and wealth accumulation are of minor significance" (Arendt, 1958: 264).

Earth alienation epitomizes the desire to escape from the confines of the earth:

there can be no free public realm (Arendt, 1957: 58-67).

spurred by modern science and technology, we have searched for ways to overcome our earth-bound, and thus limited, condition by setting out on the exploration of space, by attempting to recreate life under laboratory conditions, and by trying to extend our given-life-span. In doing this, we seem to be driven by “a rebellion against human existence” (Arendt, 1958: 2) which we wish to exchange for something we have made entirely by ourselves. Earth alienation represents thus, in the helpful formulation of Kateb, a resentment against the human condition (Kateb, 1984: 162). The paradox of this resentment, however, is that it will not lead to liberation, a freedom from earthly constraints. Rather, it will only lead us back to the prison of our minds, since we will be able to know only those patterns that we ourselves have created. Modern science and technology thus make it more and more unlikely “that man will encounter anything in the world around him that is not man-made and hence is not, in the last analysis, he himself in a different disguise” (Arendt, 1968b: 277). Moreover, the conquest of space can only lead to an infinite regress, because once we have reached the Archimedean point with respect to the earth, we would need “a new Archimedean point and so on *ad infinitum*. In other words, man can only get lost in the immensity of the universe, for the only true Archimedean point would be the

absolute void behind the universe” (Arendt, 1968b: 278).

The Hierarchy of Human Activities and the Victory of *Animal Laborans*

Arendt claims that in the tradition of Western philosophy, starting with Plato, there occurred a shift away from the activities connected with political life, with action and the striving for earthly immortality, in favor of the silent contemplation of eternal truths. For Arendt, in fact, our tradition of political philosophy was founded in explicit opposition to the *polis* and its activities, with the philosopher turning away from politics and then returning to it in order to impose his alien standards upon human affairs (Arendt, 1968b: 17-18; 1958: 14-17). This debasement of the values of the *vita activa*, and especially of political action, was continued by the Christian tradition, in so far as it gave a religious sanction to the activity of contemplation and stressed the sinfulness of our worldly activities. The announcement by Christianity, the belief in the immortality of the soul and in a world beyond this one, had fateful consequences for the esteem and dignity of politics. Politics was now no longer seen as the sphere where individuals could perform noble deeds, reach agreement on matters of mutual concern, and achieve a measure of justice; it became, instead, the instrument for checking and controlling men’s sinful nature, for punishing their evil conduct, and for looking

after their earthly necessities. As Arendt puts it: “Political activity, which up to then had derived its greatest inspiration from the aspiration toward worldly immorality, now sank to the low level of an activity subject to necessity, destined to remedy the consequences of human sinfulness, on one hand, and to cater to the legitimate wants and interests of earthly life, on the other” (Arendt, 1958: 314).

What Platonism and Christianity achieved, then, was an elevation of the values and concerns associated with the *vita contemplativa* and a corresponding denigration of those associated with the *vita activa*. Henceforth all the values of the *vita activa* had to serve and be justified in terms of the values of the *vita contemplativa*.

With the emergence of modernity we witness a reversal of this hierarchy, although such reversal was not straightforward. What it affected, in fact, was not the relation of contemplation and action, but that of thinking and making, of thought and fabrication. Contemplation, in the original sense of silently beholding the truth, was altogether eliminated, since it was associated with a passive state of the mind, with the stillness required for the revelation or apprehension of truth. Thinking, on the other hand, was associated with a highly active state, with the engagement of the mind with itself, the inner dialogue between me and myself.

Thus, when, in Bacon's well-known formulation, science became the acquisition of power over nature, it was thinking, and not contemplation, that became the servant of making. And it became the servant of making because with the scientific revolution it became evident that our claim to knowledge was restricted to what we ourselves could produce with our tools and instruments (e.g., through the setting up of artificial experiments, through the invention of the telescope).

According to Arendt, the principle that we could only know what we ourselves had produced was summed up in Vico's statement that truth was a product of making. Vico's claim, to be sure, was restricted to history, since only history could be "made" by man. She argued, however, that the principle itself was already established at the time of the discoveries of Galileo. Galileo's telescope had demonstrated that merely contemplating the heavens in the belief that truth would disclose itself was no longer an adequate way to knowledge. Knowledge was arrived at not through contemplation or passive observation, but through making and fabricating. As she puts it, "it was not reason but a man-made instrument, the telescope, which actually changed the physical world-view; it was not contemplation, observation, and speculation which led to the new knowledge, but the active stepping in of *homo faber*, of making and fabricating" (Arendt, 1957:

274). Thus the reversal in the modern age elevated *homo faber* to the position previously enjoyed by contemplation, and channeled all human activities into the pursuit of knowledge through making.

Furthermore, the knowledge was no longer concerned with the why or the what of phenomena, with the cause or the substance of things, but only with the how, that is, with the processes of generation and development. To know something meant to know how it came into beings and to be able to reproduce its processes artificially. One of the reasons for this shift, in Arendt's view, was that "the scientist made only in order to know, not in order to produce things, and the product was a mere by-product, a side-effect" (Arendt, 1958: 297). The result was that in the place of the concept of Being we now find the concept of Process: nature itself became a process governed by immutable laws, and it was not long before history too was viewed in the same light. In Arendt's words, "processes, therefore, and not ideas, the models and shapes of the things to be, become the guide of the making and fabricating activities of *homo faber* in the modern age" (Arendt, 1958: 300). One of the key concepts of physical science, that of development, was in fact taken up by the historical sciences (Arendt, 1958; 296).

For Arendt, then, the break with contemplation was finally consummated "not

with the elevation of man the maker to the position formerly held by man the contemplator, but with the introduction of the concept of process into making” (Arendt, 1958: 301). This break had fateful consequences, insofar as it led to the final reversal, namely, the elevation of labor to the highest position in the hierarchical order of the *vita activa*, at the expense of both fabrication (*poiesis*) and action (*praxis*). Man as *animal laborans* now became the standard against which *homo faber* and man as *zoon politikon* were assessed and found wanting. And what permitted this to happen was the focus of the concept of process with the emergence of modernity. As Arendt points out:

It deprived man as maker and builder of those fixed and permanent standards and measurements which, prior to the modern age, have always served him as guides for his doing and criteria for his judgement...For the mentality of modern man, as it was determined by the development of modern science and the concomitant unfolding of modern philosophy, it was at least as decisive that man began to consider himself part and parcel of the two superhuman, all-encompassing processes of nature and history, both of which seemed doomed to an infinite progress without ever reaching any inherent *telos* or approaching any preordained idea (Arendt, 1958: 307).

Submerged in the overall process of nature and later, with the rise of the historical sciences, of history, man lost all contact with the permanent and durable features of the world, and with the objects and standards that previously governed his activities. Arendt finds an example of this loss in the transformation of the principle of utility, characteristic of the worldview of *homo faber*, into Bentham's principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number (Arendt, 1958: 308). In the principle of greatest happiness all worldly values are replaced by the subjective sensations of pleasure and pain, which are geared exclusively to the promotion of life and the survival of the species. Life, then, and not the world, became the highest good of man, and all activities previously directed at the construction of a human world and at the establishment of public spaces where speech and action could flourish, were reduced to the single and monotonous activity of labor.

Arendt maintains that the Christian emphasis on the sacredness of life partly responsible for the obliteration of the ancient distinctions within the *vita activa*, since it viewed labor, work, and action as equally subject to the necessities of life (Arendt, 1958; 316). In this respect, Christianity helped to free labor from the contempt in antiquity, paving the way for its revaluation and eventual triumph in

the modern age. But as we saw, the impact of modern science and the loss of trust in the senses were also contributing factors in the emergence of the worldview of *animal laborans*, insofar as both forced man to concentrate on processes as found in nature or in the internal workings of the mind. The overall result was to make labor, the endless repetitive cycle of man's metabolism with nature, the highest of man's capacities, and to elevate life, or the preservation of our biological species, into the highest value. In Arendt's word: "What was left was a "natural force", the force of the life process itself, to which all men and all human activities were equally submitted and whose only aim, if it had an aim at all, was survival of the animal species man. None of the higher capacities of man was any longer necessary to connect individual life with the life of the species; individual life became part of the life process, and to labor, to assure the continuity of one's own life and the life of his family, was all that was needed" (Arendt, 1958: 321).

A world whose chief values are dictated by labor is a world whose private activities, previously enclosed in the sphere of the household (*oikos*), have taken over the public realm and turned it into the oxymoron, i.e., "public household". In this respect, the victory of *animal laborans* has carried forward the obliteration of the distinction between the public and the private that started in the eighteenth

century with the rise of the social. It has enabled the activities connected to the necessities of life to appear in public and therefore the public (the polity) has become a function of the private (the economy). As Arendt puts it, “with the rise of society, that is, the rise of “the household” (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a “collective” concern” (Arendt, 1958: 33). This is indeed one of the major objections of Arendt against the modern age, since the private’s exclusive preoccupation with economic matters has resulted in the disappearance of the public sphere, the creation of a society of job-holders, the imposition of conformity and isolation, the enforcement of predictable behavior, and the establishment of bureaucratic forms of government. All these phenomena are connected, in Arendt’s view, to the rise of society, or more precisely, to its most extreme development, mass society.

The Rise of the Social and the Rule by Nobody

We know that the contradiction between private and political, typical of the initial stages of the modern age, has been a temporary phenomenon which introduced the utter extinction of the very difference between the private and public realms, the submersion of both in the sphere of the social (Arendt, 1958:

69).

Both the private and the public realm suffer from the threat of extinction; in the case of the former, it would mean the destruction of a private space in which to find comfort and rest from the activities of work, labor, and action; it would also mean the loss of initiative that springs from necessity and the blurring of the distinction between freedom and necessity. In the case of the latter, it would mean the elimination of a public space of appearance where our identities are revealed, our deeds remembered, our traditions renewed and our history preserved; it would also mean the loss of objectivity, the disappearance of stability and permanence, and the destruction of freedom and plurality.

All these harmful consequences are seen to follow the emergence of mass society in the modern age. Such a society, for Arendt, constitutes a novel form of living together characterized by the fact that individuals are united only by their common membership in the human species, that is, by their common biological needs of life and survival, and not by a public world of action and speech. In such society, people are expected to conform, to share the same private interests (economic by definition), and to behave in a predictable manner, rather than to act in original and distinctive fashion. Arendt claims that this form of living together

allows for forms of despotic rule which have varied from the more benign one-man rule of monarchical absolutism to the more terrifying forms of totalitarianism.

In the last chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 'Ideology and Terror',

Arendt writes:

Totalitarian government, like all tyrannies, certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life, that is, without destroying, by isolating men, their political capacities. But totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of men (Arendt, 1951: 475).

Moreover, Arendt claims that, in Western democracies, this form of living has encouraged the rule by nobody, namely, a bureaucracy. In the following passage, Arendt mediates Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic regimes through which individuals are tamed, and Weber's depiction of the bureaucratic penetration of everyday life. Also, she prefigures Foucault's basic theme in *Discipline and Punish*:

The rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed, under certain

circumstances, even turn out to be one of its cruelest and most tyrannical versions. It is decisive that all society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement (Arendt, 1958: 40).

Therefore this rule by nobody does not mean no rule. It only means that no one appears to be responsible, and that no one in particular can be blamed for certain policies or programs. As she remarks: “A complete victory of society will always produce some sort of “communistic fiction”, whose outstanding political characteristic is that it is indeed ruled by an “invisible hand”, namely, by nobody. What we traditionally call state and government gives place here to pure administration” (Arendt, 1958: 44-45).

Moreover such form of rule is perfectly suited to a society that, in Arendt’s view, has done away with all distinctions of rank, status, or title and replaced them with mere function. This process started with the absorption of the family and its economic activities by larger social groups; these groups, in turn, expanded and

became consolidated as social classes; but with the emergence of mass society these classes have themselves been absorbed by society, and we are left with a situation where every individual is identified only by his or her function. Thus with the establishment of mass society the realm of the social “has finally, after several centuries of development, reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength” (Arendt, 1958: 41), and the reason for this is that no boundaries between public and private, no distinctions among individuals, and no world common to them all, are allowed to exist. In their place we now have the relentless dynamic of wealth accumulation characteristic of a society, in which, as Arendt puts it, “the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance, and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public” (Arendt, 1958: 46).

As we have seen so far, Arendt’s critique of modernity is very harsh. If so, it is because of her concern that the trends she has identified in the modern age might become permanent, thereby impoverishing our existence. Her most worrisome conviction is that the modern age, by restricting the opportunities for political action and allowing the unlimited expansion of the social, has undermined the

possibilities of politics. Furthermore, by eroding the public world and concentrating human energies on the unlimited accumulation of wealth, it has left individuals isolated and vulnerable to political manipulation. As she argued in her essay 'The Concept of History', modern mass society stands for: "a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass. For a mass-society is nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who are still related to one another but have lost the world once common to all them" (Arendt, 1968b: 89-90).

And as we know from her writings on totalitarianism, these characteristics of mass society carry serious political dangers, since "loneliness, the common ground for terror, the essence of totalitarian government...is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution' (Arendt, 1951: 475). It is important to stress this connection, because in Arendt's indictment of modernity the novel and catastrophic event of totalitarianism plays a crucial role. Without a deep appreciation of this event and the impact it had on Arendt's life and work, it is difficult to understand the harshness of her judgement. In her view the terrible

originality of totalitarianism consisted in the fact that through its terror and violence, and through the brutality of its ideology, and it constituted a radical break with all the standards and categories of our moral and political tradition. As she put it in the essay 'Tradition and the Modern Age': "Totalitarian domination as an established fact, which in its unprecedentedness cannot be comprehended through the usual categories of political thought, and whose 'crimes' cannot be judged by traditional moral standards or punished within the legal framework of our civilization, has broken the continuity of Occidental history. The break in our tradition is now an accomplished fact" (Arendt, 1968b: 26)

This tragic rupture in our history forced Arendt to rethink the whole tradition of political thought in the West and to refashion in the form of a phenomenological anthropology and those categories of human condition.

4. Totalitarianism and Modernity

Throughout her work, from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt was extremely skeptical of all causal explanations of totalitarianism. She did not think that elements – racism, imperialism, the decline of the nation-state, antisemitism – caused it as a kind of logical consequence. Totalitarianism remained for her a monstrous, unprecedented event, one that "exploded our

traditional categories of political thought (totalitarian domination is unlike all forms of tyranny and despotism we know of) and the standard of our moral judgement (totalitarian crimes are very inadequately described as ‘murder’ and totalitarian criminals can hardly be punished as ‘murderers’)” (Arendt, 1994: 405). However, Arendt, did see a connection, even if not a causal one, between totalitarianism and the spirit of modern age.

For Arendt, the modern age is boundless self-assertion growing out of a resentment of the human condition, a resentment of all the limits that define human existence (mortality, labor, and natural necessity, earth-boundedness, etc).

Unwilling to accept what he hasn’t made himself, modern man transforms reality by means of modern science and technology, in the hope of creating a totally humanized world in which he can be at home.

What Arendt calls “the modern triumph of *homo faber*” in *The Human Condition* thus gives birth to the modernist faith that “everything is possible” – that there are no limits to humanity’s capacity to exploit natural processes, and thus no limits to the reshaping of reality. It is this hubris – the hubris of *homo faber*, of “everything is possible” – which finds expression in the totalitarian project of “fabricating mankind”. This project consists in the violent reshaping of available human

material so that, in the end, neither classes, races, or individuals exist, but only specimens of the species (Arendt, 1951: 475). In such a world, the incalculable has been eliminated.

One of the oddities of totalitarianism is that it couples this distinctively modern hubris with an equally modern determinism. As Canovan points out, Arendt's thought that modern man was tempted to "purchase unlimited power at the price of siding with inhuman forces and giving necessity a helping hand" (Canovan, 1992: 13). Totalitarian regimes demonstrate what happens when human beings surrender to this temptation. Submission to a racist "law of nature", with its imperative of genocide, or historical "laws of motion", which predict not only the extinction of capitalism but also class enemies of the proletariat, creates a feeling of power in the totalitarian leader and follower. Each feels themselves to be an instrument of superhuman necessity, a necessity manifest in the historical laws of motion.

The Human Condition turns from the danger of totalitarian dynamism to consider other "world-destroying" forces that the modern age has released. Among these are the tremendous growth in the forces of production and consumption brought about by the rise of capitalism. This growth, with the hegemony of the economic

concern, threaten all other relatively autonomous spheres of human activity. Thus, it promotes the eradication of human plurality, freedom, and uniqueness.

The image of fragile “island of freedom” surrounded by a sea of automatic, natural processes is a recurrent one in Arendt (see Arendt 1968b: 168). Both totalitarianism and modern technological capitalism, with its transformation of man into the *animal laborans*, put this artifice – island of freedom – in processes of destruction and reproduction. Arendt reminds us of the differences between action, work, and labor in order to underline how dangerous it is to forget that an individual’s life is human to the extent that it has the possibility of a limited transcendence of natural processes. In Arendt’s view, action – speech and deed in the public realm – is the vehicle by which we achieve this limited transcendence and a unique identity. To be deprived this opportunity is to be deprived of the chance of living a fully human life (see Arendt, 1958: 176). If the goal of totalitarianism is to reduce human beings to mere examples of the species, technological capitalism has a parallel, if less horrible, logic. Both are damages to the human status because they strive to replace human plurality and spontaneity with a kind of oneness, while moving us closer to the law of nature and necessity.

On this point, there is the temptation to say that Arendt views capitalist modernity

as a kind of “soft” totalitarianism. For what is the difference between totalitarianism and capitalist modernity if the result is the same? The destruction of the common world, the eradication of freedom understood as speech and deed in the public realm, and the ultimate assimilation of human beings to nature and necessity are common to both the modern and totalitarian projects. In addition, the emphasis on resentment of human condition is common to both projects.

However, Arendt herself was too far aware of the horrible originality of totalitarianism to read it back into some broader, world-historical movement. Even if, as Kateb notes, Arendt sees the story of modern Europe as a story of pathologies, with Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism as “the climactic pathology” (Kateb, 1984: 66), she does not identify totalitarianism with capitalist, technological modernity, and she does not see totalitarianism as a single metaphor or the ultimate culmination of modern age. Despite her harshness of her critique of modern age, and despite her conviction that the rootlessness of the modern masses provided the soil for totalitarianism to take root, there is no inner link between the worldlessness of the modern age and the essence of totalitarianism, namely, “terror”, which is not lawlessness, but “lawfulness, if law is the law of the movement of some superhuman force, Nature or History”, including particularly

“the law of killing” (Arendt, 1951: 464-465).

All we can say is that, for Arendt, the modern age creates unprecedented alienation and loneliness; that the experience of loneliness or uprootedness deprives people not only of a place of the world, but their sense of identity and their feeling for the world, i.e. their common sense; that deprived of the sense that relates him or her to the world and the others, the modern individual is likely to turn an ideology which explains the past, present and future by deductions from single premise. Having lost contact with his fellow men and their public reality around him, the modern individual loses the capacity both thought and experience. Hence the modern individual becomes easily infected with totalitarian fictions. It is in this sense that totalitarianism is based on the worldlessness inherent in loneliness, on “the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man” (Arendt, 1951: 475).

The reflection on the “worldlessness” of the modern masses in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* obviously prepare the way for the phenomenology of action and the public realm in *The Human Condition*. Arendt moves from the most pathological expression of worldlessness –the intense loneliness and the embrace of totalitarian fiction - to a description of how political action on the public realm

endows the world with meaning and offers the individual recognition and identity.

What matters most to her in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* are the pathological possibilities caused by the loss of a worldly reality. What leads her to *The Human Condition* is the desire to show how a strong sense of the public world manifests itself in political action.

Both texts, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*, locate the most basic threat to our political health in the loss of a sense of the public world among people. As far as we fail to confront the implications of this loss, we will fail to understand why racism, imperialism, antisemitism and totalitarianism had such enormous appeal in the late modern age, and why they encountered such minimal resistance. We will be unable to understand the peculiar mix of “stupidity” and cynicism that characterized European society between wars, and that characterizes our own contemporary political culture (Arendt, 1994: 314). Finally, we will be unable to “think what we are doing” as we make politics, the public sphere, and the claims of justice ever more subordinate to the demand of the market, technology, and the “national” - now international – household.

If Arendt’s attempt to link totalitarianism to the spirit of the modern age sometimes strains credulity, we must remember her original goal of converting

trauma into understanding in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. That aim remained unfulfilled, in her view, so long as political theorists failed to confront the potential disaster in the various formative modern projects to assimilate human beings to natural processes. Rights, positive laws, constitutional framework, all contribute to containing the tendency to treat human beings as raw material. Yet, from Arendt's perspective, liberalism fails to imagine or comprehend the worst, and therefore fails to see that the preservation of rights and procedural safeguard depends on worldliness. The "right to have right" to membership in a political community is more fundamental than the "rights of man" (Arendt, 1951: 290-302). This, at any rate, is the fundamental conviction behind her political thought, and the reason why it will always remain, for better or worse, beyond the frailty of liberalism.

5. Conclusion

Arendt's critique of modernity is very harsh and shows a sign of antimodernism. However, Arendt's antimodernism does not entirely relapse into such conservatism as that of Heidegger, nor attempt to design some sort of utopia. Rather, her understanding of politics, her democratically motivated "love of the

world”⁷ places her antimodernism not in nostalgia, nor in utopia but in the context of “criticism as well as experiment” (Arendt, 1968b: 14).

As she freely admitted (Arendt, 1979: 334), Arendt’s purpose is not to praise liberal bourgeois society. In this respect, she barely qualifies as even a “antimodern modernist” (Benhabib, 1994: 113) or a “reluctant modernist” (Benhabib, 2003: 198). Besides, George Kateb characterizes Arendt as a “great antimodernist” (Kateb, 1984: 183). Yet this description is offered with polemical intent. Kateb persuades us to view Arendt as the kind of cultural critic who wishes to see modernity undone. This way of understanding strikes me as a liberal version of what Foucault calls “the blackmail of Enlightenment” (Foucault, 1984: 42) – the insistence that one should take a stand “for” or “against” bourgeois democracy, enlightenment rationality, and so on, before delivering the specifics of one’s critique. While Arendt is antimodern in a broad sense, she does not share the conservative’s wish, such as that of Heidegger, to return to the premodern. Arendt refuses to deal in this type of nostalgia, and it is evident throughout her theoretical work. *The Human Condition*, in particular, is a multifaceted account of why the structures of meaning, and politics defining the premodern world are no

⁷ Arendt wanted to call her book, *Amor Mundi* [love of the world] instead of *The Human Condition* (Young-Bruel, 1982: 324).

longer possible.

What is it, then, that makes Arendt's critique of modernity seem like an antimodernist, or totalizing critique? Partly, as Kateb notes, it is her unyielding focus on the downside of modernity (Kateb, 1984: chapter 5). She describes its horror and pathologies at length, but none of its greatness. In addition, her critique of modernity develops explicitly on the ontological terrain, focusing on the decline of the public realm. In this respect, her critique is different from that of Habermas, who takes the Weberian concept of rationalization as its central category of analysis, and who attempts to identify both the emancipatory and repressive aspects of modernity.

Yet, ironically, Arendt believes that the modern era is a kind of progress in terms of the refinement of techniques of domination. On this point, her initial position is similar to that of Adorno, who speaks of the continuity of disaster "leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb" (Adorno, 1973: 320), and that of Foucault, who speaks of a kind of historical progress proceeding "from domination to domination" (Foucault, 1977a: 151). Like Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), and Foucault (1990a; orig. 1976; 1991a; orig.1975), Arendt believes that modernity is a coercive force, but where Arendt focuses on the decline of the public realm,

Horkheimer and Adorno focus on the colonization of nature, and the subsequent repression of social and psychic existence, and Foucault concentrates on the domination of the individual through social institution, discourses, and practices. Despite Arendt's intensive focus on the public and Foucault's focus on the individual, it is a mistake to see that their arguments are limited to the public (in Arendt's case) or to the individual (in Foucault's case). Arendt believes that mass society and loneliness, which are the categories in explaining the rise of totalitarianism, threaten the extinction of both the public and the private realm (Arendt, 1958: 69), therefore, the annihilation of otherness and plurality. For Arendt, the world is characterized by two words, the term, "in-between" (1958: 52; 1968a: 4) and the term, "plurality" (Arendt, 1958: 176, 201 and passim; 1963: 175 and passim), since the world goes on among plural persons with space between them. In this context, the term, interest, as Arendt points out (1958: 182), originally had nothing to do with the highly individualist meaning we attribute to it today. Inter-est means, literally, what is between us, what binds us together and draws us apart. On this point, her final position is converged into that of Foucault, who warns of "political double bind, which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structure" (Foucault, 1983a: 216).

The impression that *The Human Condition* is an exercise in “Hellenic nostalgia” (Kateb, 1984: 39; O’Sullivan, 1976; Pitkin, 1981; Bakan, 1979: 59) is created when we insert Arendt’s ontological concerns into a static phenomenology of human activity. The old hierarchy of the *vita activa* then appears as the means to condemn the new, i.e., modernity. Yet this phenomenology is not as conceptually static as it first appears, and in fact, it relies upon an implicit historical ontology. Arendt refused to reify the capacities and conditions of human existence into a transhistorical human “nature” (Arendt, 1958: 10). As her reply to Eric Voegelin makes clear, she was intensely aware of the internal connection between individual capacities and the conditions necessary for their exercise (Arendt, 1994: 407-408). Thus, it is not simply a question of the relative status an activity has in the hierarchy of the *vita activa*. It is also a matter of the peculiar historical reality the activity inhabits. Hence it is the matter of the possibility not only a change in rank, but of a dis-essencing or transforming of the capacities themselves. Admittedly, Arendt shows some qualifications of her critique of modernity. In *The Human Condition*, she writes, “the instrumentalization of action and the degradation of politics into a means for something else has of course never really succeeded in eliminating action, in preventing its being one of the decisive human

experiences, or in destroying the realm of human affairs altogether” (Arendt, 1958: 230). Moreover, as her interpretation of modern political action in *On Revolution* shows, Arendt believes that authentic political action is manifest in select moment of revolutionary upheaval and resistance (Arendt, 1963, chapter 6). Yet, these qualifications do little to transform the pessimism that runs through her approach to modernity. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she emphasizes how totalitarian domination, as an incarnation of the modernist faith that “everything is possible”, attempts a refabrication of man that threatens humanity (Arendt, 1951: 458-459). This nightmare haunts her thinking about modernity as a whole. Arendt’s analysis of the destruction of the common world, the rise of technological automatism, and the victory of the *animal laborans* implies that, the modern project, as a resentment of human existence, will triumph. Modernity will attain its goal of not only remaking the world, but man also.

This line of thought leads Kateb and others to question the validity of Arendt’s critique. From Kateb’s perspective, Arendt’s critique of modernity is totalizing in the worst way. It leads to a rejection of the energies of the modern age on the basis of religious conviction that humanity exist to be at home in the world (Kateb, 1984: 158). Arendt’s emphasis on the redemptive character of political action

hinges, Kateb observes, on the possibility of a nonalienated existence. Thus, “groups of people must be at home in the world first if the frame of memorable deeds, the frame of political action, is to be secured and strengthened” (Kateb, 1984: 158). Modernity, however, cultivates human capacities that produce world and earth alienation, and prevents us from being at home. Arendt condemns modernity because it destroys the conditions that enable the existential achievement of political action: “The hope is that humanity could be at home rightly. The hope is dashed by modernity” (Kateb, 1984: 158).

Kateb is right to emphasize the redemptive role of political action in Arendt. Her desire for “reconciliation” comes from the tragic sensibility she shares with the Greeks, and it runs through her entire approach to modernity. Yet, Kateb’s exclusive focus on the “existential achievement” of political action distorts Arendt’s critique of modernity. For while Arendt idealizes the Greeks as being uniquely at home in the world, she also believes that there is no return. I think that it is one of the reasons for her fondness for René Char’s aphorism: “Our inheritance was left to us by no testament” (Arendt, 1963: 215); and Tocqueville’s epigram: “Since the past has ceased to turn its light upon the Future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity” (1968b: 7).

If we, like Kateb, insist on seeing Arendt driven by the desire to overcome alienation – a desire that transforms into theoretical grief, then Arendt’s theory would simply be another unhappy expression of utopian hopes. However, Kateb’s interpretation is insufficient, because Arendt’s critique of modernity is not just about the “religious” hope for reconciliation, but about the pagan value of “worldliness”. For Arendt, modern existential rebellion is bad not because it blocks reconciliation, but because it undermines worldliness. To be sure, “being at home” is one of the qualities Arendt attributes to a “worldly” - in Kateb’s words, “unalienated” – existence. Yet, it is precisely the artificiality of this home that Arendt is talking about. In other words, it is not alienation *per se* that she combats, but world alienation. In this sense, Kateb’s identification of worldliness with the absence of alienation is problematic.

Unlike Kateb, Habermasians, communitarians, and participatory democrats do not see Arendt’s antimodernism as totalizing or rejectionist. Instead, they understand Arendt’s critique of modernity in the light of ontological implications. As we have seen earlier, these three schools of thought wish to enlist Arendt in the project of recovering a public sphere. Hence, Habermas appeals to her “intersubjective” concept of political action, the communitarian appeals to her worldly, “rooted”

conception of membership, and the participatory democrat appeals to the tendency toward civic republicanism in her text. Each school hopes that the pursuit of one of these Arendtian paths will bring us closer to a genuine – more democratic, just, and meaningful – public sphere.

The notion of a unitary or comprehensive public sphere has been the target of criticism from Foucauldian, feminist scholars who champion difference wishing to expose the disciplinary techniques or the power relations implicit in the intersubjective accounts of discursive rationality. Since Arendt's Greek masculinist conception of the public sphere, to some extent, shows general insensitivity of such concerns, and therefore does not offer an account of the irreducibility of mechanisms of exclusion in any discursive community.⁸

Interestingly, what binds Arendt's contemporary critics and admirers together is the unquestioned assumptions that she stands for the recovery of a single, institutionalized public sphere. Of course, Arendt's work, particularly its idealization of the public realm of *polis* in *The Human Condition* and its invocation of the "lost treasure" of the revolutionary tradition in *On Revolution*, invites this reading. However, I think that her focus on the public sphere cannot be

⁸ For an overview of these criticism, see Fraser, 1992.

identified with her conviction of the recovery of the public sphere. Rather, her pronouncement about the end of the common world in the modern age implies that the prospect for a comprehensive public sphere is obscure and dark. This is not to say she gives up on action and politics. Rather, it is to say that she is aware of how the energies of modernity, which initially open the possibility of a groundless politics, end in intensifying the paradox of revolution and political action.⁹ In other words, the moment in which a space of freedom emerges is also the beginning of its disappearance. The combination of modern world alienation with the late-modern escalation of the automatism makes the appearance of freedom “miracles” (Arendt, 1968b: 168).

It is not a question, therefore, of pretending that we can resurrect the *agora* by appealing to deliberation, intersubjectivity, or acting in concert. What matters is our ability to resist the demand for functionalized behavior and to preserve, as far as possible, our capacity for agonistic action and spontaneous, independent judgement.

⁹ “If foundation was the aim and the end of revolution, then the revolutionary spirit was not merely the spirit of beginning something new but of starting something permanent and enduring; a lasting institution, embodying this spirit and encouraging it to new achievements, would be self-defeating. From which it unfortunately seems to follow that nothing threatens the very achievements of revolution more dangerously and more acutely than the spirit which has brought them about. Should freedom in its most exalted sense as freedom to act be the price to be paid for foundation?” (Arendt, 1963: 232).

It is here that Arendt's concerns intersect more sharply with Foucault. Arendt's theory of political action, so clearly at odds with a Foucauldian politics of everyday life, links up with Foucault's concept of resistance. For where the space of action is taken away, as both Arendt and Foucault argue it is, action in the strict sense is no longer possible. Resistance becomes the primary vehicle of spontaneity and agonistic subjectivity, a kind of alternative concept of action. Similarly, critical thinking is not activism *per se*, but an effort to resist the temptation to ground this faculty in a theoretical discourse, that is, thinking outside of the concept and habit, in Arendt's words, "thinking without a banister" (Arendt, 1979: 336). Also, in an age that has witnessed the withdrawal of the political, and its dispersion throughout the social body, as Foucault has recognized, Arendt's effort to think the specificity of the political is not an anachronism nor opposite to Foucault. For where everything is political, nothing is.

Arendt's critique of modernity evades easy classification. It is too antinostalgic to be premodern or rejectionist, yet too radical to qualify as modern or immanent.

Among recent theorists, only Foucault can be said to match her Nietzschean capacity to distance herself from the unquestioned assumptions of the age. This ability is the source of embarrassment and frustration for those theorists, such as

Walzer (1987), who believe that the first duty of social or political critics is to identify with basic assumptions or values of their age. However, I think that an attitude of theoretical detachment is not exclusive privileges for armchair philosophers. To be suspicious of grand projects does not necessarily mean not to address public issues or not to engage the historical experience or political struggle of his or her time. This ability also clashes the current misuse, ironically raised by Foucault, which insists on viewing theory as a kind of “tool box” (Foucault in Eribon, 1991: 237), to be judged and deployed according to strategic considerations. While Foucault intends his work to enlist itself into the reality of a contest, he does not intend his work to be the provision of programs, prophecies, or policies. From Foucauldian perspective, theory is not a totalizing instrument, but one that multiplies tactics and potentialities. This “tool box” statement should not be understood in terms of guiding thread or theoretical apparatus. Rather it should be understood in the sense of detachment from authorship preferring instead to see his work as public property, which can be used by anyone. Foucault shares this unusual sense of detachment with Arendt: “Each time you write something and you send it out into the world and it becomes public, obviously everybody is free to do with it what he pleases, and this is as it should be... You

should not try to hold your hand now on whatever may happen to what you have been thinking for yourself. You should rather try to learn from what other people do with it” (Arendt, 1958: xx).

Arendt’s central theoretical works are valuable not just because they offer an illuminating lessons of human agency in an age of ideology, as Isaac (1992) has observed, or a passionate refusal of docility as Honig (1993) has argued. There is more. What Arendt learned from the experience of totalitarianism is that all human capacities – and particularly the capacity for action and judgement – crucially depend on the conditions of their exercise, and that it is indeed possible to uproot such capacities. The urgency of her attempt to “think what we are doing” (Arendt, 1958: 5) in *The Human Condition* flows from this insight. What Arendt suggests is that totalitarian ideologies underlying much of the modern project may still succeed. For the extermination of the human capacity for action by peaceful means is the danger that appears after Auschwitz.

Arendt was profoundly pessimistic about the prospects for a genuine public sphere in our time. Indeed, from the standpoint of her critique of modernity, action in the strict sense is no longer possible. It is precisely the impossibility of a genuine public sphere in postmodernity that leads Arendt to stress agonism over

consensus, resistance over docility, and the “defeated causes” of the “revolutionary spirit” over the normalizing politics of representative democracy. Her faith in action and her pessimistic prospects for a public sphere reflect a continuing wonder at the fact that political action persists in the various “defeated causes”. For some, this state of affairs may be a source of despair, for Arendt, however, it signifies both loss and hope. Her point as a critic of liberalism and modernity is similar to Foucault: it is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous. This includes those modern political innovations for which she – and we – are necessarily grateful. Arendt’s theoretical work demonstrates how man as a political being must refuse both “the blackmail of Enlightenment” and the appeal to a religiosity.

Chapter Six

Arendt: Participation, Independent Judgment, and Critical Thinking

1. Introduction

Arendt insisted that “thinking and acting are not the same”, that “they occupy two entirely different existential positions” (Arendt, 1979: 304-305). This distinction between thinking and acting underlies her phenomenology of human activities, providing the basic architecture for her consideration of the active life in *The Human Condition* and mental activities in *The Life of the Mind*. Arendt believed that action took place in the world, with others, while thinking involved a withdrawal from the world into the solitude of an internal “dialogue...between me and myself” (Arendt, 1971: 185). This formulation of the gap between thinking and acting has frustrated many theorists who want to link theory and practice, and has driven her sympathetic critics to her fragmentary and unfinished work on judgement (Habermas, 1983; Benhabib, 1992b; Gray, 1979; Miller, 1979; Bernstein, 1986; Beiner, 1982; 1983). Their paths are diverse, but their hope has been that her analysis of this faculty would provide the missing link between the life of the citizen and the life of the mind. Arendt encouraged such hopes by

referring to the faculty of judgement as “the most political of man’s mental abilities” and “the political faculty par excellence” (1984: 36). Furthermore, her description of political or “representative” thinking in several essays from the 1960s, certainly seems to show the faculty of judgement as a kind of bridge between thought and action. Yet Arendt remained adamant about keeping them distinct. She continued to insist upon the distinction between thinking and its “by-product” (Arendt, 1971: 193) judgment, as well as distinction between judgement and action.¹

On the surface of Arendt’s work, there are two different accounts of judgement, which correspond to two distinct phases of her thought about this faculty. As Beiner suggests, it is quite plausible to speak of not one, but two theories of judgement in Arendt (Beiner, 1982: 91). The first, earlier theory considers judgement from the perspective of *vita activa*; the second, later theory considers it from the standpoint of the life of the mind. Thus, as we move from Arendt’s

¹ In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt states that “the faculty of judging particulars (as brought to light by Kant), the ability to say “this is wrong”, “this is beautiful”, and so on, is not the same as the faculty of thinking. Thinking deals with invisibles, with representations of things that are absent; judging always concerns particulars and things close at hand. But the two are interrelated, as are consciousness and conscience. **If thinking – the two-in-one of the soundless dialogue – actualizes the difference within our identity as given in consciousness and thereby results in conscience as its by-product, then judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearance, where I am never alone and always too busy to be able to think. The manifestation of the wind of thought is not knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly**” (Arendt, 1971: 193, my emphasis). Cf. Arendt, 1971: 69, 70; 1984: 37.

essays of the 1960s to her writings of the 1970s, the emphasis in her account of judgement “shifts from the representative thought and enlarged mentality of political agents to the spectatorship and retrospective judgement of historians and storytellers” (Beiner, 1984: 91).

I don't want to deny this shift in emphasis. As both Beiner (1984) and Bernstein (1986) have shown, it is textually demonstrable. Although perhaps more pronounced in the later writings, I do want to argue that Arendt's emphasis on independent or autonomous judgment underlies both phases. When viewed in the light of “thinking (and judgment) for oneself” (Arendt, 1982: 43, 71), her articulations of political (or representative) and critical (or Socratic) thinking turn out to be more closely related than often assumed. Indeed, interpretations of “representative thinking” as a method of public deliberation and decision-making fundamentally distort Arendt's intention.

This judgment may be that of actor, of a “citizen among citizens”, or it may be that of the spatially or temporally removed spectator. It is always, however, each individual's opinion, that is, the expression of how the world and the things in it (actions, events, phenomena) “appear to me” (Arendt, 1990: 80; 1968b: 241-242; 1968a: 26-27), “me”, the engaged actor of enlarged thought, “me”, the detached

interpreter of impartial judgment. While judging is “one, if not the most important, activity in which...sharing the world with others comes to pass”, it is also the activity by which we express our moral “taste” – our capacity for discrimination and discernment – and choose our company (Arendt, 1968b: 221; 223-225). In Arendt’s case, the expression of her moral “taste” put her at odds with many who placed solidarity at the head of the political virtues, who viewed fundamental political commitments as entailing the abandonment of the privilege of independent judgment. Arendt clung fiercely to this privilege, holding it to be the core of any defensible idea of human dignity.² For Arendt, the world is humanized not by consensus but by “the unending discourse” (Arendt, 1968a: 27), and the diversity of opinion.

² “Since Hegel and Marx, these questions [the question of judgement] have been treated in the perspective of History and on the assumption that there is such a thing as Progress of the human race. Finally we shall be left with the only alternative there is in these matters – we either can say with Hegel: *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*, leaving judgment to Success, or we can maintain with Kant the autonomy of the minds of men and their possible independence of things as they are or as they have come into being. Here we shall have to concern ourselves...with the concept of history...which...is Greek in origin and derived from *historein*, to inquire in order to tell how it was...But the origin of this verb is again Homer...where the noun *histor* (“historian”, as it were) occurs, and that Homeric historian is the judge. If judgment is our faculty for dealing with the past, the historian is the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgment over it. If that is so, we may reclaim our human dignity, win it back, as it were, from the pseudo-divinity named History of the modern age, without denying history’s importance but denying its right to being the ultimate judge. Old Cato, with whom I started these reflections – “never am I less alone than when I am by myself, never am I more active than when I do nothing” – has left us a curious phrase which aptly sums up the political principle implied in the enterprise of reclamation. He said... “The victorious cause pleased the gods, but the defeated one pleases Cato” (Arendt, 1971: 216, my emphasis). Here, Arendt’s sympathies are with Cato rather than with Hegel, for Arendt sees history not in terms of Logos and Success, but in terms of historical judgment and the defeated causes. For Arendt, historical understanding is a form of judging and the historical narrator or the spectator is no less than the moral actor who has to engage in acts of judgement.

2. Arendt's Thought on Judgment

Judgment: Two Models

Arendt's theory of judgment was never developed systematically. She intended to complete her study of the life of the mind by devoting the third volume to the faculty of judgment, but was not able to do so because of her untimely death in 1975. What she left was a number of reflections scattered in the first two volumes on *Thinking* and *Willing* (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 5-6, 69-70, 76, 92-8, 111, 129-130, 140, 192-193, 207-209, 213-216; *Willing*: 59-62, 217), a series of lectures on Kant's political philosophy delivered at the New School for Social Research in the fall of 1970 (Arendt, 1982), an essay entitled 'Thinking and Moral Considerations' written at the time she was composing *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt, 1984), and two articles included in *Between past and Future*, where judgment and opinion are treated in relation to culture and taste ('The Crisis in Culture') and with respect to the question of truth ('Truth and Politics') (Arendt, 1968b: 197-226; 227-264). Thus, in order to reconstruct her theory of judgment we will have to follow and make use of these writings in place of the systematic treatment that she was not able to complete. Moreover, these writings do not present a unified theory of judgment, but rather, two distinct models, one based on

the standpoint of the actor, the other on the standpoint of the spectator, which are somewhat at odds with each other. As Ronald Beiner has noted, Arendt's writings on the theme of judgment can be seen to fall into two distinct phases, an early one in which judgment is the faculty of political actors acting in the public sphere, and a later one in which it is the privilege of non-participating spectators:

In her earlier writings (for example, in 'Freedom and Politics', 'The Crisis in Culture', and 'Truth and Politics') Arendt had introduced the notion of judgment to give further grounding to her conception of political action as a plurality of actors acting in concert in a public space...In the later formulation, which begins to emerge in the Kant Lectures as well as in both 'Thinking and Moral Considerations' and the *Thinking* volume, she approaches judging from a quite different, and much more ambitious, point of view (Beiner, 1982: 93).

In the later formation, judgment is located in the sphere of the *vita contemplativa*, it is the faculty of the non-participation spectators, primarily poets and historians, who seek to understand the meaning of the past and to reconcile us to what has happened.³ Here, Arendt is no longer concerned with judging as a political life as

³ Arendt also endows judgment with the capacity to reclaim human dignity against those theorists that would posit a world-historical process whose only criterion is "success". In the Postscriptum to *Thinking* she claims that:

"If judgment is our faculty for dealing with the past, the historian is the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgment over it. If that is so, we may reclaim our human dignity, win it back, as

such, as the faculty which is exercised by actors, but with judgment as a component in the life of the mind, the faculty which is exercised by the privileged spectators (cf. Bernstein, 1986).

Furthermore, Arendt did not clarify two of its philosophical sources, Aristotle and Kant. As Benhabib has observed:

Arendt's reflection on judgement do not only vacillate between judgment as a moral faculty, guiding action, versus judgment as a retrospective faculty, guiding the spectator or the storyteller. There is an even deeper philosophical perplexity about the status of judgment in her work. This concerns her attempt to bring together the Aristotelian conception of judgment as an aspect of *phronesis* with the Kantian understanding of judgment as the faculty of "enlarged thought" or "representative thinking" (Benhabib, 1992b: 123).

This attempt appears puzzling insofar as the two conceptions seem to stand in tensions to each other, the Aristotelian toward a concern with the particular, the Kantian toward a concern with universality.

It would appear, therefore, that Arendt's theory of judgement not only incorporates two models, the actor's – judging in order to act – and the spectator's it were, from the pseudo-divinity named History of the modern age, without denying history's

- judging in order to collect meaning from the past - but that the philosophical sources it draws upon are somewhat at odds with each other. I shall follow, then step back, and relate them to each other, and will attempt to show that the two models articulate two functions of judgment, but that the tension between them is not a “flagrant contradiction” (Bernstein, 1968: 231), and can be read in terms of the underlying continuity.

Judgment and the *Vita Contemplativa*

Arendt’s concern with judgment as the faculty of retrospective assessment originated in her attempt to understand the twin political tragedies of the twentieth century, Nazism and Stalinism. Faced with the horrors of the extermination camps and the Gulag, Arendt tried to understand these phenomena in their own terms, neither deducing them from precedents nor placing them in some overarching scheme of historical necessity. “Understanding”, she wrote in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,

does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means,

importance but denying its right to being the ultimate judge” (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 216).

rather examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us - neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be (Arendt, 1951: viii).

This need to understand these traumatic events is something to which Arendt returned in her *Partisan Review* essay of 1953, ‘Understanding and Politics’. Understanding, she wrote, “is an unending activity by which...we come to terms with, reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world” (Arendt, 1994: 307-308). However, faced with the horrors of totalitarianism, we suddenly discover the fact that “we have lost our tools of understanding. Our quest for meaning is at the same time prompted and frustrated by our inability to originate meaning” (Arendt, 1994: 313). Totalitarianism has in fact “exploded our categories of political thought and our standards for moral judgment” (Arendt, 1994: 310).⁴ We cannot make sense of this evil phenomenon by means of such categories as tyranny, despotism, or authoritarianism, or by means of such conventional moral standards as vice, depravity, or sinfulness.⁵ Our inherited

⁴ Cf. “Totalitarian domination as an established fact, which in its unprecedentedness cannot be comprehended through the usual categories of political thought, and whose “crimes” cannot be judged by traditional moral standards or punished within the legal framework of our civilization, has broken the continuity of Occidental history. The break in our tradition is now an accomplished fact” (Arendt, 1968b: 26).

⁵ Indeed, as Arendt noted in her review of *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime Against the Jewish*

framework for judgment fails us “as soon as we try to apply it honestly to the central political experiences of our own time” (Arendt, 1994: 309). Even our ordinary common-sense judgment has become ineffective, since, “we are living in a topsy-turvy world, a world where we cannot find our way by abiding by the rules of what once was common sense” (Arendt, 1994: 314).

The crisis in understanding is therefore identified with a crisis in judgment, insofar as understanding for Arendt is “so closely related to and interrelated with judging that one must describe both as the subsumption of something particular under a universal rule” (Arendt, 1994: 313). Once these rules have lost their validity we are no longer able to understand and to judge the particulars, that is, we are no longer able to subsume them under our accepted categories of moral and political thought. Arendt, however, does not believe that the loss of these categories has brought to an end our capacity to judge; on the contrary, since human beings are distinguished by their capacity to begin anew,⁶ they are able to fashion new categories and to formulate new standards of judgment. Thus:

In the light of these reflections, our endeavoring to understand something which

People, significantly entitled ‘The Image of Hell’: “The Attempt of the Nazis to fabricate a wickedness beyond vice did nothing more than establish an innocence beyond virtue. Such innocence and such wickedness have no bearing on the reality where politics exists” (Arendt, 1994: 199).

⁶ Here, Arendt invokes the principle of natality, expressed in the Augustinian saying “that there

has ruined our categories of thought and our standards of judgment appears less frightening. Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality (Arendt, 1994: 321, my emphasis).

For Arendt, therefore, the enormity and unprecedentedness of totalitarianism have not destroyed, strictly speaking, our ability to judge; rather, they have destroyed our accepted standards of judgment and our conventional categories of interpretation and assessment, whether they are moral or political. And in this situation the only recourse is to appeal to the imagination, which allows us to view things in their proper perspective and to judge them without the benefits of a pre-given rule or universal. As Arendt puts it:

Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective...to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice...to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our
might be a beginning, man was created before whom nobody was” (Arendt, 1994: 321).

own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding (Arendt, 1994: 323).

The imagination therefore enables us to create the distance which is necessary for an impartial judgment, while at the same time allowing for the closeness that makes understanding possible. In this way, Arendt notes, it makes possible our reconciliation with reality, even with the tragic reality of the twentieth century:

Without this kind of imagination, which actually is understanding, we would never be able to take our bearings in the world. It is the only inner compass we have...If we want to be at home on this earth, even at the price of being at home in this century, we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with the essence of totalitarianism (Arendt, 1994: 323).

Arendt's participation at the trial of Eichmann in the early 1960s made her once more aware of this need to come to terms with a reality that initially defied human comprehension. How could such an ordinary, law-abiding, and all-too-human individual have committed such atrocities? In her encounter with the person of Eichmann Arendt had first to show the intelligibility of his actions, the fact that they stemmed from a lack of thought and an absence of judgment, so that ultimately we could come to terms with their enormity, with their absolutely

unprecedented nature. Once Eichmann's deeds were rendered intelligible they could be judged, and judged to be not only monstrous but "banal".

The impact of the Eichmann trial forced Arendt to raise another problem concerning judgment, namely, whether we are entitled to presuppose an independent human faculty, unsupported by law and public opinion. The conduct of Eichmann was in fact typical of all those individuals who, during the Nazi period, had abstained from judgment, who had blindly followed the orders of their leaders, and in so doing, committed the most unspeakable atrocities. Eichmann's guilt resided in his banal thoughtlessness, in his failure to engage in responsible judgment when confronted with Hitler's orders to exterminate the Jews. Those few individuals who refused to carry out the orders of their superiors were thus left entirely to their own resources, that is, had to be capable "of telling right from wrong even when all they [had] to guide them [was] their own judgment, which, moreover, happen[ed] to be completely at odds with what they must [have regarded] as the unanimous opinions of all those around them" (Arendt, 1965: 294-295).

In this respect, Arendt notes:

Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their

own judgment, and they did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by, under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no rules existed for the unprecedented (Arendt, 1965: 295).

Judgment and The Wind of Thought

Arendt returned to this issue in *The Life of the Mind*, a work which was meant to include the three faculties of thinking, willing, and judging. In the introduction to the first volume she declared that the immediate impulse to write it came from attending the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 3), while the second, equally important motive, was to provide an account of our mental activities that was missing from her previous work on the *vita activa* (this was in fact the title she had chosen for German edition of *The Human Condition*). It was Eichmann's absence of thinking, his "thoughtlessness", that struck her most, because it was responsible in her view for his inability to judge in those circumstances where judgment was most needed. "It was this absence of thinking", she wrote, "that awakened my interest. Is evil-doing (the sins of omission, as well as the sins of commission) possible in default of not just "base motives"...but of any motives whatever, of any particular prompting of interest or volition? Is

wickedness...not a necessary condition for evil doing? Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought?" (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 4-5)

The same question recurs in her essay of 1971, 'Thinking and Moral Considerations', written during the same period she was composing the volume on *Thinking*, where she asked: "Is our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, dependent upon our faculty of thought? Do the inability to think and a disastrous failure of what we commonly call conscience coincide?" (Arendt, 1984: 8)

Arendt attempted a reply by connecting the activity of thinking to that of judging in a twofold manner. First, thinking – the silent dialogue of me and myself – dissolves our fixed habits of thought and the accepted rules of conduct, and thus prepares the way for the activity of judging particulars without the aid of pre-established universals. It is not that thinking provides judgment with new rules for subsuming the particular under the universal. Rather, it loosens the grip of the universal over the particular, thereby releasing judgment from ossified categories of thought and conventional standards of behavior. Indeed, thinking "does not create values, it will not find out, once and for all, what "the good" is, and it does

not confirm but rather dissolves accepted rules of conduct. Its political and moral significance comes out only in those rare moments in history when “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world”, when “The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity”” (Arendt, 1984: 36).⁷

It is in times of historical crisis that thinking ceases to be a marginal affair, because by undermining all established criteria and values, it prepares the individual to judge for him or herself instead of being carried away by the actions and opinions of the majority. As Arendt puts it:

When everybody is swept away unthinkably by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action. The purging element in thinking, Socrates’ midwifery, that brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them – values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions – is political by implication. For this destruction has a liberating effect on another human faculty, the faculty of judgment, which one may call, with some justification, the most political of man’s mental abilities. It

⁷ The last lines are from W. B. Yeats, who was one of Arendt’s favorite modern poets.

is the faculty to judge particulars without subsuming them under general rules which can be taught and learned until they grow into habits that can be replaced by other habits and rules (Arendt, 1984: 36. Cf. Gray, 1977: 47).

The second way in which Arendt connected the activity of thinking with that of judging is by showing that thinking produces conscience as a by-product. This conscience, unlike the voice of God, gives no positive prescriptions; it only tells us what not to do, what to avoid in our actions and dealing with others, as well as what to repent of. Arendt notes in this context that Socrates' dictum "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong", and his proposition that "It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me, rather than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself and contract me", derive their validity from the idea that there is a silent partner within ourselves (Arendt, 1984: 29-30, 35).

What we fear most is the anticipation of the presence of this partner, i.e., our conscience. Thus, as Arendt puts it:

A person who does not know that silent intercourse (in which we examine what we are and what we do) will not mind contradicting himself, and this means he will never be either able or willing to account for what he says or does; nor will

he mind committing any crime, since he can count on its being forgotten the next moment. Bad people...are not “full of regrets” (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 191).

She goes on to note that thinking “is not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty in everybody; by the same token, inability to think is not a failing of the many who lack brain power, but an ever-present possibility for everybody” (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 191). For those who do engage in thinking, however, conscience emerges as an inevitable by-product, since “the self...must take care not to do anything that would make it impossible for the two-in-one to be friends and live in harmony...Its criterion for action will not be the usual rules, recognized by multitudes and agreed upon by society, but whether I shall be able to live with myself in peace when the time has come to think about my deeds and words” (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 191).

Conscience as the side-effect of thinking has its counterpart in judgment as the by-product of the liberating activity of thought. If conscience represents the inner check by which we evaluate our actions, judgment represents the outer manifestation of our capacity to think critically. Both faculties relate to the question of right and wrong, but while conscience direct attention to the self,

judgment directs attention to the world (Cf. Bernauer, 1987: 43-50). In this respect, judgment makes possible what Arendt calls “the manifestation of the wind of thought” in the sphere of appearance. As Arendt put it:

If thinking – the two-in-one of the soundless dialogue – actualizes the difference within our identity as given in consciousness, and thereby results in conscience as its by-product, then judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always too busy to be able to think.

The Manifestation of the wind of thought is not knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 193).

Judgment and Arendt’s Kant

The previous account has explored the way in which Arendt attempted to connect the activity of thinking to our capacity to judge. This connection of critical or Socratic thinking and judging seems to operate in crisis, in those moments where individuals, faced with the collapse of traditional standards, must come up with new ones and judge according to their own autonomous values. There is, however, a second view of judgment which does not restrict it to moments of crisis, but which identifies it with the capacity to think representatively, that is, from the

standpoint of everyone else. Arendt called this capacity to think representatively an “enlarged mentality”, adopting the same terms that Kant employed in his Third Critique to characterize aesthetic judgment. It is to this work that we must now turn our attention, since Arendt based her theory of political judgment on Kant’s aesthetics rather than on his moral philosophy. At first sight this might seem a puzzling choice, since Kant himself based his moral and political philosophy on practical reason and not on our aesthetic faculties. Arendt, however, claimed that the *Critique of Judgment* contained Kant’s unwritten political philosophy, and that the first part of it, the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgment’, was the most fruitful basis on which to build a theory of political judgment, since it dealt with the world of appearances from the point of view of the judging spectator and took as its starting point the faculty of taste, understood as a faculty of concrete and embodied subjects (see Arendt, 1968b: 219-220). “The *Critique of Judgement*”, she argued, “is the only of [Kant’s] great writings where his point of departure is the World and the senses and capabilities which made men (in the plural) fit to be inhabitants of it. This is perhaps not yet political philosophy, but it certainly is its condition *sine qua non*. If it could be found that in the capacities and regulative traffic and intercourse between men who are bound to each other by the common

possession of a world (the earth) there exists an a priori principle, then it would be proved that man is essentially a political being” (Arendt in Beiner, 1983: 15).

For Arendt the capacity to judge is a specifically political ability insofar as it enables individuals to orient themselves in the public realm and to judge the phenomena from a standpoint that is relatively detached and impartial. She credits Kant with having dislodged the prejudice that judgements of taste lie altogether outside the political realm, since they supposedly concern only aesthetic matters. She believes, in fact, that by linking taste to the wider manner of thinking which Kant called an “enlarged mentality” the way was opened to a revaluation of judgment as a specific political ability, namely, as the ability to think in the place of everybody else. As she put it:

In order to see the faculty of judgment in its proper perspective and to understand that it implies a political rather than a merely theoretical activity, we must shortly recall what is usually considered to be Kant’s political philosophy, namely, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which deals with the lawgiving faculty of reason. The principle of lawgiving, as laid down in the “categorical imperative” – “always act in such a manner that the principle of your action can become a general law” – is based upon the necessity for rational thought to

agree with itself...In the *Critique of Judgment*, however, Kant insisted upon a different way of thinking, for which it would not be enough to be in agreement with one's own self, but which consisted of being able to "think in the place of everybody else" and which he therefore called an "enlarged mentality" (Arendt, 1968b: 219-220).

Moreover, as Arendt noted in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, it is only in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that we find room for the idea that judgment is not the faculty of noumenal selves legislating for mankind as a whole, but the faculty of concrete subjects operating in a worldly space of appearances. "In neither of the two parts [of the *Critique of Judgment*]", she writes, "does Kant speak of man as an intelligible or a cognitive being...The first part [Critique of Aesthetic Judgment] speaks of men in the plural, as they really are and live in societies; the second part [Critique of Teleological Judgment] speaks of the human species". Thus, "the most decisive difference between the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment* is that the moral laws of the former are valid for all intelligible beings, whereas the rules of the latter are strictly limited in their validity to human beings on earth" (Arendt, 1982: 13).

Lastly, it is only in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that we find a conception of

judgment as the ability to deal with particulars in their particularity, that is, without subsuming them under a pre-given universal, but actively searching the universal out of the particular.⁸ Kant formulated this distinction as that between determinant and reflective judgments. For him judgment in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, or law) is given, then the judgment which subsumes the particular is determinant. If, however, only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgment is reflective (Kant, 1952: 18). For Kant determinant judgments were cognitive, while reflective judgments were non-cognitive. Kant then distinguished two kinds of reflective judgment, aesthetic and teleological: the former is dealt with in the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgment’ and concern objects to which we attribute the property of beauty, the latter is dealt with in the ‘Critique of Teleological Judgment’ and concern the attribution of finality to nature. In neither type of judgment, the universal is given in advance or general rule is provided under which to subsume the particular. For Kant, therefore, reflective judgment is seen as the capacity to ascend from the particular

⁸ Arendt stresses that this capacity to judge the particular *qua* particular is not to be found in Kant’s moral philosophy. As she puts it:

“For judgment of the particular – This is beautiful, This is ugly; This is right, This is wrong – has no place in Kant’s moral philosophy. Judgment is not practical reason; practical reason “reasons” and tells me what to do and what no to do; it lays down the law and is identical with the will, and the will commands; it speaks in imperatives. Judgment, on the contrary, arises from “a merely

to the universal without the mediation of determinant concepts or of general rules given in advance; it is reasoning about particulars in their relation to the universal rather than reasoning about universals in their relation to the particular. In the case of aesthetic judgment this means that I can understand and apply the universal predicate of beauty only through experiencing a particular object that exemplifies it. Thus, upon encountering a flower, a unique landscape, or a particular painting, I am able to say that it is an example of beauty, that it possesses “exemplary validity”.

It is important to note in this context that this notion of examples, or of the exemplary validity strikes Arendt as the fruitful solution to the problem of mediating the particular and the universal. “Examples”, she says quoting Kant, “are the go-cart of judgments” (Arendt, 1982: 76). They permit us to discover the universal in and through the particular, insofar as they embody a universal meaning while relating their particularity. Thus, “one may encounter or think of some table that one judges to be the best possible table and take this table as the example of how tables actually should be: the exemplary table (“example” comes from *eximere*, “to single out some particular”). This exemplar is and remains a contemplative pleasure or inactive delight” (Arendt, 1982: 15).

particular that in its very particularity reveals the generality that otherwise could not be defined” (Arendt, 1982: 77).

For Arendt this notion of exemplary validity is not restricted to aesthetic objects or to individuals who exemplified certain virtues (she uses the figure of Achilles as an example of courage). Rather, she wants to extend this notion to events in the past that carry a meaning beyond their sheer happening. It is here that aesthetic judgment joins with the retrospective judgment of the historian or spectator. The American and French Revolutions, the Paris Commune, the Russian Soviets, the German Revolutionary Councils of 1918-1919, the Hungarian uprising of 1956, all these events possess the kind of exemplary validity that makes them of general significance, while still retaining their own specificity and uniqueness. Thus, by attending to these events in their particularity the historian or judging spectator is able to illuminate their general significance.

It is important to note that Arendt does not value the fact that Kant begins with the moral law and justifies republican government in terms of it. This is why Arendt dismisses Kant’s political writings (‘Perpetual Peace’, ‘What is Enlightenment?’ etc.), and seeks an “unwritten political philosophy” in the Third Critique. However, Arendt returns ‘What is Enlightenment?’ and refers to Kant’s attitude to

the French Revolution, since Kant, in this essay, praised this event for arousing a universal yet disinterested sympathy on the part of the spectators, although from the standpoint of the actors it was an illegitimate act. “We are here concerned only with the attitude of the outlookers”, Kant writes, “as it reveals itself in public while the drama of great political changes is taking place; for they openly express universal yet disinterested sympathy for one set of protagonists against their adversaries, even at the risk that their partiality could be of great disadvantage to themselves” (Kant, 1970b: 182).

The sympathy that the French Revolution evoked in the spectators indicates for Kant a “moral disposition” shared by mankind. Thus, even if unsuccessful, the French Revolution “can never be forgotten, since it has revealed in human nature an aptitude and power for improvement of a kind which no politician could have thought up by examining the course of events in the past” (Kant, 1970b: 184). Indeed, “the occurrence in question is too momentous, too intimately interwoven with the interests of humanity, and too widespread in its influence upon all parts of the world for nations not to be reminded of it when favorable circumstances present themselves, and to rise up and make renewed attempts of the same kind as before” (Kant, 1970b: 185).

Arendt interprets this passage as an affirmation that the importance of the French Revolution lies for Kant exclusively in the opinions of the spectators rather than in the deeds of the actors. The spectator, because they are not involved, can perceive the ultimate meaning of the event, the meaning that the actors, blinded by their partiality and their lack of disinterestedness, are not aware of:

Only the spectator occupies a position that enables him to see the whole; the actor, because he is part of the play, must enact his part – he is partial by definition. The spectator is impartial by definition – no part is assigned to him (Arendt, 1982: 55).

Hence, she concludes, “withdrawal from direct involvement to a standpoint outside the game is a condition *sine qua non* of all judgment” (Arendt, 1982: 55, my emphasis). Furthermore,

what the actor is concerned with is *doxa*, fame – that is, the opinion of others...For the actor, the decisive question is thus how he appears to others...the actor is dependent on the opinion of the spectator; he is not autonomous (in Kant’s language)...The standard is the spectator. And this standard is autonomous (Arendt, 1982: 55, my emphasis).

By viewing judgment as the capacity to be impartial and disinterested, Arendt

locates it on the side of the spectators rather than that of the actors. Only the spectators can produce judgments which are free, autonomous, disinterested, and impartial. They can thus understand the meaning of events better than actors:

What counted in the French Revolution...a phenomenon not to be forgotten, were not the deeds and misdeeds of the actors but the opinions, the enthusiastic approbation, of spectators, of persons who themselves were not involved (Arendt, 1982: 65).

Therefore, “what constituted the appropriate public realm for this particular event were not the actors but the acclaiming spectators” (Arendt, 1982: 61).

It would be a mistake, however, to take these passages as indicating an absolute separation of the actors from the spectators. Arendt in fact seeks to reconcile their different perspectives by noting that the “critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator; without this critical, judging faculty the doer or maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived” (Arendt, 1982: 63).

For Arendt it is the spectators who have the privilege to judge impartially and disinterestedly. It is not simply because they are detached from the doings of actors, but also because in their judgment the spectators have to appeal to two

crucial faculties, imagination and common sense.

Imagination is the faculty of representing in one's mind that which is already appeared to one's senses. Through the imagination one can represent objects that are no longer present and thus establish the distance necessary for an impartial judgment. Once this distancing has occurred, one is in a position to reflect upon these representations from a number of different perspectives, and thereby to reach a judgment about the proper value of an object. As Arendt says:

Only what touches, affects, one in representation, when one can no longer be affected by immediate presence... can be judged to be right or wrong, important or irrelevant, beautiful or ugly, or something in between. One then speaks of judgment and no longer of taste because, though it still affects one like a matter of taste, one now has, by means of representation, established the proper distance, the remoteness or uninvolvedness or disinterestedness, that is requisite for approbation and disapprobation, for evaluating something as its proper worth. By removing the object, one has established the conditions for impartiality (Arendt, 1982: 67).

The faculty of judgment thus depends upon two mental operations: there is the operation of the imagination, in which one represents objects that are removed

from immediate sense perception and therefore no longer affect one directly, and then there is the operation of reflection, in which one judges these representations. This twofold operation establishes the most important condition for judgment, the condition of impartiality, or of “disinterestedness”. As Arendt puts it:

By closing one’s eyes one becomes an impartial, not a directly affected, spectator of visible things...Also: by making what one’s external senses perceived into an object for one’s inner sense...one is in a position to “see” by the eyes of the mind, i.e., to see the whole that gives meaning to the particulars. The advantage the spectator has is that he sees the play as a whole, while each of the actors knows only his part or, if he should judge from the perspective of acting, only the part of the whole that concerns him (Arendt, 1982: 68-69, see also Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 94-96).

The other faculty that spectators have to appeal is common sense or *sensus communis*. Kant himself declared that “In matters of taste we must renounce ourselves in favor of others...In taste egoism is overcome” (Kant in Arendt, 1982: 67). By this he meant that for our judgments to be valid we must transcend our private or subjective conditions in favor of public and intersubjective ones, and we are able to do this by appealing to our *sensus communis*. In this respect,

Arendt notes:

Judgment, and especially judgments of taste, always reflects upon others and their taste, takes their possible judgments into account. This is necessary because I am human and cannot live outside the company of men. I judge as a member of this community and not as a member of a supersensible world (Arendt, 1982: 67).

The term *sensus communis* is used by Kant to indicate not merely the common sense we expect everybody to have, but a special sense that fits us into a human community. It is a specifically humane sense because communication, i.e., speech, depends upon it. Arendt remarks that in Kant this community sense or *sensus communis* is contrasted to the *sensus privatus* that every individual, in his or her singularity, possesses. Kant's own definition of *sensus communis* is given in paragraph 40 of the *Critique of Judgment*, entitled 'Taste as a kind of *sensus communis*'. Here, after having distinguished it from mere common sense, he writes that:

By the name *sensus communis* is to be understood the idea of a public sense, i.e., a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of everyone else...This is accomplished by weighing

the judgment, not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible, judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else, as the result of a mere abstraction from the limitations which contingently affect our own estimate (Kant, 1952: 151).

Kant then offers three maxims of “common human understanding”: (1) think for oneself (the maxim of unprejudiced thought); (2) think from the standpoint of everyone else (the maxim of enlarged thought); (3) always think consistently, be in agreement with oneself (the maxim of consistent thought). Arendt notes that these are not maxims of cognition, strictly speaking, since “truth compels, one doesn’t need any “maxims”. Maxims apply and are needed only for matters of opinion and in judgments” (Arendt, 1982; 71). In the case of second maxim, that of enlarged thought, it indicates for Arendt one’s quality of thought “in the worldly matters” (Arendt, 1982: 71). Or as Kant put it:

However small the range and degree to which a man’s natural endowments extend, still [it] indicates a man of enlarged mind if he detached himself from the subjective personal conditions of his judgment, which cramp the minds of so many others, and reflects upon his own judgment from a universal [general] standpoint (which he can only determine by shifting his ground to the

standpoint of others) (Kant, 1952: 153).⁹

Judgment and the *Vita Activa*

As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, Arendt presented a model of judgment in the essays ‘The Crisis in Culture’ and ‘Truth and Politics’ which could be characterized as far more political than the one presented so far. In these essays, judgment is viewed as a specifically political ability, namely, as “the ability to see things not only from one’s own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present”, and as being “one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm, in the common world” (Arendt, 1968b: 221). Indeed, in this model Arendt identifies judgment with *phronesis* on the grounds that both are capabilities of political actors, and that both are rooted in *sensus communis*. She says that:

The Greeks called this ability [to judge] *phronesis*, or insight, and they considered it the principal virtue or excellence of the statesman in distinction

⁹ It should be noted that Arendt consistently substitutes “general” where the standard translations have “universal”. One important reason for this change is suggested in Arendt’s essay ‘The Crisis in Culture’ (1968b: 221), where she says that “judgment is endowed with a certain specific validity but is never universally valid. Its claims to validity can never extend further than the others in whose place the judging person has put himself for his considerations. Judgment, Kant says, is valid “for every single judging person”, but the emphasis in the sentence is on “judging”; it is not valid for those who do not judge or for those who are not members of the public realm where the objects of judgment appear”. Thus Arendt’s choice of terms in the Kant lectures is quite important

from the wisdom of the philosopher. The difference between this judging insight and speculative thought lies in that the former has its roots in what we usually call common sense, which the latter constantly transcends. Common sense...discloses to us the nature of the world insofar as it is a common world; we owe to it the fact that our strictly private and "subjective" five senses and their sensory data can adjust themselves to a nonsubjective and "objective" world which we have in common and share with others. Judging is one, if not the most, important activity in which this sharing-the-world-with-others comes pass (Arendt, 1968b: 221).

Moreover, in discussing the non-coercive character of judgment, the fact that it can only appeal to but never force the agreement of others, she claims that "this "wooing" or persuading corresponds closely to what the Greeks called *peitein*, the convincing and persuading speech which they regarded as the typically political form of people talking with one another" (Arendt, 1968b: 222). She then goes on to claim that:

Culture and politics...belong together because it is not knowledge or truth which is at stake, but rather judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of

in relation to her reading (See Beiner, 1982: 163).

opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it, as well as to how it is to look henceforth, what kind of things are to appear in it (Arendt, 1968b: 223).

Now, all these statements would seem to indicate that for Arendt judgment is the ability most closely associated with political action. The identification of judgment with *phronesis* would seem to confirm this, since what is required in matters affecting the political community is precisely that form of practical reasoning that Aristotle sought to discriminate from both *episteme* and *sophia*, as well as from *techne*. Arendt's treatment of political judgment, however, constantly make reference to Kant's idea, in particular those discussed in the previous section under the heading of aesthetic judgment. She claims that both aesthetic and political judgment are concerned with particulars, that they can only claim a subjective universal validity, since they are reflective and not determinant, and that they rest ultimately on the potential agreement with others. Interestingly, Arendt also claims that Kant was the first philosopher to discover the importance of judgment, and underlines the fact that:

What...is quite new and even startlingly new in Kant's propositions in the *Critique of Judgment* is that he discovered this phenomenon in all its grandeur

precisely when he was examining the phenomenon of taste and hence the only kind of judgments which, since they concern merely aesthetic matters, have always been supposed to lie outside the political realm as well as the domain of reason (Arendt, 1968b: 221).¹⁰

What becomes clear, therefore, is that in her discussion of judgment from the standpoint of political action Arendt appeals not only to Aristotle's ideas but also to those of Kant. Arendt emphasized to a great extent the representative nature of judgment, the fact that it always has to take into account the opinions of others, and that as a political faculty it can only be exercised and tested in public, in the free and open exchange of opinions in the public sphere. The emphasis is particularly evident in her treatment of Kant's notion of an "enlarged mentality", which he saw as the ability to think from the standpoint of everyone else. Arendt elaborates this notion as follows:

The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself

¹⁰ Cf. "Kant was the first, and has remained the last, of the great philosophers to deal with judgment as one of the basic mental activities" (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 95); "Not till Kant's *Critique of Judgment* did this faculty become a major topic of a major thinker" (Arendt, 1971, *Thinking*: 215).

always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement. From this potential agreement judgment derives its specific validity. This means, on the one hand, that such judgment must liberate itself from the “subjective private conditions”, that is, from the idiosyncrasies which naturally determine the outlook of each individual in his privacy and are legitimate as long as they are only privately held opinions, but which are not fit to enter the market place, and lack all validity in the public realm. And this enlarged way of thinking, which as judgment knows how to transcend its own individual limitations, on the other hand, cannot function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the presence of others in whose place it must think, whose perspectives it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all. As logic, to be sound, depends on the presence of the self, so judgment, to be valid, depends on the presence of others (Arendt, 1968b: 220-221).

For Arendt, therefore, the validity of political judgment depends on our ability to think “representatively”, that is, from the standpoint of everyone else, so that we are able to look at the world from a number of different perspectives. In this

respect the process of opinion formation is never a solitary activity; rather, it requires a genuine encounter with different opinions so that a particular issue may be examined from every possible standpoint until, as she puts it, “it is flooded and made transparent by the full light of human comprehension” (Arendt, 1968b: 242).

The capacity to enlarge one’s perspective, is indeed crucial to the formation of opinions that can claim more than subjective validity; individuals may hold personal opinions on many subject matters, but they can form representative opinions only by enlarging their standpoint. As Arendt says:

Political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them. This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is a question neither of empathy...nor of counting noses and joining a majority, but of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not. The more people’s standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my

final conclusions, my opinion (Arendt, 1968b: 241).

Truth, Opinion and Judgment

The representative character of judgment and opinion has important implications for the question of validity. Arendt always stressed that the formation of valid opinions requires a public space where individuals can test and purify their views through a process of mutual debate and enlightenment. She was, however, quite opposed to the idea that opinions should be measured by the standard of truth, or that debate should be conducted according to strict scientific standards of validity. In her view, truth belongs to the realm of cognition, the realm of logic, mathematics, and the strict sciences, and carries always an element of coercion, since it precludes debate and must be accepted by every individual in possession of his or her rational faculties. Against the plurality of opinions, truth has a despotic character: it compels universal assent, leaves the mind little freedom of movement, eliminates the diversity of views and reduces the richness of human discourse. In this respect, truth is anti-political, since by eliminating debate and diversity it eliminates the very principles of political life. As Arendt writes:

The trouble is that factual truth, like all other truth, peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate, and debate constitutes the very essence of

political life. The modes of thought and communication that deal with truth, if seen from the political perspective, are necessarily domineering; they don't take account other people's opinions, and taking these into account is the hallmark of all strictly political thinking (Arendt, 1968b: 241).

For Arendt, a truth "whose validity needs no support from the side of opinion strikes at the very roots of all politics and all governments" (Arendt, 1968b: 233).

She cites the famous statement of Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that says "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights", and argues that by saying "We hold these truths to be self-evident" Jefferson acknowledged that these truths were not self-evident, that they stood in need of agreement and consent, and therefore that the statement "All men are created equal" was a matter of opinion and not of truth. "That all men are created equal", Arendt writes, "is not self-evident nor can it be proved. We hold this opinion because freedom is possible only among equals, and we believe that the joys and gratifications of free company are to be preferred to the doubtful pleasures of holding domination...these are matters of opinion and not of truth" (Arendt, 1968b: 247).

Arendt also quotes the remark by Lessing – “Let each man say what he deems truth, and let truth itself be condemned unto God” – and interprets it as saying “Let us thank God that we don’t know the truth”. For Arendt this expressed the insight that “for men living in company, the inexhaustible richness of human discourse is infinitely more significant and meaningful than any One Truth could ever be” (Arendt, 1968b: 233-234). “Lessing’s greatness”, Arendt writes, “does not merely consist in a theoretical insight that there cannot be one single truth within the human world, but in his gladness that it does not exist and that, therefore, the unending discourse among men will never cease so long as there are men at all. A single absolute truth, could there have been one...would have spelled the end of humanity” (Arendt, 1968a: 27, my emphasis).

The appeal to Lessing is meant to vindicate the power and dignity of opinion against those thinkers, from Plato to Hobbes, who saw it as mere illusion, as a confused or inadequate grasp of the truth. For Arendt opinion is not a defective form of knowledge that should be transcended or left behind as soon as one is in possession of the truth. Rather, it is a distinct form of knowledge which requires the use of imagination and the capacity to think “representatively”. It is important to stress in this context that Arendt does not want to dismiss the philosophers’

attempt to find universal or absolute standards of knowledge and cognition, but to check their desire to impose those standards upon the sphere of human affairs, since they would eliminate its plurality and essential relativity, that is, the fact that it is composed of a plurality of individuals who view it from different perspectives which are all relative to each other.¹¹ The imposition of such a standard would mean that individuals would no longer be required to exercise their judgment, develop their imagination, or cultivate an “enlarged mentality”, since they would no longer need to deliberate in common. Strict demonstration, rather than debate and argumentation, would then become the only legitimate form of discourse.¹²

Now we must be careful not to impute to Arendt the view that truth has no legitimate role to play in politics or in the sphere of human affairs. She does indeed assert that “All truths – not only the various kinds of rational truth but also factual truth – are opposed to opinion in their mode of asserting validity” (Arendt, 1968b: 239), since they all carry an element of compulsion. However, she is only preoccupied with the negative consequences of the former (i.e., rational truth)

¹¹ Arendt reproaches Kant for having proposed an absolute standard for morality in the form of the categorical imperative. This standard for Arendt is inhumane, because it “is postulated as absolute and in its absoluteness introduces into the interhuman realm – which by its nature consists of relationships – something that runs counter to its fundamental relativity” (Arendt, 1968a: 27).

¹² It is important to note that for Arendt persuasion is the only truly political form of speech. It is that form of speech designed to “woo the consent of everyone else in the hope of coming to an agreement with him eventually” (Arendt, 1968b: 222). Because of this it is very different from demonstration or logical proof, which rests on compelling arguments that require the assent of every rational being.

when applied to the sphere of politics, while she defends the importance of factual truth for the preservation of an accurate account of the past and for the very existence of political communities. “Factual truth”, she writes, “is always related to other people: it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon testimony...It is political by nature” (Arendt, 1968b: 238). It follows, therefore, that:

Facts and opinions, though they must be kept apart, are not antagonistic to each other; they belong to the same realm. Facts inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interests and passions, can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth. Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute. In other words, factual truth informs political thought just as rational truth informs philosophical speculation (Arendt, 1968b: 238).¹³

The relationship between facts and opinions is thus one of mutual entailment: if opinion were not based on correct information and the free access to all relevant facts they could scarcely claim any validity. And if they were to be based on

¹³ Arendt is fully aware that facts are theory-laden and that historical inquiry is always framed by interpretive categories. Nevertheless, she believes that facts cannot be changed at all and that the historian must always respect the line separating the interpretation of facts from their manipulation or distortion. See her comments on this issue, Arendt, 1968b: 238-239.

fantasy, self-deception, or deliberate falsehood, then no possibility for genuine debate and argumentation could be sustained. Both factual truth and the general habit of truth telling are therefore basic to the formation of sound opinion and to the flourishing of political debate.¹⁴ Moreover, if the record of the past were to be destroyed by organized lying, or be distorted by an attempt to rewrite history (as the case of Stalinist historiography was), political life would be deprived of one of its essential and stabilizing elements. As Arendt writes:

The liar, who may get away with any number of single falsehoods, will find it impossible to get away lying on principle. This is one of the lessons that could be learned from the totalitarian experiments and the totalitarian rulers' frightening confidence in the power of lying – in their ability, for instance, to write history again and again to adapt the past to the “political line” of the present moment or to eliminate data that did not fit their ideology... The results of such experiments when undertaken by those in possession of the means of violence and terrible enough, but lasting deception is not among them. There always comes a point beyond which lying becomes counterproductive. This

¹⁴ Indeed, they are the basic preconditions for the establishment of self-identity and of an adequate sense of reality. As Arendt observes:

“The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lies will now be accepted as truth, and the truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world – and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end – is being destroyed” (Arendt, 1968b: 257).

point is reached when the audience to which the lies are addressed is forced to disregard altogether the distinguishing line between truth and falsehood in order to be able to survive...truth that can be relied on disappears entirely from public life, and with it the chief stabilizing factor in the ever-changing affairs of men (Arendt, 1972: 7. Cf. Arendt, 1968b: 257-258).

In this respect, Arendt notes:

Not the past – and all factual truth, of course, concern the past – or the present, insofar as it is the outcome of the past, but the future is open to action. If the past and present are treated as part of the future – that is, changed back into their former state of potentiality – the political realm is deprived not only of its main stabilizing force but of the starting point from which to change, to begin something new (Arendt, 1968b: 258).

In sum, both factual truth and the practice of truth-telling are essential to political life. The antagonism for Arendt is between rational truth and opinion, since the former does not allow for debate and dissent, while the latter thrives on it. Against Plato and Hobbes, who denigrated the role of opinion in political matters, Arendt reasserts the value and importance of political discourse, and thus of a politics that acknowledges difference and the plurality of opinions.

3. Conclusion

Is there a “flagrant contradiction” (Bernstein, 1986: 231) in Arendt’s thought on judgment? I think not. Of course, the faculty of judgment looks different depending on whether we take the perspective of the actor or the spectator. But it is simply not the case that Arendt recommended “common sense”, persuasion, and consensus for those in the game, and critical thinking, impartiality, and autonomy for those who were out of it. Arendt’s historical understanding does not permit such clear dichotomies. If we step back and relate the account of representative thinking in ‘The Crisis in Culture’, and ‘Truth and Politics’ to Arendt’s account of critical or Socratic thinking in ‘Philosophy and Politics’, ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations’, and her Kant lectures, we see the underlying continuity in her thought on judgment.¹⁵

One reason why critics like Bernstein (1986) and Beiner (1982) see an irreducible gap between Arendt’s early, actor-centered account of judgment and her later, critical or historical one is that they fail to take sufficient account of Arendt’s narrative about the destruction, loss, or decline of the public realm in the modern age. This narrative, developed in detail in *The Human Condition*, makes any

¹⁵ To be fair, Bernstein points in the direction of “independent thought” in his essay, but tends to restrict its hermeneutical importance to thinking about Arendt’s own activity as a writer and

appeal to community-based judgment, whether Aristotelian *phronesis* or Kant's judgments of taste, highly complex.

Furthermore, when we put Arendt's various statements about judgment in the context of the "crisis in judgment" implied by the narrative in *The Human Condition*, they are revealed to be highly conditional.¹⁶ From the very beginning – indeed as far back as *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – Arendt emphasized the dissolution of modern Europe's moral groundwork, the "break in our tradition" and the "loss of common sense". *Phronesis*, representative thinking, and an "enlarged mentality", their basic conditions of possibility have been destroyed by "the moral and spiritual breakdown of occidental society" (Arendt 1994: 315), on the one hand, and the rise of mass culture, on the other.

Arendt writes about judgment in a historical situation parallel to the one Socrates confronted in Athens. There, too, traditional morality had fragmented to yield a morality of success. The way out of this situation, for Arendt as well as Socrates, is no return to a shattered tradition, nor a simple call to action, but a radical questioning of all the old "yardsticks" for action and judgment. What is called for

political thinker. See Bernstein, 1986: 234.

¹⁶ Arendt also explicitly addresses this crisis in the essay 'Understanding and Politics' and 'The Crisis in Culture'. In the former essay, Arendt emphasizes the difficulties confronting understanding and judgment in the wake of the "growth of meaningless" and the "loss of common sense" (Arendt, 1994: 31); In the latter essay, she underlines the "inability to judge" of mass man

in such situations is not activism, but independent judgment, “thinking without a bannister” (Arendt, 1979: 336). It is important to remember, in this regard, that Arendt wrote *The Human Condition*, her consideration of the *vita activa*, not in order to stimulate activism, but in order to help us “think what we are doing” (Arendt, 1958: 5).

It is because of the modern crisis in judgment, of the staggering growth of stupidity and the inability to judge, that Arendt explicitly turns to Socrates as a model in ‘Philosophy and Politics’, ‘Thinking and Moral Consideration’, and in the *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*. In these texts, she poses Socrates as a model of “critical thinking”, a model which captures the negative and public dimensions of how thinking prepares for independent, impartial judgment.

In all three texts, Arendt emphasizes the purifying quality of Socratic thinking. Socrates did not teach anything; rather, he exposed unexamined prejudices to the “wind of thought”, dissolving prejudices but putting no “truths” in their place (Arendt, 1990: 81; 1984: 23; 1982: 37-39). Hence “critical thinking” is an essentially destructive activity. It has a “destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short on those (Arendt, 1968b; 199).

customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics” (Arendt, 1984: 24).

The Socratic dialogue can hardly be characterized as deliberation aiming at decision and action. Socratic thinking is a public exercise of reason, yet this kind of thinking prepares for judgment by suspending all “fixed habits of thought, ossified rules and standards”. As Arendt put it at a conference on her work in 1973:

I think that this ‘thinking’... - thinking in the Socratic sense – is a maieutic function, a midwifery. That is, you bring out all your opinions, prejudices, what have you; and you know that never, in any of the [Platonic] dialogues, did Socrates ever discover any child [of the mind] who was not a wind-egg. That you remain in a way empty after thinking... And once you are empty, then, in a way which is difficult to say, you are prepared to judge. That is, without having any book of rules under which you can subsume a particular case, you have got to say “this is good”, “this is bad”, “this is wrong”, “this is beautiful”, and “this is ugly”...we are now prepared to meet the phenomena, so to speak, head on, without any preconceived system (Arendt in Young-Bruel, 1982: 452, my emphasis).

It is the negative preparation that thinking provides for judgment which Arendt

valued above all. Judgment of a particular phenomenon or event can be the “by-product” of thinking, not because it is in any sense the direct result of thought, but rather because thinking clears the space which makes it possible (Arendt, 1984: 36). The testing and examination of opinions that is the heart of critical thinking as practiced by Socrates, and articulated by Kant, creates the mental space necessary for independent, impartial judgment (Arendt, 1982: 38-39).

In fact, as the Kant lectures make clear, “representative thinking” and “enlarged mentality” are not just models for public deliberation. They are, rather, the necessary vehicles of critical thinking. They proceed imaginatively, drawing on the possible standpoints and opinions of others in order to “abstract from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment” (Kant in Arendt, 1982: 43). As Arendt puts it in the Lectures:

The “enlargement of the mind” plays a crucial role in the *Critique of Judgment*. It is accomplished by “comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man”. The faculty that makes this possible is called imagination... Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut

itself off from “all others”. To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides...To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one’s imagination to go visiting (Arendt, 1982: 42-43).

Dialogue in the agora, or the public use of one’s reason, are good ways of “enlarging” one’s mentality, of “training one’s imagination to go visiting”. But neither representative nor “enlarged” thought have decision or action as their *raison d’être*. The “abstraction from contingent limitations” enables the attainment of a “general standpoint”, which Arendt characterizes as “a view point from which to look upon, to watch, to form judgment, or as Kant himself says, to reflect upon human affairs” (Arendt, 1982: 44).¹⁷ It “does not tell one how to act”; rather, it enables one to judge, impartially, independently.

What links Socratic dialectic and Kantian enlarged thought for Arendt is the way both yield not the truth, but a more impartial, and hence more valid, each individual’s *doxa*, his or her “it appears to me” (Arendt, 1990: 80-81; 1968b: 241-242; 1982: 37-40). If we view Arendt’s thoughts on judgment in terms of a broader perspectivism, the standpoints of the actor and the spectator emerge not as

¹⁷ I disagree with those who view Arendt’s notion of representative thinking as similar to empathy. See, for example, Disch, 1994.

two radically different kinds of judgment (engaged and political vs. detached and historical), but rather as two poles of independent judgment. To be sure, the “general standpoint” of the impartial judge is different from the seemingly more vigorous standpoint of the citizen’s *doxa*, “it appears to me”. Yet, as Kant’s great enemy Nietzsche reminds us, “the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity”, be” (Nietzsche, 1989: 12). Impartial judgment, as conceived by Arendt, remains perspectival in character; it is opinion in its highest form.

Now, I want to conclude by briefly considering the political implications of her controversial thesis about the “banality of evil” as an example of judgment. In the fifteenth chapter of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt closes her description of Eichmann with these words, “the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*” (Arendt, 1965: 252). Twenty years later she wrote that by the “banality of evil” she meant “no theory or doctrine, but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was a perhaps extraordinary

shallowness” (Arendt, 1984: 7).

While the furor surrounding the Eichmann book was largely the result of Arendt’s brief discussion of the complicity of some Jewish ghetto leaders with Nazis, her concept of the banality evil was also controversial. Many found her description of a thoughtless, patently undemonic Eichmann too much. The gap between the crimes and the man seemed somehow to diminish the horrors and the guilt (see Young-Bruehl, 1982: 347-355).

Both the novel, paradoxical quality of Arendt’s concept and the outraged response to her judgment are of interest here. “The Banality of evil” is, first of all, a perfect example of detached judgment, the judgment of the spectator. A particular – Eichmann – is not subsumed under ready-to-hand ideas about the nature of evil; rather, Arendt practiced a form of reflective judgment, ascending from the particular (Eichmann in the flesh) to a concept. This concept, “the banality of evil”, enabled her to disclose not only the specific nature of Eichmann’s evil, but also the increasingly widespread phenomenon of evil detached from wickedness, evil committed by the most ordinary or “normal” of men, men who were neither ideological fanatics nor beasts in human form (Arendt, 1965: 25-26; 48-52). The precondition of this disclosure was the purging of a traditional theoretical and

philosophical ways of thinking about evil as a phenomenon with deep roots in the sinful character of the doer. Only then, when the concept of evil had been unfrozen, the recognition and naming of a new phenomenon could occur. It is important to note that, as a judgment of a particular, the “banality of evil” is not intended as a global redefinition of the nature of evil *tout court*.

We must not forget, however, that this very judgment evoked the most outraged responses. Following Kant’s dictum, Arendt had resisted enormous pressure and made her judgment public (see Young-Bruehl, 1982: 347-348). The price of “publicity” was not “testing and purification”, but virtual excommunication. Her judgment revealed her moral sense, her moral “taste”, yet this was not the case of “wooing the consent” of others (Arendt, 1968b: 222). The philosophical and moral challenge implicit in Arendt’s judgment was too much. Her independence of mind was regarded, in Gershom Scholem’s word, as a “perversity” (Scholem in Arendt, 1978: 243), the reflection of a lack of “*Ahabath Israel*, love of the Jewish People” (Scholem in Arendt, 1978: 241).

Indeed, in making her judgment, Arendt self-consciously took the standpoint of the outsider: a nonparticipant in the trial, to be sure, but also an outsider when it came to the immediate political stakes of the process. In her view, it was far more

important to focus attention on “the central moral, legal, and political phenomena of our century” than to align herself in solidarity with the narrative and the tactics of the prosecution in the case. But, like Socrates, Arendt was not very good at the persuasive speech that convinces the many. To this day, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* remains her most controversial book.

Just as Socrates’ public performance of thinking led him to be charged with “corrupting the youth”, so Arendt’s public judgment was seen as a betrayal of her people. This is the risk run by anyone who dares to truly think and judge in public, a risk which is glossed over by the neo-Aristotelian presentation of judgment as a form of deliberation, as well as by the liberal Kantian formula of “the public use of one’s reason” (Kant in Arendt, 1982: 39). The more genuine judgment is, the less it respects the pre-given “yardsticks” (Arendt, 1994: 321) that are appealed to by “common sense”. Independent judgment “brushes history against the grain” (Benjamin, 1999: 261). As a creative activity, which Arendt shared emphasis with Kant on the role of imagination in judgment, it will most likely be misunderstood and resented.

This is not to say the truly independent judge must become a martyr like Socrates. However, it will be difficult to avoid becoming something of a pariah, especially

if one has the courage to make one's judgments public. Indeed, for Arendt, looking at things from "the pariah's point of view" was a lifetime vocation. Arendt's own understanding of the pariah perspective is best expressed in her letter to Scholem:

What confuses you is that my argument and my approach are different from what you are used to; in other words, the trouble is that I am independent. By this I mean, on the one hand, that I do not belong to any organization and always speak only for myself, and on the other hand, that I have great confidence in Lessing's *selbstdenken* [to think for oneself] for which, I think, no ideology, no public opinion, and no "convictions" can ever be a substitute. Whatever objections you may have to the results, you won't understand them unless you realize they are really my own and nobody else's (Arendt, 1978: 250).

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Reflections on Foucault and Arendt's Work and Life: From the Pariah's Point of View

Now, I want to conclude with a reflection between their life and work, between their political commitments and theoretical detachment, reviewing the overall theoretical tensions in the point of pariah they distinctively hold.

1. Modernism/ Postmodernism, Kant/ Nietzsche

It is my contention that Foucault and Arendt are situated within a tradition of critical theory running from Kant to Nietzsche. The opposition between modernism and postmodernism, between its philosophical sources, Kant and Nietzsche, has been widely overstated, for example, in the polemical stance taken by Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987). I think that this way of mapping does Foucault and Arendt an injustice.

While Foucault and Arendt have prefigured and influenced postmodern theory, they cannot be wholly assimilated to that rubric. They are subtle, sophisticated, and complex thinkers who draw from multiple sources and problematics while aligning themselves with no single one. If there are privileged figures in their work, they are critics of reason and Western thought such as Nietzsche. Nietzsche

provided Foucault and Arendt with the impetus and ideas to attack Hegelian and Marxist philosophies. While Foucault and Arendt give Nietzsche a political democratic twist, they did accept Nietzsche's claims that systematizing methods produce reductive social and historical analyses, and that knowledge is perspectival in nature, requiring multiple viewpoints to interpret a heterogeneous, fragile, and hazardous reality.

Foucault and Arendt do not appreciate Kant's official philosophy, i.e., an analytical philosophy of truth, a philosophy derived, in deductive fashion, from an absolute. Yet in their later work, they appropriate Kant's reflection on the Enlightenment and revolution (Foucault) and his aesthetic judgment (Arendt). Arendt bases her theory of political judgment on Kant's aesthetics rather than on his moral philosophy. It is an interesting choice, since Kant himself bases his moral and political philosophy on practical reason and not on our aesthetic faculties. Arendt, however, claims that Kant's practical and political writings fail to address the question of action in the realm of plurality and appearance, and that the *Critique of Judgment* contains what she calls Kant's "unwritten political philosophy" (Arendt, 1982: 61). She does not deny that Kant begins with the moral law and justifies republican government in terms of it. But her point is that

Kant's politics of truth brackets the realm of opinion, plurality, and appearance from the outset, and so denatures the political. In order to appropriate Kant for politics of opinion, Arendt turns to the third *Critic*, while ignoring the systematic intent that governs his political writings, his politics of truth.

Like Arendt, Foucault also acknowledges that Kant has founded the two philosophical traditions, one, the analytical philosophy of truth, the other, the critical ontology of the present and of ourselves. Regarding himself as a critic and an ontologist, Foucault sees in Kant's reflection on the Enlightenment and revolution the origin of a critical ontology leading through Hegel, Nietzsche, and Weber, to Horkheimer and Adorno.

Foucault holds that our modernity begins with Kant's attempt to make reason critical, i.e., to establish the limits and legitimate use of reason. But Kant's attempt to show that this critical use of reason is its true universal nature is not what is original and important for Foucault. Foucault does not deny that Kant is attempting to preserve the normative role of reason in the face of the collapse of metaphysics. But Rather than seeing Kant as announcing a universal solution, Foucault uses Kant's essays as a diagnostic of a particular historical conjuncture.

What Foucault finds distinctive and insightful in Kant's essays is a philosopher

qua philosopher realizing for the first time that his thinking is an attempt to respond to his historical situation.

Although Foucault and Arendt end up by affirming Nietzsche, I find it useful as an initial approximation to view Foucault and Arendt as an idiosyncratic synthesis of their two predecessors, Kant and Nietzsche. Viewing them from this perspective, that is, seeing them as lying both “between” and “beyond” Nietzsche and Kant, enables us to understand more clearly the tensions and complexity of their work.

Along with the selectivity of their interpretation of Kant, they also embrace postmodernity not as an absolute given but as an attitude in a historical conjuncture. By “attitude”, Foucault means a way of thinking and acting, the consciousness of the discontinuity of time, of a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty. This is the same with Arendt. Rather than seeking to distinguish the modern era from the premodern or postmodern, they try to find out how the attitude of modernity has found itself struggling with attitudes of “countermodernity” (Foucault, 1984: 39). Arendt’s turn to Socrates and Foucault’s turn to Kant should be understood in this light. Foucault writes about knowledge, power and the self, and Arendt writes about action, thinking and

judgment in a modernity-crisis when a taken-for granted understanding of reality as well as the conventional categories of interpretation ceases to function as a shared background. In other words, the breakdown of the traditional virtues in Athens at the time of Socrates, the end of metaphysics at the time of Kant are parallel to the one Foucault and Arendt confronted after Auschwitz and Gulag. In this sense, for Foucault and Arendt, postmodernity is not a terminus of critical inquiry but an inescapable element of our historical experience.

Considering their way of accepting postmodernity not as an absolute given but as an attitude as well as the selectivity and idiosyncrasy of their interpretation of Kant, the mapping of modernism/ postmodernism, and of Kant/ Nietzsche is inadequate to read Foucault and Arendt. This invites a new reading, placing them within a tradition of critical theory running from Kant to Nietzsche. Critical thought, which is experiment as well as problematization (Foucault, 1992; orig. 1984: 8-9, 13; Arendt, 1968b: 14-15), must live within a field of tension. In this light, I argue that these tensions between premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives as well as between Kant and Nietzsche provide the elements for the uniqueness and coherence of their work, and that viewing these tensions as a source of contradiction fundamentally distorts their intentions.

2. The Political and the Personal: Tensions and Continuity

Arendt insisted that “thinking and acting are not the same”, that “they occupy two entirely different existential positions” (Arendt, 1979: 304-305). This distinction between thinking and acting underlies her phenomenology of human activities, providing the basic architecture for her consideration of the active life in *The Human Condition* and the mental activities in *The Life of the Mind*. Arendt believed that action took place in the world, with others, while thinking involved a withdrawal from the world into the solitude of an internal “dialogue...between me and myself” (Arendt, 1971: 185). This formulation of the gap between thinking and acting has frustrated many theorists who want to link theory and practice, and has driven her sympathetic critics to her fragmentary and unfinished work on judgment (Habermas, 1983; Benhabib, 1992b; Gray, 1979; Miller, 1979; Bernstein, 1986; Beiner, 1982; 1983). Their paths are diverse, but their hope has been that her analysis of this faculty would provide the missing link between the life of the citizen and the life of the mind. Arendt encouraged such hopes by referring the faculty of judgment as “the most political of man’s mental abilities” and “the political faculty par excellence” (Arendt, 1984; 36). Furthermore, her description of political or representative thinking in several essays from the 1960s,

certainly seems to show the faculty of judgment as a kind of bridge between thought and action. Yet Arendt remained adamant about keeping them distinct. She continued to insist upon the distinction between thinking and its “by-product” judgment, as well as distinction between judgment and action (Cf. Arendt, 1971: 69, 70; 1984: 37).

On the surface of Arendt’s work, there is the shift from the *vita activa* to the *vita contemplativa*, and there are two different accounts of judgment, which correspond to two distinct phase of her thought. As Beiner suggests, it is quite plausible to speak of not one, but two theories of judgment in Arendt (Beiner, 1982: 91). The first, earlier theory considers judgment from the perspective of *vita activa*; the second, later theory considers it from the standpoint of the life of the mind. Thus as we move from Arendt’s essays of the 1960s to her writings of the 1970s, the emphasis in her account of judgment “shifts from the representative thought and enlarged mentality of political agents to the spectatorship and retrospective judgment of historians and storytellers” (Beiner, 1984: 91).

Is there a “flagrant contradiction” (Bernstein, 1986: 231) in Arendt’s thought on judgment? I think not. Of course, the faculty of judgment looks different depending on whether we take the perspective of the actor or the spectator. But it

is simply not the case that Arendt recommended common sense, persuasion, and consensus for those in the game, and critical thinking, and autonomy for those who were out of it. If we step back and examine the earlier work and the later work in context, and relate them to Arendt's account of critical thinking, we see the underlying continuity in her thought on judgment.

It is because of the modern crisis in judgment, of the growth of inability to judge, that Arendt explicitly turns to Socrates as a model. She poses Socrates as a model of critical thinking or *Selbstdenken* [self-thinking], since he exposed unexamined prejudice to the wind of thought, while putting no truth in their place. Hence critical thinking is an essentially destructive activity. The Socratic dialogue can hardly be characterized as deliberation aiming at decision and action. Socratic thinking is a public use of reason, yet this kind of thinking prepares for judgment by suspending all fixed habits of thought, ossified rule and standards.

The testing and examination of opinions that is the heart of critical thinking is practiced not only by Socrates, but also by Kant. In fact, as the Kant lectures make clear, "representative thinking" and "enlarged mentality" are not just models of public deliberation. They are, rather, the necessary vehicles of critical thinking.

They proceed imaginatively, drawing on the possible standpoints and opinions of

others in order to “abstract from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment’ (Kant in Arendt, 1982: 43).

What links Socratic dialectic and Kantian enlarged thought for Arendt is the way both yield not the truth, or an Archimedean standpoint, but a more impartial, and hence valid, each individual’s *doxa*, his or her “it appears to me” (Arendt, 1990: 80-81; 1968b: 241-242; 1982: 37-40). If we view Arendt’s thoughts on judgment in terms of a broader perspectivism, the standpoint of the actor and the spectator emerge not as two radically different kinds of judgment (engaged and political vs. detached and historical), but rather as two poles of spontaneous, independent judgment. To be sure, the “general standpoint” of the impartial judge is different from the seemingly more vigorous standpoint of the citizen. Yet, the representative thinking made possible by disinterested judgment is crucially dependent upon perspective. As Nietzsche reminds us, its objectivity arises from being able to use “more” and “different” eyes to judge and to interpret a thing (Nietzsche, 1989: 12; cf. Arendt, 1968b: 241).

The shift from the political to the private is also found in Foucault’s thought. On the surface of Foucault’s work, there is the third major shift, from the archaeological focus on systems of knowledge in the 1960s, to the genealogical

focus on modalities of power in the 1970s, to the focus on technologies of the self, ethics, and freedom in the 1980s. It could be said that in his earlier work, Foucault privileged political issues relating to the theme of power, but in his later work he states that “what interests me is much more morals than politics or, in any case, politics as an ethics” (1984: 375), and that “it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research” (1983a: 209).

As Dews (1987) has noted Foucault rejects the Enlightenment model which links consciousness, self-reflection, and freedom, and instead follows Nietzsche’s claim in *The Genealogy of Morals* that self-knowledge, particularly in the form of moral consciousness, is a strategy and effect of power by which one internalizes social control. However, in his later work, he focuses on the new project and revalues previous positions. One important shift in Foucault’s later work involves a reevaluation of the Enlightenment in terms of its positive contributions to a critique of the present era and his identification of his own work with a trajectory of critical theory running from Kant to Nietzsche to the Frankfurt School. The second major difference involves a qualified turn to a problematic of the creative subject, which was previously rejected as a humanist fiction, along with the use of the vocabulary of freedom, liberty, and autonomy, previously eschewed by the

theorist of the death of man.

Is there a flagrant contradiction in Foucault's thought? I think not. I do not want to deny the shift in emphasis. But this does not mean that Foucault abandons his past concepts and methods, for all three axes of his studies – the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics (Foucault, 1984: 48) - overlap in his later works on techniques of self (see Foucault, 1984: 47-49; 1992; orig. 1984: 11-13).

The archaeology of problematizations intersects with a genealogy of the ethical practices of the self. Nor is it that the turn to analysis of techniques of the self represents a rejection of his earlier political positions, since ethics for Foucault suggests the struggle of individuals against the forces that dominate, subjugate, and subjectify them.

Foucault still rejects essentialist liberation models that assume the self is an inner essence waiting to be liberated from its repression or alienation. He contrasts liberation with liberty, and defines the later as an ongoing ethical practice of self-mastery and care of the self. He sees liberty as “the ontological condition of ethics” and ethics as “the deliberate form assumed by liberty” (1988a: 4).

Similarly, the return of the subject in Foucault is not a return to a pre-archaeological – i.e., humanist or phenomenological – concept of the subject

endowed with an inner essence that stands apart from the social. The subject is still discursively and socially conditioned for Foucault, and still theorized as situated within power relation. The difference is that individuals also have the power to define their own identity, to master their body and desires, and to forge a practice of freedom through techniques of the self. What Foucault suggests, therefore, is a tensional relationship between an active and creative agent and a constraining social field.

3. Pessimistic Faith in Action and Resistance

The cumulative effect of Foucault's archaeologies and genealogies is perhaps enervating. For, in his description, power is diffused throughout the social field and individuals have been caught within a complex grid of disciplinary, normalizing, panoptic powers. There are no spaces of primary liberty in society, power is everywhere. As he says, "What I am attentive to is the fact that every human relation is to some degree a power relation. We move in a world of perpetual strategic relations" (Foucault, 1988e: 168).

Despite this intense vision of oppression, it is a mistake to see Foucault as a fatalist with respect to social and political change for his work can be read another way. Indeed, Foucault's own interventions into political struggles and debates

would make little sense if he felt that the deadlock of power was unbreakable. Foucault's optimism issues from his belief in the contingency and vulnerability of power: "There's an optimism that consists in saying that things couldn't be better. My optimism would consist rather in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints" (Foucault, 1988e: 156).

Misinterpretations of Foucault turn on a conflation between power as omnipresent and as omnipotent. While power is everywhere, it is indissociable from contestation and struggle: "I am just saying: as soon as there is power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy" (Foucault, 1988e: 123). The common argument that Foucault presents subjects as helpless and passive victims of power fails to observe his emphasis on the contingency and vulnerability of power and the places in his work where he describes actual resistance to it (see Foucault, 1991a; orig. 1975: 273ff.; 1990a; orig. 1976: 101).

The pervasive effect of Arendt's fragmentary historiography is also enervating. *The Human Condition* is a narrative about the decline of action and the public realm throughout the modern age. "The purpose of the historical analysis", she tells us, "is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self" (Arendt, 1958: 6). The story she unfolds is not an optimistic one. The modern "rise of the social" promotes the absorption of the public realm by household concerns, while *homo faber's* utilitarianism result in "the instrumentalization of the whole world and the earth" (Arendt, 1958: 157). In addition, the developments of modern science provoke the tendency to view the earth, which Arendt calls "the very quintessence of the human condition" (Arendt, 1958: 2), as merely one more object, and technological automation leads to the transformation of work into a form of labor. The overall result is pervasive and radical world alienation. Worldlessness, a loss of the world, is "always a form of barbarism" (Arendt, 1968a: 13), and the forces released by modernity are, according to Arendt, directly responsible for this state of affairs. In other words, the forces of capitalist expropriation and accumulation of wealth, of modern science, and of technology have contributed intensively to the undermining the world, then eventually to an alienation from the world.

Misinterpretations of Arendt base on the unquestioned assumptions that she stands for the recovery of a single, institutionalized public sphere. Rather, her pronouncement about the end of the common world in the modern age implies that the prospect for a comprehensive public sphere is obscure and dark. Indeed, from the standpoint of her critique of modernity, action in the strict sense is no longer possible. It is precisely the impossibility of a genuine public sphere in postmodernity that leads Arendt to stress “the unending discourse” (Arendt, 1968a: 27) over consensus, resistance over docility, and the “defeated causes” of the “revolutionary spirit” over the normalizing politics of representative democracy. Her faith in action and her pessimistic prospects for a public sphere reflects a continuing wonder at the fact that political action persists in the various “defeated causes”.

Foucault’s historical analysis as well as that of Arendt manifests grim pessimism and despair penetrating history. As Foucault puts it, “the fear of ridicule or the bitterness of history prevents most of us from putting side by side: revolution and happiness...or indeed, revolution and pleasure” (Foucault, 1990a; orig. 1976: 7).

Arendt is also aware of how the energies of modernity, which initially open the possibility of a groundless politics, end in intensifying the paradox of revolution

and political action.¹ In other words, the moment in which a space of freedom emerges is also a beginning of its disappearance. The combination of modern world alienation with the late-modern escalation of the automatism makes the appearance of freedom “miracles” (Arendt, 1968: 168).

The image of fragile “island of freedom” surrounded by a sea of automatic process (Arendt, 1968b: 168) is parallel to Foucault’s conviction that phenomenon of revolt is itself inherently mysterious and inscrutable. As he puts it, “the man who rebels is finally inexplicable; it takes a wrenching away that interrupt the flow of history, and its long chains of reasons...people do revolt; that is a fact. And that is how subjectivity (not that of great men, but that of anyone) is brought into history, breathing life into it...A question of ethics? Perhaps. A question of reality, without a doubt” (Foucault, 2000: 449, 452).

The despair arises from the “bitterness of history”, but if there is no resistance to that bitterness, the one-dimensional despair leads only to political depression and theoretical closure. Similarly, if the hope is not grounded firmly in that same

¹ “If foundation was the aim and the end of revolution, then the revolutionary spirit was not merely the spirit of beginning something new but of starting something permanent and enduring; a lasting institution, embodying this spirit and encouraging it to new achievements, would be self-defeating. From which it unfortunately seems to follow that nothing threatens the very achievements of revolution more dangerously and more acutely than the spirit which has brought them about. Should freedom in its most exalted sense as freedom to act be the price to be paid for foundation?” (Arendt, 1963: 232).

bitterness of history, it becomes just a one-dimensional and silly expression of optimism. As Arendt argues, “progress and doom are two sides of the same medal” and “both are articles of superstitions, not of faith” (Arendt, 1951: vii). For some, this state of affairs may be a source of despair, for Foucault and Arendt, however, it signifies both loss and hope.

Arendt’s point as a critic of liberalism and modernity is similar to Foucault: it is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous (see Foucault, 1983b: 231-232). This includes those modern political innovations for which she – and we – are necessarily grateful. Arendt’s theoretical work as well as that of Foucault demonstrates how man as a political being must refuse both “the blackmail of Enlightenment” (Foucault, 1984: 42) and the appeal to a religiosity as well as “political double bind, which is...individualization and totalization of modern power structures” (Foucault, 1983a: 216).

4. Reflections on Work and Life: From the Pariah’s Point of View

Along with theoretical tensions, the life and writings of Foucault and Arendt also present a paradox. As Habermas points out, “in Foucault the stoic attitude of the observer who keeps his precise distance, obsessed with objectivity, was combined with the opposite element of passionate self-consuming participation in the reality

of the historical moment” (Habermas, 1986: 103). Foucault shares this tension with Arendt. That is, there is the tension in Foucault and Arendt, which resists easy categorization, between the scholar striving objectivity - whether in the form of genealogical objectivity or the Arendtian objectivity achieved by distance and imagination - on the one hand, and, the politically vital, morally sensitive intellectual, on the other. In fact, this is an issue which is so close to the center of their work and life that they were not often clear about it. In an interview published shortly before his death, Foucault speaks for himself:

The role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so? And remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions, and programs that intellectuals have managed to formulate over the last two centuries and whose effects we can now see. The work of an intellectual is not to shape others’ political will; it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own fields, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this re-problematization (in which he carries out his specific task as an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he

has his role as a citizen to play) (Foucault, 1988e: 265, my emphasis).

This quotation points to the tension between Foucault's work and life, between his political commitments and theoretical detachment. This is the same with Arendt. I want to conclude by examining this issue in the point of the pariah they distinctively hold. As I will seek to show, for Foucault and Arendt, looking at things from "the pariah's point of view" was a lifetime vocation. It is an admirable vocation, but one which cannot provide a theoretical apparatus as a guiding thread nor a bridge between theory and practice. If we desire, then, to do justice to Foucault and Arendt's insights concerning the interrelations of what we are thinking and what we are doing, we must avoid the twin temptations of political commitment and theoretical detachment. For, in the end, what Foucault and Arendt teach us is the irreducible need to be both in and out of the game.

Let's go back to Foucault's first major book, *Madness and Civilization*, here. In this book, Foucault follows the images of woe-begotten yet holy lepers with equally compelling description of the Ship of Fools, *Narrenschiff*. During the Renaissance the mad were loaded onto the ship and sent off to sail down Europe's rivers in search of their sanity. On this subject, Foucault wrote: "He [the madman] is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely...He is a prisoner in the midst of

what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger par excellence: that is, the prisoner of the passage” (Foucault, 1989; orig. 1961: 11). As we have already seen, in this description, the madman’s passage is no other than the odyssey of Foucault’s thought, from the sea to the ship of the sea, or rather precisely, from “the thought of the outside” (power) to “the inside of thought” (subjectivation) (see Deleuze, 1988). But, there is more. It is, to some extent, an analogy of his life as a pariah.

I see Foucault as a pariah not only because of his sexuality but also because of his ethos, his philosophical life. According to Young-Bruehl, “a self-conscious pariah” is not only the theme of Arendt’s book, *Rahel Varnhagen*, but also the theme of her life (Young-Bruehl in Hill, 1979: 3). Furthermore, “in Hannah Arendt’s lexicon...real people were pariahs” (Young-Bruehl, 1982: xv). This is the same with Foucault. I think that the pariah perspective is not limited to an actual condition - a Jew or a homosexual and so on - but linked to the philosophical question, i.e., the ontology of human beings. In this sense, the personal ideal of pariahdom, which Foucault and Arendt framed in their youth, was transformed in their later years into the intellectual’s *raison d’être* as well as political ideas.

Arendt borrowed the term pariah and parvenu from the French journalist Bernard Lazare (Arendt, 1978: 68-69). While the pariah is the one who is cast aside, marginalized, and treated with contempt by society because of his or her otherness, the parvenu denied his or her otherness so as to become accepted by the dominant society. Arendt's own understanding of the pariah's perspective is best expressed in her letter to Gershom Scholem:

What confused you is that my arguments and my approach are different from what you are used to; in other words, the trouble is that I am independent. By this I mean, on the one hand, that I do not belong to any organization and always speak only for myself, and on the other hand, that I have great confidence in Lessing's *selbstdenken* [self-thinking] for which, I think, no ideology, no public opinion, and no "convictions" can ever be a substitute (Arendt, 1978: 250).

The pariah's task, in Arendt's understanding, was to be alert to the unexpected, to look at how things and event appear without preconceptions about history's course or pattern, to avoid sacrificing the outsider's perspective for the parvenu's comforts. Arendt's solution to her own Jewish problem was not to repudiate her Jewishness nor blindly affirm it, but to adopt the stance of a conscious pariah, an

outsider among non-Jews, and a rebel among her own people. It was because of this marginal position that she was able to gain critical insights into both the Jewish and non-Jewish world.

It is possible to see that Foucault had to give sexuality a central position in his work, since it was central in his life, or that his last books in some ways constitute the personal ethics he imposed upon himself by force of will. Nevertheless, one cannot pretend that Foucault's entire work is explained by his homosexuality, as certain academics do (see Miller, 1993; Lila, 2001), imagining, moreover, that this would be enough to discredit it.

It is interesting to see how an intellectual project is born in an experience that should perhaps be described as primary. However, it is much more important to see how an intellectual adventure is created in the struggle of individual and social life, not to remain stuck in them, but to think them through, to go beyond them, to problematize them. In doing so, Foucault ironically turns the question back on those who level it. Do you really know who you are? Are you so sure of your reason, of your scientific concept, of your categories of your conception?

Foucault tries to perform the philosophical task as a pariah by taking the double detour of literature and theory. On the one hand, there is his fascination with

writers who deal with “transgression”, the “limit experience”. By reading Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Klossowski, Foucault seeks to discover the possibility of a mad philosopher (see Foucault, 1977a, ‘A Preface to Transgression’). On the other hand, there is his examination at a historical level of the scientific status of psychological disciplines, the medical gaze, and then the established human sciences as a whole. “Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work”, he said in 1981, “it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me...each time was partly a fragment of autobiography” (Foucault, 2000: 458).

Exile is one of the saddest fates. In premodern times, banishment was a particularly dreadful punishment. There has always been an association between the idea of exile and the terrors of being a leper or a madman, a social and moral untouchable. And yet, it is true that in the idea of exile, there is, in a self-tortured way, the irresistible temptation of not following the prescribed path. Originally, exile is an actual condition, but it is also a metaphorical condition. In other words, the condition of exile is produced not only by the social and political trimming but also by the censorship of conscience. As Foucault describes, the exile is put “across a half-real, half-imaginary geography”, from “a visible fortress of order”

to the “castle of our conscience” (Foucault, 1989; orig. 1961: 11).

In *Presentations of the Intellectual* (1994), Edward Said explores the role of the intellectual. He sees intellectual as an exile, whose spirit is “in opposition, rather than in accommodation” (Said, 1994: xvii), whose challenge is to be found in “dissent against the status quo” (Said, 1994: xvii). His diagnosis of the intellectual in exile is derives from the social and political history of dislocation and migration, for example, the widespread territorial rearrangements of the post-World War Two period, but his observation is not limited to it. Said argues that even intellectuals who are lifelong members of a society can be divided into insiders and outsiders: those, on the one hand, who belong fully society as it is, those who can be called yea-sayers; and on the other hand, the nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges and power are concerned (Said, 1994: 52-53). Said derives some positive things from exile and marginality, that is, the pleasure of restless and unsettled life:

An intellectual is fundamentally about knowledge and freedom. Yet these acquire meaning not as abstractions...but as experiences actually lived through.

An intellectual is like a shipwrecked person who learns how to live in a certain

sense *with* the land, not *on* it, not like Robinson Crusoe whose goal is to colonize his little island, but more like Marco Polo, whose sense of the marvelous never fails him, and who is always a traveler, a provisional guest, not a freeloader, conqueror, or raider (Said, 1994: 59-60).

In this book, Said does not deal with Foucault and Arendt as examples, but his diagnosis of the intellectual in exile explains Foucault and Arendt very well. It is a matter of thinking of the intellectual vocation as maintaining a state of constant alertness, of a perpetual willingness not to let the one and only truth or accepted ideas dominate. It also involves a sense of the present, an almost athletic rational energy, and a complicated struggle to balance the problems of one's own selfhood against the public demands, an everlasting effort, constitutionally unfinished and necessarily imperfect. The exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation. Also, the exile intellectual does not respond to the logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still. In a very Deleuzian passage, Foucault speaks for himself: "I dream of the intellectual who destroys evidence and generalities, the one who, in the inertias constraints of the present time, locates and marks the

weak points, the openings, the lines of force, who is incessantly on the move, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he will think tomorrow for he is too attentive to the present" (Foucault, 1988e: 124).

What Foucault shares with Arendt is a peculiar critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or orthodox party line, or fixed dogma. They both are against belief in a theoretical god or a political god of any sort. Of course, there is no real pariahdom, even for the exile who tries to remain suspended, since the state of inbetweenness can itself become a rigid ideological position. Furthermore, for the intellectual in exile, there is always a danger of being irresponsible and flippant under the disguise of marginality. Nevertheless, what strikes me as much more important is how to keep a space in the mind open for doubt and for the part of an alert, skeptical irony, also self-irony. It is "the ethics of discomfort" that consists in revising certainties without renouncing convictions, in managing to change one's opinion and at the same time to remain faithful to oneself. It is Foucault's urging that one is "never to consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions" (Foucault, 2000: 448), which brings to mind Arendt's letter to Gershom Scholem (Arendt, 1978: 250), and her confidence in *selbstdenken* [self-thinking] rather than

fixed opinion or unmovable thought.

5. Summary and Conclusions

In this work, I present an interpretation of Foucault and Arendt. Recognizing the problems of attaching labels to Foucault's work and that of Arendt, I focus on the tensions and complexity of their work. My reading develops under following contentions.

First, Foucault and Arendt are fascinated by history and the relationship between personal experience and those events of which they are a part. Particularly, the experience of totalitarianism and Stalinism, which they see as a disease of modern power, haunts their critique of modernity as a whole. This is not to say their writings on history are only concerned with actual experiences, whether contemporary or historical. Because their writings on history are intertwined with "an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought", which constantly undoes its own construction. Furthermore, a tension between their profound commitment to political reality and the sense of detachment from the subject matter continually complicates their work. However, these tensions in theory as well as in practice, in the technique of life as well as in the political choices provide the elements for the uniqueness and coherence of their work.

In this sense, a new historiography performed by Foucault and Arendt is neither subjective nor objective. Rather it is an unusual combination of imagination, analysis, and commitment. Yet, we should not forget that they were very wary of the analytic link between a “philosophical conception” and the “concrete political attitude”, between “what one is thinking and saying” and “what one is doing”. For them, this ideal is chimera and a dangerous one, because it grows out of and enforces an instrumental configuration of theory and practice.

Bearing these questions in mind, we should read Foucault and Arendt not only through their ideas, but also through Foucault’s “ethos” and Arendt’s “moral taste”. We should perform the two readings, which are, on the one hand, a scientific analysis of their work, the ability to decipher Foucault’s “ethos” and Arendt’s “judgment”, on the other.

Second, there are three dimensions of Foucault’s work: power, knowledge, and self. Also, there are three dimensions of Arendt’s work: thinking, action, and judgment. These dimensions are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another. A philosophy, especially one so subtle and complex such as Foucault and Arendt, must always be understood at a distance. We should not allow ourselves to become too caught up in a certain phase of their thought. We should rather step

back. We should read the earlier work in relation to the later. Although there is the shift in Foucault and Arendt, from the focus on the political to the focus on the personal, when viewed in terms of a three-fold circular (i.e., non-totalizing) reciprocity, we see the underlying continuity in their thought. In this regard, it is one of the goal of this work to decenter the place of *Discipline and Punish* and *The Human Condition*. Only when read *Discipline and Punish* and *The Human Condition* in the light of the historical development of their thought as a whole, we can understand Foucault and Arendt, then can indeed go beyond them.

Third, questioning the adequacy of the mapping of modernism and postmodernism, I do not read Foucault and Arendt as postmodernists *tout court*, but rather as theorists who combine premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives. There are tensions in Foucault's thought between totalizing/detotalizing impulses, discursive/ extra-discursive theorization, macro/micro perspectives, and domination/ resistance relations as well as between ethical-political commitments and archaeological detachment. There are also tensions in Arendt's thought between creative rupture and exercise in retrieval, between agonism and consensus as well as between existential engagement and philosophical withdrawal.

More importantly, Foucault and Arendt embrace postmodern sensibility not as an absolute given but as an attitude that must be – at the risk of inviting Nietzschean scorn – constantly checked and examined. For them, critique is based on a serious and sustained interrogation of historical experience as much as it is on a deconstruction of metaphysical philosophy. This is why they cannot be wholly understood by a stark opposition between modernism and postmodernism.

Fourth, focusing on the selectivity and idiosyncrasy of their interpretation of Kant, I place Foucault and Arendt within a tradition of critical thought running from Kant to Nietzsche. Indeed, what binds Foucault and Arendt together is the effort to link Kant and Nietzsche in order to overcome the analytics of truth without abandoning philosophical seriousness. Foucault's turn to Kant in his later work enables him to identify the thread that connects Kant with Nietzsche within a critical thought. The critical ontology of ourselves and of the present, which Foucault sees that Kant formulated by reflecting on the Enlightenment and revolution, is Foucault's Kantian version of Nietzsche's ontological support of the moment against the flux of time. Also, Arendt's turn to Kant's aesthetic judgment in her later work enables her to identify the thread to connect Kant with Nietzsche, the thread running from Kant's objectivity, the objectivity arises from being able

to “think in the place of everybody else” to Nietzsche’s perspectival objectivity, the objectivity born of using “more” and “different” eyes to judge and to interpret a thing. The representative thinking made possible by disinterested judgment through a free play of imagination is Arendt’s Kantian version of Nietzsche’s perspectival objectivity. Their challenge to Kant and Nietzsche or rather their Nietzscheanism with a Kantian twist opens the possibility of genuine dialogue between postmodern theory and critical theory.

As we have seen, Foucault and Arendt are profoundly subtle, sophisticated but not well-conceptualized thinkers whose thought is in tensions. However, in this work, the tensions of their work are not the target of criticism but the positive working concept. What Foucault and Arendt teach us is that critical thought must live in the field of tension. Far from vindicating one against the other, this work is also situated in the force field created by these interpretative tensions which run deep in this work.

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