



# The poet and the spectator: Arendt's conceptualization of publicness and judgment in context.

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To my friends and to the protesters in Chile, resisting and facing authority.

“Sappho says that to die is evil: so the gods judge. For they do not die.”

Aristotle, Rethoric 1398b = Sappho fr. 201 Voigt. <sup>1</sup>

“It was Miss Arendt choice to place herself, as it were, between the philosophers and the poets. She knew all of Plato’s warnings against the latter, but she paid no heed.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Carson, 2002: xiii)

<sup>2</sup> (Shklar, 1998: 360)

## **The poet and the spectator: Arendt's conceptualization of publicness and judgment in context**

Hannah Arendt did more than write philosophy and publishes books; she rescued conceptions of the public and recovered the problem of thinking and judging in politics as a manner to make sense of a world that shattered the political tradition. The current thesis will present a reading of Arendt's political judgment and publicness by taking some elements of the Cambridge Intellectual History approach. The goal of using this approach is not a way of declaring itself as the true interpretation, but a manner of relating Arendt's work to a proper understanding of her words and actions as part of a context for the enunciation. By using this method we are proposing a perspective of Arendt late work as a crucial shift in her notion of freedom and its relation with politics. This shift starts with some undeveloped intuitions from her early work, mostly *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The human Condition*, to her essays such as *Between Past and Future* and *Responsibility and Judgment*, to finish in her later works such as *On Revolution*, *Crises of the Republic*, *The Life of the Mind*, and her *Lectures on the Political Philosophy of Kant*. We can notice a shift from narration to judgment in Arendt's theory.

By relating to this topics we propose a reading of publicness as a central element of Arendt's work that appeals to the space of appearances that is opened in judgment and action, and at the same time a certain urge for courage required for politics; for leaving the comfort of the private space and take responsibility to appear with others and be judged and remembered in public. This notion of publicness changed or is complemented by a different one in her later work where we find instead a shift towards the attitude of the spectator and the disinterestedness of judgment. Disinterestedness is an aesthetical attitude that Arendt recovers from Kant's discussion on his Third Critique and refers to a certain distance regarding interest and necessity. This notion is expressed in her appropriation of Kant's idea of reflective judgment and her reflections on taste related to Kant's concern with *sensus communis* and her own concept of common sense. In these elements we see judgment in the attitude of the spectator along with a certain taste and preoccupation for the human-made artifacts and the grounding for a space of appearances. These elements and shifts in Arendt's work are discussed by using the Cambridge Intellectual Approach; we read Arendt texts in its relation to a context and as deeds as a way to answer the question regarding what was Arendt doing or performing while she was discussing publicness and judgment.

### **Publicness – Hannah Arendt –Political Judgment**

## 1. *Introduction: Thinking, understanding and cutting.*

“I will cast my glance only on several places that seem especially to stand out in this region, and even on these more with the eye of an observer than of the philosopher.” - Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime*.<sup>3</sup>

The role of Hannah Arendt in political philosophy and political theory is quite ambivalent today. On the one hand, her reflections on the contemporary situation of politics have been widely discussed, and her views on the importance of public space, the space of appearance and politics as a way to show ourselves and appear in front of others recovered an original conception of politics. On the other hand, the same discussion has derived into either simplification of her thoughts or postures that questioned the possibilities of applying such demanding theories in an adverse environment. The situation is even more complex if we compare the reception of ‘*The Human Condition*’ with ‘*The Life of the Mind*’<sup>4</sup>.

In ‘*The Human Condition*’ Arendt described the different activities that condition human life in the world, while in ‘*The Life of the Mind*’ she focused on the activities of contemplation and withdrawal from the world. Both books presented a story of the experiences and foundations of our understanding of these activities and were written in the form of a triptych covering the relations and differences of each one of the three activities of *the vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. In the case of ‘*The Life of the Mind*’, the final and conclusive part of the book was not finished and presents a huge interpretative gap for the understanding of Arendt’s thoughts on judgment<sup>5</sup>. However, if we look closely at those difficulties we are able to understand an important (and often neglected) part of the discussion. Arendt’s work (as her biographer accounts) moved in different directions, relating her to poets, activists and academics; this is why a deeper understanding of her context is usually required for a proper reading. Following that line of argumentation then, it is important to ask both why such conspicuous ideas have not been received so well, and why her theory of judgment has been so elusive to political theories. The way to obtain a better understanding, following Quentin Skinner’s method is to approach to Arendt’s writings and talks as an enunciation, as a speech act in relation to a certain context as a way to answer the question on what was Arendt doing (or performing) by these topics in her early and later thought.

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<sup>3</sup> (Kant, 2001: 13)

<sup>4</sup> Beatriz Porcel’s (2018) paper analyzes the reception of the *Human Condition*; unfortunately, we do not have a similar paper for *The Life of the Mind*.

<sup>5</sup> Heller explains:

“Although some of Arendt’s lectures on Kant’s Critique of Judgment have now been published in a volume entitled Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy, and despite the fact that preliminary remarks on judging are scattered all over the first two volumes, a reconstruction of the whole project demands a greater than usual measure of interpretive sensitivity. But there is perhaps an even deeper problem to be faced by those who wish to attempt such a reconstruction. The second volume (on “willing”) was written impatiently, visibly in a hurry.” (Heller, 1978: 281)

In order to study Arendt's text in relation to her context and enunciations, in this thesis we will study Arendt's notions of publicness and judgment. Now, for the introduction, we will start with a succinct approach to Arendt's position in political theory and the difficulties related to her method, as a way to show the discussion presented in the first book of *'The Life of the Mind'*. The first section of the introduction explains the idea of thinking, the second one notion of understanding in both Arendt and Skinner, and the final part will show the tensions between Arendt's intentions and context along with her quest for understanding.

## 1.1 Thinking

*"With no consideration, no pity, no shame,  
They've built walls around me, thick and high.  
And now I sit feeling hopeless.  
I can't think of anything else: this fate gnaws my mind –  
because I had so much to do outside.  
When they were building walls, how could I not have noticed!  
But I never heard a sound, a noise of builders.  
Imperceptibly they've closed me off from the outside world."  
Constantino Cavafi, Walls.<sup>6</sup>*

Thinking about politics is not doing politics, is a search for its meaning and a chance to make sense of the actions, but still, it is not the same that the political activity itself. Our focus on the thinking activity deprives our perception and language of the experiences contained in politics; therefore the activity of thinking about politics becomes a curiously paradoxical movement. The movement consists in two steps, the first is the moment of withdrawal, of solitude and reflection, the moment in which thinking becomes possible by relating to thought-things; the second is the returning moment when reflection meets and contrasts politics.

There are at least two ways in which this activity has been exercised. On the one hand, there is the political thinker who needs an introspective movement outside context and the public discussion to appreciate the truth and enlighten the darkness and misunderstanding

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted and translated by Alexander Nehamas (1983: 295). In our interpretation, the poem gives a proper account of both the philosophers' view of the thinking activity and the risks of professional thinking. The problem that Arendt (1978: 80) called 'the intramural warfare between thought and common sense'; that is to say, the complex relation between thinking and its withdrawal, and the common sense that fits our senses into a plural world we share in common. The affinity is even higher if we consider the name of the poem 'Walls' and the way Arendt called the problem an '**intramural** warfare'.

of politics with his theoretical wisdom. On the other hand, the political theorist observes the event, not for knowledge, but to grasp some of its meaning, to reveal some of the experience crystallized in our words. Arendt's work is an example of the second path<sup>7</sup>.

Arendt characterized the activity of thinking both as an independent activity and as an inner dialogue, but also under the Socratic idea of the two-in-one, and by relating it to three mythical scenes. Orpheus and Penelope are the characters of the myths recovered by Arendt in the first book of *The life of the Mind* and Ariadne is presented in *Understanding and Politics* and in a forum discussion titled *Arendt by Arendt*. By recovering Orpheus and Eurydice's story, Arendt explores the way thinking and imagination relates to 'thought-things', that is to say, how we pick up what is absent and bring it to our mind making it present without its presence in a de-sensed outline 'outside' time and space. The story is quoted as follows:

"Orpheus went down to Hades to recover his dead wife and was told he could have her back on the condition that he would not turn to look at her as she followed him. But when they approached the world of the living, Orpheus did look back and Eurydice immediately vanished. More precisely than could any terminological language, the old myth tells what happens in the moment the thinking process come to an end in the world of ordinary living: all the invisible vanish again. It is fitting too, that the myth should relate to remembrance and not to anticipation."

(Arendt, 1978: 86)

The thinking activity contains the risk of being immersed in these objects, to 'move in the Hades' and disregard the physical world, however, it is precisely that physical world that provides us with the materials for thinking, and in order to communicate that thought we must return to it in words leaving behind Daphne's memory. The same argument remains true to any kind of thought, not just metaphysical questions; however thoughts and experiences hold no meaning outside the thinking activities. In thinking we look for meaning, we try to understand the world and then we question that meaning; that is precisely for Arendt's reason for the evocation of Penelope in the *Odyssey*:

"From which it follows that the business of thinking is like Penelope's web; it undoes every morning what it has finished the night before. For the need to think can never be stilled by allegedly definite insights of "wise men"; it can be satisfied

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<sup>7</sup> This method, practiced by Hannah Arendt is described by Elizabeth Young Bruehl as follows. "She called her method "conceptual analysis"; her task was to find "where concepts come from". With the aid of philology or linguistic analysis, she traced political concepts back to concrete historical and generally political experiences which gave rise to those concepts. She was then able to gauge how far a concept had moved from its origins and to chart the intermingling of concepts over the course of time, marking points of linguistic and conceptual confusion. To put the matter another way: she practiced a sort of phenomenology." (Young-Bruehl, 2004: 318).

only through thinking, and the thoughts I had yesterday will satisfy this need today only to the extent that I want and am able to think them anew.”

(Arendt, 1978: 88)

The focus on the quote is in thinking’s tendency to destroy its own results, to question and create a spark of doubt, it is what she called the “unending activity” (Arendt, 1994: 308) of understanding, the search for meaning that does not produce any final result; in fact it shakes the ground below us<sup>8</sup>, breaking its solidity to offer us a new meaning to be questioned once again.

Finally, the Ariadne thread is presented by Arendt in two occasions; the second of the two will be discussed in the next section, while the first one will be presented here. Arendt, replying to her friend Mary McCarthy, appeals to the myth of the Minoan labyrinth in Knossos’ Palace.

“This business that the tradition is broken, that Ariadne’s thread is cut. Well, that is not quite as new as I made it out to be. It was, after all, Tocqueville who said that “when the past has ceased to throw its light onto the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity”. This is the situation since the middle of the century, and seen from the viewpoint of Tocqueville, it is entirely true.”

(Arendt, 2018: 473)

The thread then is presented as a way of seeing our relation with tradition and also as a form to think without following traces or traditions because of their authority. In fact, it proposes that tradition should be looked after and illuminated by one’s own thoughts and understanding of it. That is why Arendt’s position in political theory and philosophy seems to be unclear at times, while she moves between references, poets and experiences trying to grasp some meaning.

Arendt lived in a world threatening to destroy the very possibility of politics and chose the distant path of political theory against the old tradition of western political thought. She confronted and opposed the foundations of political philosophy as a way to recover some of the experiences of politics, in her own words; she tried to “look at politics, so to speak, with eyes unclouded by philosophy” (Arendt, 2003: 4). This attitude produced a certain distance between Arendt and political philosophy, a distance that she made clear in the

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding this specific metaphor, we find one of the few moments in which Arendt explains some of her method to political thinking. She replied to Draenos, S. (1979) by pointing:

“There’s this other thing, which Draenos brought out. You said “groundless thinking.” I have a metaphor which is not quite cruel, and which I never published but kept for myself. I call it thinking without a banister. In German “*Denken ohne Geländer*.” That is, as you go up and down stairs you can always hold on to the banister so that you don’t fall down. But we have lost this banister. That is the way I tell it to myself. And this is indeed what I try to do.”

(Arendt, 2018: 473)

same interview. When she was asked by Günter Gaus about the difference between political philosophy and political theory, Arendt replied:

“The expression “political philosophy”, which I avoid, is extremely burdened by tradition. When I talk about these things, academically or nonacademically, I always mention that there is a vital tension between philosophy and politics.

(Arendt, 2003: 4)

The gesture performed by Arendt, by rejecting and distancing herself to the tradition is also the affirmation of a new manner to look and judge at politics, and a warning about the risks involved in thinking without judging. The thinking activity contains a certain danger when it is radicalized in a solipsistic way, when the professional thinker moves outside the world, outside time and space spending most of his time with de-sensed thought-things without turning back. After that moment of reflection and solitude, the thinker needs to communicate an experience that is described as *arhéton* (unspeakable) in Plato (Arendt, 1998: 20), and as *aneu logon* (without word) in Aristotle and Heidegger (Taminiaux, 1997: 20); such experience of a truth outside the world and beyond opinion, common sense and communication, is precisely the risk of philosophy and professional thinking. Thinking is for Arendt (via Kant)<sup>9</sup> an activity that we all share in common, and it relates to judging. Judging is a condition for returning to the plurality of the world, but also an activity that constructs a new space of opinions.

## 1.2 Understanding

Knowledge and facts are a central element in our life, a fundamental part of our life; they help us to state what is happening and what is true, what we can give a proper account and what seems to be unreal, what is reliable and known what is unclear and new; however all this knowledge cannot answer the questions of meaning. Meaning moves outside knowledge, but at the same time relates to it. Meaning and understanding are different aspects of life, but they are deeply intertwined. In her essay *‘Understanding and Politics’*, Arendt states a distinction between these two processes, while at the same time expressing their bond. As she explains: “Understanding is based on knowledge and knowledge cannot proceed without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding.” (Arendt, 1994: 310)

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<sup>9</sup> “Reason itself, the thinking ability which we have, has a need to actualize itself. The philosophers and the metaphysicians have monopolized this capability. This has led to very great things. It also has led to rather unpleasant things - we have forgotten that *every* human being has a need to think, not to think abstractly, not to answer the ultimate question of God, immortality, and freedom, nothing but to think while he is living. And he does so constantly.

Everybody who tells a story of what happened to him half an hour ago on the street has got to put this story into shape. And this putting the story into shape is a form of thought.”  
(Arendt, 2018: 443-444)



In order to explain this relation we need to appeal to another quote by Arendt, this time from the book 'On Revolution'.

“The date was the night of the fourteenth of July 1789, in Paris, when Louis XVI heard from the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt of the fall of the Bastille, the liberation of a few prisoners, and the defection of the royal troops before a popular attack. The famous dialogue that took place between the king and his messenger is very short and very revealing. The king, we are told, exclaimed, 'C'est une revolte', and Liancourt corrected him: 'Non, Sire, c'est une revolution.' Here we hear the word still, and politically for the last time, in the sense of the old metaphor which carries its meaning from the skies down to the earth; but here, for the first time perhaps, the emphasis has entirely shifted from the lawfulness of a rotating, cyclical movement to its irresistibility. The motion is still seen in the image of the movements of the stars, but what is stressed now is that it is beyond human power to arrest it, and hence it is a law unto itself. The king, when he declared the storming of the Bastille was a revolt, asserted his power and the various means at his disposal to deal with conspiracy and defiance of authority; Liancourt replied that what had happened there was irrevocable and beyond the power of a king. What did Liancourt see, what must we see or hear, listening to this strange dialogue, that he thought, and we know, was irresistible and irrevocable?”

(Arendt, 2016: 40-41)

In this paragraph we can see these two processes, knowing and understanding. On the one hand, the king, with all the political intentions that are included in such a statement, called the event a revolt as a way to approach something knowable, stable and manageable; he was applying a rule to something he knows, therefore the revolt could be known (and dispersed as such). The Duke, on the other hand, tried to understand what was happening and in order to perform such task; he took an example from the world, something completely unrelated to politics (the movements of the stars) and shapes with it the understanding of this new moment calling it revolution. Such action could not be performed without knowledge, but at the same time, exceeds it and gave it a new understanding, a way to make sense of the world and its experiences. Hence, in understanding, as Arendt explains, there is a chance to reconcile ourselves with the world, however we are not always as lucky as the Duke; sometimes there is no rule to describe what is happening, or as Arendt stated in a question:

“[...] how can we measure length if we do not have a yardstick, how could we count things without the notion of numbers?”

(Arendt, 1994: 313)

The answers to these questions, we will argue, are part of Arendt's reading of Kant's third critique, and the notion of judgment plays an important role in it. The way understanding works is by returning to prejudices, commonsense, knowledge, judgments and to the clichés and the words in popular language as a way to recover and restate meaning by looking at the common sense and the experiences of our world. This is why Arendt quoted the myth of Ariadne, Theseus and the Labyrinth.

“If the scientist, misguided by the very labor of his inquiry, begins to pose as an expert in politics and to despise the popular understanding from which he started, he loses immediately the Ariadne thread of common sense which alone will guide him securely through the labyrinth of his own results.”

(Arendt, 1994: 311)

By telling the myth of Ariadne’s thread, Arendt links the story of the thread in the Minoan Labyrinth with common sense. The thread is in Arendt’s description what common sense and knowledge is for our judgments; in her recovery of the ancient myth, there is an attempt to show how knowledge and understanding relate to each other in a relation of interdependency. However the distinction that Arendt uses as a focus for its attitude regarding thinking and understanding is recovered from Kant and it is the distinction between reason and intellect. The activity of thinking is presented by Arendt (1978:57) ascribing to Kant’s distinction between *Vernunft* (reason) and *Verstand* (intellect)<sup>10</sup>.

Now that we have explained what is for Arendt the activity of understanding and its relation to thinking and judging, we can move to Quentin Skinner’s notion of understanding as a way to approach our question regarding what she was doing by recovering judgment and publicness. For Skinner, there is a tension between the dimension of meaning and the notion of understanding that asks for a proper understanding of a text and its own context along with the enunciation as an act in itself. As Skinner explains:

“My aspiration is not of course to enter into the thought-processes of long-dead thinkers; it is simply to use the ordinary techniques of historical enquiry to grasp their concepts, to follow their distinctions, to appreciate their beliefs and, so far as possible, to see things their way.”

(Skinner, 2006: 3)

Such a task, may seem risky or too contextual, however in Skinner’s method the distinction between meaning and understanding is what allows us to be as clear as possible. Understanding is to read an author’s context and milieu as a fundamental part of his work, without it, and looking only at the content or premises of the books, our understanding is incomplete and not able to grasp the contours and implications of what is the author doing. One aspect that should be noted, is that Skinner talks about a history of philosophy, and Arendt, tried to move outside such tradition, this is why we will call this application (or re-appropriation) of Quentin’s method ‘Intellectual Story’, as a way to remain true to Arendt’s concern with stories and politics rather than History and Philosophy. Instead of considering her as part of the tradition of philosophers that have ignored the problem of action, we look at her in her specific attitude and method.

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<sup>10</sup> Knowing and understanding differ in their task. The first one is concerned with knowledge and facts, while the second one cares about meaning and its aim is to understand rather than to know.

Jerome Kohn interpreted the first book of the *Life of the Mind* in a more specific fashion, by stating that:

“[...] her primary overall consideration in *Thinking* may be seen in terms of reviving the ancient Greek distinction between *theôria*, the activity of theorizing, and *theôrêmata*, theorems in general. This runs against the current of traditional philosophy, in which, as has been remarked, “The word ‘theory’ is used indifferently for the enterprise and its outcome.”

(Kohn, 1990: 111)

Returning to the distinction between meaning and understanding, Skinner states:

“[...] the dimension of meaning, the study of the sense and reference allegedly attaching to words and sentences. The other is perhaps best described in Austin’s terms as the dimension of linguistic action, the study of the range of things that speakers are capable of doing in (and by) the use of words and sentences [...] I try to take seriously the implications of the contention that, as Wittgenstein expresses it in his *Philosophical Investigations*, ‘words are also deeds’”  
(Skinner, 2006: 3-4)

Skinner then, recovers this distinction from philosophers of language and opposes the idea of a hermeneutical gap needed to be filled by a deeper interpretation of the text by contrasting it to a deeper concern with context.

To conclude this section, we need to take a decision regarding our way to approach the problem of judgment in Arendt, so we will take part in a discussion presented by Agnes Heller. The author, in her paper about Arendt’s *‘Life of the Mind’*, presents two ways of handling the problem of judgment:

“Since the *Life of the Mind*, therefore, remained incomplete, the interpreter can choose one of two options. She can either take the text as it now stands or she can try to eliminate those inconsistencies she believes the author too would have eliminated. The second option is riskier, though certainly more fecund.”

(Heller, 1987: 281)

Opposing such a statement, we will take the first option, however we will hear Quentin Skinner’s advice regarding what he called mythologies. The final section of this introduction will present the notion of understanding in Skinner, his accounts on the mythologies and Arendt’s own views on her work and its relation (unintended for her) with speech acts and knowledge. As John Austin (Austin, 1975:3) explained, words are not just ‘constative’ but also performative. Words (and books) do something in the world. Both Skinner and Arendt use the words meaning and understanding, but in different contexts. What we try to do is to mix them, by using Arendt’s notion of understanding as the search for meaning, Skinner’s idea of understanding as a proper account of the context and the enunciation of an author in history.

### 1.3 Cutting.

“[...] *knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.*”

- Michel Foucault, *“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”*<sup>11</sup>

“*Do I imagine myself as being influential? No. I want to understand.*”

- Hannah Arendt, *“What remains, the language remains.”*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> (Foucault, 1984: 88)

The world of Hannah Arendt was not the same world we are living today, besides technological changes and political affairs regarding the cold war and the market, Arendt lived in a different mindset and understanding, we share a very dissimilar understanding of the meanings of concepts. We can take as an example the word philistine<sup>13</sup> that she uses on her essay ‘The Crisis of Culture’. The author uses this word as an insult for someone who is not able to appreciate art, education and culture for itself, which needs to think in terms of money and status and is not able to maintain a distance regarding the cultural object. Nowadays such word is no longer an insult, is just commonsensical that we need to live, that we need to relate to labor and necessities as our first and basic condition and then we can ‘have time’ to spend in leisure. Such an insult today needs an explanation in order to be effective, and even with that explanation it is still an insult against the current common sense, so it may not be understood or even shared. Arendt lived in a world where that insult was indeed a very strong one and she believed in a certain attitude that we are almost losing today. This example helps us to explain why this intellectual story approach is needed to a proper research on Arendt milieu.<sup>14</sup> We need to reconstruct the epochs’ common sense rather than intellectual history. Quentin Skinner’s notion of understanding is close to the exercise we did with the word philistine, for him understanding is to read an author in a specific context, between a constellation of texts, influences and relations.

According to Skinner, writing a text, publishing a book, reading it, presenting it; they all are elements to be taken into account.<sup>15</sup> We cannot picture language and texts as a means without interactions and intentions. In the same sense we talked about the context of the word philistine in Arendt’s environment, we need to look at her publications, relations with other authors, letters, classes and enunciations, as relevant elements. He recovers the distinction between meaning and use, for Skinner to understand we need:

“[...] to grasp not merely the meaning of what is said, but at the same time the intended force with which the utterance is issued. To study what past thinkers have said about the canonical topics in history of ideas is, in short, to perform only the first of two hermeneutical tasks, each of which is indispensable if our goal is of attaining an historical understanding of what they wrote. As well as grasping the meaning of what they said, we need at the same time to understand what they meant by saying it”

(Skinner, 2006: 82)

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<sup>12</sup> (Arendt, 2003b: 5)

<sup>13</sup> Quentin Skinner (2006: 6) also uses the Word philistine to talk about the objection to the belief in perennial wisdom in the ancient texts.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Isaac (1993) is the only one paper that mentions Cambridge’s method regarding Arendt.

<sup>15</sup> Skinner states this in a very deep way by saying: “perhaps the moral is that seminar rooms are really battlefields”. (Skinner, 2006: 7).

This is the idea of understanding for Skinner, a different but compatible idea with Arendt's emphasis on understanding. However, there is a point where Skinner is useful to see the limits of Arendt's understanding; for Skinner there are other mistakes we can commit by trying to read an author's work; he called them mythologies. Mythologies rise when some mindsets, paradigms and ideas are applied to the past without taking into account their context and applicability. For Skinner there is no such thing as perennial debates.

The discussion in the history of ideas states two different positions, *supra* and *filia temporis*; the former describes arguments as containing perennial issues, while the latter relates to them as part of a certain context. Skinner is representative of the second approach, or philosophically speaking, a historical nominalist who disregard some bad applications of *filia temporis* as mythologies.

The first mythology is the mythology of doctrines, in which by taking an incidental remark, the researcher describes a whole doctrine out of it, or even attributes an author as the start of a tradition unknown to him or her. By selecting obscure references the author is criticized or praised as the founder of a certain tradition or as someone to be blamed for not doing so. (Skinner, 2006: 65)

The second mythology is the mythology of coherence. It is explained by Skinner as the assumption in which an author can be criticized for not being faithful enough to his later development. The third mythology is prolepsis, this error relates to the action of attributing an unintended reason to the author, thinking that we have certainty of his intentions. In this sense, Hobbes can be stated as a reader of Machiavelli and Plato can be read as a totalitarian author (Skinner, 2006: 73) even before totalitarianism, and even without writing about such issues in any of his dialogues. Finally the last mythology is localism, the error in which we use criteria from a familiar time, context to understand ideas or an author.

In Arendt's reading of Kant, especially in her lectures in the University of Chicago and the New School for Social Sciences, some of these issues appear in a very obscure way<sup>16</sup>. Arendt praised and criticized Kant, and at the same time she makes a re-appropriation of his notions of judgment. In order to answer to our question about what was Arendt doing when she was discussing publicness and judgment, we need to revisit her context and the authors she was referring to, as a way to map her relations, intellectual *milieu* and the academic constellations and power relations involved. In this way we will see how Arendt was at certain moments understanding while at the same time she was 'cutting' or re-appropriating some Kantian notions of judgment and Aristotelian political claims. Her reading was not praise or a critique *in toto*, but an inventive appropriation in a certain context. In her early work '*The Human Condition*' we can trace a perspective related to narration and poetry,

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<sup>16</sup> It is surprising to notice Skinner committing some of the mistakes he associated with mythologies. Arendt (2003d: 182-185) states a clear difference with Aristotle in the *Human Condition*, still Skinner reads her as an Aristotelian by relating her work to the notion of *zoon politikon*. (Skinner, 2002: 242).

while in her later works such as the essays compiled in *Responsibility and Judgment*, *On Revolution* and *The Life of the Mind*, we can notice the appearance of a Kantian conception of freedom related to the spectator. This reading of Aristotle and Kant has some problematic elements we will discuss later; however in the next chapter we will focus on the notion of publicness and narration as basis for her later ideas of judgment.

To see what was Arendt doing we need to recapitulate. In these sections we described the method and the meaning of thinking for Hannah Arendt; we have shown how important it is her emphasis on the broken status of the political tradition and the need to ‘think without a banister’. Her views on these topics were a radicalization of political thinking, political tradition is a broken thread, and according to her we need to look for political experiences and words to recover the very idea of politics. Arendt opposed the Platonic model of thinking presented in his allegory<sup>17</sup> and contrasts it with a different one. Thinking in this model is not remembrance but the very chance to question and dissolve our notions about concepts and the world, is the capacity to look for a new meaning that needs to return to reality through judgment. The political theorist is not caring about ideas for its application, but is a participant in a common and shared world, a member and critic of it rather than a leader.

Judgment also represents a sense of particularity that Arendt is recovering for political thought. When she opposes Plato, she is presenting judgment as a nonprofessional activity; it is not the privilege of the philosophers or statesman to judge, but a capacity we all share, and it is grounded in reason and common sense. Just like the the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt corrected the King Louis XVI judgment regarding the revolution, Arendt’s corrects Plato’s philosopher king on thinking that their judgments can exceed the common sense and impose thoughts without returning to the world and be shared with others.

In this thesis then, we will imitate the way thinking and judgments are connected by stating first the basis of Arendt thought, the idea of groundless thinking. Then we move to the product of thinking, to her first attempt at returning and understanding publicness and judgment, and finally we can notice her returning to her previous ideas and contrasting them to common sense. We can see Arendt turning her thoughts judgments to the world, connecting herself to Ariadne’s thread, to this ‘wire to the soil’ that allows her to think and judge in our worldly experiences about publicness. Finally we will conclude by showing some final remarks regarding the power relations and the ideas that Arendt was opposing or re-appropriating when she was discussing judgment and publicness in her books and in her life.

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<sup>17</sup> The allegory can be found in the books VII and VIII of Plato’s (2005) *Republic*.



## 2. *In praise of light: private, public and the space of appearances.*

Travelling to North America, rediscovering the world and covering Eichmann's trial are some of the most important experiences for the development of Arendt's political thought. The idea of being able to reconcile with the violent world she lived in and at the same time describe the most frightening and anti-political elements of totalitarianism without looking for forgiveness or shortcuts, was one of Arendt's highest achievements and most criticized features<sup>18</sup>. She committed herself with the chance to see the world with different eyes by looking for the spaces of light in the middle of dark times, by searching as she said for the right for some illumination<sup>19</sup>. This search was more than the search to dwell in individual peace after a world shattered by war and totalitarianism, it was even more than the recovery of the public space and the space of reasons; it was the pursuit for an autonomous space as a provider of the light needed to see and judge each other's appearances and stories, the space for plurality.

Public space is for Arendt a certain kind of relation between people that bonds plurality and togetherness with opinion and beauty, a way of living among other men. For Arendt, publicness cannot lead to ideas such as truth, consensus, will or our self-interests, it is on the contrary, an extremely radical notion that allows a relational mode of being in the world in which we are not fully autonomous agents while at the same time we are responsible. That way of living among fellow men is our relation with the public space, with the space in-between that makes politics possible. The public space and the chance to show ourselves, the space to be remembered and judged is one of the main topics of Arendt's *Human Condition*. This problem will remain and will be deepened in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in *On Revolution* and finally in her last work *The Life of the Mind* as a distance between two modes of life, the active and the contemplative.

“[...] the activity of thinking, which in its most general, entirely nonspecialized sense can be defined with Plato as the silent dialogue between me and myself. If applied to matters of conduct, the faculty of imagination would be involved in such thought to a high degree that is, the ability to represent, to make present to myself what is still absent – any contemplated deed. To what extent this faculty of thought, which is exercised in solitude, extends into the strictly political sphere, where I am always with others, is another question.”

(Arendt, 2003e: 157)

There are, as Visker (2009) and Wurfgart (2016:161) explain, we find two concepts of politics in Arendt, one related to action and speech, and the second one regarding our relation to politics as spectators. These two concepts, *the political freedom* and *the freedom*

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<sup>18</sup> For such criticism the main targets are her writings on *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *Reflections on Little Rock*, some controversial moments in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and her use of irony and coldness to judge; see chapter 9 of *Arendt and America* (King, 2015) and (Bloom, 1986), Arendt's biography by her teaching assistant (Young-Bruehl, 2004), and chapter 2 *Hannah Arendt Irony and Atrocity* (Nelson, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> “That even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination.”

*from politics*, are the elements we will discuss in this thesis, however in this chapter we will focus on the relation of that concepts with the public space. In the first part of this chapter we will describe briefly Arendt's discussion of private space in '*The Human Condition*', while in the second we will take into account some moments of Arendt's conceptualization of publicness. Finally we will discuss what was Arendt doing by discussing publicness in '*The Human Condition*', and we will present the claim that she was pushing Aristotle ideas about politics and public space further or as Heller (1984) explains, pushing them to their extremes.<sup>20</sup>

Arendt, to say it clearly, didn't have a refined conception of judgment in '*The Human Condition*'; her focus was much more in the idea of a narrative life and the space of appearances as the space for stories and action. His notion was closer to poetry and persuasion rather than judgment and taste, and her recovery of Kant's ideas regarding the third critique and reflective judgment starts just in 1957 (Marshall, 2010: 369) after reading a book from her master Karl Jaspers' (1962) on Kant<sup>21</sup>.

## **2.1 Warmth and shadows, the private space.**

To think about the private space we need to think about despotism, property, necessity and fire. The private space is not the space of freedom, today it is a space for shelter and comfort, for warmth and for tranquility, while in the past it was something completely different related to property and shadows. Private space nowadays refers mostly to the idea of intimacy and the social sphere of necessity as opposed to the public space.

When Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* defines the private space, her most important gesture is to look at the word itself and to define it by opposition to the public space, to look at it as a negative space.

“In ancient feeling the private trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all-important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man's capacities. A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, was not fully human.”

(Arendt, 2003d: 191)

Such privacy of the public and shared world is what constitutes the private space, a space for family and despotic government. The private space then refers to a realm for a different

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<sup>20</sup> According to Heller (1984: 283) Arendt was pushing Aristotle, Kant and Heidegger to their extremes regarding thinking, pure reason and *nous*. Here we will argue the same, but regarding Aristotle, and Kant's notions of the public. (Kant's notion of publicness and judgment will be discussed in the next chapter).

<sup>21</sup> The *Human Condition* was released in 1958, and her book on Rahel Varnhagen on 1957, so it was virtually impossible for Arendt to remake the book after her readings of Jaspers and Kant. According to Marshall (2010: 368), Arendt lectured on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason on 1955. Also later in 1961 in her text '*The Crisis of Culture*', we can see a shift towards a mixture of elements from both Aristotle (*phronesis* or practical wisdom) and Kant (*Geschmack* or taste) along with some remarks on culture and preservation from Cicero and the notion of *cultura animi*. (Arendt, 2001)



kind of life than the one we live in the public space, a life we share with animals and living beings. It was concerned with the biological life, with necessity and with despotic forms of government; the public space, on the contrary, was concerned with political life and freedom.<sup>22</sup> There is also another sense of the private, and is the privation of the shared ‘objective’ world that opens in the public space, that sense will be explored in detail in the following sections, however the one that was closer and at the same time different than today’s notion of the private is the sense of the private space as a realm related to property and the warmth of family life.

The most important influence to take into account for Arendt’s explanation of the private space and its political implications<sup>23</sup> is the one she borrowed from the classicist Fustel de Coulanges in *The Ancient City*. Arendt’s appropriation of Coulanges’s argument is an ingenious way of debating against liberal and contractualists visions of property and politics<sup>24</sup>; property and necessity are not the basis for political life, on the contrary, they refer to different and separated spheres. The author explains that “the ancient family was a religious rather than a natural association” (Coulanges, 2018: 25) based on the cult of the sacred fire, and also that the despotic nature of the father was not based completely on force but derived from religious authority.<sup>25</sup>

Religion rather than necessity or force was the constituent force and the foundation of the family on the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans with the cult of the goddess Vesta.<sup>26</sup> Property was related, as Arendt explains, with the idea of having a place in the world, a soil related to the fire cult and the hearth of the house. For this reason, the expulsion of a citizen in disgrace was punished with the complete destruction of the house and the cult inside

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<sup>22</sup> In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (book I, 5) Aristotle (2014) shows the three different forms of life (*bioi*), the life of pleasure (*hedoné*), the political life (*bios politikos*), and the theoretical life (*bios theoretikos*). For Aristotle the most important of these three was *bios theoretikos* or contemplative life.

<sup>23</sup> For contemporary applications of the problems of the public/private relation, one of Arendt’s biggest references was David Riesman (1965) ‘The Lonely Crowd’, see also chapter 5 in King (2015).

<sup>24</sup> “Prior to the modern age, which began with the expropriation of the poor and then proceeded to emancipate the new propertyless classes, all civilizations rested upon the sacredness of private property. Wealth, on the contrary, had never been sacred before. Originally, property meant no more or less than have one’s location in a particular part of the world and therefore to belong to the body politic, that is, to be the head of one of the families which together constituted the public realm” (Arendt, 2003d: 207)

<sup>25</sup> Necessity played an important role according to Arendt, however is important to notice that the household and the family are not strictly the same. The family referred to a religious institution based on the cult of fire, while the household, as Arendt explains is born out of necessity. The liberal and contractualist treatment of necessity as the founding principle rests on the destruction of property as a place in the world. Arendt explains:

“The distinctive trait of the household was not that in it men lived together because they were driven by their wants and needs. [...] Natural community in the household therefore was born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in it.”

(Arendt, 2003d: 186)

<sup>26</sup> “[...] the authority of the father or husband, far from having been a first cause, was itself an effect derived from religion, and was established by religion. Superior strength, therefore, was not the principle that established the family.”

(Coulanges, 2018: 24-25)

remains wondering in the place as a ghost. Property was much more than money; it was a place in the world, a space to see and judge from a unique perspective and a relation with the ancestors and the community. Arendt refers to this idea and the relation between private and public realms:

“Privacy was like the other, the dark and hidden side of the public realm, and while to be political meant to attain the highest possibility of human existence, to have no private place of one’s own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human.

[...] To own property meant here to be master over one’s own necessities of life and therefore potentially to be a free person, free to transcend his own life and enter the world we all have in common.”

(Arendt, 2003d: 208-209)

The relation between public and private was for the sake of the public space and the chance to appear and act<sup>27</sup> in front of others and see the world with multiple eyes convincing each other rather than looking for an absolute criterion for truth. The next part of this chapter is about that space we all have in common, the public space that holds the different views that gather and compete in it and the courage needed to appear in public and to be judged, immortalized and remembered by other fellows of the *polis*. It is about public space providing light to the common world.

## 2.2 Into the light of the public sphere.

The table is the object Arendt chooses to describe the public space; it relates and separates us in a strange way and the same time is closer to the notion of space in-between than to our intuitive idea of the public space. Her idea of public space is a different one, she was trying to tie plurality, opinion and appearance in one concept, while opposing or pushing further the shared notions of publicness. In Arendt’s relation to public intellectuality we see some of her differences with the idea of the public intellectual, and her change of opinion (Wurgaft, 2016: 3) when she was able to compare the New York intellectuals<sup>28</sup> and the German intellectuals and that *déformation professionnelle* she felt so ashamed of<sup>29</sup>. For Arendt the public space considers not only a relation between people (space) or reason (publicity), but also a relation with a world of man-made things:

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<sup>27</sup> According to Arendt (2003a) humans are conditioned in the *vita activa*, as *animal laborans* (labour), as *homo faber* (work), and finally in action and speech they are unconditioned. For Arendt, labor is the activity for humans to satisfy their needs with nature in a cyclical and perpetual series till death. Work is the way in which humans create a stable and objective world from nature. Finally, action is the capability of starting something new, to appear and been seen with others. (Auden, 1959)

<sup>28</sup> For Arendt’s relation with the New York Intellectuals, see ‘*Prodigal Sons*’ by Alexander Bloom (1986).

<sup>29</sup> “I left Germany dominated by the idea – of course somewhat exaggerated: Never again! I shall never do with that lot. Also I didn’t believe then that Jews and German Jewish intellectuals would have acted any differently had their own circumstances been differently. That was my opinion. I thought that it had to with this profession, with being an intellectual. I am speaking in the past tense. Today I know more about it.” (Arendt, 2003b: 11)

“To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time”.

(Arendt, 2003d: 201)

The public realm, different from the private realm, is about the common world that opens and enlightens us when we gather together, is about a shared and non-sovereign mode of living in common. The greek word κοινόν (*koinón*), opposed to ἴδιος (*idios*) refers to this difference; the former is about this common space, the common experience that does not belong properly to anyone but can be remembered and told by everyone, the latter explains a relation to my belongings and what is proper to each one individually. The word idiot that came from ιδιώτης (*idiotes*) in Greek and it was used as an insult to someone who was not able to care for the public world that was confined in his own business and did not care about losing the chance to be seen and judged by others in a public life and the community κοινωνία (*koinonia*).

In this space, and only here is possible to experience reality in a deeper sense, to contrast different positions and views. As Arendt explains:

“The subjectivity of privacy can be prolonged and multiplied in a family; it can even become so strong that its weight is felt in the public realm; but this family “world” can never replace the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators. Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspect without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.”

(Arendt, 2003d: 204)

Arendt describes more than a public space in today’s sense; she describes a space of appearances, a space to see and being seen, a chance for us to be the actors and the spectators in different moments of our life. This relates the public space to opinion and to the plurality of views, spectators and visions shared, to share that particular view related to our property to our place in the world and to our unique way of seeing things. We think that this chance to alternate one’s position as a spectator and as an actor (never at the same time), is closely tied to Arendt’s discovery on her later work on the *vita contemplativa* and the activities we do outside the world. In order to look deeper into Arendt’s notion of public space we need some time to look at another classicist she used for her conceptualization of publicness. In her recovery of the poetic attitude of Pindar we can observe a focus on the spectator. The text by Bruno Snell regarding Pindar reads as follows:

“Zeus asks: Is anything still missing in this beautiful world? And the gods reply: Divine creatures who will praise this beauty. If we had this episode in Pindar’s own language instead of the dry prose of the orator, it would surely be among the most famous in Greek literature. Pindar could not have expressed more fittingly what

poetry means to the world. On the day when the world attained to its perfect shape he affirms that all beauty is incomplete unless someone is present to celebrate it. Pindar frequently says that the great deeds stand in need of a singer so as not to lapse into oblivion and to perish – a thought which is rooted in the ancient tradition that a great name and a great deed are rendered immortal by song. But he deepens the thought by implying that the great deed requires a ‘wise’ poet who will lay bare its special significance. The beauty and order of the world certainly do not depend upon song for their immortality, but they do depend on the wise singer to have their meaning made clear to them. This meaning which the singer teaches by virtue of his praising skill does not lie concealed in some far-away region, behind or above Appearance, but is open to view of all; only most men do not perceive it and need to have it pointed to them.”  
(Snell, 1982: 78-79)<sup>30</sup>

The space of appearances is a space of memory, of stories, judgments and remembrance that the spectators and the poets make possible; without their sight, poetry, music and words, action would be futile and meaningless. This relates to action’s main characteristics, fragility and the construction of stories<sup>31</sup>. In action, precisely for this shared objectivity of the public realm – by being seen and judged by many others- we can know and finally answer to the question of who we are. In this space we are able to disclose just as the *δαίμων* (*daimon*) in the Greek religion, our stories. The spectator and the poet reveal what is hidden to the gods, the unique vision that everyone holds in his unique perspective to be shared and judged with others in a public space.

### **2.3 Arendt’s Aristotle: stories from the polis.**

*“Miss Arendt is more reticent than perhaps, she should be, about what actually went on in this public realm of the Greeks [...] Miss Arendt may be right when she deploras Plato’s attempt to eliminate the freedom of the public realm and turn politics into a form of craftsmanship, but the way the Greeks used their freedom makes it understandable.”*

*W. H. Auden.*<sup>32</sup>

In this last section we will discuss Arendt appropriation of Aristotle along with his conceptions on publicness and judgment. Aristotle defines in his treatise *Politics* a three-fold distinction between the household, the city and the polis and connects it teleologically to the notion of the *zoon politikón*. His notion of the public space remains hidden in most of

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<sup>30</sup> Also in (Arendt 1978:132)

<sup>31</sup> “And it is also because of this medium and the attending quality of unpredictability that action always produces stories, with or without intention, as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things.”  
(Arendt, 2003a: 180).

<sup>32</sup> (Auden, 1959: 74)

his commentators; however in Arendt appropriation in chapter 5 of *The Human Condition*, she mixes Aristotle with her notion of action and narration from *The Poetics*. She takes care to distinguish between the political thought related to the polis and action and the political thought related to lawmaking and government; of course Arendt makes this distinction by taking as a paradigm for politics the ideas of plurality, freedom and action. In the case of judgment her recovery was closer to tragedy and the *The Poetics* than to the notion of Aristotelian Φρόνησις (*phronēsis*). Also, as we will see, Arendt was far more critically than apologetically involved with the Greek legacy of the Periclean polis; her recovery of action was not a praise of fragility but a claim for *Amor Mundi* (care for the world).

Aristotle's context in his writing of *Politics* is profoundly interesting and mostly unnoticed, the philosopher from Stagira never lived in the golden times of Athenian democracy, and he never fully experienced what he describes in his book, to be precise he was not even a citizen of Athens. The times of Periclean Democracy or the golden century of Athens were not exactly what Aristotle describes, in fact the only constitution or πολιτεία (*politeia*) left of the group that Aristotle researched for *Politics* is the Athenian one (Ἀθηναίων πολιτεία). His research (made with a group of students) was not considered a book (or a papyrus in that context), but a recompilation and a research about the activities concerning different poleis made as teaching notes<sup>33</sup>. Greek culture was an oral culture and Aristotle was not writing these sketches from the point of view of the citizen, but researching different constitutions to be discussed in classes with students and philosophers of the Lyceum. By taking into account this cautions and the context, we can see Arendt's reading of Aristotle as a way to reestablish Aristotle's *Politics* to its main concerns, *praxis* and the polis affairs. Her reading presents the recovery of both *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* along with one text that is deeply underrated in the Aristotelian cannon and scholarship. That book provides Arendt with a theory of narration and a conception of the political life as a life to be shared and remembered by others; such text is *The Poetics*.

Arendt recovers the distinction between the house, the village and the polis from the first book of *Politics* (Aristotle, 1998) and ads and accent on the purpose of the polis and the difference between good life and the life of necessities. This life to share and show oneself to others, to appear, and to be seen and judged was the life of the polis, a life of men willing to take the risk of being judged, remembered and seen by others. Aristotle knew that, and counted courage as the virtue needed in order to leave the safe and stable space of the home and appear in front of others<sup>34</sup>; however his conception of politics (following Plato) was at the same time very aware of the fragility of action and preferred laws and government to the unpredictability of democracy and the polis.

“Though it is true that Plato and Aristotle elevated lawmaking and city-building to the highest rank in political life, this does not mean that they enlarged the fundamental Greek experiences of action and politics to comprehend what later

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<sup>33</sup> See Werner Jaeger's (1962) '*Aristotle: Fundamentals of the history of his development*' for a description of Aristotle's work in Arendt's intellectual milieu.

<sup>34</sup> Aristotle (2014) considers courage a political virtue in the third book of *Nicomachean Ethics*.

turned out to be the political genius of Rome: legislation and foundation. The Socratic school, on the contrary, turned to these activities, which to the Greeks were prepolitical, because they wished to turn against politics and against action.”  
(Arendt, 1998: 195)

Hannah Arendt read Aristotle keeping this in mind, and she appropriated his concepts from the perspective of *πρᾶξις* (*praxis*) instead of *ποίησις* (*poiesis*)<sup>35</sup>, however her answer to Aristotle, was not an apology to the golden age of democracy. The name Arendt selected to explore the Greek answer to the fragility of human affairs was ‘The Greek solution’ (§27), and indeed for them it was the only place that allowed both for stories that make action comprehensible<sup>36</sup> and a contention for the boundless and unpredictable character of action and politics. We can notice Arendt’s irony in §27 by calling the mistake of Pericles a solution; she was not praising but actually denouncing Pericles’ ὕβρις *hýbris* (insolence or exaggerated overconfidence) in thinking that Athenians were able to hold action without discourse, that they needed no Homer to tell their stories (Arendt, 1998:197) and no reification or stability for discourse and stories. Arendt, as Tsao (2002) explains knew that both action (*praxis*) and discourse *λέξις* (*lexis*) need some stability and fabrication (*poiesis*) in order to overcome its frailty.

For Arendt, as we explained before the *polis* was a space outside necessity, a space for the good life of the free men, for εὐδαιμονία (*eudaimonia*) and for stories. What is then the relation between stories, politics and the good life?

In an ancient dialogue documented by Herodotus, Croesus asks Solon who is the happiest and best living of all men. Solon replies that just a dead man can be called *eudaimon*<sup>37</sup>. Arendt wrote something profoundly similar in ‘*The Human Condition*’.

“[...] the light that illuminates processes of action, and therefore all historical processes, appears only at their end, frequently when all the participants are dead.”  
(Arendt, 1998: 112)

The good life or *eudaimonia* is something that is revealed at the end of life, in the τέλος (*telos*) or completion of our cycles<sup>38</sup>, however our political life can remain in the memory of the *polis*. In the *polis*, as Arendt notices, we enter a different life, a second and political life regarding the question of the agent of the action, the question regarding the story of

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<sup>35</sup> Honig (1993) and Villa (1992), in different ways, called this appropriation a post-nietzschean reading of Aristotle. Both Kristeva (2001) and Taminioux (1997) consider the influence of Heidegger rather than Nietzsche as the main reference.

<sup>36</sup> “Action without a name, a “who” attached to it, is meaningless, whereas an art work retains its relevance whether or not we know the master’s name.” (Arendt, 1998: 180-181)

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in (Hadot, 2002: 16)

<sup>38</sup> See book X in Aristotle’s (2014) *Nichomachean ethics*.



who we are. It is only in this artificial<sup>39</sup> human-made public space of appearances that such question can be answered and the life of somebody can be treated with such dignity and uniqueness. This dignity and glory is given by the poets and the spectators who judge the actions and immortalize them by creating poems and stories from different perspectives in the discourse that is repeated for the memory of the *polis*. Aristotle seemed to be aware of this and in *The Poetics* argues - in opposition to both Plato<sup>40</sup> and Pericles<sup>41</sup> - for recognizing the political importance of poetry and tragedy and knowing that both discourse and action should be reified by the artists. Aristotle chooses tragedy to approach such problem, stating that tragedy as imitation of action μίμησις Πράξεως (*mimesis praxeos*).<sup>42</sup>

As Julia Kristeva explains, Arendt recovers Aristotle and brings him closer to the notion of *praxis* or action by focusing in the political and narrative life that she is putting into the heart of the polis and its memory for human immortality:

“We need to find a discourse, a *lexis* that can answer the question ‘Who are you?’ – A question that is implicitly addressed to all newcomers, concerning their actions and their speech. *Narrative* will fulfill this role, the invented story that accompanies history. In interpreting Aristotle, Arendt proposes a way of articulating these two narrations (story/history), a way that differs, in its originality, from both the formalist theories of narrativity and the theories of Paul Ricoeur.”  
(Kristeva, 2001b: 15)

Arendt recovered the importance of tragedy and Aristotle’s *Poetics*<sup>43</sup> and even more she called theater “the political art par excellence” (Arendt, 1998:188) because it is the only

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<sup>39</sup> It is important to notice, as Arendt’s friend and classmate Hans Jonas explained, that Aristotelian ethics were unstable, or ethics for the ‘artifact of the city’ rather than codes of conduct:

“[...] the very inconstancy of human fortunes assures the constancy of the human condition.” (Jonas, 1984:4)

<sup>40</sup> In book X of *The Republic* Plato (2015) expels the poets from the *polis*.

<sup>41</sup> Against readings like the one proposed by Marshall (2010b: 129), we decided to highlight Arendt’s concern with the polis rather than a celebration of it: “The words of Pericles, as Thucydides reports them, are perhaps unique in their supreme confidence that men can enact and save their greatness at the same time and, as it were by one and the same gesture, and that the performance as such will be enough to generate *dynamis* and not need the transforming reification of *homo faber* to keep it in reality.”

(Arendt, 1998: 205)

<sup>42</sup> [...] tragedy is a representation of an action [...]

(Aristotle, 1987 :39)

<sup>43</sup> Authors like Marshall (2010) have recognized the influence of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in Arendt; we on the contrary do not think that such an influence is clear enough. Even if Arendt as Marshall explains quoted Aristotle in her philosophical journal (*Denktagebuch*), the influence on her published texts is not enough to take such a statement as correct. In fact, we think this is case of the mythology of coherence that Quentin Skinner (2006) talks about. The author takes some small remarks of Arendt journal and supposes a whole coherent work from it. The same happens with the Hegelian influence Marshall attributes to her unwritten theory of judgment. Hegel is quoted just 3 times in Arendt’s lectures in relation to her distinction between ‘history’ and ‘story’; in *The Life of the Mind* we can notice citations regarding will, however no third part of *The Life of the Mind* was written, so her thoughts about judgment and Hegel are unclear.

In the case of *phronēsis*, there are some moments in Arendt’s writing when she came closer to this idea. (like footnote 66 of the chapter 5 of *The Human Condition*), however the most direct quote is one in her essay ‘*The*

kind of craftsmanship that can imitate action (*praxis*) with fabrication (*poiesis*), like a sort of spell that enables us to live the actions once more and disclose their meaning and reinterpret them once again. It allows the spectators to take an active role and participate at the same time, to revisit and understand the memory of the polis with different eyes.

In this chapter we have noticed how Arendt's conception regarding action and judgment were far from the simplification we tend to use to refer her work. Her account of action was not a praise of fragility and boundlessness but actually a call for contention and for the reification of the space of appearances from the poets and the *homo faber*. Her quotes of Pericles' Funeral Oration is a way to show how action needs stories, how this two elements belong together and need each other in order to stay in the world. Her rescue of the polis is a manner to show the problem of memory and its relation with poets and fabricators, or to say in another way, the need for poetry, public spaces, glory and remembrance of action, both at its best and its worse. We argue that this is call for poets, fabrication and reification of the public space rather than a plea for the statesman's *phronēsis* or a celebration of the polis.

The public space is something that Arendt knew we cannot take for granted or linked just to self-interest, she lived the disintegration of such a space, the conditions of loneliness that allow people to live in loneliness rather than solitude, and allow bypassing thinking and judging. In the next chapter we will see how Arendt shifts her conceptions regarding public space and judgment in *On Revolution*, her lectures on Kant and the *Life of the Mind*.

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*Crisis of Culture*' and in both cases she links *phronēsis* to the virtue of the statesman rather than a civic virtue or a virtue of the philosophers. Kantian judgment in contrast was valid for everyone exercising it and we can notice a much more developed and systematic appropriation of Kant's third critique than the one shown regarding Aristotelian *phronēsis*. (Arendt, 2001: 20) Also in the second section of second book of *The Life of the Mind* we can notice Arendt (1978: 59-62) discussing *phronēsis* in relation to προαιρεσις *proairesis* (the forerunner of the will) rather than judgment. Others authors like Taminiaux (1997) and Kristeva (2001), opposed *phronēsis* to and σοφία *sophia* (wisdom), to contrast Arendt with Heidegger. Such interpretations are interesting, however even recognizing the influence of Heidegger's 1924 seminar on the Sophist, Arendt did not make that opposition strictly clear, so it is a very accurate interpretation of Arendt's intention but not a documented and developed notion that Arendt wanted to share in her writings.

We cannot take small references and use them as indications for influences on the authors; they need to be put in context to seize their weight fair and properly. Just like Aristotle explained:

"[...] one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day".

(Aristotle, 2014:10)



### 3. The distant revolutions and the spectators

“Madison, Hamilton, Jefferson, John Adams – what men. And when you look at what’s there now – what a comedown.”  
Arendt to Jaspers, November 16, 1958.<sup>44</sup>

In 1950, after thirteen years of being stateless, Hannah Arendt received the American citizenship and published ‘*The Origins of Totalitarianism*’ (1951) and ‘*The Human Condition*’ (1958), the next decade her political thought moved towards different sources and stories. ‘*On Revolution*’ was the book where Arendt recovered the American political thought and the revolutionary spirit of the founding fathers as a hidden treasure, one that perhaps could enlighten the present with the founding experiences and its relation with the public sphere. The Foundation of liberty and the stories of the revolutionary spirit were the topics of Hannah Arendt’s book ‘*On Revolution*’, and they represented at the same time a shift or a radicalization of the problems that Arendt described in *The Human Condition*. In that book she was looking for the spectators rather than reading the Olympic poets, she was describing a republic rather than a *polis*, commenting Virgil rather than Homer, and moving from νόμος (*nomos*) to *lex* (law) following the attempt to constitute public happiness rather than idealize the ancient Greeks and the boundlessness of *praxis*. Her book was highly misunderstood because of its context<sup>45</sup> and taken as an exploration or eccentricity in her work. Her main focus was the recovery of the revolutionary spirit as a way to recover lost experiences in the middle of the American state of affairs of that times, or as she called it, the crisis of the republic.

In the first section of this chapter we will propose an interpretation of Arendt’s *On Revolution* in the optic of her shift towards the spectators and the re-conceptualization of freedom we perceive in her work. The second section will describe her conception of the public space and the role of culture by presenting the importance of common sense in relation with her political thought and the problem of judgment. Finally, the last section will explain how Arendt understood judgment and what is her relation with Kant, or to say it in another way, what elements of Kant’s perspective on reflective judgment and aesthetics Arendt was taking for her own theory. We will propose a different reading of Arendt’s judgment by taking into account not only her theory of judgment, but her personal judgments in relation to two moments. First on the second section of this chapter we will examine her interpretation of the Free Speech and the Antiwar Movement in the United States in relation to common sense and judgment. Then, in the final section we will take a letter exchange of Arendt with her husband Heinrich Blücher interpreting a painting by Rembrandt as a way to explain reflective judgment and the interpretation that she proposes on Kant’s aesthetic theory.

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in (King, 2015: 86).

<sup>45</sup> *On Revolution* was published the same year than *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and hence it was clearly overshadowed by it.

### 3.1 The revolution in-between.

'*On Revolution*' shocked historiography<sup>46</sup> by proposing a reading of the American founding fathers motivated by republicanism and public happiness instead of liberalism, private interest and contractualism; even more this book pioneered multiple works<sup>47</sup> regarding the creation of the American republic establishing a different trend that opposed the hegemonic work by Louis Hartz (1955). There is, however, another reading of Arendt's relation to historiography, the interpretation of her task as a monumental historian<sup>48</sup>. As Judith Shklar explains, Arendt was shifting her thoughts and producing a different conception of politics that emphasized the political experiences of modernity and the republic.

"In *Between Past and Future*, she did the critical work, in *On Revolution*, the creative."

(Shklar, 1998: 354)

What was exactly this creative work? We think that it is the recovery of a different tradition related to the act of foundation and the most important political experience of modernity: the revolution<sup>49</sup>. In her essays of *Between Past and Future* in 1961 we can notice how Arendt looked at different political experiences and concepts such as freedom, authority, history, education, truth and culture to see the political experiences and state some reflections on them. In *On Revolution*, we can see some of the concepts and political experiences as relevant to the French and American revolutionaries. The concept of foundation and its relation with tradition as a return to the founding experiences provided a different and more modern account of political action. Arendt was not creating an ideal

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<sup>46</sup> Eric Hobsbawm (1973: 201 - 208) harsh review on Arendt's *On Revolution* is a clear example of this.

<sup>47</sup> Mira S. Sielberg (2013:100) called three books published in the following years to *On Revolution* a triumvirate regarding the corruption of the American republic and the virtue of its citizens. The books are J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment*, Bernard Baylin's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, and Gordon Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic*.

<sup>48</sup> The idea of the monumental historian is presented by Nietzsche (1997) in his *Untimely meditations* in contrast to the antiquarian and the critic historian.

"Hannah Arendt was what he called a monumental historian. At its best, monumental history is addressed to political actors, to remind them that great deeds were performed by notable men and that what was once feasible is at least possible again."

(Shklar, 1998: 353)

<sup>49</sup> In the first chapter of *On Revolution* she states clearly her intention to define the American experience of politics and remind his new country of the tradition; it is a call to republican memory and a reply to historians and sociologists:

"For facts are stubborn: they do not disappear when historians and sociologists refuse to learn from them, though they may when everybody has forgotten them. In our case oblivion would not be academic; it would quite literary spell out the end of the American Republic."

(Arendt, 2016: 18).

type like the polis in *'The Human Condition'*<sup>50</sup>, and presenting it in *'On Revolution'*, on the contrary, she was doing an exercise of monumental history and political nominalism, by taking the political experiences of the modern age as stories to inspire the present and at the same explaining the differences between them and the Greeks. Her main focus can be shown properly if we take in consideration her insistence on the clear difference between the Greek *ἰσηγορία* (*isēgoría*) 'artificial equality' and the modern and revolutionary concept of equality.

“Isonomy guaranteed *ἰσότης*, equality, but not because all men were born or created equal, but, on the contrary, because men were by nature (*φύσει*) not equal, and needed an artificial institution, the polis, which by nature of its *νόμος* would make them equal. Equality existed only in this specifically political realm, where men met one another as citizens and not as private persons. The difference between this ancient concept of equality and our modern notion that men are born or created equal and become unequal by virtue of social and political, that is man-made institutions, can hardly be overemphasized.”

(Arendt, 2016: 23)

Our modern experience of equality and the Greek experience of equality are different phenomena and as such they cannot be equaled without taking in consideration their context and expressed as similar in an essentialist fashion. The same argument applies to the conceptualization of freedom. Arendt is not recovering the idea of the *polis* for the modern times, but exploring a different conception of public space and freedom in the revolutionary tradition, something stated as public happiness.

“If we think of his political freedom in modern terms, trying to understand what Condorcet and the men of revolutions had in mind when they claimed that revolution aimed at freedom and that the birth of freedom spelled the beginning of an entirely new story, we must first notice the rather obvious fact that they could not possibly had in mind those liberties which we today associate with constitutional government and which are properly called civil rights. [...] All these liberties, to which we might add our own claims to be free from want and fear, are of course essentially negative; they are the results of liberation but they are by no means the actual content of freedom, which, as we shall see later, is participation in public affairs, or admission to the public realm.”

(Arendt, 2016: 24-25)

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<sup>50</sup>This reading is a common mistake on Arendt's scholarship, and it is defended by authors like Marshal (2010b) and questioned by authors like Tsao (2002) or Taminiaux (2000).

Her position was to focus on freedom as the opening of a contingent and fragile space between people<sup>51</sup>. Her existential republicanism, as Canovan (1992) explains is rooted in the Roman conception of the *res publica*<sup>52</sup> (the public thing), rather than civic virtue or patriotism. It was a recovery of the public space and a chance to participate and to be active in this space of plurality and opinion sharing with others in an evanescent space that opens in-between. Arendt is moving outside her time and thinking in freedom as something relational that connects and appears when people interact with each other; it is a conception that goes against the tradition of sovereignty and the will, and against the conception of freedom as liberation<sup>53</sup>. Political freedom is for Arendt the participation in public affairs, people joining and associating together.

From the previous paragraph it seems like Arendt is focusing only in the actors and the active participators of the public space, in the big men of revolution, however almost in the end of *'On Revolution'* we can notice one of her most enigmatic and paradoxical statements. While discussing a form of government outside modern suffrage and the focus on the actors, she takes the opposite direction and praises another conception of freedom:

“[...] one of the most important negative liberties we have enjoyed since the end of the ancient world, freedom from politics, which was unknown to Rome and Athens and which is probably the most relevant part of our Christian heritage.”

(Arendt, 2016: 284)

This movement, from the actor to the spectator, is what constitutes one of her biggest concerns in *'The Life of the Mind'*. It is not as it may seem that Arendt renounces to the actor, but on the contrary, her question relates closely to the way in which a spectator can be engaged politically while still remaining disinterested. In that fashion her conception of the public space is also changed according to this new perspective, and she starts a recovery of some much underscored element of modernity; such elements are the problem of taste and common sense, and its relation with politics. The next section will trace the problem of common sense and judgment by comparing some elements from *'The Origins of Totalitarianism'*, *'The Life of the Mind'* and one instance of judgment enacted by Arendt herself.

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<sup>51</sup> The question of the fragility of politics is a concern for Arendt in *'The Human condition'*, *'The Life of the Mind'* and *'On Revolution'*. As Cornelissen explains:

“The condition, which in *The Human Condition* was, in light of the aim of earthly “immortality”, still called “the frailty of human affairs”, returns in *On Revolution* and the *Life of the Mind*: Willing as “the abyss of freedom”.

(Cornelissen, 2014: 171).

<sup>52</sup> “A ‘republic’ within the classical tradition was a state that is free in the sense that it is not subject to a master but is the common possession of its citizens, “the public thing”.”

(Canovan, 1992: 203)

<sup>53</sup> “Indeed, as opposed to liberty, freedom designates an action not a status, an acting and not a right.”

(Tassin, 2007: 1118)

### 3.2 Common sense: a wire to the soil.

In the last chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*<sup>54</sup>, Arendt traced for the first time some of the most important questions that she tried to answer later in *The Life of the Mind*<sup>55</sup>. The problem of common sense was the topic on her account of totalitarian governments and the incapacity to judge them was the starting point of the question on thinking and the absence of touch with reality. In her description of totalitarianism the very condition of politics is being threatened, and the *modus operandi* of such maneuver is the destruction of the condition for politics, or to say in another words, the collapse of the space that lies between people.

“By pressing men against each other, total terror destroys the space between them; compared to the condition within its iron band, even the desert of tyranny, insofar as it is still some kind of space, appears like a guarantee of freedom. Totalitarian government does not just curtail liberties or abolish essential freedoms; nor does it, at least to our limited knowledge, succeed in eradicating the love of freedom from the hearts of man. It destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.”

(Arendt, 2017: 612)

The destruction of the space in-between, and consequently the negation of the very possibility of politics can be explained according to Arendt in relation to two key factors: ideology and the logical reasoning of loneliness. Ideological thinking and logicity consist in the replacement of our sense of the real, our common experience, for a counter commonsensical belief in laws of history or others elements that displace human plurality and shared meanings for ‘self-evident truths’. Ideological thinking represents the triumph of ideas and abstract laws over our senses and our need of others to confer validity to our statements. It works along with logicity as the very refusal of our shared experience and the world as it is in order to explain everything according to a pre-established logic of the idea in which one premise is dependent to the next and arrives to conclusions without any need for the world or the presence of others<sup>56</sup>.

In the middle of the conditions we have shown before, thinking and judging become fundamental as a way to retain some sense of the real, and in such conditions judgment can work as a way to return to a common world, as a wire that brings us back to reality and shook us with the electricity of a common world that brings both the wonders and the crudeness of it. If we take this perspective regarding the notion of common sense, then we

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<sup>54</sup> The book title in England was *The burden of our time*. It presented a reflection of the enunciation and in the same way emphasized the responsibility of thinking in relation to totalitarianism. (Young-Bruelh, 2004: 200)

<sup>55</sup> “The fact that it was raised in the context of her analysis of totalitarian ideology has been largely ignored in scholarship on Arendt’s theories of judgment and action.” (Borren, 2010: 120).

<sup>56</sup> “Hence ideological thinking becomes emancipated from the reality that we perceive with our five senses, and insists on a ‘truer’ reality concealed behind all perceptible things [...]” (Arendt, 2017: 618)

can perceive the relation of the task of understanding and judging in a context. This intellectual maneuver is the first element to take in consideration to understand *'The Life of the Mind'* as a comprehension of the activities of the mind in a political sense, but also as an apology to the senses and the shared sense of the real. To say it in other words, the consideration of the fact of plurality into the activities of the mind<sup>57</sup>, of understanding instead of professional thinking, and the need for reflective judgment instead of cognitive judgment in politics, is a way to recover the inter-subjective and plural character of our existence and our shared sense of the reality of the world.

“Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is meant to be perceived by somebody. Not man but men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth.

[...] The worldliness of living thing means that there is no subject that is not an object and appears as such to somebody else, who guarantees its “objective reality”

[...] Living beings, men and animals, are not just in the world, they are the world, and this is precisely because they are subject and objects – perceiving and being perceived – at the same time”

(Arendt, 1978: 19-20)

This way to understand the world and our role as both spectators and actors, as subjects and objects reminds us of the potentiality of common sense. The capacity to bring us back to the world and the appearances that are perceived in different ways by the different spectators<sup>58</sup>, but somehow related in this common sense that unites them and bring reality to our experiences. Also it states the impossibility of thinking in loneliness<sup>59</sup>:

“Thinking, existentially speaking, is a solitary but not a lonely business; solitude is that human situation in which I keep myself company. Loneliness comes about when I am alone without being able to split myself company, when, as Jaspers used to say, “I am in default of myself” (*ich bleibe mir aus*), or, to put it differently, when I am one and without company”.

(Arendt, 1987: 185)

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<sup>57</sup> Cornelissen explains Arendt’s task stating that:

“[...] she not only provides an alternative interpretation of action, she also provides a novel account of thinking, against both traditional contemplation and contemporary “thoughtlessness”. Thus, her work should not only be understood as an attempt to restore politics, but simultaneously as an attempt to retrieve ways of thinking that are in a certain sense “fit” for politics.”

(Cornelissen, 2014: 183)

<sup>58</sup> “The subjectivity of the it-seems-to-me is remedied by the fact that the same object also appears to others though its mode of appearance may be different.”

(Arendt, 1978: 50)

<sup>59</sup> For its political implications Arendt states: “While isolation concerns only the political realm of life, loneliness concern human life as a whole.”

(Arendt, 2017: 624)

It is precisely this comprehension of thinking as a dialogue with oneself and with potential others in order to judge that we can notice in the judgment that Arendt proclaimed. She was between her colleagues of the New School for Social Sciences in the middle of the student protests against the war and for the free speech movement in Berkeley. In contradistinction to the habit of the professional thinkers and philosophers to be outside the world and disregard appearances, Arendt returned to the world, and judged that event in its particularity to state something that that can be taken as an obvious fact for a common citizen: that those particular students in that particular time were not criminals.

“When students demonstrating against the war occupied the New School’s classrooms, the faculty called a special meeting to address the question of whether the police should be summoned to restore order. Arguments pro and contra were presented, which ambled, as the meeting wore on, towards a positive resolution. Arendt said nothing until one of her colleagues, a friend she had known since her youth, reluctantly concurred that the “authorities” probably had to be informed. She turned on him sharply, saying “For God’s sake, they are students not criminals” There was no further mention of the police, and in effect those eight words ended the discussion. Spoken spontaneously and based on her own experience, Arendt’s words reminded her colleagues that the matter they addressed lay between them and their students and not between their students and the law. Arendt’s response was a judgment of a particular situation in its particularity, which the many words of argumentation had obscured.”

(Kohn, 2003: ix – x)

The judgment that Arendt enacted expressed clearly the character we wanted to give to the practice of judgment in this section, the effect it had in the professors is precisely the metaphor we used to describe judgment: the wire to the soil. After Arendt’s judgment they needed to confront reality and state that those students were not delinquents but students, that the commonsensical idea that a student is not a delinquent was something that needed to be remembered in the face of an argumentation between academics that deflected common reality in favor of ideas and abstract thoughts.

According to Arendt, Immanuel Kant, almost at the end of his life and talking about aesthetics shared this need for a common sense and recognized the value of appearances and plurality. The next section will propose an interpretation of Arendt’s appropriation of Kant’s aesthetics for politics.



### 3.3 Immanuel Kant's aesthetic revolution.

*“Kant, at any rate, seems to have been unique among the philosophers in being sovereign enough to join in the laughter of the common man.”*  
Hannah Arendt.<sup>60</sup>

In order to understand Arendt's appropriation of Kant's judgment we need to place ourselves in Kant's context and intellectual *milieu*, in the same way we approached Aristotle in the previous chapter. The most relevant element of the context is what has been called the *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment), an intellectual movement and a political effort produced by Frederick II in order to assimilate foreign thoughts and bring the Germans closer to a more sophisticated cosmopolitan culture. In such environment, Kant was able to read and participate in the discussion regarding the notion of the genius and at the same time he discussed the ideas of his movement against the ideas of *Sturm und Drang*. Kant was looking for a way to defy the old saying *De gustibus non disputandum est* (there is no accounting for taste)<sup>61</sup> without losing transcendental philosophy and the critical stance he developed since his first critique.

In his previous books, Kant rejected the usage of aesthetics as a science for its non-transcendental and empirical sources. Later in 1787 however, he changed his mind<sup>62</sup> and looked for a transcendental grounding for taste in the book he first called 'The Critique of Taste'. Kant took some elements he had developed in the past manifesting a crucial element for his later concerns, the sociability of men and the esteem and dignity for human beings that he expressed in his '*Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*'. In that text we can notice his concern explain directly in the cautionary fable he quoted, the tale of *Carazan*:

“Carazan, your divine service is rejected. You have closed your heart to the love of humankind, and held on to your treasures with an iron hand. You have lived only for yourself, and hence in the future you shall also live alone and excluded from all communion with the entirety of creation for all eternity. [...] stretched my hands out to actual objects with such vehemence that I was thereby awakened. And now I have been instructed to esteem human beings; for even the least of them, whom in the pride of my good fortune I had turned from my door, would have been far more welcome to me in that terrifying desert than all the treasures of Golconda.”  
(Kant, 2001: 17)

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<sup>60</sup> (Arendt, 1978: 83)

<sup>61</sup> See Kant's Common world (Kohn, 2003b: 102)

<sup>62</sup> Zammito (1992: 46) noticed that Kant changed his previous footnote of the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' of the 'Critique of Pure Reason'.



In expressing both the need for sociability and the terrifying condition of a life in loneliness, Kant is grounding the terrain for his later recovery of reflective judgment in his third Critique. The key idea lies in representation and its role in judgment, the Kantian response that allowed at the same time for plurality to be involved in the activity of judgment, and to be founded in reason itself and not in a posteriori or by empirical sources, but by representative thinking.

In the case of Arendt, we can perceive that her reading is involved with the Third Critique and Kant's aesthetic remarks. Her interpretation defies the interpretation of the will and the second Critique as Kant's political thought and involves an approach based on the notion of *sensus communis* and his portrayal of communication against solitude (via Jaspers)<sup>63</sup>. Arendt is not writing as a part of the tradition of political thought or trying to recover elements, on the contrary, she is exercising thought without bannisters or groundless thinking as a way to actually understand the breakdown of political tradition<sup>64</sup>. Her concern in the lectures hence is not to recover Kant's hidden political philosophy<sup>65</sup>, but to look for political elements in it and approach this work in relation to plurality<sup>66</sup>, not as a philosophy of the will, but as a political theory of the relations between men and the world they live in. In that sense Arendt's appropriation of Kant's theory of judgment relates closely to the original meaning of aesthetics as αἴσθησις (*aísthēsis*), that is to say sensation.

Her recovery of appearances is rooted in the project that she outlined in the Introduction to 'The Life of the Mind' in relation to the debunking of the two-world fallacy, the discrimination of appearances in philosophy and the absence of thinking. Kant helped her to establish the relation between being unable to judge and to think without pre-given rules. In that sense the recovery of aesthetic judgment and appearances constituted a form of engagement with the world and an answer to the meaning of politics rooted in plurality and the singularity of each action. To judge is to relate to actions in their uniqueness, in that sense the experience of judging aesthetically relates to judging politically.

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<sup>63</sup> "That pain of the lack of communication and that particular satisfaction of the authentic communication would not affect us philosophically as they do, if I were sure of myself in the absolute solitude of the truth. But I just exist in the company of others, alone I'm just nothing." (Jaspers, 2017: 26)

<sup>64</sup> According to Young Bruehl, Arendt read Kant's third critique in company of her husband Blücher, Jaspers and a small group of friends. (Young Bruehl, 2006: 171)

<sup>65</sup> "Again, most readers of Lectures on Kant's political philosophy seem to have fallen prey to the temptation to attribute Arendt's discussion of Kant's position to herself. But if we read this discussion in the light of the rest of her work, we encounter serious discrepancies." (Borren, 2010: 136)

<sup>66</sup> Using Skinner's mythologies we can notice that Arendt's appropriation of Kant is deeply imbued with her need to think her current situation and the breakdown of politics. In this sense Arendt's appropriation of Kant lies close to two of the mythologies described by Skinner: prolepsis and localism. The interpretation of Kant assumes that his discovery of sociability and the community in which taste is rooted could have been a political concern for Kant, while his work shows it as an aesthetic problem. On 'localism' we can state that Arendt's appropriation of enlarged mentality for political thinking goes far beyond Kant's understanding of politics and her own experience in relation to Frederik II, in Kant's context we can see him much more closely related to publicity and the public use of reason rather than publicness in the sense we have described in this thesis.

“Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim in our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of existence.

[...] Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right for wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought?”

(Arendt, 1978: 4-5)

The aesthetic-political sense that Arendt is trying to recover by looking at Kant goes in the direction of providing a ground for our relation to the world and our judgments of appearances and actions *qua* actions, not relying in norms, but judging without previous rules. However she recognizes that Kant was thinking politically (in Arendt’s terms) only in his writings about aesthetics and his comments on the French revolution from the spectator’s point of view. This aesthetical sense appeared to Kant only in that relation of impartiality and disinterestedness in which he was able to think against his own interests and beliefs and see something beautiful and worth observing as in his own reflections on the violent spectacle of the French revolution.<sup>67</sup> Arendt’s innovation lies also in the political application of the idea of taste. Young Bruehl provides a good example about taste, there is a deep relation between taste and sociability.

“Only the world-alienated like to eat alone; most people find it hard to enjoy a meal without company, any more than they like to go to the theater alone, without someone with whom to discuss the play. On the other hand, people have no trouble retreating from company to think or meditate. Arendt’s spectators ‘exist only in plural’ is a way of saying that judging is a form of public happiness.”

(Young Bruehl, 2006: 179)

In that sense, taste relates to a community of people and asks for sociability, it is rooted in a shared world in which we gather and discuss together, or to say it differently, it is strictly political. The same happens with reflective judgment, to explain Arendt’s appropriation of Kant reflective judgment we will look at her judgment in a letter exchange from Geneva to Paris with her husband Heinrich Blücher in 1937 concerning the painting *Bathsheba at Her Bath* by Rembrandt<sup>68</sup>.

The interpretation of her husband focused on the physical elements of liberation, private life and labor along with the marks on the body of the woman:

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<sup>67</sup> “Kant then declares that in spite of all the atrocities that render the French Revolution morally and practically objectionable, “this revolution nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger.”[...] This famous passage shows unmistakably that political judgment, like aesthetic judgment, is reserved to the spectator.”  
(Arendt, 1992: 124)

<sup>68</sup> A different interpretation of this letter exchange can be seen in Sjöholm, (2015 :43–44)

“This body is naked, but such a body can be naked (for its public) because it is totally dominated by the face. [...] For she has a face, she is a person with history. [...] This is Rembrandt greatest contribution to the liberation of woman; he makes her man’s companion, introduces her into history, and proves that she has a history of her own, by painting into the portraits the traces of her various stages of life.”  
(Kohler, 1996: 28–29)

Arendt’s reply, on the contrary focused on the actual context of the painting and the difference - instead of harmony – between the body and the face of Bathsheba. So they both were looking at the painting as spectators rather than for their own interests. They are both discussing the world and the free-play of faculties involved in their judgments.

“The true discrepancy here lies between the face and the body of Bathsheba herself. She is being decked out – a little Bible lesson for you, darling! For a most ambiguously sad purpose. Her husband, Lord Uri, has been sent to fight at the front by King David’s decree, and David has commanded her to his bedchamber.”  
(Kohler, 1996: 33)

In the painting we can notice Bathsheba’s downcast eyes and the King’s letter in her hand announcing the news that Arendt is mentioning. The contrast that Blücher tried to explain between the body and the face as an apology to the multiple capacities of woman is contextualized by Arendt by taking into account different perspectives. They both represent a community of taste, people that can potentially agree with their judgments. In that sense they are exercising enlarged mentality, it is not just their opinion but the potential agreement of others that are represented. Judgment therefore is not about truth or knowledge, but meaning and understanding.

“Here the face, and with it the human being, emancipates itself from the beautiful and used body, and with it the human being, which in its particular friability manifests every sign of transience. And precisely because this body is by no means perfectly beautiful, it is human and can be “dominated” by its face.”  
(Kohler, 1996: 33)

In that sense we can understand the activity of reflective judgment as the chance to judge without previous standards or the capacity to take thought-things and then relate them to the world by judging them as unique and particular phenomena. By judging art, or judging action we relate to an object in disinterest, just like Kant approached the French Revolution. Both Arendt and Blücher judge without interest in the reality of the object itself, it is precisely there where we can perceive the freedom of disinterestedness as a freedom from necessity. The appreciation of a work of art is not mediated through practical use, but at the

same time presuppose a relation with a world and with a plurality of men. Judgment require imagination, but at the same time is a unconditioned activity, cause it is related not to the object itself but to our representation of it and the virtual agreement of others. This is the reason why Arendt conceived Kant's aesthetical thought as his political thought, because is the only real and unconditioned freedom that Kant conceived in his work. This conception of freedom is the privilege of the disinterested spectator and Arendt's remarks on judgment in *'The Life of the Mind'* seems to be following this conception; political judgment is concerned with meaning and understanding rather than knowledge (Sjöholm, 2015: 75). This is the conception that her mentor Karl Jaspers points in the book that Arendt edited in 1957 and later helped publishing in 1962<sup>69</sup> and the final moment of Arendt's shift on her conception of freedom:

“This freedom is distinguished from ethical freedom and the freedom of theoretical speculation. Whereas these two relate to a determinate and real causality, the freedom of aesthetic play is the most perfect, because it is unconfined by interest and reality.”

(Jaspers, 1962: 79).

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<sup>69</sup> As (Marshall, 2010: 369) pointed out.

#### 4. Final remarks: What was Arendt doing?

*“What is home, but a feeling of homesickness  
for the flight’s lost moment of fluttering terror?”  
Robert Lowell, Pigeons (For Hannah Arendt)<sup>70</sup>.*

In the introduction we state that we will imitate the way judgments and thinking are done by looking first at the method of thinking of Hannah Arendt. In such introduction we have shown how she was involved in political theory in relation to the broken thread of tradition. We saw that her concern with politics starts with her experiences of the destruction of politics and her need to think about it without relying in the knowledge of the experts and philosophers but on the opposite perspective, that is to say, the task was to look at politics without the distortion of contemplation and philosophy.

In the first chapter we describe the ideas of the public and private space that Arendt discusses in *‘The Human Condition’* and by doing so she is looking back for experiences to illuminate our path in contemporary politics. Her political distinctions between public, private, social and labor, work and action allow us to relate to politics as an autonomous sphere without the interference of other topics. These concepts are strictly related to her insistence in the destruction of the public space and the appearance of a novel form of government and terror in totalitarian regimes; however the topic of narration and poetry is not something that is usually taken into account. In that chapter we looked at Arendt’s appropriation of Aristotle and the way that recovering both action and discourse allowed for a deeply human conception of politics. Arendt was dignifying appearances, stories and the acting men as a way to defy the totalitarian task of making people superfluous, she was providing a ground that allow us to relate each other in relation to plurality and action, and not just in relation to necessities that did not allow for anything new to happen.

In her recovery of Aristotle and the ancient poets there is a contribution to the care for the world and for a deeper understanding of the relations between the reification of our shared experiences and the chance to dwell in a world that allow for different sights and opinions of the events that the public space allow to be remembered in the poets works. Arendt was not being a faithful Aristotelian or performing a teleological reading of the human activities, but taking into account the elements of Aristotle that can shed a light into our present experiences. By taking *‘The Poetics’* as a political text, she is bringing dignity and recovering some of the Greek spirit of competence, the *ἀγών* (agón). In the same way that Pindar’s poem to Zeus explains the need for poets and the human dignity involved in action, the recovery of the public space as a place for stories and human life in a narrative form is as Kristeva (1999) wrote, an apology for narration. She was not, as we state clearly, recovering *phronēsis* for judgment, but providing a grounding for appearances and the reification of the common world and actions.

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<sup>70</sup> (Lowell, 1961: 149) The poem was sent to Hannah Arendt as a letter, and it is based on Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem *Die Tauben*.

Her understanding of the world as much more than the background for our life is one of Arendt's constant topics of her interventions. In her accepting speech for the Lessing Prize of the free city of Hamburg, we can notice exactly how she performs the idea of a recovery of the space for appearances and opinions, for glory and recognition; a space that for her we cannot take for granted and the task that we actually need to reinforce such places:

“Nothing in our time is more dubious, it seems to me, than our attitude toward the world, nothing less to be taken for granted than that concord with what appears in public which an honor imposes on us, and the existence which it affirms.”

(Arendt, 1973: 12)

In the second part of this thesis we tried to trace the shift that Arendt performed in her work, the manner in which her conception of freedom moved to a higher focus on the spectator. This shift started with her reflections on Eichmann's trial and the shadowed publication of *'On Revolution'*. She moved from the question of how to reify action without losing the dignity and fragility of it, to how to build the space for action within the task of foundation. Her task then is profoundly anti-platonic, but at the same time she was also taking into account the importance of world-building. What she was criticizing mostly was the incorporation of ideas and the logic of ποιήσις (*poiēsis*) in the realm of πράξις (*praxis*). However we should not think that Arendt was not concerned with world-building, on the contrary she thought of it as a condition for politics in *'The Human Condition'*.

In *'On Revolution'* she started wondering about the task of foundation and the modern experience of freedom. Arendt was not constructing an unifying theory of action, but providing stories about different experiences and moment in history that allow us to think and act politically. The authors and the concern of this book were closer to the Roman experience of foundations and the American and French revolutionaries. The founding fathers and the French revolutionaries recovered a different tradition than the classic Greek thought. Plato and Aristotle were not the main concern for them; on the contrary, the experiences and resources of these men of action were highly practical and oriented to the world rather than ideas and philosophy.

Her main concern in the book was the American Revolution and the paradoxical way in which the only successful revolution passed unnoticed for the American people. She saw in the legacy of the founding fathers and the American constitution, a way to remember action and foundation, but at the same time, almost at the end of the book she shifted once more to a different conception of politics based on the spectator.

In her later work Arendt recovered the idea of aesthetic and political judgment and developed these notions in different directions than the previous narrative conception we saw in the first chapter. Her main concern was now with the role of the spectator, of those who are not acting but observing in disinterestedness, those who look for meaning and appreciate the singularity of the political events and actions. The poet was reifying the

actions into poems and songs for the common memory, while the spectator is relating to the meaning of the action and the representative thinking involved in the reflective judgment. Arendt conceived in this last element one of the most important political skills, the chance to see from the perspective of others and to relate ourselves to a common world outside our private interests and concerns. At the same time, the discussion on common sense is rooted also in a political mode of engagement from the perspective of the spectator. In common sense we can see a perspective from the spectator that works as a wakeup call, or as we say in this thesis, a wire to the soil. In this mode of judgment, the spectator notices an element that is disrupted or changed in the common sense as a way of attunement of reality and appearances.

The movement that we have described in this thesis has three different moments in relation with the three different decades of Arendt's work. The first one in '*The Human Condition*' and the '*Origins of Totalitarianism*' relate freedom to publicness, action and narration. The second one stated in '*On Revolution*' after the Eichmann trial, is the movement to foundation. Finally the last moment is presented in '*The life of the Mind*' when Arendt describes her concern with mental activities, specially thinking and what she called the two world fallacy, and relates to the role of the spectator. Arendt did not have multiple theories of judgment (Passerin D'entrèves, 2000), because just like in action she was not relating to a unifying theory but recovering political experiences to enlighten her political environment. She was describing judgment in different times, her concern with judgment was always from the perspective of the spectator, and within that perspective we can trace a first approach in relation to poetry and tragedy and a second in relation to reflective judgment and the role of the disinterested spectator. Sadly, even taking in consideration all the elements we have shown we cannot give a full account of judgment because that project was not completely written by Arendt. All we can do however is to help clarifying some mistakes and at the same time state at the moments of what was Hannah Arendt doing.



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