THE MORAL SUBJECT VS. THE POLITICAL ACTOR:
THE POLITICAL PRICE OF INTERIORIZATION

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Degree: Magister Artium

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2004

Foreword

This dissertation forms part of ongoing research. The topic has by no means been exhausted, and certain themes will be picked up again in further publications. Especially the final chapter deals very cursorily with a complex topic that deserves further attention. The writing of this dissertation has been a fascinating experience, and it would not have been possible without the help of the following people:

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Introduction

For everything born there is a price to be paid. And the price for the birth of the subject was the death of the world. What Nancy identified as 'the immanentistic logic' of the modern subject, was responsible for an experience of reality that is at once too worldly, and yet not worldly enough. Too worldly, since the process of secularization and the rise of modern science severed the link with the transcendent, and demanded a removal from man's immediate imbeddedness in the cosmic order as it presents itself in a meaningful, context-laden experience. Deprived of the certainty of everlasting immortality and a loving God, man was thrown back upon himself. At first sight, this opened up hitherto inconceivable possibilities for freedom: Hans Blumenberg views modern 'self-assertion' as an active, reconstructive engagement with the world as a fruitful response to the *deus absconditus*. The idea that man has squandered all his treasures on God, and that by unbelief they are released for human self-affirmation, had its origins in Renaissance secularism, but only became fully explicit during the nineteenth century. Feuerbach personifies this development: 'The purpose of my writings is to turn men from theologians into anthropologists, from theophilists into philanthropists, from candidates for the hereafter into students for the here and now, from religious and political lackeys of the heavenly and earthly monarchies into *free, self-confident citizens of the world*' (Feuerbach: 1967:30).

However, the desanctifying of this cosmological order was accompanied by a very definite trauma, for as Foucault notes, 'the real scandal was Galileo's creation of an infinite and infinitely open space' (Foucault 1985: 26). Hannah Arendt agrees such modernist optimism did not fully appreciate the severity of the loss of a greater cosmological order. For her, the subject of modernity was not worldly *enough*. She points to an unequalled world*less*ness as the hallmark characteristic of modernity:

> Whatever the word 'secular' is meant to signify in current usage, historically it cannot possibly be equated with worldliness; modern man at any rate did not gain this world when he lost the other world; and he did not gain life strictly speaking either; he was thrust back upon it, *thrown back into the closed inwardness of introspection*, where the highest he could experience were the empty processes of the reckoning of the mind, its play with itself. (Arendt 1958: 320)

Tragically, the self into which man fell back to avoid the brutal contingencies of the world, proved to be an even more deceptive and inhospitable realm than the public sphere from which man so determinably sought to escape. The self, that after the turn inward had to be *discovered*, and no longer merely brought into harmony with the cosmos (as had still been the case with Platonic Man in late antiquity), turned out to offer formidable resistance. Far from 'conquering' himself through knowledge, man turned against himself, wearing himself out. As antiquity clearly proved, a fragmented self can flourish in all its life-enhancing contradictions, but a self divided against *himself* cannot stand.

After her experience of the terror of Nazi Germany, Arendt looked towards the place where both philosophy and politics have their origins. The Greek world upon which Arendt drew, is so different from our own, that a brief introduction to the world in which theatre made its first appearance, is necessary before the political possibilities of that world can be explored. Not even an encyclopaedic study of colossal dimensions however, could do justice to the richness of Periclean Athens, and a brief introduction in chapter 1 will have to suffice. It must be emphasized that it is but a brief summary to indicate the absence of limitations on acting imposed by later conceptions of the self. The Homeric self was an assemblage of various narratives and impressions, without an inner core or 'self', loosely held together by the broad narrative that is an individual's life. For this reason, it could offer an alternative politics to an age weary of the rigidly defined self of modernity. I deal with the ambiguity and slipperiness of the classical self, and briefly illustrate its complex 'superficiality' at the hand of a number of relevant Greek concepts, including *splanchma*, *poiēsis*, *daemon*, *psyché*, *phrenes*, *nōōs*, *thymos*, and *atē*

If there was no rigid distinction between self and world in ancient Athens, the same cannot be said of the public and private domains into which the *polis* was divided. Difference was spatially, not morally defined. In contrast to this, the modern self began to define his identity over and against a hostile outer world. An unfortunate effect of this barricaded modern identity was what Honig (1993) identified as the 'displacement of politics' - a marked hostility to the rough and tumble world of politics. The withdrawal into the self was accompanied by a confinement of politics - both conceptually and territorially, as Honig shows - of politics to the administrative, juridical and regulative tasks of stabilizing (and disciplining) docile moral and juridical subjects that looked upon the withdrawal from politics as a great privilege.

In a paper entitled 'Aristippus in and out of Athens' (Holmes 1979: 21), Stephen Holmes suggests that we look to the right not to participate in politics as a basic right, 'a fundamental condition for our being able to live with some degree of happiness and dignity'. By implication, Holmes does not only sever the link between politics and a dignified human life, but promotes the stronger, more vigorously anti-Aristotelian view that politics is an impediment to our happiness. That Holmes does not *deny* individuals the right to participation in the public realm is insufficient from an Arendtian perspective. What she objects to, is the shift in understanding of freedom and that a privatistic notion of freedom has taken precedence over the public one. For it is only in action that the human potential for freedom is realized:

> [A]ction and politics, among all the capabilities of human life, are the only things of which we could not even conceive without at least assuming that freedom exists…Without freedom, life as such would be meaningless. The *raison d'être* for politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action. (Arendt 1968b: 146)

In addition to my brief exposition on the Homeric world, I briefly examine the shift from acting to thinking man as it occurs in the *Republic*. I address Plato's reaction to the political decay in which Athens found itself after the Golden Age of Pericles. I argue that, already in the *Republic*, there are signs of a certain impatience towards the hidden, and a desire to 'bring things to the light', a desire that would never leave Western man again, but would grow into an all-consuming passion. After the hermeneutical turn we know that no literary work allows a definitive interpretation. This is especially true of great masterworks, and the *Republic* is no exception. Although I think that Arendt is justified in locating in Plato one of the sources for the anti-political character of our philosophical tradition, it is necessary to distinguish between 'Plato', and Plato*nism*. Anticipating the argument put forward in chapter 4, I argue that the multivocity inherent in Plato may make him more political than Arendt initially took him to be.

Augustine, who is explored in the first part of chapter 2, can be described as a 'Janus-faced' philosopher because he wrote his *Confessions* as antiquity was to fade and Christianity gradually began to occupy pagan ground. The *Confessions*, as critique of the Roman pagan self, is an exemplary manifestation of a new way of being. Whereas in the

ancient world, the vocabulary of surfaces, masks, and appearances dominated, the modern world forms, and is formed in turn, by a discourse of *depth*. As the first thinker to employ a vocabulary that reflected inner anxieties and not struggle in the world, Augustine attempted to divert the externally directed lust of the egoistic self inward into the depths of the self in order to seek the truth of God. For Augustine, the outer-directed pagan self is but an assemblage of self-defeating motives. Born in pride, this self ends in disintegration and dispersal 'Vanity', he says, 'is nothingness' (*City of God* 20: 3). By defining pride as a refusal to acknowledge one's dependence on others and one's Maker, - and by implication, the world - Augustine still leaves room for an Other that makes self-transparency impossible. He harbours none of the illusions about language that would characterize the positivists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Elsthain (1995: 30) notes: 'Augustine knew that no language could be transparent, translucent, perfectly freed from earthly habit, thickening, smudging'. Through his notion of the confessing-self, Augustine tries to formulate an ethos that allows the self to turn away from the lust to dominate the world, and he finds it in the depths of his soul. A truly unique movement distinguishes the confessing self: Never before has any self attempted to decipher its own depths. Even the Platonists, for whom Augustine had but the greatest respect, inhabited the other side of a great abyss with respect to the kinds of selves they were.

Augustine's pious alternative has, in the long run, proved to be as problematic as the pagan self it attempted to criticize, and the problems that it has generated come to light in Michel Foucault's critique of the demand to confess that characterizes the way in which modern identities are formed. Even though Augustine's conception of confession should not be equated with Foucault's, it is important to bear in mind that it is Augustine that paved the way for the prison that subjectivity would eventually become. Whereas for Augustine, inner identity is the dimension of freedom, Foucault sees depth as the dimension of subjugation. It is the dimension in which the other is routed out and the subject is constituted in terms of hegemonic norms. In the second part of chapter 2 I explore how the search for a merciful God manifested itself in the merciless self-hounding in search of a 'real' self.

By displacing the question of the 'free' subject's endowing the world with meaning, Foucault was distancing himself from the phenomenological, and in particular, the 'humanistic' subject. Bu returning to Nietzsche's account of the subject, Foucault replaced the humanistic project of a search for the 'authentic' self with a Nietzschean

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rejoicing in appearance and self-construction. By so doing, he both displaces the valorized free existential subject and retrieves a more ambivalent subject whose constitution takes place within the constraints of institutional forces that exceed both its grasp and its recognition.

This is the subject whose genealogy is traced by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals.* Engaging in the task of history as a 'curative science', Nietzsche describes the subject not as a metaphysical given, but as a historical construct, a construct whose conditions of emergence would prove to be far from innocent. Far from grounding reality, the subject is only a superfluous postulation of a 'being behind doing', a 'doer' fictionally added to the deed. This belief is exploited by the weak in order to convince the strong that they are free to be weak, and moreover, are to be held accountable for the failure to be weak. As Nietzsche puts it:

> The subject (or the use a more popular expression, the *soul*), has perhaps been believed in hitherto more firmly than anything else on earth because it makes possible to the majority of mortals, the weak and oppressed of every kind, the sublime self-deception that interprets weakness as freedom and their being thus-and-thus as a *merit*. (Nietzsche 1994: 42)

It is not only the subject's ignoble origins that come under scrutiny in the *Genealogy*. Nietzsche directs his genealogical gaze to the life-negating uses to which the idea of the subject has been put in order to continue his challenge to the subject's privileged status. As Foucault (1984) notes in his early essay, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', a genealogy of *Herkunft* is not 'the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile, it fragments what was thought unified, it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself'. And, one might add, it shows the folly of looking for a 'deep', liberating truth within the self when in fact, nothing but surfaces for the inscription of the social order, for the application and imposition of power exists. This is precisely what Nietzsche points to as his genealogy demonstrates the oppressive use of subjectivity as a principle of oppression in what he terms a 'hangman's metaphysics'. It is this account of the subject that leads Foucault to link modern manifestations of power with subjects and the process of subjection. By thoroughly historicizing our present condition, Foucault, taking his cue from Nietzsche,

seeks to reveal its hidden power relations and limitations, with a view to empower the individual with knowledge of its vulnerability to power strategies. As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) put it: '[By employing the genealogical method], Michel Foucault presents a description of our current practices as the product of a confluence of Christian techniques of self-decipherment and Enlightenment technologies for the rational policing of populations, all of which he calls bio-power'. These are the two main configurations of power that Foucault identifies through his archaeological studies - the Christian era that saw the birth of the confessing self, and the Enlightenment that intensified it. The aim of Foucault's studies is, as is explained in chapter 2, to expose two of the most important aspects of bio-power, namely the excessive interest in discovering of 'true' self through deep introspection and self-examination, and the closely linked concept of excessive control and surveillance of the citizenry, in the units of their bodies, by the state. But this should not be taken as representing a 'standard' or a norm. As will be shown throughout the thesis, more than one alternative to the introspective self of late modernity exist - for the conditions of its emergence were mere contingencies.

The Archimedean subject was born twice. Once as the Greek *thearos*, and once as the Cartesian ego. It would also be possible to refer to these events as the birth of the 'spectator-subject' of antiquity and the birth of the inward-looking, 'scrutinizing' subject of modernity. The word 'subject' derives from the Latin *subjectum*, which literally translates as 'thrown under'. Thus, the subject is that which is thrown under as a prior support or more fundamental stratum upon which other qualities such as predicates, attributes and accidents can be based. In Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics* the term refers to that of which all other entities are predicated, but is itself not a predicate of anything else. In a classical context then, the subject is the subject of predication, the *hupokeimenon* as that which persists through change (a function analogous to the phenomenological concept of *hyle*). It is *matter* that persists through change, as can still be deduced from the modern usage of 'subject matter', as that with which thought deals. The search for this fountainhead became the aim of nearly all modern philosophy in one way or another. But there is an immediate oddity attached to the word subject It originally designated an object. As Heidegger (Critchley 1996: 18) points out, during the Middle Ages the words subject and object had precisely the reverse meanings of what they mean today. Lexiographic evidence suggests that the word 'subject' was used to indicate independently existing entities. The subject was what one operated upon (today

the cadaver on which medical students practise their craft is still called a 'subject') or upon which one practised one's craft. The double meaning of the word 'subject' was caught up again by Foucault as he gave an account of the inhumanity of the subject that became a subject to himself in *The Archaeology of Knowledge.*

This means that the 'subject' is thus by no means static or universal, and cannot be taken as the norm. Different ages developed rather different conceptions of the subject - alternatives that both Arendt and Foucault hoped could provide the necessary inspiration for the revival of a flagging political tradition. For the seemingly harmless desire, in Platonic times, to 'bring things to light' has now acquired almost obsessive dimensions, as reflected in the practices of the human sciences.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt describes two concepts of the word 'public'. The first carries the connotation of 'publicity', that which is publicly available, and visible to all. The second meaning is more particular and refers to the common world that appears between individuals when they leave behind the small, particular space of the home, where every individual leads his insignificant little life fettered by biological and psychological needs, to perform great deeds worthy of general public remembrance. It is this space that provides us with a sense of reality, since what 'appears to all' is at least testified to by more than one. During the apex of modernity, the eighteenth century, 'what is felt by the self or experienced in intimate settings became the benchmark of reality' (Villa 1999: 34). In the words of Richard Sennett:

> The reigning belief today is that closeness between persons is a moral good. The dominant aspiration today is that the evils of impersonality, alienation and coldness be eliminated. The sum of these three is an ideology of intimacy: Social relations of all kinds are believable, and authentic the closer they approach the inner psychological concerns of each person. (Sennett 1976)

The result was that man, now dependent on his inner realms for certainty, would never again experience certainty to a *satisfactory* extent. This is testified to by the extreme measures that both the human sciences and the natural science took in trying to unravel the secrets of 'nature'.

Arendt locates the roots of late modern hostility towards the mask, play-acting and the theatrical in the eighteenth century. She sees the ruthless politics of unmasking -

in Rousseau's theory and Robespierre's horrific practice - as a response to the connotation of deceit and corruption that the play-acting of courtly society acquired during the reign of Louis XVI. After the Revolution, the notion of consciously adopting a role or a mask in order to allow a particular 'truth' to shine through became permanently tainted. And the cult of 'natural' man - the authentic or role-less man - came to stay.

It should therefore come as no surprise that interpreters like George Kateb (1984), among others, read Arendt's notion of self-disclosure as an outer expression of an inner self. Nothing, in fact, could be further away from what Arendt was trying to achieve. According to Arendt, it is this 'inner expressionism' that makes a robust experience of the public realm an impossibility. If the public world is to have any meaning for us, a certain distance is necessary.

Taking her cue from Montesquieu, she develops a notion of free action that is free from either will or motive, but based on the performance itself and the principle that inspires it. Citing honour, glory and courage as examples, Arendt claims that principles form no part of inner self-conception, but inspire 'from without', appearing in action, and lasting only as long as the action itself. Continuing her depersonalization of political action by insisting on a mask, or 'unique identity' (Villa 1999: 138) that appears between the masked individual and his interpreting audience, Arendt effectively undermines the notion of an integrated 'whole' identity inherited from the romantic age.

This is why some of Arendt's agonistic critics like William Connolly (1988), Sheldon Wolin (1996) and Bonnie Honig (1993) present a specific problem. As Villa 1999) rightly points out, all three ignore the 'uniquely worldly thrust to her thought'. Connolly especially, fails to see that his Foucauldian notion of 'work on the self' by no means bolsters a culture of civic agonism, but in fact aids the contemporary withdrawal from the bright light of the public arena into the murky depths of the self. Far from subverting the status quo, such a move would make the same assumptions of a unified identity transparent to the scrutinizing self, or in other words, the liberal self that has to be protected from the dangerous *askholia* (movement) of the public sphere.

Quite besides the anti-political tendencies to be found in Lockean liberalism - Macphearson (1973: 24) defines the archetypal liberal conception of the individual as 'essentially the proprietor of his own capabilities, owing nothing to society' - a transformed version of labouring man has manifested itself. The individual, rather than

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the means of production, is socialized. Arendt also saw the signs of this development, and warned that we are moving towards

> a society of labourers about to be liberated from the fetters of labour, and this society does no longer know of those high and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom deserves to be won. What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of labourers without labour, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse. (Arendt 1989: 5)

Now more a consumer than a producer, a peculiar kind of narcissist has appeared. According to Lasch (1980), the traditional definition of the autonomous individual quoted above too easily equates Locke's industriousness with the Hobbesian conception of man as a bundle of insatiable passions. He holds that Hobbesian man has triumphed over Lockean man. The individual as appropriator and entrepreneur has become obsolete. Lasch argues that the technological revolution has aided and abetted the withering of traditional American values like self-reliance and independence. Now no longer a robust, versatile virtuoso of the public sphere, but the naked, minimal self whose fragile inner world is constantly on display, the newly reborn Hobbesian Man becomes increasingly dependent on the evaluations of others of his private worth, and on bureaucracies, corporations and especially the 'helping professions' for establishing a sense of 'self'. Hypnotized by a post-Freudian discourse that constantly demands the 'display of the inner self', Hobbesian Man is frantically analyzed in the hope of locating a psychological fountainhead, analyzed to such an extent that nothing except the activity of analysis itself remains behind.

Although many believe that the emergence of psychological man suggests a new sociability, Lasch argues that the apparent concern for 'relationships' and non-materialistic values conceal a 'murderous competition' more indicative of Hobbes's state of nature than a 'caring' counterculture. The persecutor born during early modernity remains as active as he has ever been. Moreover, with the rise of modern communication technologies, and a hitherto unprecedented variety in leisure activities, strategies of surveillance as expounded by Foucault have turned into blatant voyeurism. Given the recent boom in 'reality-television' and the voyeuristic practices that accompanies it, Arendt's fear that technology would replace knowledge, and that we would become

'thoughtless creatures at the mercy of every gadget which is possible' (Arendt 1989: 3), seems to have been well-founded. With the rise of mass media in the second half of the twentieth century and the commodification of the image that it entailed, voyeuristic practices became part of everyday activities in this stage of late-capitalism. As Bruce Mau (2000: 51) puts it: 'Surveillance is the logical, even inevitable outcome of a system with unlimited capacity to record'. Echoing Foucault's plea for authorial anonymity,[1] Baudrillard makes a plea to photographers to abandon their voyeuristic stance through the guise of anonymity, to allow photographed objects their *otherness*: 'Good photography takes leave of misfortune and the aesthetics of misfortune to reveal what is neither of the order of morality nor of objective conditions but remains indecipherable within each one of us' (Baudrillard 1999).

Long before Baudrillard, though, Nietzsche, in a similar way, pointed to the violence and futility of the 'will to know'. Chapter 3 is devoted to a discussion on Nietzsche's diagnosis of the self-persecution that follows from the this epistemological obsession. If one follows Nietzscher's argument that he puts forward in the *Genealogy*, the rise of self-reflexive man is far from innocent. Nietzsche describes it as the history of a *primal repression*, or an internalisation of the body and the 'freedom' of the instincts. This turning back on oneself and one's 'animality' breaks the instinctive unity of body and mind - 'it destroys the immediate guidance of the unconscious drives'. Consciousness was thus brought into the world by the banishments of the instincts to the unconscious: 'All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward - it also provides the soil for the growth of what is later called one's *soul*' (Nietzsche 1994: 29). And the birth of the soul at once required a terrible price, even as it opened new possibilities. As Nietzsche puts it:

> It was not that the old instincts had abruptly ceased making their demands, but now their satisfaction was rare and difficult. For the most part, they had to depend on new, covert satisfactions…Man's interior world, originally meagre meagre and tenuous, was expanding in every dimension, in proportion as the outward discharge of his feelings was curtailed. (Nietzsche 1994: 16)

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[1] See chapter 4.

As with Arendt, I turn to his reading(s) of Plato to indicate that the role Plato played in the development of the Western political tradition is complex and tenuous, and that like an early Derrida, he undermines as he constructs. But first I deal with Nietzsche as the chief physician to the disease 'truth'. As indicated above, Nietzsche is famous for diagnosing the folly of the self that rips himself apart only to find nothing inside. He ironically quotes a little girl who, when confronted with the doctrine of the omniscience of God, thought it was 'indecent'. Like Arendt, Nietzsche regarded modern Western man's *prosoponophobia* - fear or hatred of the mask - as one of the most telling signs of his nihilism. And like Foucault (whose texts, among others, read like an essential supplement to Nietzsche), he hoped that the rediscovery of the essentially masked nature of reality could invigorate a culture slowly but surely sliding into nihilism as its metaphysical dreams of full presence prove to be illusions.

It appears that a rigidly defined subject, dominated by (and through) his own inner life allows private and public domains to merge into an amorphous social realm, dominated by the material and psychological needs of the private self. If this is the case then, after the much touted 'death of the subject' (which signals, if not the timely demise of a long fossilised metaphysical construct, at least cracks in its too-solid foundations), a more fluid and fragmented subject may allow for the return of the mask, and with it, greater political possibilities.

In chapter 4 I argue that the *vita lingua* contains the possibility for at least a certain degree of relief from our culture of surveillance. Language, by its very opacity, makes the ideal of (self)transparency an utopian illusion. Every attempt to come to a final conclusion about a text is bound to fail. This aspect makes our linguistic engagement with the world tragic, yet at the same time allows for a merciful, messianic dimension that might save us from the horrific nihilism that the granting of the Enlightenment wish would entail. I draw again on Arendt, this time for her conception of the storyteller, to find a viable middle ground between the death of the author and the absolute author of the Romantic era that acted as a guarantee for the truth of his text. The linguistic turn certainly requires an altered conception of the self, but there is no need to sacrifice the self to an entirely autonomous and impersonal language system. In addition, I refer to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida, to demonstrate the alternatives suggested by the very anti-utopian nature of language.

The fact that we exist *linguistically*, a fact that appeared in a more positivistic age as a curse, is now the very feature that saves us from the hell and obscenity of absolute (self)transparency. If language is indeed as opaque as Nietzsche, Lacan, Derrida and others have claimed, intentionality can play no determining role in the establishment of meaning. Nietzsche explicitly proclaimed the virtual impossibility of having his texts understood. According to Schrift (1989), to understand his texts the way Nietzsche understood them, one would have to *be* Nietzsche. And perhaps, one hastens to add, perhaps not even then:

> Ultimately, no one can get more out of things, including books, than he already knows. For what one lacks access to from experience, one will have no ear. Now let one imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events that lie altogether beyond the possibility of any frequent or even rare experience - that it is the first language for a new series of experiences. In that case, simply nothing will be heard, but there will be the acoustic illusion that where nothing is heard, *nothing is there*. (Nietzsche 1979: 52)

If this is the case, the question arises as to *what* a confession really reveals, and even if it does not conceal rather than reveal. If the author 'disappears' behind his text, textuality appears in our time to have replaced the lost mask of antiquity and the *ancien regime*. Jacques Derrida proved, especially in a sublimely contortionist essay, 'White Mythology' (1976), that language is self-contained to such an extent that even a word as simple and as basic as 'sun' cannot be shown by anyone using language, to refer to an extra-linguistic, suprasensual Sun. We are doomed to remain in a metaphoric cage: A candle is *like* the sun, but the sun is, again, *like* an enormous candle. If structurally examined, as Saussure and Barthes began to do, language, instead of working through the vertical identifications of naming, appears to operate through the lateral associations of metaphor. There is always some form of resistance that is irreducible to the particular historical framework operating at a given time. As Derrida says in *The Other Heading*:

> [The identity of a self and culture] *is not identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say 'I' or 'we', to be able to take the form of a subject only in non-identity to itself, or if you prefer,

only in difference with itself.

(Derrida 1992: 9)

If so, is confession then finally (and thankfully) an impossibility?

Chapter 1

From Politics to Plato.

> World is larger and more complex than we think
> Incorrigibly plural.
>
> Louis MacNeice, 'Snow'

Reacting to the first symptoms of the creeping sense of nihilism that was to haunt Europe in the late nineteenth century, Hölderlin, reading Sophocles in 1848, was struck by a feature of Attic insight as terrible as the wisdom of Silenius, which he famously redrafted as:

> Gibt es ein Maß auf Erde?
> Es gibt keine.

Hannah Arendt, like Hölderlin before her, turned to the Greeks, the one people who could face the horror of the ultimate meaninglessness of the world, the lack of a transcendental standard of value without resorting to a stifling subjectivity.

Like Nietzsche before her, Arendt criticizes traditional philosophy that in an attempt to come to terms with the radical contingency of the world, took freedom out of the world where it belongs and attached it to a transcendental subject and internalized it by attributing it to the will. 'The philosophical tradition distorted the very idea of freedom by transposing it from its original field, the realm of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain, where it would be open to self-inspection' (Arendt, 1958: 19). The Greeks offered the promise of meaning freed from the will to truth, the nihilism implicit in all ideology, be it of God, Nature, or Man. As inspiring as she found Nietzsche's work, his de-subjectification did not go far enough. In Heideggerian terminology: Man (Dasein), in an attempt to transcend his own temporality, inevitably violates the heterogeneity of Being through simplifying metaphysical classifications. This violation is tragic in a double sense: It is inevitable - as Heidegger shows, it 'belongs' to history - and it is tragic because through these reductions, man inevitably sacrifices his own freedom. Like Heidegger, Arendt found Kant's transcendental categories inadequate to describe lived historical experience. Analogous to Heidegger's

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idea of Dasein's 'temporal projected meanings' is Arendt's implicit thesis that the always already existing 'web of human relationships' is responsible for the meaningfulness of action through the temporal expectations inherent in those relationships. Whereas Heidegger, however, famously considered 'historicity in the context of an ineluctably finite, first-person experience' (Tsao 2002: 120), Arendt's more conventional usage of the third person perspective made it possible for her to explore the specifically political dimension of lived experience. As she famously described it, the frailty of human affairs, and the confounding evanescence of the occurrence of action, required a remedy, and she identifies 'the foundation of the polis' as the 'original, pre-philosophic remedy for this frailty' (Arendt 1958: 196). The polis, a space for 'organized remembrance' would ensure that 'the most futile of human activities, action and speech, would become imperishable' (Arendt 1958: 197-198).

That thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche and Karl Marx could likewise turn to the 'historical childhood of humanity' (Arendt 1963: 177) is a clear indication of their contemporaneity. But none of these thinkers, even if they did appreciate the robust grandeur of Homer's vision, did justice to his inherent political potential. This is exactly what Arendt finds in Homer. Her unique 'rediscovery' of Homer is predicated on her analysis of totalitarianism, which led her to reject the idea that 'there is such a thing as human nature established for all time' (Arendt 1958: 456).

The Homeric poems are the product of a long oral tradition of bardic poetry. They find their sources in saga and folk-tale, and to expect a sustained analysis of human nature does not do justice to the possibilities that reside in them. Their compositions, however, bear witness to a politically potent, albeit structurally a radically different world to ours - different to such an extent, that our conventional vocabulary of subjectivity falls short in describing them. Gill (1990: 56) distinguishes between a participatory scheme and a subjectivist scheme. In a participatory scheme, such as that of the Greeks, the lines between self and world are less clear than with a subjectivist scheme, where an observer 'represents' the world in his mind.

Snell (1953: 10) points out the lack of Homeric words that can readily be translated as 'mind' or even 'soul' in the post-Platonic Christian sense, as the locus where the individual's unique thoughts and feelings occur: 'Any touch of a unitary self in Homer is so lightly expressed that *psyche, thymos*, *kradia*, hands and feet, should likewise be seen as springs of action'. The most familiar of these, *psyche*, does not simply translate as

'soul' or 'ghost'. It is closer to 'life-force' - that whose absence defines death (*Iliad* V: 696). After death, no return of the *psyche* is possible, and Achilles complains that he constantly risks his *psyche* in war (*Iliad* XXII: 696). Our closest word is *élan*, but it must be noted that a person and his *psyche* are separable and not self-identical: Achilles states that 'not all the treasure in Troy is equal to his *psyche*' (*Iliad*: IX 401). *Thymos* is equally difficult. It was located in the chest, and conveys an impression of a sudden surge of fire. Etymologically, it is associated with the Latin '*fumos*' and according to Padel (1992: 28) the closest translation would be 'surge of pride'. *Thymos* - and the same can generally be said about *kradia* and *etor* - are words that are used to record Homeric man's experiences as he experienced them. He lacked a conceptual framework that distinguished between a psychological and a physical phenomenon - far from reducing mental and spiritual qualities to material ones, or vice versa, because for Homer as a pre-Christian Greek still steeped deeply in an oral tradition, such a dichotomy did not exist. This is evident from the passive role given to the more 'intellectual' concepts of *phren* and *nōōs*. It is acted upon rather than acting by itself. 'The heart kicks the *phren'* (Padel 1992:19). *Phrenes* are covered by grief (Hector) and by lust (Paris). *Nōōs* is more cognitive, it notices things while *phren* reasons about them.

No single word then, 'adds up' to Homeric Man. As Adkins puts it: 'Homeric man is a being whose parts are more in evidence than the whole, and one very conscious of sudden unexpected excesses of energy.' (Quoted by Taylor 1989: 118). Homer has no non-material language - even an ethereal concept like *psyche* is composed of tenuous 'stuff' that resides in the body and flies out through some orifice (including a wound), and down to Hades - and as a result, there is no clear distinction between inner and outer. The two-way relationship between the two is mercurial, ambiguous, fluid and divine. What is inside and outside is seen in terms both biological and daemonological, that is to say, with reference to suprahuman, or the transcendent realm of the gods. According to Padel (1992: 139) the fifth century world was as 'naturally' charged with gods as ours is with electricity, bacteria, pollutant chemicals, and radio waves'. Aristotle, in *De partibus animalium* tells the following story:

> A story is told of Heraclitus, that visitors came, wanting to meet him, but hesitating when they saw him warming himself at the stove in the kitchen. He told them to be bold and enter, '*for there are gods even here'* (645A: 20-24).

The daemonological order covers both the Olympian gods and other less iconographically precise forces that often manifest themselves through the elements. The important fact to note here is that feelings, moods, even ideas come from the outside. Thus Antigone's *psyche* suffers under 'blasts of wind' when she challenges Creon's power, and desire is like a storm that strikes the unsuspecting Phaedra: 'Eros tossed my innards/as a whirlwind falls on oaks in the mountains' (Padel 1992: 116). Violations by the gods blur the boundaries between human and divine. Phaedra is 'stung' by the gods, Hecuba is 'struck by fear as if by a stone' (Padel 1992: 116) and Orestes falls victim to 'the bloody knife of the gods'. No one can defend himself against the violence of fate. And the worst is madness. Atē, the oldest personification of madness, attacks unwary men and inflicts insanity upon them, as if she were wounding them. Sometimes, the gods become physically a part of human beings. Atē, for example, is depicted as a body invader: 'Zeus sent Atē into Agamemnon's mind' (Odyssey 15: 234), making him insult Achilles. The hardship suffered by the hero in tragedy and epic is generally a lesson in humility - a reminder of man's dependence on the gods. Homeric man knew that without the link to the outside, to the gods, he could not act: Hector knew in his *phren* that the gods had abandoned him (*Iliad* 13: 55).

Snell (1953: 11) notes that the Homeric hero is frequently carried to great heights by a surge of power infused in him by a god. The *daimon* is present even in what appears to be the activity driven to the greatest degree by intentionality, namely *poièsis*, that refers to all 'form-giving' activities. In the *Apology* Socrates states that poets do not produce their work through wisdom, but 'by some instinct and possessed by *entheos*.[2] The same seems to be true of tragic mistakes: Agamemnon blames his unfair and unwise treatment of Achilles on a certain madness (*menos*) visited on him by a god. Men frequently act 'as their kradia and thymos bid them' (*Odyssey* IX: 320) and Odysseus was wondering whether to attack the Cyclops when 'another *thymos* restrained him' (*Odyssey* I: 306). The absence of will forms part of a culture that allows a hero to retain his heroic status, even if he turns out to be a mere playing field of the gods. The Greek self (the usage of 'subject' is inappropriate here, because as has been indicated, the individual was not regarded as a fount of meaning) was more than soluble ego boundaries. Greek

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[2] The word literally translates to an 'indwelling deity' or *daemon*. Two modern words are derived from this word: 'enthusiasm' and 'enthetic' that refers to a class of diseases introduced from without.

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identity is hard-won through outer engagement - a precariously balanced identity under perpetual threat of slipping away. Sloterdijk's description of Nietzsche's *Übermenschlichkeit*[3] also describes the Homeric self well: it was 'something radical, cybernetic,[4] eccentric, and Dionysic; a site of sensibility within the ruling cycle of forces, as a point of alertness for the modulation of impersonal antagonisms, as a process of self-healing for primordial pain' (Sloterdijk 1989: x). The individual's identity was determined by a greater ordered totality prior to any individual. Charles Taylor describes this position as follows:

> In those earlier societies, what we could now call identity was largely fixed by one's social position. That is, the background that explained what people recognized as important to themselves was to a great extent determined by their place in society, and whatever roles or activities attached to this position. (Taylor 1992: 31)

Most cultures picture some specific site for the location and equipment of consciousness. For the twenty-first century reader[5] it may seem strange that, as late as the fifth century, there was no general consensus about the organ that housed the intellect. Socrates refers to a controversy, current when he was young, about with what part of the body we think.[6] But according to Padel (1992: 13) when the Greeks of the fifth century wanted to talk about what was going on inside someone, they used the collective concept of '*splanchma*' - 'guts' (but here not in the sense of courage)[7] or 'innards'. *Splanchma* comprised the whole collection of heart, liver, lungs, gallbladder and attendant blood vessels. The meaning of the word depends on context - feeling, mood or mind could be

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[3] Sloterdijk, P. in *Nietzsche: Thinker on Stage*. p.x. See chapter 3 for a discussion on Nietzsche, Arendt and their criticism of the 'moral' subject.

[4] The word 'cybernetic' is derived from the Greek *kuber*, meaning 'to move'. The usage of the word here points to a self unconstrained by the demands of autonomy.

[5] Wolheim (1974: 44) argues that the concept behind the English 'mind' is not fully spatial, 'but 'tinged with spatiality', that we attribute shifting degrees of spatiality to the mind, and the greater the degree of spatiality, the more inhibited our intellectual activity becomes.

[6] Phaedo 96a. Alcmaeon of Croton, in the early fifth century was probably the first to think that the brain was important. Philolaus (fragment 13) argued later in the fifth century that the *arché* of rationality was the brain: 'The head is the *arché* of *nóōs*, the heart of *psyche* and perception'. Plato's joke in the *Hippias Major* (292d) 'all ears and no brain' may be evidence of Philolaus's influence.

[7] It should be noted at this point that the association between innards and courage is by no means exclusively Greek. The word 'guts', contemporary slang usage for 'stamina, courage, grit' (O.E.D), is derived from the Old English word *gut*, which like its Greek equivalent, refer to 'innards, viscera'.

applied in different contexts, but in general, *splanchma* feel. The cruel Menelaus 'softens' his *splanchma* when his daughter is at risk (Padel 1992: 16). A young man's *splanchma* 'is stretched and he says foolish things' (Aristophanes: *Frogs* 884). Sometimes the physicality of the term seems obvious: When the Erinyes chase Orestes, their *splanchmon* 'pant with many labours'. But sometimes the word comes closer to our concept of 'character': it is unfair, for example, to judge a man before you 'clearly learn his *splanchma'* (*Medea* 221).

But if *splanchma* contains feeling, it also hides it. One may conceal feelings 'under one's *splanchma*'. The very thing that must be learned if one wants to know people, masks their feeling. And tragedy gives voice to this lack of transparency: 'there are no clear boundaries set by the gods between good and bad' (*Medea* 516-519). And we cannot see into each other's *splanchma*. A fifth century drinking song mocks the idea of penetrating to the inner core or 'self' of a person: If only it were possible,

> to see what sort of man each person is
> divide up (*dialonta*) his breast
> and look at his mind (*nōōs*), then close it again,
> and think with an undeceiving mind (*phren*)
> that he is your friend.

<div align="center">(Padel 1992:14)</div>

The Byzantine scholar Eustathius connected this song with a certain fable of Aesop that blamed Prometheus for 'putting gates (*pulai*) in the human breast' (Padel 1991:15). Eustathius interprets *splanchma* as gates of thought and feeling, as that which allows us to be masked. Our innards are hard to see, and they themselves mask the feeling they contain.[8] Gates set up by the gods can only be forced at the peril of the forcer.

The vocabulary surrounding *splanchma* suggests that perceptions and constructions of darkness and gender profoundly pattern the Greek perception of innards. Philology suggests three connections between the innards, especially the womb, and the underworld. By itself *splanchm*a can mean 'womb' (Just 1989: 9). Furthermore, Hades

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[8] See discussion of metonymy and the mask in Chapter 3.

can also be spelt 'Haides' or 'Aides', and the Greeks related it to *a-idein* 'not to see', *aidēs* 'unseen' or 'hidden' - 'the dark domain where no fame is possible' (Just 1989: 14). Just also points out the close relationship between *adein* and *aidōs* (shame). Death and all experiences of shame go beyond what can be put into speech.

The twentieth-century philosopher Hannah Arendt revives the adversary distinction between the public and private that formed the essence of ancient Greek political life as the enabling theme of her critique of modern society. The polis was not a conglomerate of households, but a domain that stood in an adversarial relationship to the *oikos*. Shakespeare had it wrong. Not all the world was a stage, but the stage comprises a very distinct domain of its own that derives its specificity from being different from the rest of the world. Arendt writes: 'According to Greek thought, the human capacity for political organization is not only different, but stands in direct opposition to that organization whose centre is the home and the family' (Arendt 1958: 24). *The Human Condition* is not only a book about the advantages offered by a vigorous political life, but also about the vices of subjectification, the dissolution of a free common world due to the hegemonic activities of labour and consumption. Arendt turns to politics and not to art, as Adorno, Horkheimer and others have done in the hope of finding a means to transcend the imperialism of consumerism, because, according to her, morality, art, and religion have become too privatized by the subjectivizing tendency of modernity to bear any potential of liberation. Politics, on the other hand, is public, if it is to exist at all.

Following her experience, Arendt sought to rethink the traditional hierarchies implied in the three activities whose 'elementary articulations' she set out to describe in The Human Condition. Her phenomenological distinctions between labour (*Arbeit*), work (*Werk*), and action invite a superplenitude of possible interpretations, many of them overlapping. At their most basic level they designate the fundamental human activities to be found in the active life, the vita activa, and each of them corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which, Arendt says, 'life has been given to man'. The human condition of labour is life itself. Quintessentially the activity of the *oikos*, labour concerns the bodily processes of production and re-production. It is necessary and unavoidable, but as Dr Johnson had said about notes about Shakespeare, a necessary evil. It involves the production of consumer goods of ephemeral value such as food, that is consumed as soon as it is produced, and then the process, by necessity, repeats itself, leaving nothing of a more permanent nature behind. As the Dutch poet Willem de

Koning described the misery of poverty: 'The problem with poverty is that it takes up all your time' (De Koning as quoted by Hassblach 1988: 21). Labour sees man at his most animal-like, because as the young Marx said, labour is the metabolism man shares with nature. That Marx elevated animal laborans to the highest category of human possibilities is something for which Arendt could never forgive him. Not that the importance of animal laborans can be denied: As Bertold Brecht remarks in *Der Dreigroschenoper*: 'Erst kommt das Fressen und dann die Moral'.

Not only the ephemeral is relegated to the private, for romantic love 'destroys the in-between that relates us to and separates us from others' which means that it destroys the world in which we can appear as masked selves. Love, Arendt writes, is unworldly and unpolitical; unlike friendship, 'love is killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it appears in public'[9].

In *Life of the Mind* Arendt employs a highly original rendition of Virgil's famous description of man caught up in the cycles of nature in the *Georgics*:

There is no tale (*numerus*) of the manifold kinds of names they bear, nor truly were the tale (*numero*) worth reckoning out; whoso will know (*scire*) it, let him […] likewise learn how many grains of sand eddy in the west wind on the plain of Libya, or count how many waves come shoreward across the Ionian seas. (*Georgics* 2.537).

As much as the happy farmer of the golden age of Saturn toils in harmony with nature, he exists in anonymity. The bucolic life is not inclined to yield great deeds, nor does it transform the world. For that, let us consider another of Arendt's Roman encounters.

The arrival of Aeneas on the shores of Italy marks the possibility of the beginning of a new world. Like with her better known discussion of the Augustinian concept of natality, Arendt acknowledges that new founding is not a birth ex nihilo. The Romans, Arendt holds, provide a 'lesson in the art of foundation', for unlike the Hebrews who

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[9] The refusal to allow emotions to 'pollute' politics may provide an explanation Dante's placing of Dido in Hell, rather than merely at the entrance to Hell proper, as he did with Virgil himself and other virtuous pagans. According to the Christian creed of Dante's time love is supposed to conquer all. Dante, however, a victim of faction fights in his beloved Florence, may have had ample reasons for banishing 'wild' passions

date their founding as a people back to the Creation of the Universe, and thus put it beyond human time, power and comprehension, the Virgilian version of Roman history counts history *ab urbe condita* – from the founding of the City. Arendt suggests that this implies that history begins when there are tales to tell. The *Aeneid* is not merely become a story of liberation from the burning walls of Troy – but is about the foundation of a new body politic within the confines of historical time. The divine moment of birth appears as a miracle, not because it makes release from the world a possibility, as the Christian narrative that succeeded the Roman one would have it, but because it offers an opportunity to transform the natural world into a human one. Arendt holds the *Aeneid* to be a 'pure' form of political thinking, because the world is not left in order to create it, but finds the world itself an inspiring source of action.

Written at a time when the political realm was in a process of disintegration, with a resulting disunity of man and world that gave rise to 'the desire to find another world, more harmonious and more meaningful' (Hammer 2002: 155). While labour conforms to the unceasing natural rhythms of growth and decay, the activity of work then offers a limited degree of mastership over the world and a measure of stability 'over nature's ceaseless flux' (Arendt 1978a: 152). Work is artificial: by surrounding himself with a large number of fabricated goods, man is able to create a world if not exactly immortal, at any rate less mortal than himself. In other words, labour allows man to survive, but the products of work survive man. The typical representatives of *homo faber* are the artist, the lawgiver, and the architect. They are the erectors of walls - literally and figuratively, that separate the human world from nature. Without them, no space for the unfolding of the drama that is human life would be available. According to Hammer (2002: 132), Virgil's usage of the Latin word condere indicates an awareness of the closeness between the art of writing and that of building or founding (*condet*) of a city. In the sixth *Eclogue* he uses the word to indicate how bards 'build a story', and create a platform on which heroes can appear.

This is where Arendt's thought leaves the world of *homo faber* behind. For although making or manufacturing man is involved in creating a stabilized unity of potentially immortal objects (or objects at least less mortal than himself), he is still not entirely free in the fully political sense of the word, because the confident artisan of the

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from politics. The opposite of Dido would be Machiavelli, famous for his credo 'I love my city more than my soul'. For a more 'feminist' depiction of Dido, see Christiane du Pisan's 'Book of the City of Ladies'.

work is still tied to a pre-established blueprint that he must follow to the letter if he is to be considered a success. Even 'the builder of city walls' is still tied to the means-end relationship, because his activity is determined by a telos that lies outside the activity itself. Even if the human condition of work is an experience of worldliness, genuine freedom is only to be found in a third activity: that of action.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt famously asserts that plurality - 'the fact that men and not Man live on earth and inhabit the world'- is the specific pre-condition of all political life. It makes possible a world that is at once worldly, limited and non-sovereign (Villa 1992:277). Worldly, because it is the domain of a plural 'We' engaging in changing a common world through an agonistic interplay of viewpoints. It is, Arendt remarks, the very opposite of an inner freedom, a freedom into which 'men can escape from external coercion and *feel* free' (Arendt 1961:146). Such philosophical freedom, the tenuous freedom of the will, remains without outward manifestations, and is thus by definition politically irrelevant. For similar reasons, political equality should not be equated with social equality. Social and especially economic equality leads to homogenization and erosion of the specifically political dimension of the public sphere. Political equality is thus 'necessarily an equality of unequals who stand in need of being 'equalized' in certain respects and for certain purposes' (Arendt 1958:178). Homer's texts, for example, disclose an Odysseus that is not an isolated individual engaged in meaningful practices that he deploys on an existing order, but a self that emerges in the system of reproduction in the family, the system of proprietorship in a hierarchical land-holding structure, but, important for our purpose, also a participator in the isonomic network of Achaian polities that form the larger polis - the political 'space' that emerges between the main actors of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Derived from '*iso*'- meaning equal and '*nomos*' meaning law, the concept of isonomia refers to the unique freedom of the public space, a space reserved for political speech. In this space, contrary to the domination of others in the *oikos*, political relations existed between peers who were free from any humiliating taint of domination. Arendt interprets this equality in contradistinction to the tradition of natural equality to be found in the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. As Villa (1990:249) puts it: 'The possibility of a body of peers joined in the experience of shared citizenship is a deliverance of nomos, not physis'. It is because people are not naturally equal that an artificial domain of equality is required for the flourishing and fulfillment of radically diverse individuals. It is this

freedom that made the citizen an erastes - a lover of the city that offers freedom. Alcibiades says: 'Love of city have I not where I am wronged, but where my citizenship is secure' (Thucidides VI 92.4, as quoted by Grene 156: 21).

Arendt's concept of 'self' can certainly be said to include a 'will' if by that is meant the capacity to make choices and initiate action. This will, however, would not be autonomous, but would reflect character. Arendt's conception of the self involves an attempt to refuse the anchoring of identity in a secure ground, be it 'human nature', reason, or any other referent that would be immune from the finitude and ambiguity stigmatized by traditional metaphysics. Instead, like Lacan, she decenters the sovereign subject by insisting on a 'second self' beyond the control of the intending or willing 'I' and constituted through the complex, intersubjective medium of discourse. This 'self' can come into being where identity is confirmed through a plurality of others: For that self, one should not seek too hard, for the freedom of self-revelation is precisely to be found in the unexpected.

Like Lacan, she opposes the unity and self-sufficiency of the Cartesian conception of self, claiming instead that the ego's experience of itself is frail and that self-certainty is ultimately dependent on 'fellow creatures to assure us that what was perceived by us was perceived by them too', without which 'we would not even be able to put faith in the way we appear to each other' (Arendt 1958). The existence of not only the world, but the very self is thus at stake where there is no politics. It is this common sense that emerges between people, the 'space of appearance', that saves the data that feed the other five senses from merely being the nerve stimuli of a solipsist. Arendt emphasizes the plural character of not only 'basic consciousness' (Dolan 1995: 335), but also the more complex notions of willing and thinking. In common with most post-structuralists, she holds that the apparently simple self-identical self-awareness expressed in the 'I-am-I' equation, is in fact marked by 'a strange difference that inserts itself into the core of this identity' - 'an original duality or the split between me and myself', which marks the reflective nature of consciousness. Arendt states:

The specifically human actualization of consciousness in the thinking dialogue between me and myself suggests that difference and otherness, which are such outstanding characteristics of the world of appearances as it is given to man for his habitat among a plurality of things, are the very conditions for the existence of

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man's mental ego as well, for this ego actually only exists in duality. And this ego, the I-am-I, experiences difference in identity precisely when it is not related to other things that appear, but only related to itself. (Arendt in Dolan 1995: 335).

It should be clear that Arendt's self is not a subjective 'inner' self 'discovered' through introspection, but neither is it the 'post-mortem self'[10] of poststructuralism that dissolves into roles and structures until only a trace remains. It is rather a 'revealed' self - a 'who' revealed through a lifetime of deeds and action, and a 'who' who is known better by others than through itself. In Julius Caesar, Shakespeare's most political play, Cassius reminds Brutus: *'Since you cannot see yourself/ I, your glass, will modestly discover to yourself/that of yourself you know not of'* (I.ii.50). For this reason the Greeks regarded friendship as indispensable to the good life. This friendship, however, was a very particular political friendship, a concept completely alien to an age of intimacy. Arendt writes: 'For the Greeks, the essence of friendship consisted of discourse, and since the talk among citizens unified the polis, *philia* or friendship had a political relevance that we as moderns, who are wont to see friendship solely as a phenomenon of intimacy, find hard to understand' (Arendt:1958). The discourse of political friendship can be seen as preserving the world, and even 'humanizing' it. The private talk of intimacy has no reference to the world, and can even be said to avoid it. The common world needs to be talked about, however, if it is to exist at all, and in making 'the things of the world' the object of common discourse, they become human and make us 'more at home in the world'. For this reason the traditional conception of the friend as *alter ego* needs to be carefully qualified. No simple relationship of mimesis exists between friends, rather an attitude of awareness of, and rejoicing in, fruitful difference. The friend is neither an echo, nor a supplement, but a complement. In keeping with her belief in 'plurality as the law of the earth' Arendt understands the solitariness of thinking as an inner duality and not as a singularity.

It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus that I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that the multitude of men should disagree with

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[10] A reference to the much quoted paragraph by Foucault on the death of the subject.

me rather than I, being one, should disagree with myself and contradict me. (Quoted by Arendt 1978: 156).

Tempting as it is to read this famous statement of Socrates merely in terms of a search for self-identity - Arendt is critical of this statement - it must be borne in mind that thinking is not a teleological activity. One never stops thinking. The principle of natality also applies to the life of the mind. Like the deeds in the outer world, new thoughts and ideas are constantly born anew, and the existing network of ideas is continuously disrupted. This is evidenced by the fact that Socrates refers to the other self in himself as 'a very obnoxious fellow' who always awaits him at home in order to cross-examine him, and Arendt's usage of Cato's statement that 'Never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself'. Arendt further compares thinking with Penelope's work at the loom: it continually undoes its own work, and must start each day anew. Harmony in the Hellenic self is always deferred. Thinking in this sense is no search for foundations, and ancient withdrawal was not a flight from reality, but a temporary suspension of it, before the thinker steps back into the limelight of the agon to become an actor once more.

While Lacan's subject is 'split between immediate self-certainty and its simultaneous representation in language' (Dolan 1995: 333) and remains in the thoroughly private world of the workings of desire and the struggle for position in the family, Arendt's public self is a unique personality undetermined by generic, biological, or psychological traits, but formed exclusively through words and deeds, like the heroes of Pericles's speech. A heroic act requires power to sustain it, but this power is not the individual property of the strong subject, but the 'possibility of plurality that springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse' (Arendt 1958: 200). A public persona appears through engagement with others in a novel enterprise, that contains the potential to yield greatness and distinction, but the meaning of which, its destiny, is impossible to fix in advance. Herein lies the *limitation* to the freedom of the public domain. Plurality, the condition of human existence that accounts for the potency of human action, also accounts for its 'predicaments' (Arendt 1958: 236).

Under conditions of plurality, one always acts in a pre-established network of human relationships, with the accompanying contingencies that cannot be mastered by the *sujet-maître*. This is why entry into the public realm inevitably opens up possibilities

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for tragedy: Acting, as opposed to fabrication, carries with it certain ineluctable risks. Arendt links the unexpected or improbable act with the task of understanding how agents, as initiators of action, are disclosed or revealed in what they do. She illustrates the twofold character of action by an unorthodox usage of a quote from Dante's *De Monarchia*:

In every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity, or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, insofar as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that is desired has its own being, and since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows...Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self'. (Arendt 1958: 175)

Dante's remark strikingly finds the intentional side of action in what an agent does both from 'natural necessity' and free will. Arendt uses the last part of the passage to decenter the intentional subject: 'the human sense of reality demands that men actualize the sheer passive givenness of their being, not in order to change it, but in order to make articulate and call into full existence what otherwise they would have suffered anyhow' (Arendt 1858: 208). Here we see a distinct Arendtian view of freedom, as opposed to what she calls 'sovereignty' - an illusionary view of freedom as uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, a view she finds in particularly the Stoic concept of freedom.

Action must be free from motives on the one hand, and aims and consequence on the other. Since action, insofar as it is free, 'is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will, an enormous abyss opens up' (Arendt 1978: 207). The gap is not merely spatial, as might be supposed, but rather temporal - it occurs with the disruption of the 'normal' sequence of cause and effect. For Arendt, all action then has an element of arbitrariness to it, as it could as easily not have been done. The effects of a single act exceed the limits of an actor's knowledge, and it is precisely in this that the unique freedom of action is to be located. For while action is a beginning, it is not a beginning over which the actor retains control. It takes courage leaving the warmth of the oikos behind to step into the bright spotlight of the polis. Whoever chooses to do this

inevitably invites the tragic. Whoever refuses, however, invites disaster.[11] Acting brings one face to face with the condition of plurality. The political actor always moves among, and in relation to other actors. Action, then, involves a certain recursivity, a certain doubling back upon itself: if human beings were not part of the causal order, the will would be impotent. At the same time, our very capacity to insert a novel *imbroglio* in the world connects us with a chain of events that eventually proves to be beyond our control, and at the same time blurs the boundaries between action and the preceding events that helped us to act in the first place. The paradox of enabling structures that at the same time act as limitations places humans in an 'ontological double bind' (Markell 2003: 21), rendering us dependent on the forces that we, through action, seek to transcend. The actor is therefore 'never merely a doer, but also and at the same time a sufferer' (Arendt 1958).

> In this sense no acting person ever knows what he is doing; he cannot know and for the sake of man's freedom is not permitted to know. For freedom is dependent on the absolute unpredictability of human actions. (Arendt 1958:149)

If this were not the case, the actor would not have been free, but in the words of Jerome Kohn '…we would not be free, but enacting or enfolding a plan, as if the course of the world were set like that of a planet plotted on a celestial map, itself like an artifact', and the victory of homo faber would be absolute. Instead, the freedom inherent in acting can be illustrated at the hand of the double meaning of the word. The first association is with the theatre: 'To perform on stage, feign the character of, impersonate as if in a drama' (Funk and Wagnell 1970: 15). The other meaning that we commonly associate with the word is 'to put forth power, to produce an effect, to initiate'.

As opposed to the inherently finite motives and aims of the private self, that determine from within, 'principles', the timeless and universal counterparts to the more limited private motives, determine from without - like the ancient daemons - and become fully manifest in the world only when we act upon them. We identify principles only with the benefit of hindsight. 'They are too general to prescribe particular goals, although every particular action can be explained in the light of its principle once it has been started' (Arendt 1977: 146). Unlike the goal of an action, 'the principle of an action can

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[11] Chapter 2 examines the implications of the refusal of the political, and the implications of the turn inwards.

be repeated time and again, and in distinction from its motive, the validity of its principle is universal. In other words, in a move resembling Gadamer's philosophy of play, Arendt makes principles neither agent nor action specific - they are 'inexhaustible' (Arendt 1977: 157)

It is this relationship between self-disclosure of the actor in action and the lack of control over the 'who' that is disclosed, that reveals the explicitly tragic dimension of action. It is in tragedy, above all, that the familiar Arendtian distinction between 'what' an agent is (his qualities, gifts and shortcomings) and 'who' the agent is, becomes visible.

Throughout her essays collected in *Men in Dark Times* Arendt seeks to capture the 'who' of the person she admires. In her portrait of Waldamar Gurian, she says: 'We are inclined to identify ourselves with what we make and do, and frequently forget that it remains the greatest prerogative of every man to be essentially and forever more than anything he could produce or achieve, not only to remain, after each work and achievement the not yet exhausted, sheer inexhaustible source of further achievements, but in his very essence beyond all of them' (Ferrara 1988: 134).

Not only does the sum of 'who' an actor is exceed the parts, a political actor qua actor remains as much of a mystery to himself as to a chronicler who tells his story later. Arendt draws on the concept of the Greek *daimon* visible not to an agent himself, but only to those who are the spectators of a particular act:

> It is more than likely that the 'who' which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimon* in Greek religion which accompanies each man through his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind, and visible only to those he encounters'. (Arendt 1958:179-180)

The relationship between what others can see and what is visible to the agent, is of course a central concept of Greek tragedy, where spectators watch with terror the mistakes of tragic heroes. The ancient saying 'nobody can be called *eudaimon* before he is dead if we could hear its original meaning after two and a half thousand years of hackneyed repetition ' (Arendt 1958: 192) reveals the human perplexity about the tragic component to action. For action, like tragedy, reveals its meaning - and the 'who' of the

agent - only retrospectively, 'when it has ended' (Arendt 1958: 192), and even then the process of revelation is far from over.[12]

Although only infrequently mentioned in her *oeuvre* - and largely in a negative light[13] - Hegel 's account of agency in his 'Spirit' section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* seems to have had an important influence on Arendt. Like Arendt, Hegel's analysis of action begins with a description of action as an 'opening out' of the unexpected, and with a reflection on the tragic dynamic of unpredictability and self-disclosure in action. Like Arendt, Hegel was drawn to 'the son who does not recognize his father in the man who wrongs him, nor his mother in the queen whom he makes his wife' (*PhG*: 564). The central figure for Hegel, however, is Antigone. Antigone knows 'beforehand the law and the power it opposes' (*PhG*: 470), and her action (in a way that resembles Arendt's notion of action) breaks open something previously not visible in the world, and in doing so radically undermines the existing ethical order. For Hegel, of course, it is not something radically new that breaks open into the world, but the deed rather reveals powers latent in the world lying in wait to show themselves as Spirit progresses. Hegel's Antigone resembles Arendt's actor whose daimones are present in action, but not visible to the agents themselves. According to Speight (2000), it is this retrospectivity of her action that drew Hegel to Antigone. Sophocles's Antigone is no Hamlet, he does not portray her in deliberation about what she is to do, but she steps forth into an action whose meaning she herself only later comes to understand. It is this *irreversibility* of action that calls for some form of restitution. Hegel, unlike Arendt, does not strip action from either intentions or consequences. For him, all action seeks to serve some interest. It is necessary, however, to recognize that intentions cannot satisfactorily be articulated prior to the completion of the act, but is bound up with the action itself. Despite his resistance to a separation between deed and intention, Hegel agrees with Arendt on the importance of the possibility of revocability, and consequently, like her, stresses the importance of forgiveness. Arendt stresses the natality and the freedom from the constraints of morality of action, and wants to preserve the unconditionality and unexpectedness of the aspect of human life, especially since these qualities redeem action as well. Hegel sees the practice

[12] It is interesting to note in this context that one of the most complete biographies on a nineteenth-century republican, that continued the republican tradition of Jefferson and Madison, Arendt extolled as prime examples of modern politicians that understood the importance of the public sphere, bears the title of *Lincoln the Unknown* (Carnegie 1944).
[13] See Hansen (2000) for more on Hegel's influence on Arendt.

of forgiveness as a way to incorporate revisability into an account of moral judgement. Both thus see the practice of forgiveness as a way to deal with what Arendt had called 'the threefold futility of action': its unpredictability, irreversibility and anonymity'. (Arendt as quoted by Speight 2000:531).

Besides the formulation of principled action so that it 'would not detract from the performance itself' (Villa 1999:130), Arendt depersonalizes action by adopting a vocabulary of dramaturgy. Thoroughly Nietzschean in her distrust of a metaphysical distinction between a 'real' and an 'apparent' world however, the mask of the actor on public stage is not an illusion (which would invite traditional epistemological desires to expose and dismiss it as such), but rather a creation. Or, to avoid the subjectivist teleological vocabulary of *homo faber*, the mask is an event, as mediator between the world of appearance and the hidden world of the private, the precondition for appearance in the world as such. As indicated by the single word for 'face' and 'mask' in ancient Greek - *prosopon* (the word 'literally' translates to 'outer appearance'), the Greeks made no formal distinction between the mask and the 'real' person beneath it. The mask was not a 'false' face, but 'being-masked' the condition for existence in the public sphere.[14] Or, as Hollis (1985: 215) puts it: 'To be Greek was to be masked'. Since, as indicated above, the Greeks lacked a *category* of 'self', the mask had ontological priority - there was no self that 'sat for the portrait'. When Antigone, for example, uses the first person singular, it is radically different from our own post-Romantic usage: 'her usage of the first person singular may exceed the mere grammatical sense of the word 'I', and she may have a quasi-concept of self, but she definitely lacks a category of self' (Hollis 1985: 218). Whoever attempts to go beneath the surface of the mask does so at his peril. As Poe depicted it in *The Masque of Red Death*, whoever attempts to rip off the mask, finds under it - nothing. It is important to add in this context, that in contrast to the act of unmasking, the event of disclosure involves no violence, for whereas only I will disclose myself - I can never 'be disclosed', any more than I can 'be acted' - the deed of unmasking

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[14] And as all the tragedies show, the masks did not come to an end once the threshold to the *oikos* was crossed. Norma Moruzzi in her *Speaking through the Mask* (2002) uses this to undermine what she regards as Arendt's too rigid distinction between private and public. According to her, it is a mistake to assume that social identities are not the result of some form of masquerade, and 'one should read Arendt against herself in order to break down the strong dichotomies that structure her thought' (p.1). Moruzzi, who used Kristeva's work on abjection as an inspiring source for her book on Arendt, fails to do justice, however, in my view, to the *particularity* that is the political in Arendt. See the discussion on the disappearance of the public realm in Chapter 2.

always implies the unmasking of someone else. Put differently: I am the subject of disclosure, but the object of unmasking.

It is the violence of objectification that is so typical of a post-political era that Arendt seeks to undermine by reviving the classical respect for the power of the mask. The mask allows politics to breathe: for it is the mask that allows 'men and not Man' to appear in all their plurality on stage. For Nietzsche, merely having an opinion is already a form of the mask (Goosen 2001: 52). For similar reasons, Arendt revives a Socrates, who, in contrast to Plato, almost resembles a liberal pluralist. For this Socrates, every opinion is important, not as a falsehood to be overturned, but as a potential truth waiting to be unfolded. What makes Socrates different from the Sophists, is that he did not cynically rejoice in the *falsa infinita* of *doxai*, but was nevertheless willing to acknowledge the truth to be found in opinion, even if it does not offer the possibility of unqualified certainty. Arendt:

> To Socrates, as to his fellow citizens, *doxa* was the formulation in speech of what dokei moi, of what appears to me. This *doxa*, had as its topic the world as it opens itself up to me. It was not, therefore mere subjective fantasy and arbitrariness, but nor was it something absolute and valid for all. The assumption was that the world would open up differently to each man according to his position in it. (Arendt 1990: 81)

Aristotle, in chapter 6 of the *Poetics*, makes a famous statement about the importance of action in the tragic drama: 'The most important part [of all the parts that make up the tragic drama] is the combination of incidents of the story, for tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons, but of *action'* (Aristotle 1984: 231 section 1452). 'Character' (*êthê*) is of secondary importance, and is even included for the sake of the action, rather than the other way around. (*ibid*). This priority of action over character cannot, as Belfiore (1992: 19) suggests, be reduced to merely a poetic technique. One should take into account the entire paragraph in which this sentence occurs :

> Tragedy is essentially not of persons, but of action and life, of happiness and misery. *All human happiness or misery takes the form of an action*: the end for which we live is a kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but

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it is in our *actions* - in what we *do* - that we can be happy or the reverse. *In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the characters, but they include the characters for the sake of the action* (*Poetics*: 1450a 16-22).

It should be clear that Aristotle's claims in the italic sentences refer not only to action and character on the stage, but action per se. As Nussbaum suggests (1986: 380-382), 'the priority of action over character in tragedy should somehow correspond to the relationship between action and character in real life'. Aristotle's idea of happiness as a habit calls up his more detailed discussion of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 2. Pointing out the etymological link between the words for character (*êthos*) and the ethical (*êthikê*), Aristotle claims that virtues are formed through habituation, or repeated activity, and this is why it is so important that we 'perform the right activities' (*NE*: 1103a 31-33). The relationship between performance and *êthos* is then anything but onesided. But even so, it should be borne in mind that if the deeds are reciprocal, 'they are not perfectly symmetrical' (Markell 2003: 19). Character extends into the world by shaping it (a brave man's action makes history), and is at the same time formed by worldly activity - Achilles becomes the particular kind of hero that he eventually became by virtue of Hector's, Agamemnon's and Patroclos's actions. Because action takes place in the world, this circuit of mutual exchange is not closed, but action, and by implication character is exposed to the numerous forms in which contingency manifests itself. As Arendt reminds us:

> This unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself tangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and the speaker's life, but as such it can be known, that is grasped as a palpable entity only after it has ended. (Arendt 1958: 270)

That identity cannot decisively be ascribed to a person while a person acts, and even after the fact the final 'who' of the person eludes us, is ignored by many modern classicists. The power of the Romantic subject-based biases towards text interpretation stretches far into the twentieth century, and formed the basis for most British and American approaches to classical scholarship. Cedric Whitman's well-known interpretation of Achilles as the personification of the 'most genuine' kind of heroism - the 'quest for self-realization' (Whitman 1958: 119) is a typical example of this.

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The whole quarrel with Agamemnon was merely the match that lit a fire, the impetus that drove Achilles from the simple assumptions of the other princely heroes onto the path where heroism means the search for the dignity and meaning of the self (Whitman 1958: 193).

Far from depicting the classical Achilles of the *Iliad,* Whitman's text reveals the idea that man's deepest quest inheres in the activity of some type of 'absolute self' or subject against the constraints of our existence as natural, mortal beings. This usage recalls Fichte and Schelling. Whitman (and the large body of scholarship on Homer that followed this anachronistic trend, such as Parry (1956),[15] rather reflects the dominant intellectual concerns of the fifties - the time in which the texts were written. Arendt's political reading of Homer, on the other hand, depicts a world where 'nobody, not even Achilles acts alone'. For Arendt it is considerations of the frailty of the individual's action that formed the impetus behind the establishment of the public realm 'much more than notions about the individual's right to self-expression [that] played a decisive part in the in the finally more or less successful struggle to obtain freedom of thought for the spoken, and later printed, word' (Arendt 1968: 245). Jefferson linked expressing with discussing and deciding, and for Arendt, these are the activities of freedom. But expressing, as Justman (1981: 414) points out, seems to mean here little more than 'voicing', and cannot be connected with any kind of Romantic notion of self-expression. Arendt avoids the language of self-expression carefully, lest her position on action should be misread as indicating 'behaviour', that is a mere function, an expression of some motive or mechanism. For a mechanism functions predictably according to a set pattern, and it is the character of unexpectedness, of spontaneity, and the exceeding of the subject's expectations of his own action that Arendt wants to emphasize. Justman (1981: 415) distinguishes between acting and *en*acting. To express is to enact according to a pattern, and as Justman points out, an 'expression of something' could have strong psychological overtones, and may under certain circumstances mean 'a symptom of' - a patient may seek therapy in order to 'discover the rule underlying' his behaviour.

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[15],See chapter 3. 'Nietzsche'. Parry analyzes the 'candour' of Achilles's famous speech in Book 9 of the *Iliad* as that of 'someone who sees the awful distance between the truth that society imposes upon men, and what Achilles has seen to be true for himself' (Parry 1956: 5-6).

Throughout her work, Arendt makes no effort to hide her contempt for the concept of self-expression whenever the subject arises. She clearly sets disclosure against unmasking - the correlate of forced expression:

> Since men live in a world of appearances and in their dealing with it, depend on manifestation, hypocrisy's conceits - as distinguished from expedient ruses followed by disclosure in due time - cannot be met by so-called reasonable behaviour. Words can be relied upon only if one is sure that their function is to reveal and not to conceal. (Arendt 1972: 63)

Although interpreters like Knox (1957: 105), who tend to place every dimension of the ancient polis in a tragic framework, take the analogy between the tragic Oedipus and the historical Pericles too far, I agree that from a certain Arendtian perspective, Pericles presents an unexpected problem for the life of the polis. Like Oedipus, whose conflation of the roles of investigator and object of investigation, victor and victim, author of action and player in a divine script threatens not only the city but also the divine order of things itself, Pericles's famous Funeral Oration hides what Nietzsche might have called an 'unhellenic' threat to action. Consider for example the rhetoric Arendt employs in her much quoted gloss on the classic speech:

> The polis - if we trust the famous words of Pericles in the Funeral Oration - gives us a guarantee that those who forced every sea and land to become the scene of their daring will not remain without witness and will need neither Homer nor anyone else who knows how to turn words to praise them; without assistance from others those who acted together will be able to establish together the everlasting remembrance of their good and bad deeds, to inspire admiration in present and future ages. (Arendt 1958: 197)

A common complaint against Arendt is that she succumbs to 'polis envy' - an unrealistic and irresponsible nostalgia for the Golden Age of Pericles's Athens. Seyla Benhabib has made it the aim of her major publication on Arendt to decentralize the role

played by The Human Condition in Arendt's *oeuvre*[16]. Arendt's aim, however, is not to engage in the writing of a monumental history of the Greeks, but to respond to the philosophical problem concerning the possibility of freedom - a problem that she inherits from Kant, but made explicit by her experience of Fascism. At first sight Arendt appears to endorse this attempt to emancipate action from any dependence on fabrication. However, it must not be overlooked that Arendt employs a hypothesis: *if* we trust Pericles. But this is not an endeavour that Arendt expects of her readers. For as Tsao (2002: 111) points out, Arendt, with her well-developed historical sense, knew how important it was that political action be transformed into 'the sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into painting and sculpture and all sorts of records, documents and monuments' so that they at least stand a chance of being remembered. For action is fragile, and easily forgotten. *Frailty, thy name is politics*! If Pericles is remembered at all today, it is only because in Thucydides he found his own Homer. As Arendt puts it - in a very Hegelian-sounding way - 'The light that illuminates processes of action and therefore all historical processes, appears only at their end, frequently when all their participants are dead' (Arendt 1958: 192). She significantly adds the following remark:

> Even Achilles, it is true, remains dependent on the poet, storyteller or historian without whom *everything he did remains futile* but he remains only hero, and therefore the hero par excellence who delivers into the narrator's hands the full significance of his deed, so that it is though he had not merely enacted the story of his life, but at the same time also made it. (Arendt 1958: 194)

Unlike a scientific causal explanation that dissolves human behaviour into a complex series of reactions to stimuli governed by natural laws, which allows for an infinite regress of causes trailing to any given effect, every story has a unique beginning and end that strings together a unique sequence of events, or to put it differently, narrative act as a measure for what would otherwise have been a chaotic disarray of data. What makes it possible for human actions to cohere, according to Arendt, is their relationship to a distinct individual whose life is temporally bounded, or 'measured' by

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[16] Benhabib, S. 1996: xxv. Villa (1992) takes the opposite view.

his death.[17] Arendt calls the schema through which action makes sense 'an enacted story'. And stories are always meaningful. As Gadamer proves throughout his *oeuvre,* 'meaning is never exhausted' (Benhabib 1996: 122). It is because, as we have seen, the events that make up a story occur within the 'web of human relationships with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions' (Arendt 1958: 216) that stories can be told, not only once, but innumerable times. Or, to put it differently, action derives its meaning in the way they exceed, fulfill, disappoint, or surprise the mutual expectations that constitute human relationships. Natality, as Van der Hoek (2000: 75) points out, makes possible a plurality that is not simply restricted to simultaneity but a dialogue between old and new, a concert of non-reducible singularities. There is therefore a reciprocal relationship between action and history: Through the retelling of acts and deeds in *history,* a measure of resistance to the fragility of action becomes a possibility, and at the same time, action provides the *content* for the historian or storyteller. Thucydides mentions the fact that history, the record of human action, is the only literary *genre* 'that is free from gods' (Padel 1991: 124). As we have seen, epic, comedy, and especially tragedy had its fair share of divine characters, but only history offers the possibility of immortality for humans. To pick up on a previous thread: labour allows man to survive, work survives man, but action makes him immortal - though only with the aid of the storyteller. Pericles espouses a vain fantasy - a wish to remain in a perpetual present, the frozen aesthetics of a Grecian Urn - 'the unravished bride of time.'[18] And this is dangerous. Arendt directly implicates the fierceness of the agonal spirits of the Greeks for the rapid decline of the polis. It may have been founded to win man glory and fame, but man does not live by fame alone. Arendt observes: 'One, if not the chief reason for the incredible development of gift and genius, *as well as for its hardly less swift decline of the city state*, was precisely from beginning to end its foremost aim was to make the extraordinary ordinary' (Arendt 1958: 197). 'Measureless' action is in the long run just as great a danger as its opposite, the 'tamed' or 'normalized' subject.

Written at a time when the Athenian polis was in a state of decay the main founder of what we today call classical political philosophy, Plato, suggested that the distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* then prevailing in the City, be abolished. In the

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[17] Werner Marx explored this theme in his 1983 text with its title drawn from the Hölderlin-text quoted at the introduction.

[18] A reference to John Keats's famous poem 'Ode to a Grecian Urn'.

Republic, it is decreed that every citizen should fulfil one strictly defined and controlled activity. In the *Laws*, Plato transforms the theatre of the *res publica* into a puppet show where a hidden God, a puppet master, manipulates hapless marionettes. To thwart this 'hidden God,' the polis must be turned into a kind of workshop where the former citizens are changed into means for pre-determined ends. Where *praxis* was, there *poiesis* shall be. The ideal of univocity in the *bios theoretikos* would become the ideal of the human community as well. This ideal of univocity implies that *homo faber,* the craftsman who operates according to a pre-established blueprint with a specific telos in mind forged a bond with the clear episteme of the philosopher: Both opposed the murky ambiguity of human affairs. In an attempt to treat action as if it were fabrication, Plato 'elevated lawmaking and city-building to the highest rank in political life' (Arendt 1958: 195) at the expense of the agonal action that the earlier Greeks had prized. It would however, be too easy at this point, to divide the Greeks in the pre-Platonic agonists and the post-Platonic city-builders. Surprisingly, Arendt locates another lack in the Periclean polis:

> In their opinion, the lawmaker was like the builder of a city wall, someone who had to do and finish his work before politics could begin…To them, the law, like the wall around the city, was the result not of action, but of making (Arendt 1958: 194).

Although she does not elaborate here, she compares this facet of the Greek world rather unfavourably with what she calls 'the political genius of Rome: legislation and foundation' (Arendt 1958: 195). Other than the Greek word *nomos* that recalls the wall that separates people physically, the Latin word *lex* refers to the act of establishing relationships between citizens. As Tsao (2002: 109) points out, this 'symptom of their highly individualistic beliefs' explains why the Greeks, to their cost, did not include the maintenance of the 'formal relationship between people as part of their political activity', and, importantly for our purposes, further explains why Arendt's critique of the philosopher's attempt to escape the frailty of human affairs should apply equally well to the Greeks of Pericles's day. If Aristotle and Plato thinks of acting in terms of making, so do the Greeks of the polis, at least when it comes to the issue of the law.

As complex and multivocal as the tragedy it claims to reject, the *Republic* has been read variously as positing an ideal utopia, as a critique of idealism, a blueprint for

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totalitarian ideology, a comedy and a tragedy. According to Euben (1990: 9), Plato invented political philosophy to compensate for the failure of tragedy to educate its citizen audience. The failure was evident in the factionalism that made Athens into many cities rather than one. Philosophy thus had to turn away from existing cities to find another audience, or rather, another kind of audience. For the audience was now not conceived of as a whole, but as individual souls whose moral self-ordering is a prerequisite for political re-constitution.

The *Republic* is pervaded by the theme of 'bringing hidden things to the light' (Rocco 1997: 108). Socrates begins his famous narrative by recounting a visit to Piraeus to see (theasthai) an inaugural festival of the goddess Bendis. This journey to see the sights and Socrates's assessment of the spectacle invoke and transform an earlier meaning of the word theory and the vocation of the *theōros*. Originally, the *theōros* was an official envoy sent to a strange and unfamiliar land to report back on the sacred events he had witnessed. Later, the word was used for the city's representatives at tragic performances. But Socrates's journey to Piraeus, Athens's port and democratic stronghold does not conclude with his appraisal of the procession, nor is much time devoted to the festival itself. He quickly proceeds to describe the theoretical vision the *Republic* itself proposes. The initial journey, then, serves as a pretext for the prisoner's journey out of the cave and into the light - a journey that culminates in the upward ascent of the philosopher to the Good. In accordance with most of the Greek tragedies, sight serves as a trope for knowledge. With the main character of *Oedipus Tyrannos* it shares a certain impatience with the constraints of tradition, an insistence on exposing unitary patterns behind the phenomenal world. Yet the *Republic* transforms the emphasis in a way that Oedipus only dreamt of and in a way Sophocles probably feared to depict. Where Oedipus only sought to master his own destiny (and paid the most severe price imaginable for this), Plato would re-imagine an entire world in order to master the destiny of mankind. Plato is not a founder like Virgil - he does not 'found Athens anew' - but creates an entirely new city that does not resemble his current city - or any real city - in the slightest.

Other than Aristotle's more 'political' notion of friendship, in Plato's utopia, rulers and the ruled are steered by the same hand of divine intelligence towards their own well-being, and so 'become alike and friendly' (*Rep*. 9.950c). Here [in Plato's ideal republic] friendship depends on a coincidence of interests: 'In our city more than any other, when

any individual fares well or badly, they would all speak in unison the words spoken just now, namely mine (to emon) is doing badly' (*Rep*. 5.463e). Both Plato and Augustine maintain a Higher Reality, open to the participation by the select few, and for both the merely sensible stands in the way. The metaphysical continuities between Plato and, for example Augustine, seem so obvious, that it is often forgotten that the dichotomy of inner/outer, commonly held to be the foundation of Western metaphysics, inaugurated by Plato, in fact only makes a marginal appearance in his oeuvre. The only examples that come to mind are in 401d of the *Republic*, where Socrates lauds music as the most sovereign art, because its rhythm and harmony find its way into the innermost soul – eis *entos tes psyches* – and takes a hold there, and at 44d where Socrates says that true justice is not just about external actions that affect other people (*peri ton exo*), but also about that that lies within and concerns oneself (*peri ton entos*). This usage anticipates Augustine, and comes close to the modern sense of conscience.

For centuries the *Republic* was taken to be the locus classicus of Plato's thought, and standard readings of this dialogue (especially Books V, VII, and VIII), stigmatized Plato as 'the enemy of the open society' (as Karl Popper famously put it). It is possible, however to find in Plato (and not only in Socrates) a hitherto rarely acknowledged democratic potential. This is not simply because he is the last 'apologist for autocracy' left[19] (Nietzsche having been 'converted' for democracy by among others, Honig and Ansell-Pearson, and Hegel by Critchley[20]), but because his political philosophy is fragmentary, aphoristic and to be found throughout his oeuvre. Leo Strauss, a contemporary of Arendt, reads the *Republic* as an ironic satire as to how politics cannot and should not look. According to Strauss, Plato relegates his city to the domain of the fantastical in order to show Athenians the futility of human desire in the light of temporal human existence. The perfect polis sees all its citizens as brothers and sisters, no *thymos* disrupts the order of things - everything has a place and everything is in its place. Such a city, however, bears a closer resemblance to Augustine's *Civitas Dei* than anything the contemporary reader would recognize. *The Republic* can thus be seen as a dialogue of limits - a dialogue that at once subverts and confirms what is human in the political

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[19] A true democracy should also contain elements or representatives of its opposite, aristocracy or autocracy, if it is to count as a democracy at all. A democracy that aimed at eradicating any particularity completely, is not worthy of that name.
[20] Honig applies a Derrida-inspired critique to Arendt's conception of the agon in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics.* (Honig 1993).

order.

As clear-cut as Plato's misopology (hatred for his city) appears, there is more than meets the eye. For all the veneration of the *bios theoretikos* it must be pointed out that something of the agonal spirit of the *vita activa* remains in Plato's dialogues if one remembers that his political philosophy is fragmentary, dispersed through his work, and importantly, does not succeed in ever really achieving a Final Solution. Plato thus remains political despite himself. Pascal wrote in his *Pensées* :

> We can only think of Plato and Aristotle in grand academic robes. They were honest men, like others, laughing with their friends, and when they diverted themselves with writing their Laws and their Politics, they did it as an amusement, that part of their lives was the least philosophic and the least serious; the most philosophic was to live simply and quietly. (quoted in Taminaux 1992: 12)

But be it read ironically or 'literally,' Plato's work does suggest a key to a new kind of moral life. Whereas self-mastery has always been part of the warrior ethos of the Homeric Greeks, Plato for the first time suggests a kind of 'self-mastery' (*kreitto auto*, *Rep* 430e), by the higher parts of the soul over the lower. This means reason over desire. But this involves more than a simple shift in a hierarchical order. As Taylor (1989: 115) puts it: 'order reigns there for the first time'. Plato 'tames' the most political instinct, *thymos*, by placing it under the control of reason, making it the auxiliary of reason, analogous to the warrior function in society, and best put under political control. Plato thus becomes an important contributor to the long path of the development of reason, a process whereby it eventually began to dominate over the quest for action and glory. And with this process, a subtle shift in the understanding of the agent occurred, one that would have consequences of colossal dimensions. Plato, although still far away from the self-identical transcendental subject, began to favour a conception of the mind (as we have seen) as a unitary space. This view accompanied a condition of self-collected awareness, and the state of 'maximum unity with oneself' became a desired telos. The older Homeric view of man being immersed in a greater cosmic order, was gradually becoming a thing of the past. The new state, as Padel (1992: 10) points out, is 'dicontinuous with other states, one in which we can understand and survey all others'.

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This condition is thus a condition where all feelings and thoughts, especially moral ones - for to think too much on political matters leads to a kind of political impotence and the inability to act [21] are under purview. This is the result of the self-centering that rationality brings. The new experience of the 'soul' as unitary locus, as opposed to the plurality that is the psyche, is an essential concomitant of the drive inwards: The soul must be one if we are to reach the highest point of self-understanding which is to bring the entire person into harmony. As we have seen, vision plays an important role bringing this harmony about. 'Reason is the capacity to see and understand' (Taylor 1992: 122). To understand rationally is to be able to 'give reasons', or to 'give an account' (*logon didonai*, *Rep.* 534b). To be rational is thus to have 'the correct vision', to grasp the 'natural' order of things and to align oneself with it. That is why *theōria*, or contemplation of the unchanging order becomes the most important activity after Plato. At this stage, there is still a strong connection between the inner and the outer world, but the stabilizing and separation of the 'soul' that the 'turn inwards' would require, has taken place. And as we will see, as man turned inward, his once severe distinctions between public and private began to crumble.

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[21] See chapter 3, 'Nietzsche' for a discussion on the stifling that 'too much thinking brings.'

Chapter 2.

Inwardness: The Political Price of Modernity.

While Plato brought into Western culture the obligation to question politics, desire and friendship as well as their purported objects in the context of truth, the Roman citizen (especially of the Imperial period) put care of the self at the centre of moral preoccupation. The Roman citizen was under a pressing obligation to clarify his relationship to himself, for that self was challenged by an unparalleled multiplicity of potential identities and conflicts created by offices held, responsibilities shouldered and powers exercised in the growth of the Roman Empire, on a scale hitherto unprecedented in the ancient world. A new, 'fragile' individual led thinkers like Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius to develop 'programs' for the examination and articulation of consciousness - exercises that promoted not only a more detailed knowledge of the self than had been the case in the Hellenic model, but also a novel pleasure in the self as such.

Although the ancient world fashioned a culture of the self and its mastery, only Christianity with its practices of confession and examination of conscience, constituted the self as a hermeneutic reality whose truth must be uncovered by a permanent process of self-interpretation and diagnosis of the truths and illusions operating within itself. Christian monasticism introduces the program of discovering one's truth not only in terms of one's acts, but also one's thoughts and desires, which must be manifested by means of another verbal process. The Christian obligation to decipher the truths of the self results from the conviction that the person who engages in a physical, as well as a mental struggle with Evil becomes an obscure text requiring vigilant deciphering.[22]

The legacy of this history is to be found in the project of forging truth, sex and personal identity into a unity. In the modern era, as we shall see below, desire is no longer a mere vehicle for approaching the self, but sexual acts and desires form part of the positive identity of the self. This development is solidified by Freud, for whom sexuality becomes the 'truth' that permeates all other fields of human existence and identity: his conscious reason, his speech, his finitude and death, and as Hannah Arendt was to lament mere decades later, also his politics. Whatever its other merits may be,

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[22] This shift is easily traceable in the shift of meaning that occurred in the word *hamartia*, that in Aristotle refers to a 'character flaw' (Staiger 1956: 21), a particular characteristic mostly of the tragic hero alone, but

Freudian psychology became the maximum-security division in the prison of man. The search for the self and its intelligibility lost the last remaining links with the world and is reduced to an acceptance of both the positive elements articulated in the human sciences, designating the 'nature of the human being', and the norms they propose for man's fulfilment.

On the way to modernity stands Augustine. In his doctrines the thought of the 'Attic Moses' mingles with the Gospel's great image of creation through the Word, and in the process links Platonism with the central Christian idea of the Trinity. The success of this synthesis is debatable, but the effects of the quasi-Platonic picture of the cosmos as the external realization of a rational order, are still felt today. Augustine makes a more severe distinction between the inner and the outer than Plato did: Famously summarized as *'Noli foras ire in teipsum redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas'* (Go inward, return within yourself, for inward truth dwells). In *De Trinitate* XII: I he explicitly distinguishes between inner and outer man: The outer, physical man is what we have in common with animals, and this includes even our senses and memory of outer things. This is to distinguish it from our inner selves - the soul – for inner is also higher. The road to God leads inward, for God is more than the order of things – he is the very underlying principle of the activity of knowing itself. The light of God lights up not only the world, as had still been the case for Plato, but for Augustine it becomes the Johanine inner light that 'lights up every man that comes into the world' (Joh.1: 9). In the words of Charles Taylor (following Foucault): 'The struggle is not over the content, but the direction of our gaze' (Taylor 1989: 22). Augustine moves the focus from the field of objects to be known to the activity of knowing itself, and he does this by adopting a first-person standpoint. To engage in this activity is to become reflexive – to look inward. From unfathomable depths a question emerges whose answer is predicated by the question itself. Augustine famously enquires: 'What then am I, oh my God? What nature am I?' (*Confessions* 10: 17). Through this very question the *Confessions* come into being. Although it is a question that transforms the questioner into both the subject and object of the question, it is important to note that, at this stage, it is still a question whose limits and character are set by the God it evokes - a God who promises to guide the sincere questioner. With a passion rarely equaled in Western philosophical history, Augustine pursues the question

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after the rise of Christianity refers to 'sin' a general condition of all mankind, something against which all should constantly guard. Confession becomes the best weapon of self-defence.

in search of the great truths within himself. In this novel pursuit he signifies the dawn of the hermeneutic self. In a revealing moment he specifically states: 'I have become a question to myself' (*Conf.* 10: 33).

To the question 'What am I?' Augustine answers: 'A life powerfully various and manifold and innumerable' (*Conf.* 10: 17). The pagan self is now a fallen multiplicity that is continually scattered in its involvement in the world. Whether in pursuit of riches or another's praise, the self's relationship with others and with things now cuts through him, divides him, pushes him out of focus and decenters him. In an unreflective state, this self generally does not engage with others as a whole. This self is still a pagan self: The external world still speaks to, and incites, various parts of the body and soul, in Augustine's view, at the expense of the integrated self. Prior to becoming a confessing-self, this self is in a constant state of being 'scattered about in multiplicity' (*Conf.* 10: 29). Augustine turns to his inner dimension and finds - far from a simple indwelling truth - that his inner depths are in even greater disorder than his physical being. Whereas the body tends to obey the will on command, Augustine discovers that the will does not obey itself: 'the body more readily obeyed the slightest wish of the mind…than the mind obeyed itself in carrying out its own great will which could be achieved simply by willing' (*Conf.* 8: 9). The problem is that 'it does not will totally' (*Conf.* 9: 9). It is divided against itself. And for Augustine, 'a house divided against itself cannot stand' (St Mark 3: 25). Arguing against the Manichians that we have one divided will rather than two natures, the divided self is 'monstrous', and a 'sickness of the soul' (*Conf.* 8: 9). For Augustine the divided self is bonded to the world in an immediacy of desire that weakens and enslaves the self. Importantly, in addition to the evil that it generates, this self cannot face God, by reason of its being in such a scattered, dispersed and impure state.

The goal of confessing - a goal that can never be realised while on earth - is to unify and purify this pagan multiplicity. Only then can it be deemed ready to face God. And the very act of confessing, over and above its particular content, is unifying. To confess is to stand face to face with oneself, to endlessly scrutinise the self and to proclaim the truths that one discerns there. In the act of confession, one overcomes time-boundaries, because the self that one faces is not the self in the pure present moment of confession, but confession as a human act happens in time, and the self faced in the act of confession has always ceased to be instantaneous. 'For Augustine, the self is always infinitely minute' (Brown: 1967: 144) and has no duration. The present is, and rapidly

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ceases to be, infinitely rapidly becoming past. These infinitely, fleeting, passing moments scatter the self in uncontrollable ways. Confession, however, makes the self present by holding its past - up to a few minutes before confession - as a unified narrative before itself. The self confesses as a temporal being with a history, or rather, the self participating in the confessional activity is this history. The self is not an ephemeral wisp existing only in the present, but becomes lodged in the self's past, a past that is not only possible to be presented in memory, but does present itself frequently through the uncanny insertion of one's past being, customs, and history in the present.

For Augustine 'the extent to which the past makes the present behind one's back is inversely related to the extent to which it is presented in remembering' (Brown 1967: 177). It is thus of cardinal importance that the self engages in deliberate attempts to remember, and so to bolster the unity of itself. Confession is a stabilising strategy, because it allows the self - partially at least - to escape the tyrannical dissemination of the present, and thus begins to unify the self by transferring its attention and the trajectory of its being to the more stable presence of the self's past in memory. In remembering, the self that was tossed about in the violent, contradictory waves of the present is allowed to sink in the cool depths of its own past in order to regain composure. Augustine begins the first section of his famous Book X with the plea (a restatement of the general theme of the Confessions as such) 'Let me know Thee' (*Confessions* 10: 1). To know God, means of course to confess one's sins and to extirpate that which is evil in His light. Augustine writes: 'He that does the truth comes to light. I wish to do it in confession.' Knowledge of the self is inextricably intertwined with knowledge of God. But in his unceasing questioning of both, he comes up against the puzzle of memory: 'For how shall I find Thee if I am without memory of Thee?' (*Conf*.10: 17). Instead, in the labyrinth of memory, Augustine more frequently meets the self again: 'In my memory too I meet myself' (*Conf*. 10.8). Everything to be known about the self lies there. Memory does not simply form part of the self, but Augustine identifies memory with identity - it is 'this thing that I am' (*Conf*. 10: 17). The self is the very manifold and constantly expanding field of memory and the thoughts, desires and feelings to be found within it. One does not simply have a memory and a past, one is it. To confess or remember is not simply a form of meditation to ensure ordered thought, it is to draw the self together, to collect it out of dispersion. As memory, the self is the locus in which its existence is impressed as

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being dispersed, and the possibility for the purposefully drawing together of this dispersal.

The determined manner that characterises confession is extremely important for Augustine, since it undermines the 'false' pagan ontology of conceit and fosters a new self-understanding. He shows that deep reflection leads to a powerful understanding of one's own finitude, iniquity and dependence. In confronting his own finitude, Augustine discovers that his is a life that he can never completely know, or make his own. Rather than being the origin of truth that the conceited ontology of the pagans perceived itself to be,[23] Augustine realizes that he cannot even hope to grasp himself with complete certainty. His forgotten infancy is accessible only through the accounts of others and through the observation of other infants. His childhood keeps resisting his cognitive grasp - different to such an extent that 'I am loth to count it as part of the life I have lived in this world. For it is buried in the darkness of the forgotten as the period earlier still that I have spent in my mother's womb.' (*Conf.* 1: 7). But Augustine cannot dismiss his own infancy any more than he can discount the hidden depths of his soul which he discovers can never be rendered completely intelligible. Augustine is this hidden depth that demands to be known for the truths he/it reveals and the evils it hides. Paradoxically, his inability to reveal every imperfection and iniquity makes a more moral, or a more humble, life possible.

There is supreme irony to be found in the fact that whereas the modern epistemological project can be seen as an attempt to escape solipsism, the early modern moral self was to be protected at all costs from the 'polluting' presence of the Other. The lesson that Saint Augustine derives from the famous incident of the theft of the pears, is that he probably would not have sinned had he been alone. The miasmic other is a snare, a trap of self-abandonment. A cardinal difference from Plato that began to manifest itself in Augustine is the sudden urgency that characterizes his epistemic endeavour. Whereas for Plato, thinking is an elegant leisure activity that allows one to withdraw from the painful contingencies of daily life into the quiet life of the mind, for Augustine it is quite literally a matter of life and death. With Augustine the ghost of Cartesian anxiety, formally still so far off, first makes its appearance.

In Augustine a new way of being manifests itself - his confessions is the gesture,

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[23] Augustine is biased in this respect, and for all his thoroughness, tends to oversimplify the issue of pagan ontological conceit. For example, he makes little, if any use of the tragedians.

the expression of a hitherto never experienced form of self. Foucault continues with what Augustine started long ago: the definition of a Christian self in contrast to the pagan self. Even the Platonists, for whom Augustine has but the deepest respect, inhabited a region on the other side of Christianity: 'Their pages show nothing of the tears of confession' (*Conf*.7.21).

The confessing-self is distinguished from previous forms of identity in that it is constituted through a very specific movement: the movement of the self towards deciphering its own depths. In a most fundamental sense, the confessing-self is to be identified with this movement. In its ceaseless journey to examine and reveal its interior, it becomes a being of depth. The confessing-self dwells in depth: it is of the dimension that is at once its most profound discovery, the dimension that makes the confessing-self in the first place a possibility and a necessity.

It must be emphasized, however, that at this point, confession is still voluntary. Confession signifies a way of being that one does not become unless one chooses to do so through conversion. The act of conversion sets the limits to the confessing-self, and contains through its very structure the possibility of being different from the pagan self. During the fourth century, when Augustine wrote the *Confessions*, the Other to the confessing-self is still of paramount importance to preserve the uniqueness and specificity of the act, and the 'holiness' of the chosen brethren. Throughout his massive oeuvre, Augustine is explicit about the fact that he is a confessing-self. Unlike the modern Western world, which, as we shall see below, has become in the words of Foucault 'a singularly confessing society' (Foucault 1980: 59) - a society where confession has become a constituent activity of most of its key practices - Augustine's world was one in which non-confessing modes of being were hegemonic. This does not mean, of course, that we encounter here a solitary confessor. As Brown (1967: 159) notes, Augustine associated himself with a community of people for whom 'the events of their inner life was everything'. The confessional demands were not nearly as severe or subtle as they became during the modern era, however. Augustine was the most extreme case during his time (Brown 1967: 60). His reflections are as much about the art of confession itself, than an act of confession. His life as confessor is still deeply steeped in the pagan world of late antiquity, and the element of self-implication is still largely absent from his work. It is also important to note that, unlike Rousseau centuries later, Augustine does not view the self as a solid, static entity, but characterized by its dynamic

relationship with the world and itself. It is these relations that Augustine seeks to discern. Because they are primarily dynamic, Augustine (still under the influence of an Aristotelian teleology), is concerned with the trajectory that the various dimensions of the self might assume: towards strength, unity, love, or truth.

In his critique of the pagan self, Augustine makes the statement that an ontological error is at the root of all the woe in the world: 'This then is the original evil: man regards himself as his own light'[24] (*City of God*: 14: 13). For Augustine, God is the origin of everything, and the light that lights up the world. The ontological error committed by the proud pagans is to see themselves in this light. For the sinfully proud, being and truth originates in the self alone. In taking itself to be the *raison d'être* of its own being, the self of the purest ontological conceit renounces its relations of reciprocity with and dependence on God, and, important for our purposes, others and the world. In the words of Augustine: this self lives 'by the rule of itself' (*City of God* 14: 3). Freed from all necessary relationships, this self becomes conditionless and absolute and grants itself universal status. It is interesting to note at this point, that in Augustine's eyes, he himself only overcame the ontological conceit by becoming a confessing Christian. Although he expressed a great deal of interest in Christianity before his famous conversion in his garden in Milan, it is not until he overcame his ontological conceit that conversion in the fullest sense became a possibility. For Augustine, the superiority of Christianity lay in its willingness to experience the world at its most basic level of perception, desire, and judgement.

While the desire for glory is generally held to be a vice in Christianity, Augustine states that those who seek glory, or even mere human praise, are 'anxious for the good opinion of enlightened judges' (*City of God* 5: 19). Augustine praises this version of *thymos* in the early Romans:

> They took no account of their own material interest compared with the common good…They resisted the temptation of avarice: they acted for the city's well-being with disinterested concern: they were guilty of no offence against the law, they succumbed to no sensual indulgence. By such immaculate conduct, they

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[24] There is a profound irony to be found in the fact that this criticism could also be levelled against the *modern* self. A comparison between Augustine and the post-structuralists suggests interesting possibilities, but cannot be pursued here.

labored towards honour, power and glory, by what they took to be the true way. (*City of God* 5: 15).

Yet at the same time, Augustine expresses the first doubt as to the suitability of the worldly stage as a sphere for the exercise of virtue, because of its inherent lack of stability. For example: at first the passion for glory gave rise to a desire for liberty, 'but when liberty had been won, such a passion for glory took hold of them, that liberty alone did not satisfy - they had to acquire dominion' (*City of God*: 5: 2). Augustine, like Plato before him, and Arendt and Nietzsche after him, recognizes the dilemma of an agon that loses sight of its limits. 'There is a slippery slope…from excessive delight in the praise of men to the burning passion for domination' (*City of God* 5: 19). Even if the noblest desire for fame seeks the praise of 'enlightened judges', it contains within it the germs of tyranny and strife. In the timeframe of the fall of the Roman Empire, the threat of a measureless agon became even more of a reality than in the post-Periclean Athens of Plato. This is an experience of the world as being 'too much with us'[25] that Augustine describes as 'massed thick' - a world that 'bore in upon' him and 'pressed him under' (*City of God* 5: 19). The ontology of conceit and the absence of self-reflection are inseparably linked in a mutually re-inforcing dynamic. For Augustine it amounts to an impossibility to come face to face with oneself, and still to affirm that one is the origin of Being, Truth or Goodness. Accordingly, unreflectiveness proliferates in those who dwell in the immediacy of their ontological error.

Augustine located in the self of ontological conceit a multifarious evil, a self that was constantly overstepping its limits in the relentless appropriation of the world. The only remedy to a self with such imperialistic tendencies would be to change the self's trajectory, to steer it back from its outward course to the inner depths to seek the *vox deus* within.

The long history of the self saw many prefigurings of selfhood since the first sparks in Augustine. Jacob Burckhardt writes that 'by the end of the thirteenth century Italy began to swarm with individuality, the ban on personality was dissolved' (Burckhardt as quoted by Howe, 1991:251).

But so was the link between man and world. The Christian-medieval legacy of the

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[25] A reference to William Wordsworth's famous poem 'The World is Too Much With Us'.

absolutization of life survived, and even intensified during the Reformation and the rise of *homo faber* in the industrial age. Hannah Arendt writes:

> The reason why life asserted itself as the ultimate point of reference in the modern age and has remained the highest good in modern society is that the modern reversal [between contemplative and active life] within the fabric of a Christian society whose fundamental belief in the sacredness of life has survived, and even remained completely unshaken by, secularization and the general decline of the Christian faith. (Arendt 1958: 313).

The modern prioritization of fabricating man over ascetic thinking man left unchanged the earlier Christian assumption that the human being, and not the world (whether in the form of cosmos or body politic), is immortal. Human life had come to re-occupy the position that the world formerly occupied in the ancient world. For this reason, Arendt, unlike thinkers like Blumenberg and Löwith, for example, do not see secularization as a decisive moment in the march to modernity.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, a self resembling the contemporary modern self is in the process of being constituted. The self begins to attain the dignity of a noun, and earlier notions of the self began to give way to the idea, or more correctly, the sentiment of the self. The new perception of internal space becomes a major social factor. Charles Taylor identifies the two most important facets of this new self as 'self-responsible independence' and 'recognised particularity' (Taylor 1989: 185). Both represent strands of radical reflexivity and moral inwardness, and both are forms of self-exploration and self-control with Augustinian roots.

A third factor, crucial for our purpose, must now be added, and that is the category of the will. Taylor (1989: 158) identifies this as a Stoic legacy: the capacity to give or withhold consent - the *synkathesis* of Chrysippus, or the *prohairesis* of Epictetus. The elevation of this ethic made commitment essential. No way of life is truly good, unless it is endorsed with the whole will. And once more, we find an Augustinian root. Augustine identifies sin with the refusal to 'will fully' (*Confessions* VIII: 9). The appeal of 'purer' ethical forms was, of course, that it laid down a challenge for the individual - he could pit his whole will against the more 'lax' rules of society.

An important factor comes into play at this stage: Central to any doctrine of salvation, and especially true of the Protestant reformation, is the idea that total commitment is not expected of the 'select few' only, but was demanded of all Christians simultaneously (Steck 1955: 146). This was the basis of their rejection of any kind of 'role', for role-playing implies division, something the new, self-identical Christian could not tolerate. But neither could he bear the new straitjacket of having to take responsibility for his own identity - an ideal that the post-modern philosopher Jean Baudrillard dismisses as 'vain and arrogant' (Baudrillard 1995: 86). The burden to be 'true' to one's faith' became the responsibility of every individual, and not only that of the church. The severity of this burden is indicated by what Odo Marquard identifies as 'compensatory strategies' (Marquard 1989: 35). They include a desire for absence (as testified to by the rise of the travel memoir), a general desire to escape into unindictability, and the need for anonymity. Surprisingly enough, one of these compensatory strategies was a boom in individuality, and from the eighteenth century onwards, 'the individual became ineffable' (Marquard 1985: 51). A super-individual is so strong that he becomes unindictable. Because the position of 'patient' gave man another opportunity to slip back into a 'role', anthropological nosologies appeared, and 'the birth of the clinic' occurred during the second half of the eighteenth century. But this 'escape route' would not be without its own particular traps and burdens.[26] The strategy with the most severe consequences for human freedom was however, the escape into the aesthetic. As Hannah Arendt has shown, the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century used art to 'throw a veil of sweetness and light' (Arendt 1954: 202) between themselves and the ugly social reality for which they themselves were responsible. This movement paved the way for the colonization of the political by the aesthetic, which culminated in the sublime horror of the Third Reich.

With the rejection of role-paying and the emergence of a unified self, a novel condition emerged that Hannah Arendt identified as the condition of 'worldlessness'. Ceasing to see the world as a possibility for a space in which relationships can be forged, only the inner world merits the concern of the modern subject. That only 'life itself is the highest good' (Arendt 1958: 291) becomes the uncontested truth of modernity. Since Descartes, philosophy has been almost exclusively occupied with the self, as opposed to interest in the greater world as had been the case with the Pre-Socratics or in men as they

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[26] See below for a discussion on Foucault and the demand for self-revelation.

are to be found in a particular role, such as that of warrior. The pre-occupation with the self signals a certain resentment of the world and its contingencies which was, if not completely absent from the ancient world - after all, philosophy was born during that moment of despair when the existing world forced a temporary retreat into the safer domain of the eternal Ideas - certainly not its defining characteristic. After his sojourn in the perfect city, the philosopher returned to the imperfect one to attempt change.

By contrast, modern man turned away from the world, but the possibility of gaining an eternal one, a hope still present in Augustine, disappeared. The modern mind is defined by its passion for introspection: 'the cognitive concern of consciousness with its own content…[The place where] man is confronted with nothing and nobody but himself' (Arendt 1958: 254). Arendt regards this self, unbound by any common experience or the relationship between man and world, as 'self-indulgent' (Arendt 1958: 255). Modern man is more than indifferent towards the world, however. As testified to by the entire history of the 'mind-body problem', the world - and by implication other people - appear as entities that threaten the individual and his peace of mind.

The concern with the well-being of the 'unencumbered self' is particularly obvious in the history of political philosophy. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition from Hobbes through the liberal-democratic thought of Mill and Bentham, right up to Rawls and Walzer, the individual and his well-being (of which his freedom from politics is of cardinal importance) became the sacred canon of politics.

It must be added that these thinkers, at least the liberal-democratic strain of thought, still paid heed to the world. The most unworldly thinker of the political canon that Arendt identifies is Karl Marx. While it is true that *prima facie*, he made no noteworthy addition to the psychologizing of man, Marx, like Rousseau and Robespierre, became a moralist of the public sphere. In Marx, it is still the private self, but now only in a social disguise (sic), that operates in the public realm. While this self is 'public' in that he operate and secures his 'life-interest in the public realm, he slowly turns the public realm into a merely social realm by fusing the distinction between private and public. Marxist man is 'natural', as well as 'moral', which makes him incompatible with the domain of politics according to Arendt's criteria.

But the death knell for politics would already have been rung by Rousseau. Jean-Jacques Rousseau - not the Rousseau presented by Ernst Cassirer[27] as the philosopher of a coherent political philosophy of the 'General Will' - but the Rousseau who moved from speculative thought to personal apology, a man intensely aware of his own existence, ushers in the modern age. Augustine, who wrote what we may today call 'a spiritual autobiography', put before his readers the story of his own spiritual waywardness, and as a result, Rousseau's *Confessions* may strike the reader as just another confession, resembling that of Augustine. But there is a cardinal difference between the two. Augustine was concerned more with *the* spirit than *his* spirit, and although his personal experiences are important as an exemplum of the workings of the Spirit, his purpose is not to tell his own personal history. In recounting his carnal experience and the incident of the theft of the pears, Augustine seeks to show that even the most apparently unworthy of God's creatures can still discover the mercy of God. It is available even to the decadent libertine that Augustine once was.

For the modern reader, there is precious little Augustine, and much more spiritual revelation in his Confessions. The importance of this work is to be found in the fact that Augustine committed his life to writing. This was of significant importance to the history of Western thought, because it meant that there were fleeting thoughts pinned down for later scrutiny, both by the author himself, and by later readers. The self became a problem to itself, and in the process a novel self was created, a self that would take many turns and manifest itself in many ways. But what would remain familiar in Augustine's confession-self to all subsequent readers, is a certain element of relentlessness.

The revelation of self, hesitantly presented in Augustine, takes a different turn fourteen centuries later. Gone is the link with the transcendent. Augustine confessed to God, Rousseau sometimes to a filled public house, packed with enemies, sometimes merely to the shifting selves he refused to acknowledge. Augustine sought truth, Rousseau, sincerity. For Augustine the self would represent a barrier to God, Rousseau publicly created a private self. Rousseau's purpose is rather to unburden himself of shame, and to justify what he deems weaknesses in the eyes of society - as Foucault puts it: 'One goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell' (Foucault 1978: 59). In doing this, the 'defined self' - a self that can fall back upon

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[27] Strictly speaking, there is a strong link between Rousseau's notion of the General Will, the death of the political and the rise of totalitarianism, but it cannot be pursued in depth at the present moment.

himself without reference to what is perceived as a 'hostile order' - comes into being.

In the *Confessions* Rousseau writes that the more he had seen of the world, the less he was able to conform to its manners. And Rousseau had seen much of life in a great cosmopolitan city, and he did not like what he saw.

Anticipating the nineteenth-century meliorists,[28] Rousseau believes that a distinct social milieu creates distinct social types. He employs the term *moeurs* to refer to the manners, morals and beliefs that, taken together, form a person's lifestyle. *Moeurs* are a mixture of custom, and emotion. Rousseau suggests the more the former prevails in a person, the less 'natural' or expressive the latter will be. By contrast, the fewer and weaker customs are, the more 'natural' and expressive individuals will be in their actions.

Moeurs are determined by the nature of work and needs, as well as the scope and nature of social relationships in the life of an individual. 'The state of man has its pleasure in which are derived from nature and born of his labours, is relations and his needs' (Rousseau 1968: 26). Rousseau creates two opposing forms of the social bond: In small towns, style of life is grounded in 'labour, fundamental necessity, and social ties with family and intimates' (Ellison 1985: 501), whereas in the cosmopolitan city, impersonal relations that entail a variety of public entertainments and the idleness to enjoy them characterized life. As the former was 'closer to nature' it embraced a greater degree of emotional expressiveness than the *moeurs* of the great city, that is dominated by custom. In the *First Discourse*, Rousseau notes that on the surface, the social bonds that were forged in the city appeared to be sources of pleasure. The appearance of sociability is conveyed by 'politeness of manners' (Rousseau 1964: 39). Rousseau, however, is troubled by what he finds, in typical romantic fashion, *beneath* the surface: 'Public things are either too uniform, or too artificial' (Rousseau 1979: 241). Rousseau maintains a typical Romantic faith in the 'repressed treasure' hidden in each individual that would gush out if only rigorous convention could be abandoned: 'Incessant politeness requires, propriety demands, incessant usage is followed, never one's own inclinations' (Rousseau 1964: 34). The artifice in the presentation of emotion creates a believable public life based on theatrical illusion. This is at the centre of Rousseau's attack on public life, and also, what makes it possible to classify him, surprisingly enough, as a conservative theorist (Ellison 1985: 503). For Rousseau is well aware that

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[28] The nineteenth-century meliorists, like George Eliot believed that environmental improvement could lead to moral improvement.

public actors have the imaginative power to revise the rules according to which they present themselves on the stage of the public street. The same freedom of play is possible in codes ruling dress and speech. Rousseau exhibits an almost Platonic resentment against the contingency and uncertainty attached to the field of appearance: 'Such changeable creatures are men! They vary their language as they vary their habit, and speak the truth only in night-gowns. When they are dressed, they are equipped only to deceive' (Rousseau 1972: 295). The theatrical mode of speech and dress forms the kernel of Rousseau's critique of the city. He describes in great detail the speech of the capital city as a convention that helped to create distinct realms of public and private life. Codes of public life enabled citizens to express feelings without having to define them first. In public speech, as Sennett (1977: 65) points out, speech 'signified in and of itself, rather than by reference to outside situations or the person of the speaker'. Public speech occurred not only in the theatre, but also at inns, in pubs - the very word is an abbreviation of 'public' - cafés and pedestrian parks. A 'matter of signs rather than symbols' (Sennett 1977: 65), public speech was detached from definitions of self and individual conduct with others, it was believable in for its own sake and thus gave people the freedom to invest emotion in public life without the feeling of being exposed. Private speech, on the other hand, did not occur in circumstances of diversity, nor did it assume the need for self-distance. Private speech revealed and symbolized the self and its feelings to others, thus the need for the speaker to define the self, or allowing it to be known by others was assumed.

Throughout his work, Rousseau develops a critique of speech as a code of public life. Early in his work he established the importance of language: 'Speech distinguishes man from beasts…It is the first social institution' (Rousseau as quoted by Ellison 1985: 511). It is important to note at this point that Rousseau explicitly refers to the social dimension of speech, and not like Aristotle did, to its *political* dimension. It is the moral dimension to speech that Rousseau feels suffers in a great city, and for this reason he opposes the introduction of theatre to small towns: It would 'substitute a theatrical jargon for the practice of the virtues' (Rousseau 1968: 68). For in the city, Rousseau feels, 'art has moulded our manners and taught our passions to speak in an affected language' (Rousseau 1964: 37). His attack on public speech is also reflected in his discussions of ancient Greece and Rome, and a common theme throughout his work is his fear of speaking in public. During such occasions he tended to 'drown in emotion' (Ellison 1985:

505), and his account of the meeting with the Academy of Sciences and his refusal to appear before the King of France and the Consistory of Geneva point to his rejection of public codes and his fear of loss of self in urban public life.

This fear is echoed by Saint-Preux, the 'true' hero of the *Nouvelle Heloise*. He finds that the 'paradoxes of city life troubles him deeply: 'This chaos offers me only a frightful solitude, in which a dismal silence reigns' (Rousseau 1970: 55). Saint-Preux remains distrustful and alone, hankering after the intimacy and warmth of the smaller Geneva. What makes this work of Rousseau unique is that it narrates for the first time a revolution of the heart. The novel centers around Julie, who has to choose between duty (the man her father wants her to marry) and her 'true love', Saint-Preux. Although the story centres around an apparently age-old dilemma, she is tragic in a new sense because she has to balance the demand to act autonomously against her own principles, but also because she has to act *authentically* against her own principles. She chooses duty (as everyone else does), but suffers the pain of leading an 'inauthentic life'. Julie describes her feelings during moments of doubt as 'a sudden revolution inside'. Rousseau makes it clear that the real 'Julie' disappears in her various roles as a loyal wife, a good mother, a generous hostess and a good master of her servants. The only compensatory strategy she is granted for having to act inauthentically, is the development of a 'beautiful soul' (Babbitt 1990: 121).

An element of sacrifice and renunciation inspires heroism at all times, but what makes Julie and Saint-Preux unique is that it was not the quest for undying fame that moved the lovers, but a certain purity of feeling. Love transmuted by suffering seems to lead to an exaltation of feeling that ordinary happiness cannot bring. Furthermore, their tale no longer inspires political heroism as those of Homer did, but plays a more didactic, morally uplifting role: Mme Roland thought that 'any woman who could read the book without being morally uplifted must have a soul of mud' (Mornet 1971:202).

In the later, darker, books of his *Confessions*, an additional fulcrum for Rousseau's need to confess manifests itself. These books exhibit a sense of paranoia, a self not simply cut off, or ostracized, but alienated from the rest of society. Paranoia[29] the delusion of self-reference is an exaggeration of the self as sole arbiter of order and

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[29] Paranoia, which literally translates as being 'besides the mind', only makes its first appearance in eighteenth century literature. Macbeth, for example, experiences the results of his *hubris*, of his upsetting

meaning. It has its roots in the Reformation's insistence on the unmediated relation to God, but as will be indicated below, this phenomenon reaches its apotheosis in the Romantic era, where the individual replaced divinity as the ultimate arbiter of order, meaning, as well as value. Paranoia, as Gutman (1988: 118) indicates, is historically definable. It only came into being with Rousseau and the Romantics, and its stance derives not from some illusionary conception of reality, but from an exaggerated sense of the self's importance. Feeling betrayed not only by his friends, but also by an entire continent, Rousseau seeks to justify his existence. He would present a self as he feels himself to be. He would hold this self up as an alternative to the one the public perceives: self-serving, immoral, asocial, and downright dangerous. As a defense mechanism against what he perceives to be a grand conspiracy, Rousseau must 'create' himself as a character with a history. This requires that he exhibits everything, exposes himself completely before a public gaze, even the

> petty details… since I have undertaken to reveal myself absolutely to the public, nothing about me must remain hidden or obscure. I must remain incessantly beneath his gaze, so that he [the reader] may follow me in all the extravagances of the heart and into every least corner of my life. Indeed, he must never lose sight of me for a single instant, for if he finds even the smallest gap in my story, the smallest hiatus, he may wonder what I was doing at that moment and accuse me of refusing to the whole truth. I am laying myself sufficiently open. (Rousseau 1953: 118).

The response to social accusation that Rousseau thus develops, is one of total exposure, and its revelations are to be subjected to an external and judging gaze. Throughout his work Rousseau refers to what Gutman (1988: 106) has called 'the triumvirate of compunction, external gaze and the need for complete disclosure':

> A change in my relations with Mama, of which I must speak, since, after all, I must tell everything. (Rousseau 1953: 184).

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of the cosmic order. The hallucinations that many of the characters of Poe's short stories, suffer by contrast, are deeply steeped in paranoia, particularly tales like 'The Man of the Crowd' and 'William Wilson'.

[There is] my indispensable duty to fulfill it in its entirety… If I am to be known, I must be known in all situations, both good and bad. (Rousseau 1953: 373).

In my memoir will be found the heart of Jean-Jacques, who my contemporaries have been so unwilling to recognize. (Rousseau 1953: 585).

Nowhere is the great shift in consciousness that took place in the many centuries that separate Rousseau and Augustine more visible than in the dividing strategies that Rousseau employs. This 'strategy of division' is seminal for the construction of the subject. Whereas, as we have seen, the division of place, namely the boundaries between *oikos* and *polis*, public and private, set the rules of identity in ancient Athens, in early modern France the division now occurs within the self. For a man or a woman to be constituted as subject, it is first of all essential that he or she be separated from the world, or the totality of the body politic. In the words of Gutman (1988: 106): 'For a 'me' to emerge, a distinction must be made between 'me' and 'non-me'. The self was now no longer in the world, but a subject over and against the world.[30] But Rousseau does not restrict division to man and world. It becomes a primary tool in his quest to explain his own existence. He divides, and then sets up oppositions (less neatly than his critics usually suppose) between head and heart, nature and society, self and other, nature and civilization, and country and city. The mind was of course already a thing apart from the body, the eighteenth century is of course the 'Age of Reason'. Rousseau sought to rectify the overvaluation of reason by emphasising the emotions. There is a genuinely new conception of self that shapes Rousseau's presentation of himself. For the first time the emotional life is seen as the basis for individuality: 'I felt before I thought' (Rousseau 1953: 19). In this single sentence Rousseau recognizes both his unique sensibility, and prescient recognition that it is through time that the self becomes what it is. This is no mere superficial curiosity, but as Foucault (1970) demonstrates, the constitutive principle of the nineteenth century *episteme* became temporality and causation. Rousseau's description of his own development is an important element in the transformation of an *episteme* of the Enlightenment, based on spatial placement, to the later *episteme* that was

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[30] See in this respect the research done by J.H. van den Berg: *Divided existence and Complex Society*, Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1974. His work traces procedures that he sees as the main

only in the first stages of development during the eighteenth century. In a famous passage Rousseau speaks of a life governed by the emotions:

> The sword wears out its sheath, as it is sometimes said. That is my story. My passions have made my life, and my passions have killed me. What passions, it may be asked. Trifles the most childish things in the world. Yet they affected me as much as if the possession of Helen, or the throne of the universe, had been at stake. (Rousseau 1953: 199).

The valorisation of feeling, as the ultimate hermeneutic authority, of course has its roots in the Reformation, but it is with Rousseau that it first becomes modern and Romantic. It should, however, not be assumed that he simply dismissed the clarity of thought so highly prized in the 'Age of Reason': For 'Feelings come quicker than lightning and fill the soul, but they bring me no illumination; they burn and dazzle me. I feel everything and see nothing' (Rousseau 1953: 113). Even if the Romantics seemed to reject some of the Enlightenment's most cherished notions, and acted as apologists for traditional religion against excessive rationalism, their defence of the validity of original thought, and the freedom of the moral individual, mirrors the rationalists' challenge to the individual to think for himself (*Sapere aude*!). Rousseau is aware of his own uniqueness like no other philosopher before him: 'I am unlike anyone I have ever met, I will even venture to say that I am like no one else in the world' (Rousseau: 1953: 17). Rousseau completes the Enlightenment rather than subverts it.[31] In the *Confessions*, by dividing himself, he constitutes himself as a subject that knows, and an object that is known. He lists and explores the experiences he had, and in doing so traces the development and boundaries of his own particular consciousness. In this process the Romantic type is created: The recounting of a history of the self in such a way that it concurrently creates itself and confirms, self-consciously, what it has created. This means that only the self is now the source of his own story. Autobiography, and even biography, becomes a private

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constitutive factors of the modern self, techniques that developed throughout the eighteenth century. Slightly more phenomenological in approach than Foucault, their work shares many similarities.
[31] As Solomon (1988: 14) points out, the real anti-Enlightenment philosopher would be David Hume (1711-1776). But even he shares with Rousseau a profound belief in the capabilities of the individual and scepticism towards received knowledge and traditional authority.

affair. The birth of the author becomes the death of the storyteller.[32] The self that Rousseau creates, becomes 'objectified' to such an extent, that it becomes possible to examine it as if it is an object apart from its own consciousness - like a piece of wax, for instance.

One of Rousseau's strangest works is Rousseau *Juge de Jean-Jacques*, a work in which Jean-Jacques becomes the subject of an investigation. Led by a nameless Frenchman, a representative of what might be called the 'public gaze', an inquisition subjects Jean-Jacques to an inquiry. Drinkwater (1963: 766) calls this lesser known work a 'precursor to Kafka's *The Trial'*. Through what Foucault calls his 'anti-confession', Rousseau becomes the first author who plays with the two senses through which one becomes a subject - the one being a subject to be discussed, the other a subject in the sense of being in an inferior position with regards to a discourse of power - and a third form of übersubjectivity through which the subject recognizes its own subjectivity. There is a clear link between Rousseau's two defining sensibilities, a clearly defined self, and the emergence of the emotional life as defining characteristic. The two exist in a reciprocally defining relationship. Rousseau has this to say about the activity of writing his life's history:

> I have only one faithful guide on which I can count: the succession of feelings that marked the development of my being, and thereby recall the events that acted upon it as cause and effect. I easily forget my misfortunes,[33] but I cannot forget my faults, and still less my genuine feelings. The memory of them is too dear ever to be effaced from my heart. I may omit or transpose facts, or may forget dates, but I cannot go wrong about what I have felt, or what may feelings have led me to do, and these are the chief subjects of my story. The true object of my confessions is to reveal all my inner thoughts exactly in all the situations of my life. It is the history of my soul that I have promised to recount, and to write it faithfully, I have need of no other memories; it is enough if I enter again into my inner self, as I have done till now. (Rousseau 1953: 262).

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[32] See chapter 4.
[33] This appears not to be the case, and would contradict his claim of being able to recount everything from his life, and to reveal himself completely before his audience.

What Rousseau confesses is 'who' he is - the individuated self called Jean-Jacques, - because he has had a succession of emotions prior to his engagement with the world. If, as Foucault indicates, there has been an immense labour to turn man into a subject, that is, into a definable personage in the social order, and an individuated self so that he is caught up inescapably in the chains of power, then Rousseau's *Confessions* has provided en essential *technè* for the enterprise. Far from liberating man [who] is 'born free' and 'everywhere else in chains,' Rousseau forms his own 'mind-forged manacle'[34] through his *Confessions*. Here is Foucault's famous statement on confessing man:

> Western man has become a confessing animal. Hence a metamorphosis in literature: we have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, centering on the heroic or the marvellous narrations of trials of bravery and sainthood, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage…The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement. (Foucault 1978: 61)

The anthropological turn of Kant and by implication, modernity, is tied to the production in knowledge of a new portrayal of human being: Man. According to Foucault he is but a recent invention, a fashion that did not exist before the end of the eighteenth century. Classical rationalism and Renaissance humanism were certainly able to allot human beings a privileged position in the order of the world, but they were not able to conceive of 'Man'. In claiming man's recent invention, Foucault is pointing to his modern epistemological identity as the 'being such that knowledge will be attained in him that makes all other knowledge possible' (Foucault 1966: 318). Accordingly, man is both the difficult object of knowledge and the sovereign subject of knowing, a being whose nature is to know 'nature and itself, in consequence, as a natural being' (Foucault 1966: 318). The birth of this new figure of man and his identity is determined by his modern constitution as the being who is describable as the one who 'produces, who lives, and who speaks' (Bernauer 1985: 370). This fabrication of identity is the result of three key fields of modern knowledge: philology, biology and economics, and their corresponding

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[34] A reference to another Ronantic, William Blake.

empirical fields. These three fields, through which man sought enlightenment, became however the very domains in which man's finitude is confirmed: a being forced to work by his very condition, under the sentence of death and trapped in the density of language. The articulated fields of knowledge exist in - in the words of Bernauer (1985: 375) - 'a state of interminable cross-reference with man's finite nature itself'. The very theme of Kant's epistemological philosophy is of course man's strange condition as transcendental-empirical duality. As transcendental, he bears the privilege of being constructor of the world while as empirical being he is subject to its forces.

Foucault sees this strange definition of man as a challenge for man's transformation. Existing within greater histories on whose calendar man is but a peripheral phenomenon, the utopian impulse in modernity hopes for a time in which man would be able to harmonize his life with that of production, life and language. The human sciences paint man's finitude within the context of an endlessness and consequently, they take on both an ideal of achieving positivistic, value-free knowledge, and the task of human redemption (Foucault 1966: 219-320). Foucault's early work is a study of how certain features of modernity created a 'fragile' human being that required the unique care of the clinic and the asylum. Psychology, for example, was rooted in the desire to uncover the mysterious confines of a silent, threatening 'mental illness' so that reason could be safely prised from it.

The proliferation of techniques of subjectification was largely linked to the problems generated by the rise of capitalism. As wealth was accumulated in increasing quantities in workhouses, factories and ports, it became increasingly necessary to replace the old system with its lack of definition and tolerated illegalities with something 'more regular, more effective, more constant, and more detailed in its effects' (Foucault 1979: 39). Simultaneously, the increasing emphasis on productivity and growth required that the bodies of the workers be rendered disciplined and docile to maximize their utility and to integrate them in the rigid mechanized programs.[35] In addition, the increasing concentration and utilisation of larger populations required a means of constituting and controlling larger groups of people in a manner that optimized their utility and mastered the potentially resistant powers of the newly urban mass. Foucault calls the sum of these mechanisms, institutions, techniques, and discourses that developed to track, survey,

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[35] Karl Marx of course famously referred to this phenomenon as the 'alienation of the worker from himself.

regulate and constitute both individual and population (as well as making them more visible and productive) 'bio-power' (Foucault 1980: 99). The growing emphasis on achieving maximum utilisation and control of life was accompanied by what Foucault has called 'the art of light and the visible' (Foucault 1979: 171). He found that during the Classical age of modernity institutions such as schools, military camps, housing projects and so on began to be constructed with greater emphasis on the principle of visibility. Groups were organized in such a way as to facilitate inspection. The perfusion of the 'general gaze' was not enough - Foucault states that the threshold of visibility was lowered:

> For a long time ordinary individuality remained below the threshold of description. The disciplinary methods lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and domination. (Foucault 1979: 191).

Paradoxically, at the very same time that the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity, the production of the individual becomes possible. Within an accepted range, the normalising gaze identifies, separates, orders and thus helps to constitute differences, making possible the 'continuous individualising pyramid' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 211). Particularities are registered as deviations from the registered norms. The gaze manifests a relentless 'will to truth' that seeks to transform the atoms of bodies into objects of knowledge to be examined, classified, ordered around or excluded. Light, vision and visibility are never neutral components in this process. One of the most striking features of normalizing power is the role played by 'mechanisms that coerces by means of observation' (Foucault 1979: 170). Observation and illumination ensure the desired behaviour. For this reason Foucault compares these techniques with 'the telescope, the lens and the light beam' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 208). As Hannah Arendt pointed out, these tools were central in the development of knowledge forms that facilitated the ordering and utilization of the physical world and the rise of *homo faber*. In a similar fashion the observatories of mankind - of which the Panopticon is the most infamous - made it possible to constitute human beings as objects of power. Foucault argues that with the rise of panoptic disciplinary power, it is no longer simply the deviation, visible error, or crime that is judged, but also the drives, instincts, passions,

and desires that lurk beneath the visible: 'these shadows *lurking behind the case itself*' (Foucault 1979: 17, my emphasis). The judgement of the disciplinary gaze is generally characterized by a depth dimension: it deciphers, compares, measures and analyzes all with a view (!) to make visible.

Surprisingly, Foucault finds the object of disciplinary power in the soul. Far from being a leftover from a more religious age, the soul acts as general referent to disciplinary power: that which is educated, trained, punished, normalized, and identified. It is codified and inhabits the body in which it is produced. The soul is the most supreme form of subjection, because it buries the effects of power deep within the flesh of the subject's skin.[36] A form of power quite consonant with, though not identical to the deployment of the disciplinary gaze, the 'deep self' is driven by a 'hermeneutics of suspicion that delivers it to infinite depths, meaning behind meaning. On endless circles of self-reflection the modern self attempts to discern the deep truths hidden behind the surfaces of everyday existence. 'For the disciplined man, however, no detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power it wishes to seize' (Foucault 1979: 140). If the panopticon aims at pure light, then what one might call the *autopticon*, or the deep self, aims at an object that constantly moves beyond reach, at best a 'dark shimmer' (Foucault 1980: 151). Because this is a truth that continually recedes with every gaze, it demands a confession that can never end. Regarding similarities between the strategy that produced the panopticon, and the one that produced the autopticon, it can be stated that both create a self that is related to itself through a colonized, codified and continuous self-reflection - a self-reflection that normalizes as it observes. This is done via self-definitions constituted by hegemonic discourses that make divisions between certain 'desirable' characteristics and those that are isolated as 'undesirable' or 'other'. The conception of the self as deep-harbouring hidden truths and secret circuitous causalities, that is tightly bound up with confessional strategies, serves to multiply disciplinary holds over the self. The overlap between the greater disciplinary strategies (that form the main object of study in *Discipline and Punish*) and the more private self-discipline of the deep self (addressed, among others, in *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self* at Dartmouth) appears as the background to *Madness and Civilization.* It is visible in the modern treatments of

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[36] A theme that fascinated Franz Kafka. *Cf. In the Penal Colony.*

madness as evinced by the nineteenth century 'moral methods' which operated through 'that psychological inwardness where modern man seeks both his depth and his truth' (Foucault 1973: 182). With the birth of the asylum, guilt was used to produce a deeper and more detailed self-consciousness and responsibility. Foucault noted that our juridical practices have moved towards an examination of 'the desires, drives and deep personal tendencies that lurk beneath the relevant acts' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 179). But in no locus of discipline is depth more important than in sexuality.

According to Foucault, depth is not an essential quality of selves. It is a dimension that comes into being as a correlate of a variety of technologies that operates upon the self. Together with the formation of the soul, depth appears as a result of the discourse that deploys sex as 'the secret' that is signified by all desires, acts and thoughts as a 'universal signified' (Foucault 1980: 154). The visible manifestations of selves thus refer to something *beneath* themselves, to a true meaning. Unlike the Greeks, for whom the *surface* was the main field of operation, the modern subject experiences the visible as a barrier between himself and the true meaning that he seeks. The modern self becomes deep, not simply because he is constituted as a being with depth, but because he is constantly directed towards depth. Depth promises to yield the 'secrets that will offer us health, freedom and intelligibility' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 69). With the depth dimension comes the 'therapeutic' compulsion to express:

> [One should] tell what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten, what one is thinking, and what one thinks when one is not thinking. (Foucault 1980: 60).

Failure to comply with the demand to 'illuminate' and explore involves a terrible fate: the perpetuation of our 'repression', 'inauthenticity' and 'ignorance' towards our 'essential nature'.

One should beware however, from reducing depth as a 'trap' to lure us into subjectivity. For no one can speak from a position outside of this subjectivity. This dimension was colonized at the inception of subjectivity, and is continually penetrated by a great variety of power strategies. Truth is not merely 'the child of protracted solitude' (Foucault 1980: 131), and has no pure origins 'within'. On the contrary, like Hannah Arendt, Foucault describes truth as 'a thing of this world, it is produced only through

multiple forms of constraint' (Foucault 1980: 131). When we examine our inner world in order to discover the thing we have been made into, we only perpetuate and intensify our condition as modern subjects. Only a soul can aim to find the soul. The meaning and content of depth are not established permanently, however. As power burrows into the self to discover truth, the task of discovery proliferates in depth as the dimension of the hidden that is never depleted. Foucault illustrates this at the hand of the vocabulary of 'latency' that is employed in modern therapeutic discourse. According to the therapeutic industries, a certain 'latency' obscures the truth of sex from the self. No one, no matter how severe the demand to dig deep into the self, can delve deep enough. This privilege is reserved for 'the other who knows' (Foucault 1980: 70). These 'masters of truth' include psychologists, psychiatrists, various counsellors and therapists who will decipher 'who we really are'. A plethora of discourses develop that present us with an enormous range of classifying possibilities for the 'truths' thus extracted. Depth is the dimension in which we are identified as objects for these exercises. And as illustrated by the case of Herculine Barbin, unlike the classical public sphere, depth is not a dimension tolerates ambiguity, difference, uncertainty, or anything with the prefix 'pseudo-'.[37]Far from liberating ourselves when we look for the 'truth about sex', we do not slip out of its power any more than Rousseau escapes authority through his Discourses. Instead, we are 'fastened to the deployment of sexuality that has lifted up from the deep within us a sort of mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected - the dark shimmer of sex' (Foucault 1980). This 'shimmer' darkens all the surfaces that it consumes. According to Blakeney (1990: 85) 'we entered into a Faustian bargain when we, in exchange for sexual liberation, gave up our Miranda Escobedo - the right to remain silent' (my emphasis). Foucault himself is no less critical: [We] 'exchanged life in its entirety for sex itself' (Foucault 1980: 156).

Foucault thus finds in the interrogation of man's interiors, the questioning of the depths below the surfaces of the bound and circumscribed realities, the quintessential operation of modern power. Depth, the dimension that promised freedom the Augustinian self, is for Foucault the dimension of subjugation. The constellation of absolute, fixed and given truths and a utopian faith that hinges on the progressive discovery of these truths, is a promise that lures people deeper and deeper into the prison

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[37] The public sphere on the other hand is founded on a lie - the Socratic *pseudos* that does not get resolved in any of the Platonic dialogues.

of subjectivity and the reign of pure light. This crystalline, motionless transparency, where even internal organs would be visible, might have been an Augustinian vision of heaven, since it would make the need to confess superfluous, but for Foucault it means subjectification (in both senses of the word, of being made a subject and being subject to something) and for Arendt - politicide.

It should come as no surprise that as soon as a developed 'Interior Man' appeared on the scene, so did theodicy. It happened once before. For it is only with enlightenment that theodicy becomes a possibility. It is the very source of Plato's moralist censure of the poets in the *Republic*: Given his understanding of God as Good, Plato states, that we must devise an interpretation of tragic literature that shows that the hero properly deserved his fate as chastisement by a good and just God, otherwise it must be censored. In other words, just as is the case with modern theodicy, divine justice must be vindicated in the face of the existence of evil – human suffering must be rendered as theodicy. But the Platonic theodicy turned out to be a negative one:[38] Socrates paid for his life for his insolence. God was safe for the time being.

Modern theodicy only became formally vocalized in philosophy in 1710 with Leibniz. According to Odo Marquard, the Leibnizian theodicy implied an important re-definition of man: Man was now to be party to a legal action, and in no other role than God's prosecutor. Leibniz valiant purpose was to exonerate God from having created a hell instead of an earth. His defence – so well satirized in Voltaire's *Candide*[39] – is of course well known: 'Creation is the art of the best possible'. That is why, when talking about God, the question of history inevitably comes up. The answer that Leibnitz provides is simply that the end justifies the means: 'the optimal as end, justifies evils as the means of its possibility' (Marquard 1989: 47). But this approach fails, for according to Marquard, it is precisely this exoneration that stirs doubts about God's goodness. For in a time when the Devil became a mere employee of systematic doubt (after Descartes) and no longer had the substantial status of a real entity to be believed in, God's virtue could also be doubted. Man thus had to make a choice between God the Good and God the Creator. God must be saved from Himself: In order to preserve God as good, he must

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[38] Since the Greeks had a concept of fate and a just cosmic order, the death of Socrates could be seen as a natural consequence of events preceding it. His death may be seen as a just result following sacrilegious behaviour and might therefore even have entrenched the belief of the rest of the polis in the just order.

[39] It must be pointed out that Voltaire oversimplified Leibniz's argument, and may even be guilty of setting up a straw man argument in order to exploit the comic potential of such a position.

be liberated from a world which clearly – is not. In Marquard's words: 'For the sake of divine goodness, God's non-existence must be allowed, or even insisted upon' (Marquard 1989: 54). From now on, Man would take the burden of creation upon himself – Man must redeem God. As from now on, the world was something to be made. Vico was the first to suggest that man can make history. Enter the optimism of the modern age! Man, however, not only usurped God's functions, but also the position of the one that is accused in theodicy. The juridification of philosophy not only remained, but intensified, and man remained the prosecutor he had once been under the original theodic position, but with one very important difference: He was now the defendant as well. The result of this 'tribunal' (Marquard: 1981) was an intensified need for self-justification. Whereas in Christianity man is spared the role of the absolute accused, because of God's grace, in modernity man advances to the positions of both the absolute prosecutor and the absolute defendant. And the absolute defendant is without either grace or mercy. *Lupus est homo homini.*

Nowhere was the pattern of tribunal mania clearer than in the events of the French Revolution. This was the moment when 'men became aware that an event could result from action, and even from the conscious intention of man' (Arendt 1968a: 67). With the collapse of traditional hierarchies and points of reference, and the resulting euphoria of a free beginning in history there is a tendency to see every obstacle, every limit, as the result of an opposing will.

At this stage, the ideologues of conspiracies attempt to resolve this paradox by posting the fiction of a sovereign will behind the petrified necessity of history. By doing this they continue to pay homage to the inaccessible treasure of human freedom. But because their conception of freedom had been transformed by now, they vainly try to find a freedom that is no longer there. By transferring the domain of action from the world to a speculative sphere, they are no longer looking for the free agent of action, but an Invisible Author, who weaves his intrigues, and manoeuvres his subjects according to a secret plan. This allows them to exorcize by means of a 'total knowledge' and an 'infallible plan', the indeterminacy and potential tragic dimensions of history. As Arendt puts it:

In this French Revolution, the Abbé Barruel wrote, everything was foreseen, premeditated, constituted, resolved upon, instituted: everything was the result of

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the most profound wickedness, since everything was prepared and brought about by men who alone held the threads of conspiracies which had long been woven in secret societies. (Arendt 1968: 64).

With the French Revolution came a terrifying example of how 'virtue becomes vice/ being misapplied'.[40] What began as an attempt to end tyranny and political exploitation, became a moral crusade against the exploitation of the poor and unfortunate. The roots for this crusade were impeccably moral: Saint-Just and Robespierre were justly deeply moved by the injustices suffered by the poor of France. Arendt recognizes the legitimacy of such feelings, but holds that pity is too diffuse and limitless a feeling to serve as a platform for political action. In their rush to achieve justice for all, selflessness, honesty and pity for the unfortunate became the chief virtues. Purity of heart and a passionate hatred of hypocrisy also became essential. In this climate of opinion, one not only had to 'display one's virtues in public, but also had to act in such a manner which left no room for the merest suspicion about the goodness of one's motive' (Dossa 1982: 12). Virtue in the 'ordinary sense' was insufficient - one had to bare one's soul and one's most private thoughts to public scrutiny. In addition to the demand for baring the soul lay the injuction that the leaders of the Revolution should be good, honest and pure.

For Arendt, as we shall see, human motives are by their very nature clothed in darkness, and sometimes not even available to the actors themselves. The demand that political motives should be morally pure, was to the detriment of both realms, the private and the public. From Arendt's point of view, Robespierre's demand that motives should be clear, unquestionably moral and pure, denied the distinction between the private and the public.

This was to the detriment of both: In Robespierre's Rousseauian terms there is no public self: There is only the unified, undivided self-identical to itself, that presents itself as such for public inspection. As a result, public ordeals of self-inspection and public protestations of honesty and 'purity of soul' become necessary for all public actors. That it is this naked public self, stripped of all his 'artificial' masks that invite public approval, only ostensibly frees him, because the suspicion of hypocrisy, the inkling that the subject

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[40] Shakespeare, W. *Romeo and Juliet*, IV.iv.

under scrutiny may be adopting an act, can never entirely be eliminated. Since one cannot even completely trust the authenticity and veracity of one's own motives, – as a wiser Romantic[41] once said, 'I cannot see my entire self, and God forbid that I ever should' - those of others are likely to inspire even less trust and confidence. To perceive even the least resistance was to identify a hidden hostility, which must be exposed so that it can be confronted in broad daylight. The will to unmask a hidden enemy becomes an irresistible movement that escapes the grasp of action – as though

> [a] greater force than that of men had intervened at the very moment when men began to affirm their greatness.[42] (Arendt 1979: 119)

The rise in the demand for justification did not begin with the French Revolution, however. Nor was it its apotheosis. Its roots could be traced to the Reformation and the Protestant demand for 'redemption by good works'. But it certainly reached a pivotal moment in the practice of the French Revolution of treating everyone as suspect until he or she had proven his or her innocence. This practice found its parallel in German idealism: To quote Heine: 'As in France every privilege, so in Germany every thought had to justify itself'. The philosophical Jacobins gathered around the *Critique of Pure Reason* to purify the *a priori* from the *a posteriori.* Only when the *a priori* and by implication the human subject, is justified, it receives its stamp of approval and the right to be in history and science at all. R. C. Zaehner justly remarks: 'What we should ask of theologians is not a theology of the death of God…but a theology of the death of the self, the ego who has 'got religion' because he thinks he has found the 'true' self' (Zaehner 1970: 208).

Theodicy's pragmatic variation recently appeared in the communications theory of Habermas and Apel – theories that deflect philosophical concerns of justice away from articulations and defence of principles unto the justifications and conversational forums within which the demand arises for unconstrained dialogue in the 'ideal speech situation'. Habermas's attempts are laudable since it is intended to highlight the normative possibilities implied in dialogue, but at the same time the severe demand that dialogue

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[41] Goethe in *Conversations with Eckermann.* 10 April 1829. (Sutherland 1978).
[42] The greatness in question refers to the political potential originally present at the onset of the revolution - the promise that here the opportunity to *begin* something presented itself.

should be free of any constraints hamper the project of justice, since it presupposes an exposed subject similar to the one demanded by Rousseau. Discourse ethics could benefit from an Arendtian articulation of justified constraints. Rather than to look for wholly external constraints, it would do well to look for performative commitments and role-taking limits on actual discourse.

Taking her cue from the Greeks, Arendt dismisses the inner life of the subject, firstly, because she believes that knowledge of the inner world is unattainable, and secondly, as being unsuitable for the public realm, because 'feelings, passions and emotions can no more be part of the world of appearances than our inner organs' (Arendt 1958: 31). Time-bound, limited, and important for our purpose, 'never unique' - for as Arendt says, 'If this inside were to appear, we would all look alike'[43] (Arendt 1958: 152), the inner self must remain behind in the darkness of the oikos when one steps outside in the bright spotlight of the public sphere to act. To this inwardness 'no other has access, because the human heart is a very dark place' (Arendt 1977: 146). This explains her fierce criticism of romantic expressivism in politics. According to Villa (1999: 137), Wolin, Connolly and all other political agonists that refuse the distinction between public and private collapse the public world back into the self which entails the destruction of politics for its own sake. In true romantic fashion, Wolin insists that politics should flow from 'the common being of human beings' (Wolin 1986: 303). Such a statement begs the question of why it does not. For far from a politics of 'multiple selves' and 'expressive action', politics stubbornly refuses to make a comeback, and what passes for political activity today is more determined by economics than ever before in history. Luc de Middelaar's diagnosis of the 'politicide' of the contemporary age is closer to the actual political situation.

Although they are fiercely trying to combat the effects of the disappearance of politics, the attempts by political scientists like Wolin and Connolly in trying to revive it *is no longer politics* in the Arendtian sense of the word. Bringing the inner world into politics is no more than a symptom of a certain type of 'curiosity-seeking' (Dossa: 1989: 107). For Arendt, the knowledge that emerges in the therapeutic industry's sustained attempts to uncover the 'true' self, generates very little besides 'pseudo-knowledge'

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[43] The disappearance of the public sphere and the pre-occupation with the private generates an experience of *ennui*, a theme that runs like a thread through most of the early twentieth century writers. T.S. Eliot, for example has Alfred J. Prufrock 'measure out [his] life with coffee spoons' (Eliot in Norton 1970:1233).

(Dossa 1989: 107). Furthermore, it violates the one small domain that each man can call his own, the place that harbours his innermost secrets which are legitimately private and should remain so. As Lionel Trilling (1971: 307) notes, the mere word 'authentic' bears traces of violence: *'Authentheo*; to have power over, also to commit a murder. *Authentes*: not only a master, but also a perpetrator, a murderer, even a self-murderer, a suicide' (Trilling 1971: 131). Harold Rosenberg identifies the different impulses that animate the public domain of appearance and the psychological dimension of the private sphere neatly when he says 'What makes psychoanalysis the opposite of tragedy,[44] is that the sufferer hands over to another - the analyst - the process of disclosing who he is, instead of struggling towards self-knowledge through action' (Rosenberg 1970: 171). As we have seen, for Arendt the 'real' self is the public self, the self that has the courage to risk knowledge about himself in the public sphere. Character is revealed in, or inferred from, the action that takes place on the stage, which is why Aristotle placed character secondary to action. Tragedy, far removed from the 'art should imitate life' criteria, is not concerned with 'people as they are', but depicts the nobler and more distinguished part of every character.

The decline of politics in the era of the social is further attested to by the difficulty of major contemporary political thinkers, some of them even among Arendt's greatest admirers, to do justice to her greatest insight. The main idea behind Kateb's book is a certain dismay at the fact that she is not 'friendly towards representative democracy' (Kateb 1984: 284). For Arendt preferred the position of equality in councils and elementary republics to the hierarchical relationship of representative democracy, 'between those who govern and those who expect to be governed' (Arendt 1979: 84). For her, mere voting is not a discharge of political responsibility, because this would imply that political identity is envisioned in terms of a private capacity without ever allowing citizens the opportunity of *being* republicans and *acting* as citizens. Arendt sees politics as a way of life, and not merely as the arbitrary exercise of a civil right. According to Bernhauer (1986: 19), Kateb's faith in representative democracy is rooted in a non-political source, 'that is bound up with his confidence in the continuing vitality of an absolute moral order' (Bernhauer 1986: 19). This is testified to by Kateb's rejection of Arendt's delineation of the privately moral and publicly political realms. Far from being

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[44] See chapter 1.

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an elitist revolt, Arendt is fully aware of the allure of the private shell, and how current political operation discourages political participation.

It may be recalled that, like Lacan and others in the post-structuralist tradition,[45] Arendt decenters the sovereign subject's intention and will by introducing a second self substantially beyond the control of the intending 'I' or self-identical ego which makes its appearance in the thoroughly intersubjective arena of public discourse. The possibility of emergence of this second self is dependent on the cultivation of an (in our time) much neglected virtue: civility. As Machiavelli indicated, this virtue is not only one of civilization's most elegant assets, but it also has a pragmatic function which is to make possible the collective project of living together well. For civility is a supremely political goal – it concerns getting along with diverse others, not reaching the truth or reaching a grand moral idea. Mark Kingwell (1983: 249) identifies two important aspects of civility. The first is refraining from saying all that one could say. Civility thus demands a kind of insincerity. Everyday examples are legio: You run into a friend you have not seen for a while and notice that her new hair colour does not suit her. Your judgement is that she looks ugly, and this is a sincere expression of your belief. The Categorical Imperative demands that you mention this. Nevertheless you hold your peace about the hair and comment instead on her shoes.

The essence of civil behaviour is not lying, but refraining from telling the truth in inappropriate contexts. The courts are of course abound with examples where deliberate silence would be considered a lie, but in the case cited above, the silence is motivated by pressing concerns other than truth-telling, such as smooth social interaction, and the feelings of the friend. Civility should contribute to easy interaction and a regard for the claims of diverse others. In the nineteenth century Lord Chesterfield advised his son as follows:

Be wiser than others if you can,
But do not tell them that you are (James 1976: 176).

In contrast to the naïveté of the Habermassian model, which assumes that all differences can be resolved if enough of the 'right' talk continues for long enough, a discourse of civility that deserves that name should realize that there are deep differences in any

society that are irreconcilable and that the appropriate aims of the matter should be mediation, not resolution. (Kingwell 1983: 251). Mediation, like diplomacy, requires restraint, as well as a willingness to negotiate. This commitment is not to the force of the better argument, as Habermas's ideal speech situation would have it, but rather to a pragmatic desire for order. As pointed out above, a philosophical discourse of truth-seeking that values sincerity above everything else, is inappropriate for the domain of politics proper.

The second principle that Kingwell identifies is 'keeping one's distance', or simply – tact. This principle can be illustrated by Schopenhauer's famous anecdotal version of the *Pathos der Distanz*:

> On a cold winter's day, a number of porcupines huddled together closely in order through their mutual warmth to prevent one another from being frozen. But they soon felt the effects of their quills on one another, which made them again move apart. Now when the need for warmth once more brought them together, the drawback of the quills was repeated so that they were tossed between two evils, until they had discovered the proper distance from which they could best tolerate one another. Thus the need for society which springs from the emptiness and monotony of people's lives drives them together, but their many unpleasant and repulsive qualities and insufferable drawbacks once more drive them apart. The mean distance which they finally discover and which enables them to endure being together, is politeness and good manners. (Kingwell 1993: 250)

The fable suggests a kind of interpretative equilibrium between strong individual claims and the demands of living together and acting in concert. The porcupines found the ideal distance, which enabled them to pursue both individual and common goals. Gadamer would identify this as 'interpretive tact'. He gives us a useful definition:

> By tact we understand a particular sensitivity and sensitiveness about situations, and how to behave in them, for which we cannot find any knowledge from general principles. Hence an important part of tact is its inexplicitness and inexpressibility. (Gadamer 1980: 16).

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[45] See chapter 1.

In the modern world, however, this quality is increasingly lost as the common world which once made men's lives fully human is pushed back and they are forced to fall back upon the most basic of what they have in common: their subjective needs and feelings. They are now less worldly, and yet their 'naturalness' is not a happy one, because they have lost their attachment to the earth as well. Modern discoveries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have stripped the earth of its magical endlessness to a small, and as we increasingly realize in our time – a vulnerable planet. The change of stable property to fluid wealth, which began in the age of the Reformation, only accelerated to such an extent, that as Lyotard puts it, acceleration and growth for growth's sake seems to be the only ideology currently available to us. Not only have economic changes driven man back into being a mere member of his species, but modern man, left only with the ideals of production and consumption, is now being threatened by redundancy by his very own mechanical creations. In truly tragic fashion, man has become his own worst enemy – a wolf to himself. And with the loss of the world of plurality, the gnawing doubts of skeptics of the seventeenth century, who feared a kind of Man able to manipulate nature, but never able to understand anything except the structures of his own mind were realized.
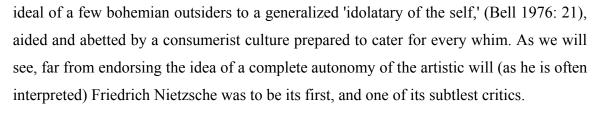
Together with this dilemma, the life of *animal laborans* took a new turn. According to cultural critics like David Bell (1976), Richard Sennett (1978) and Philip Rieff (1973) normative ideas such as the principles behind duty, morality and traditional authority have gradually been replaced with an ethos that stresses intimacy and feeling. As Foucault has pointed out, a public vocabulary of ethic gradually became replaced with the metaphors of health and sickness. In the sphere of work, the traditional Puritan ethos of self-realization and material success, that flowed out of the classical ideal of bourgeois success painted by Hobbes, is now rapidly being replaced with an ethic of self-realization and personal growth that threatens to make politics superfluous.

Daniel Bell locates the roots of what he calls 'the contemporary megalomania of self-infinitization' (1976: 33) - the idea that nothing is forbidden to explore, be it nature or self - in the aesthetic modernism of the late nineteenth century. The ideal of the total autonomy of the artistic will from both patrons and conventions,[46] shifted from being the

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[46] The 'art for art's sake'-movement harboured a certain ambivalence towards the ethos of authenticity. On the one hand, a figure like Baudelaire holds that artistic creation is the wilful transgression by an

ideal of a few bohemian outsiders to a generalized 'idolatary of the self,' (Bell 1976: 21), aided and abetted by a consumerist culture prepared to cater for every whim. As we will see, far from endorsing the idea of a complete autonomy of the artistic will (as he is often interpreted) Friedrich Nietzsche was to be its first, and one of its subtlest critics.

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imprisoned subject of the constraints set by his circumstances. On the other hand, a figure like Oscar Wilde entertained a certain, almost Nietzschean suspicion towards the idea of truth behind 'appearances'.

Chapter 3:

Nietzsche and the Prison of Subjectivity.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray.

Like the thought of Hannah Arendt just less than a terrible century later, Friedrich Nietzsche's thought reveals the fundamental hostility towards worldliness and appearance in traditional Platonistic metaphysics. Overcoming this hostility meant facing up to a history that had hitherto been the history of the erection of the barriers of subjectivity against the contingency of the world. Nietzsche's critique of the modern, detached, moral subject is of crucial importance to Arendt, and in many cases sets her agenda for recovering the value of political action. While Arendt's account of the traditional substitution of 'making for acting', and her history of the 'withdrawal symptoms' that resulted from the withdrawal of politics into the comfort zone of the social, reveal the hitherto hidden loss of freedom in the properly *political* sense of the word, it will be necessary to look at Nietzsche's unmasking of the moral subject to show exactly how immoral our morality really is. And as we shall discover, this unmasking is the unmasking that will put an end to all further justifications for unmasking.

If genealogy has to be 'gray, meticulous and patiently documentary' (Foucault 1984: 76), Nietzsche's genealogy is anything but. For it is far from being the grey and meticulous gathering of a vast amount of source material and patient attention to detail. Nietzsche's reduction of the multifarious moral past of mankind to two competing moralities suggests speculative thought painted in black and white, rather than careful documentation. The aim of Nietzsche's genealogy is not, however, exact historical explanation, but a richer understanding of human excellence, and the significance of morality itself. Honig (1993: 43) characterizes Nietzsche's project as one of 'recovery', because through his project of genealogy, he hoped to uncover the conditions that have made modern European culture sick, and by doing so, create a period of convalescence that can make way for a new renaissance. Like Hegel, he uses language such as 'unbefriedigt' to refer to the 'unsatisfied' nature of modern culture (Nietzsche 1966: 23). He gives new meaning to Schiller's famous declaration that 'modernity inflicted this

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wound upon modern humanity' (Schiller 1974: 39). As a philosophical physician, he makes the diagnosis that there is 'a general decrease in vitality' (Nietzsche 1954: 37). This weakened condition is manifest in contemporary ideas of equality and altruism, which are merely secularized versions of decadent Christian values. 'Hence each helps the other, and; hence everyone is a nurse for the sick' (Nietzsche 1966: 37). Furthermore, Nietzsche is emphatic about modern culture not being a 'real' culture, but a 'bogus culture' (Nietzsche 1983: 8). Like Hegel, Nietzsche detects a division in self-identity in modern culture that results in this 'disease', but unlike Hegel, he shows no hope that this division will 'cure' itself through dialectical sublimation.

The second sense in which the concept of recovery animates Nietzsche's work, according to Honig (1993) is the sense in which Nietzsche aims to 'recover' the origins of the values that are now taken for granted as transcendent, universal and true, in order to demonstrate that they are partial and conditional, and developed as a result of a long struggle with alternative ethical frameworks that have subsequently fallen into oblivion. In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche recovers just such a forgotten ethical framework in the form of the forgotten presocratic hero morality of the lords or masters. As we have seen,[47] the ancient Greeks made no distinction between the subject and his 'effects' because the Greek warrior was his deeds. To be and to act was from their perspective, the same.

In Nietzsche's description of the shift from master to slave morality, a number of important observations stand out. The masters 'do not know guilt, responsibility, or consideration' (Nietzsche 1994: 22), they are 'born organizers'. The masters exteriorize their will on the environment around them, they almost create it in their own image. The direction that their will to power assumes is from the inside out. In the case of the masters, 'where the ruling group determines what is "good", the exalted proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinctions and determining orders of rank… The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values, it knows itself to be value-creating' (Nietzsche 1994: 24). Master morality is sufficient to itself and therefore lacks the sense of a time when things might become conceivably better. Rather, the master seeks to behave in an honorable and unashamed fashion toward those who are his peers in that they too embody their own 'moralities'. Similar to Hegel at the commencement of

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[47] Chapter 1, pp. 3-6.

his dialectic between master and slave, there is reciprocity of relationship - not he 'who harms us is bad, but he who is contemptible is [*schlecht]*' (Nietzsche 1968: 214).

In section thirteen, one of the most famous passages of the entire *Genealogy*, Nietzsche analyzes the key tactics the slaves employ to win the war they wage against the strong and the healthy. The most important of these is the establishment of a regulative norm, the fiction that a person can be separated from, and held accountable for his deeds. In his consideration of the problems of the will, Nietzsche notes that the attempt to deal with time, has often led men to seek revenge on the past. In his consideration of the slave morality in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche links the pursuit of revenge with the notion of *ressentiment*. The term refers to the process of allocating blame and responsibility for the pain one suffers. By inventing moral inwardness, from which stem the ideas of justification and having responsibilities, the weak set a moral epistemology in place that is intrinsically hostile to agonism and the active life. Once moral inwardness was discovered, the strong were driven to doubting the legitimacy of their actions. Action has become suspect - 'only that action is good that can answer to the inner court' (Haar 1990: 22). Whereas master morality is from the onset a triumphant yes-saying to the world in which it finds itself, slave morality says 'no' to what is outside, to what is 'not itself' and 'this is its creative deed… in order to exist, slave morality first needs an external hostile world…its action is fundamentally reaction' (Nietzsche 1968a: 211). *Ressentiment* thus occurs when men do not exteriorize their instincts into action, or when the affect does not lead to action. He can only turn it against himself, in the form of repression. His rage, against not only the masters, but against the world as such, turns into self-accusation - a particular form of *ressentiment* that Nietzsche identifies as bad conscience. The interiorization of man, a 'regression of strength' - at once lead to the impotence of creative instincts, as well as the setting up repressive social structures that forbade them any exterior manifestation. It directed itself inwardly, and found there a vast terrain of 'new and subterranean satisfactions' (Haar 1990: 23).

Nietzsche's most thorough attempt at undermining interiority is the dismantling of a certain metaphysical illusion that appears through the 'seductive' power of language, and 'the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it, which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a subject…' (Nietzsche 1994: 28). The source of belief in a 'core' self, detached from and prior to its actions, effects and thoughts, is to be found in the 'rude fetishism' of language (Nietzsche

1979: 38). The principle figure in philosophy to have succumbed to this 'fetish' is of course Descartes, whose *Cogito* begs more metaphysical questions than it solves:

> There is thinking, therefore there is something that thinks, this is the upshot of all Descartes' argumentation. But this means positing as 'true a priori' our belief in the concept of substance - that when there is thought, there has to be something that thinks, is simply a formulation of our grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed. (Nietzsche 1968: 484)

Thus, far from offering an Archimedian point, Nietzsche unmasks subjectivity as being but a grammatical inference. It was faith in the structure of the subject and the predicate that inspired Descartes' certainty that 'I' is the subject of 'think', whereas it could also be stated as 'the thoughts came to me'. Faith in grammar thus conveys the desire to be the 'cause' of one's thoughts. The 'self', 'the subject', and the 'individual' are thus mere metaphysical fictions, and have at their genesis only a linguistic reality. In particular, the 'self' brought into being with the Will to Power has now, especially through Nietzsche's French afterlife, been proven to be a mere illusion insofar as underlying unity, permanent centre, or source of decision is concerned. Nietzsche compares belief in the subject to the artificial separation of lightning from its flash - taking the latter as 'symptom' or operation of the former, which is in turn regarded as a neutral underlying substratum. However, 'there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed - the deed is everything' (Nietzsche 1994: 28). It is far more accurate to suggest that the self and the individual hide complexities, a plurality of forces in conflict. 'We are a plurality that imagined itself as singularity, a multiplicity of impulses that have provided themselves with an arbitrary coherent centre.' (Nietzsche 1968: 55). For Freud, as well as Nietzsche, the subject is not a centered unity, but a complex of agencies constituted by the play of unconscious repressions. 'The Ego, formerly the sole seat of consciousness, itself in large part unconscious, fully participant in the conflict of unconscious repression in which the agencies are constituted' (Althusser 1996: 120-121). Rationalism, and indeed subjective consciousness, is viewed as the consequence rather than the cause of metaphysics. The subject is multiplicity (Nietzsche 1967: 270).

Arendt agrees that there is no given unity awaiting discovery. Like Nietzsche, she believes that this calls for a form of 'artistic remedy'. But where Nietzsche turned to the non-conformist artist and an ethos of command in order to overcome the herd's spirit of timidity, Arendt employed the metaphor of theatrical performance in order to celebrate the initiatory character of all genuine action. In the words of Honig (1988: 88): 'For Arendt, action is our art and identity the reward of a virtuoso performance'.

By separating the actor from his deed, the slave, or reactive man, is able to convince himself that action and identity are fundamentally separable. This is an immense comforting thought: it enables the reactive man to see his inability to act, his cowardice, as a choice, rather than as constitutive of who he is. Nietzsche's criticism would not be so severe, however, if the slave's self-deception remained merely a comforting thought. However, 'The slave revolt in morality begins when ressentiment itself becomes creative and give birth to values; the ressentiment of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge…' (Nietzsche 1994: 21).

At crucial points then, Nietzsche's argument depends on the distinction between doer and deed that he claims in section thirteen of the Genealogy to be a harmful and absurd invention of the slaves. Consider the following extracts from section 10:

> …and they (the well-born) likewise knew, as rounded men with energy, and therefore necessarily active, that happiness should not be sundered from action. (GM 1.10)

> To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long - that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of power to form, to mold, to recuperate, and to forget… (GM 1.10)

Berkowitz (1995: 79) holds this to be the weakest element of Nietzsche's argument. For him, the analogy between lightning flashes and strong human beings is not a sound one. For the distinction between 'true' and 'false' reactions or deeds and imaginary revenge of the slave revolt implies that the slave can be separated and blamed for his deed. Furthermore, the knowledge typical of the noble mode of valuation - that happiness should not be sundered from action - suggests that 'the character of action is in

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part under the control of agents inasmuch as action may be ill-advisedly sundered from happiness' (Berkowitz 1995: 80). Importantly, Berkowitz ascribes a distinction between doer and deed to Nietzsche, because he continues to honour the nobles for their nobility despite their humiliating defeat, and separates the slaves from their deeds by blaming them for immobilizing the nobler types through their stratagems: 'If there were no 'being' behind doing, if the deed were everything, it would be just as absurd for Nietzsche to condemn the lambs for disarming and taming the birds of prey, as it was, on his account, for the lambs to condemn the birds of prey' (Berkowitz 1985: 81). It would thus be equally legitimate to blame Nietzsche for 'succumbing to the seduction of language' as it is for Nietzsche to blame European man for succumbing to this debilitating disease. Nietzsche, however, does not so much blame the slaves as lament their victory. He does not hold the slaves accountable for promulgating slave morality, but ascribes it to them, and characterizes this development as a domestification of man and a debasing of culture (Nietzsche 1994: 3). It is also not so much the victory of the slaves itself that Nietzsche detests, but that this victory is celebrated as victory, and so complete a victory that it managed to set the rules for victory for the past 2, 000 years. It is not the slaves themselves that Nietzsche seeks to replace, as their criteria for judging strength. This is the third sense in which Honig employs the word 'recovery': Not only has traditional moral paradigms, all language and all systems of valuation been shown to be palimpsests of interpretation, but furthermore, they are no longer viable. In the name of morality itself, that demands honesty, morality itself must be denied. The realization that our values lack transcendent authority, holds open the possibility for freedom, for if the values that have now become impotent are but human creations, they can be created anew: 'A tremendous new project opens up…belief in morality, all morality, falters, finally a new demand becomes audible…we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values must itself for once be called into question' (Nietzsche 1994: 7). Far from being a full-fledged immoralist, as is commonly claimed,[48] Clark (Schacht 1994: 16), correctly in my opinion, identifies Nietzsche's project recovering the master 'morality' as trying to re-establish a non-moral mode of evaluating action rather than to found a new morality. Clark's argument is supported by *Beyond Good and Evil* section 32, where Nietzsche distinguishes between three stages of morality, namely pre-moral, moral, and

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[48] Phillippa Foot, Alexander Nehamas and Frithjof Bergman, among others.

extramoral. The second of these is moral in strictu sensu, and Nietzsche asks whether we do not stand on the threshold of a third period, the extramoral, the period of which Nietzsche himself is the precursor.

There is a fourth sense in which the word re-cover pertains to Nietzsche, that Honig does not mention. This 're-cover' taken as to mean 'covering again', is the antithesis of 'uncover'. This epistemological 'uncovering' inevitably led to the death of God. And eventually not only to the death of his murderer, Man, as Foucault[49] (1973: 385) would have it - but also to the possibilities opened up by the return of the mask that is the result of the dissolution of man. Re-covery should be construed as the re*discovery* of the mask. In both Nietzsche and Arendt, the phenomenal character of appearance in the world means that only masks present themselves on stage. Ironically, there is less exposure on stage than in the 'safety' of the dark, hidden private sphere, since penetration to the 'real' self is impossible due to the impersonality of the public sphere. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. For there is nothing behind the mask - except the danger of becoming lost in an increasingly complex series of ever more masks. Thus, whoever wants to hide himself from the sharp, penetrating gaze of the disciplinarian, should do so on stage. This is exactly what Nietzsche did:

> The hermit does not believe that any philosopher - assuming that philosophers have always been hermits first of all - ever expressed his real and final opinions in books: *does one not write books precisely in order to conceal what lies within one?* - indeed he will have his doubts as to whether a philosopher can have 'final' and 'real' opinions at all, whether behind his cave there does not and must not lie an eve deeper cave - a more extensive stranger, richer world behind the surface, an abyss behind every ground, beneath every grounding. (Nietzsche 1968a: 85)

And the re-appearance, or rather, the renewed emphasis (for it was never really gone) on the mask is made possible by language. For language allows nothing *but* the mask. Throughout his work - it can almost be said to be the theme that directs his entire enterprise - Nietzsche steers his explorations towards showing the traditional quest for knowledge to be 'grounded on the formation of metaphor' (Nietzsche 1968: 124).

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[49] Deleuze, similarly, connects the Death of God with the Death of Man in *Différence et Répétition* (1981).

Whereas philosophy has traditionally conceived knowledge to be a mirroring of reality with the aid of concepts as representations of that reality, Nietzsche overturns the comfortable metaphysical paradigm by arguing that 'the intellect unfolds itself in dissimulation' (Nietzsche 1968a: 76). The best example of this occurs in the process of naming, for it is in naming that what is at best similar is rendered identical by giving it the same name. The artist, or name-giver, cannot but leave behind a *remainder* that fails to be included. What we regard as knowledge then, is then but stabilized metaphor to which we grew accustomed. In other words, there is no originary *presence* at the birth of language - language testifies to the creative power of the artist in world production.

Central to Nietzsche's quasi-nominalistic conception of language are the two uses of metaphor. One, as we have seen, involves the identification through words, of things that are dissimilar; the other is a radicalization of Aristotle's concept of metaphor as a 'carrying over'. For Nietzsche, metaphor involves any transference of one domain to another. He famously describes the three stages of metaphor: 'a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image in turn is imitated in a sound: second metaphor' (Nietzsche as quoted by Schrift 1992: 126). And from the sound the third metaphor, the concept is derived. According to this scheme, the utopian hope of knowledge as *adequatio intellectus et rei* is shattered. For far from fully representing reality, language at once hides reality and makes it possible. Only simile can describe this condition: experiencing the world through language is (and will remain) like encountering an iceberg: two thirds remain hidden and beyond the grasp of conceptualization. Not only the actors in the world, but the world itself masks itself through language.

At this stage, it is possible to point to the specific *metonymic* character of the mask. The mask is not simply donned as a false face, and cannot be identified as something separate from the self. If metonymy is defined as 'a figure of speech which consists of the naming of a thing by one of its attributes' (O.E.D), for example 'the crown prefers' for the 'king prefers', the public *persona* operates according to a metonymic logic. The persona or mask can be defined in Arendtian terms as *that part of the self that hides the rest of the self.* In Arendt, it is the mask that prevents the intimate and subjective from contaminating the disinterested *political* nature of agents in the public sphere.

As we have seen,[50] however, the private sphere is not simply the domain of the unmasked, but the space of the *psychological* mask, and it is this dimension of the private self that robs politics of its impersonality, for as Kristeva and Lacan show at numerous places throughout their work, the private self also consists of a series of masks, making penetration to a Rousseauian 'true' self an impossibility in every possible way.

This is why criticism by, for example, Jacobitti (1988: 85), that when acting, the agent is so fragmented that he 'will disintegrate entirely', fails. No disintegration is possible, for there was no unity to begin with. On the contrary, it is entrance in the public realm that makes the attainment of identity a possibility in the first place. The private self is simply not presented in public, and the inner life lies latent for the time the actor chooses to appear in public. In the public realm, the actor simply suspends his awareness of himself as a moral, emotional and mental being. These aspects simply disappear 'when the real[51] world asserts itself' (Arendt 1978a: 75). In the murky, amorphous world of private psychological self, no identity in the fullest sense of the word is possible, since this is never self-generated, but requires the 'testimony' of others. The momentary engagement in action grants the actor a coherent, albeit not fixed and constant identity in the public realm. George Kateb describes it thus: 'Political action introduces coherence in the self and its experience. Such coherence is redemptive. Narrative, dramatic or poetic art perfects the coherence' (Kateb 1983:8). Identity is thus the manifestation of a coherent public narrative that is told about a particular author. And this narrative itself is nothing more or less than a mask.

Since Nietzsche's concept of the 'self-constructed self' calls up associations with traditional forms of autonomous subjectivity, I use the term 'self-presented' in order to indicate that there is a limited sense in which the individual retains a level of control over at least his *style* of presenting himself on stage. Out of a series of such 'self-presentations' arises finally 'what we call character or personality, the conglomeration of a number of identifiable qualities gathered together [by the spectator] into a comprehensible and reliably identifiable whole, and imprinted, as it were, on an unchangeable substratum of gifts and defects peculiar to our soul and body structure' (Arendt 1977: 137).

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[50] See Chapter 1.
[51] The word 'real' should not be read here as having a metaphysical meaning. Rather, it is the world whose reality is testified to by a plurality of others.

This model of individuality is clearly opposed to the kind offered by Kant and the early Rawls, both of whom conceives of the political individual as characterized by the metaphysical conception of the person that treats individuals as antecedently individuated subjects, or in other words, as prior to their contingent social relations with others. From this metaphysical conception of the self flows a commitment to universalism. What makes this claim metaphysical, is the claim that it not only applies universally to all human beings, but defines what it means to be a human being.

Kant's transcendental method is clearly undermined and subverted by Nietzsche. Whereas Kant clearly aimed at creating a *single* philosophy - 'for there is only one reason' (Kant 1963: ix), Nietzsche is dedicated precisely to the rejection of such a philosophy. If Kant is the arch-universalist, the philosopher who holds that morality is within everyone's grasp, Nietzsche asks why morality *should* be within everyone's grasp.

Despite the obvious differences, there is often a marked agreement between Nietzsche and Kant. Both thinkers agree that to look into our hearts is impossible, and both present self-knowledge as a task at the same time obligatory and beyond our ability to complete. Both heap contempt upon romantic ideas of easy nobility, of 'beautiful souls' who think that they can do without anything as harsh as duty or struggle. Kant's later thought, with its more profound psychological insight, sees self-deception as the 'foul spot' upon 'human nature' (Kant: 1963: 205). Nietzsche, who elevates intellectual honesty to the most supreme intellectual virtue, is in this respect at least, not very far from Kant. Both are contemptuous of pity: Kant of the 'melting compassion' and Nietzsche, in his most Stoic vein, abhors pity.

Importantly for our purpose, Nietzsche locates a certain hermeneutic *hubris* in the act of pity. Most pitiers claim to 'put themselves in the shoes of the pitied', and in doing so, commits the violence of the 'penetrating gaze', and fail to respect the inaccessibility to another's experience. In doing so, the pitier robs the pitied of the last scraps of dignity still left to him. 'To offer pity is to offer contempt', writes Nietzsche in Daybreak (Nietzsche 1982: 135). As Nussbaum (Schacht 1994: 153) points out, Nietzsche focuses on a specific type of pity, the Christian variety, that he associates closely with a depreciation of the world and of the body. Pity that flows from these impulses is therefore associated with a secret fear, best expressed by the famous exclamation of John Bradford on seeing some criminals led to execution: 'But for the grace of God, there goes I' (Sutherland 1978: 217). Pity is therefore not always altruistic, but most of the time

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egoistic. Nussbaum reminds us that our act serves to reassure us that we have 'defenses lined up against the world's assaults' (Nussbaum in Schacht 1994: 154). She also points to the link that Nietzsche makes between pity and cruelty: For once we ascribe significance to certain events in life, we make ourselves vulnerable to an endless list of possibilities for others to harm us.

The apparently diverse points of agreement between Nietzsche and Kant seem to have a common root in the importance of morality in locating identity. Nietzsche, far from simply dismissing morality as is commonly assumed, seeks to found a morality *worth having*: 'She told me herself that she had no morality - and I thought she had, like myself, a more severe morality than anybody' (Nietzsche, as quoted by Berkowitz 1995: 1). Morality is more than wishes or feelings or communitarian empathy: only a person's striving in deed would suffice. Kant, of course, famously put each person's responsibility, his free will at the centre of ethics: 'It is impossible to think of anything in the world, or even beyond it, that could be considered good except a good will' (Kant 1995: 1). Later in his career, Kant quoted with approval from a letter from a young admirer: *'The Critique of Practical Reason* has appeared and assigned to man a thoroughly active existence in the world' (Kant 1996: 121). At the risk of simplification, it would be possible to state that the main purpose of the Kantian critical edifice was to secure and understand human freedom. Nietzsche's endeavour is a radicalized, intensified version of Kant's commitments: whereas for Kant, we are free, for Nietzsche we have to achieve our freedom. This means that Nietzsche's emphasis is never on the metaphysical grounding for agency, except to dismiss such constructions provocatively. Instead, he is concerned with the worldly exercise of what he perceives to be our *stillborn* freedom.

It is one of Kant's greatest insights to see that to possess a concept is actually to possess a highly complex ability - the ability to follow a rule. Nietzsche agrees that the conceptual is a domain of rules. What he does is to raise doubts about the adequacy of rules to the contingency of lived reality, so that the realm of the conceptual begins to appear as one fraught with its own traps and illusions. For Kant, morality lies firmly within the domain of the cognitive, which is to say that it can be apprehended conceptually and communicated between rational agents. Kantian morality is thus substantially a system of rules governed by the Categorical Imperative, i.e. practical rationality.

For Nietzsche however, rules distract us from the multitude of interpretations that may follow from the same physical actions, decreasing our ability to discern the complex possibilities of what we have done. He observes: 'All rules have the effect of drawing us away from the purpose behind them and making us more frivolous' (Nietzsche 1976 section 322). This is the point between the famous disavowal of the agent behind the action (Nietzsche 1976: 45). There is ample justification for this disavowal when the strange assertion by Kant, that 'even the most hardened scoundrel' would act rightly if freed from the sensible world's burden of inclination and impulses' (Kant 1996: 132) is taken into account. As in the case of the free agent, Nietzsche sees Kant's metaphysics of the will as a ruse, one of the tactics of avoiding the demanding task of facing the radical contingencies of the world and the fundamentally tragic nature of our existence. While Kant allows that we can never be sure of our intentions or the outcome of our actions, he wishes to contain this uncertainty, and refuses to allow it to cast doubts on our ability to characterize actions eternally. What appears in Arendt's and Nietzsche's writings as complex deeds that continue to elude our final grasp, such as promising, praising and punishing, tends to be reduced in Kant's writings to cases of simple rule-following.

If, however, our motives are indeed as opaque as Kant states and Nietzsche stresses, then the Kantian 'straightforwardness' is highly problematic, and even morally misleading, when used unqualified. Nietzsche teaches us that language can radically mislead, the tendency of words being to suggest unity and simplicity, masking the radical plurality inherent in even the most everyday of human actions. Kant has not observed closely enough: 'when he does shine through his thoughts, Kant appears honest and honorable in the best sense, but insignificant: he lacks breadth and power, he has not experienced very much…' (Nietzsche 1982: 482). Nietzsche's criticism does not only come from an epistemological basis, but also from a 'psychological' one. Famously he criticizes the standing of those who feel a *need* for rules, who must be told what to do and likewise feel the need to tell others what to do. Nietzsche spares nothing regarding the longing for the unconditional he sees this to embody, reflecting what he perceives to be millennia of Christian theology. 'Refined servility clings to the categorical imperative' (Nietzsche 1974: 21).

Alongside the servility of the categorical imperative, Nietzsche senses that 'the categorical imperative smells of *cruelty'* (Nietzsche 1994: 45). It is slavish to wish to obey, to desire to remain in the comfort zone of laws not of our own making. And while

Kant identified this slavery with 'freedom' as the unconditional law is to be found in our own reason, Nietzsche observes no freedom in Kant's faith in common reason.

If there is an unconditional standard at work in Nietzsche's writings - an ethic of self-realization is clearly present right through his *oeuvre* - he certainly does not appear to think that it will be easily communicable in the simple fixity of a law. A wiser attempt would be to take a course of life as it is led among others as the summary of a person's attempt to realise or find that unconditional standard. Even in the unlikelihood of anyone ever finding that standard, it would be a life led closer to the reality of moral learning than Kant's catechisms. Mere conceptual interpretation will never convey the creativity open to an exemplary course of life, especially in the light of Nietzsche's account of the fragility of conscious ratiocination, with its persistent simplification of the complex reality of deeds, not to mention the ineluctable tendency to be pressed into the service of self-deception. Furthermore, the Categorical Imperative, as highest criterion of reasonableness, invites us to ensure that our course of action would be appropriate for any similar agent in similar circumstances - the old Sidgwickian line of 'a reason in one case is a reason in all cases, or it is not a reason at all' (Singer 1961: 57). A crucial thrust in Nietzsche's objection to Kant lies in his characteristic assertion that we should not be asked to consider ourselves in such a position of sameness. Instead, he demands that we explicitly distinguish ourselves. He does not simply dismiss our 'shared humanity' but acts as a corrective to Kant's elimination of plurality that forms part of his over-simple universalizing procedures.

In her discussion on Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, Arendt argues that the morality of absolute goodness is the morality of private judgement: 'the abstract morality of the individual removed from the common realm of human affairs' (Arendt 1972: 57). It is the double-edged nature of morality, the tendency to spill over the borders of its demarcated realms, which makes it potentially dangerous. In contrast to Agnes Heller, (whose personal history closely resembles Arendt's), who argues that morality pertains to every human realm (Heller 1986: 35), Arendt argues that the imperialistic tendencies of morality is dangerous on account of its suspicion of freedom and the realms of appearance. The contingency of the world of appearance is irreconcilable with the exactness that morality demands. The primary interests of morality are the private interests of the self, and the ultra-private domain of the individual conscience. This world is fundamentally at odds with the more morally uncertain public space, where deception,

hyperbole, and minor lies make up the ordinary ruses of worldly men in the political realm. It is possible to relate this to the famous words of Nicolas Sébatien-Chamfort on the unsuitability of saints for the public sphere: 'Qualities too elevated often makes a man unfit for society. We do not take ingots with us to the market, we take silver or small change'[52] (Sébastien-Chamfort 1988: 57 my translation). The gold standard of goodness is irrelevant to the public realm. The demands of morality make one self-conscious, and self-consciousness is fundamentally at odds with theatricality.

The most disquieting notion of all Nietzsche's subversive techniques is another recovery: that of cruelty.[53] 'Man is the cruelest animal' Nietzsche infamously states through Zarathustra: 'Whatever is most evil is his best power and the hardest stone for the highest creator' (Nietzsche 1969: 182). Moreover, on the crux of the second essay of the *Genealogy* in *Ecce Homo*: 'Cruelty is here exposed for the first time as one of the most ancient and basic substrata of culture that simply cannot be reasoned away' (Nietzsche 1988: 114). This conviction takes shape gradually through Nietzsche's work and grew from the conviction that the purity and beauty of ancient Greece emerged only after a long 'comfortless period of dark crudity and cruelty' (Nietzsche 1996: 97). He adds: 'One can speak of spring only when there has been a winter that preceded it' (Nietzsche *ibid*). Nietzsche thus proposes that we regard the infliction of pain simply as evil. When pleasure accompanies the infliction of evil - when one strongly *feels* the joy of stretching one's power to the limits - 'it occurs for the well-being of the individual…Without pleasure no life, the struggle for pleasure is the struggle for life. Whether an individual pursues this struggle in such a way that people call him good, or in such a way that people call him evil, is determined by the degree and quality of his intellect' (Nietzsche 1986: 104).

Nietzsche sees the intertwined *folie à deux* of pleasure and pain as essential to the exercise of the will to power. To exercise this will inevitably implies the courting of cruelty, but even more, the positive *enjoyment* of the pain and agony that suffering causes. 'To practise cruelty is to enjoy the *highest*' (Nietzsche 1982: 18), that is to say, 'the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing, and formative powers' (Nietzsche 1994: 54) that are the essence of life.

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[52] Des qualités trop supérieurs rendent souvent un hommes moins propres à la société. On ne va pas au marché avec des ingots; on y va avec des l'argent et de la petite monnaie.

Nietzsche contends that at first, these pleasures were public. Cruelty is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind. 'It is not long since princely weddings and public festivals of the more magnificent types were unthinkable without executions, torturing, and perhaps an auto da fe, [54] and no noble household was complete without a creature upon whom one could heedlessly vent one's malice and cruel jokes'[55] (Nietzsche 1994: 45). For millennia, societies have been organized hierarchically and allowed the man with prestige to enjoy the cruel pleasure of exciting envy and permitting him to 'vent his power freely upon the powerless, the voluptuous pleasure *de faire mal pour la plaisir de le faire'* (Nietzsche 1982: 18). It was through these displays that memory was created, and with it, the spheres of legal obligation and morality were first brought into existence. 'A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory: only something that continues to hurt stays in the memory - that is a proposition from the oldest, and unfortunately, the longest-lived psychology on earth' (Nietzsche 1994: 41). The pre-condition for joining a group in pre-modernity was that one pledged oneself to obey shared rules - or suffer cruel punishment if one did not. Such punishment produced 'an increase in fear, a heightening of prudence, mastery of desires: thus punishment tames men, but it [did] not make them better' (Nietzsche 1994: 60).

Taming, for Nietzsche, implies what he calls 'internalization', an idea that in a post-Freudian age, seems deceptively obvious: 'all instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turns inward'. Nietzsche states: 'Thus it was that man first developed what was later called his "soul" (Nietzsche 1994: 61). The invention of the soul, as we have seen, divides the human animal, pushes back its instinct for freedom, and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself, the organism declares war on itself. Nietzsche describes the inner *agon* as follows:

> …the man who, from lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and punctiliousness of custom impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted and maltreated himself… This

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[53] Cruelty is defined simply as 'a disposition to inflict suffering, indifference to, or delight in, pain and misery, heartlessness, especially as exhibited in action. (OED).

[54] The public announcement and execution of the sentence of the Inquisition, with the attendant ceremonies, such as the burning at the stake. Literally translated from the Spanish it means 'act of faith'.

[55] René Girard confirms this thesis by pointing out the importance of the scapegoat in constructing communal unity.

yearning and desperate prisoner became the inventor of bad conscience. (Nietzsche 1994: 61)

In time, the human being, suing for peace, comes to swear allegiance to a new kind of psychological 'oligarchy' 'with regulation, foresight and pre-meditation' keeping at bay our 'underworld of utility organs working with and against one another' (Nietzsche 1994: 49). With the aid of the morality of mores and the social straitjacket that accompanies it, the organism's oligarchy is kept in power, and man learns to be 'ashamed of his instincts'. Stifling his cruel and murderous impulses, he becomes 'calculable, regular, automatic [notwendig] even in his own self-image' (Nietzsche 1994: 39) - a subject of civilized reason and morality.

But the now more developed organism did not lose his impulses for cruelty. What might otherwise be inexplicable - the pleasure men have apparently taken in the pains that accompanied the process of learning to rule themselves - Nietzsche explains through the survival of internalized cruelty and the paradoxical mixture of pain and pleasure that characterizes it. The horrific oxymoron of self-torture becomes the key to interpret a number of intertwined phenomena in *The Genealogy of Morals*: the bad conscience, guilt, and above all, the asceticism of Christianity. The process of internalization cripples man's animal instincts, shared taboos make the exercise of the will to power difficult and sometimes even impossible. At the same time, in some rare souls, the masochistic pleasures of self-rule somehow strengthen the will to power in all its cruel splendour - the old animal instincts cultivated with foresight and transfigured through the use of memory, imagination and reason erupt in new forms of mastery:

[T]his secret self-ravishment, this artist's cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself as a hard, recalcitrant suffering material, and in burning a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No into it, this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labour of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes it suffer, out of joy in making suffer - eventually the entire *active* bad conscience - you will have guessed it - as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to

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life an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself (Nietzsche 1994: 64)[56]

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche surveys this history by employing the metaphor of a ladder. The great ladder of religious cruelty, as he identifies it, consists of three rungs. The first leads to the sacrifice of humans for the sake of a god. Next, one sacrificed one's instincts, one's 'nature': *this* festive joy 'lights up the cruel eyes of the ascetic'. Finally, the greatest sacrifice possible: the sacrifice of God himself. This is the form of cruelty proper to the philosopher. Governed by the will to truth, nurtured and preserved by the practice of asceticism, the philosopher appears: Recognizing that the idea of truth is in itself a kind of fiction, he spares nothing in telling his audience that everything they hold dear as solid and certain about the world, is, on closer inspection, demonstrably accidental, contingent or false - religions, laws, moralities, ideas, philosophies. Honesty like this runs the risk of ending in nihilism - the catastrophic conviction that 'after the death of God, everything is permitted'. This view destroys assumptions and essential convictions that enable societies to function and allow people to feel at home in the world. Seen in this context, the philosopher's will to truth is 'a kind of sublime wickedness' (Nietzsche 1966: 54). However, this final cruelty, unlike its Christian precedent, does not incarcerate the will to power. On the contrary, it promises to liberate the will from the shackles of groundless guilt, thereby restoring 'its goal to the earth' by translating man 'back into 'nature', a 'nature', characterized by, among other, a certain cruelty - the primordial pleasure found in causing pain.

In trying to establish what kind of society might re-awaken the animating powers of the will to power rather than to weaken it, it is necessary to recall the different degrees to which the different historical cultures have dealt with the process of internalization, and also the different forms of externalized displays of power that they have permitted. As Nietzsche points out, the state has employed the most fearful means for moulding its human material:

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[56] In a footnote to the passage quoted, Nietzsche approvingly quotes Goethe's phrase 'the labyrinth of the breast' (from 'An den Mond'). This phrase, like the one quoted in chapter 1, again suggests that Goethe, unlike most of his Romantic counterparts on the continent, and certainly unlike Rousseau, was well aware of the dangers of attempting to achieve complete self-transparency.

Consider the old German punishments: for example, stoning…breaking on the wheel…piercing by stakes…tearing apart or trampling by horses…boiling of the criminal in wine or oil…the popular flaying alive…cutting flesh from the chest, and also the practice of smearing the wrongdoer with honey and leaving him in the blazing sun for the flies. (Nietzsche 1994: 42)

Nietzsche remarks that the popular belief that punishment awakens conscience is quite mistaken, and that could be one reason, he speculates, why belief in punishment is 'tottering' among Europeans. Generally, 'punishment makes men hard and cold; it concentrates, it sharpens the feeling of alienation; it strengthens the power of resistance' (Nietzsche 1994: 58). Paradoxically, harsh penal practices both honour and preserve man's murderous impulses. An audience observing the display of such punishments see that the *type* of action as such cannot be reprehensible, since they see the same type of action pressed into the service of justice, and practiced with a clean conscience: defamation, violence, imprisonment, torture, murder practiced as a matter of principle and not even with the excuse of emotion' (Nietzsche 1994:59).

The modern state by contrast, tends as a matter of humanitarian and egalitarian concern, to outlaw such cruel practices in general, by abolishing torture, slavery, eliminating status symbols, titles, and hierarchical distinctions. In the wake of the French Revolution, a new order appeared, a legal order thought of as sovereign and universal. This new democratic state was organized, not as a means in the struggle between power complexes, but as a means of preventing all struggle in general. Nietzsche despised this order, hailed by both Kant's philosophy and the liberal and socialist movements of the nineteenth century, as an order hostile to life - an agent of the destruction and dissolution of man. For Nietzsche, mankind was becoming enmeshed in 'a tremendous clockwork, composed of ever smaller even more subtly adapted gears', in which there is 'an ever-growing superfluity of all dominating and commanding elements' in which individuals aim for 'minimal forces, minimal values' (Nietzsche 1966: 201). These individuals, deprived of spectacle and exhausted by the war within, desire nothing more than tranquillity and peace, and an end to all suffering. Lacking something to *fear*, man is no longer able to despise himself. He becomes but the tamed, docile denizen of a world that, in Foucault's words 'by the daily exercise of surveillance, in a panopticism in which the

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vigilance of intersecting gazes has rendered useless both the eagle and the sun' (Foucault 1977: 217).

In the second chapter of the original French edition of *Discipline and Punish*, *Surveiller et Punir*, published in 1975, Foucault employs the phrase *éclat des supplices* to evoke the ambiguity of the spectacle of torture. The word éclat, 'outburst', 'breakout' 'explosion', underlines a paradox underlying the entire text: Far from (merely) being a crude act of blind savagery, torture was a carefully regulated practice with its own splendours and glory. 'The poetry of Dante put into laws' (Peters 1984: 479), torture was, as we have seen, a *festive* pleasure. It was the ceremony of torture that allowed 'the crime to explode into its truth' (Foucault 1977: 33-34). The 'truth' of the crime consists in the disquieting notion that crime has its very own grandeur and beauty: 'The most intense point of lives, that which concentrate its energy, is precisely where they collide with power, struggle with it, attempt to use its forces or escape its traps' (Foucault 1977: 227). Whereas in modern society, the fascination with crime becomes a private affair, a pleasure enjoyed passively and almost in secret, for example through literature - it is no accident that crime fiction[57] as a genre was born during the more 'enlightened' nineteenth century with its emphasis on social 'progress' - the *ancien régime* allowed crime to exert its power of fascination directly in public. Presented with both outlaw and executioner, the crowd is allowed to enjoy[58] 'how men have been able to rise against power, traverse the law, and expose themselves to death through death' (Foucault 1975: 206). In these carnivals of cruelty, roles were easily inverted. In beholding the cruel excesses of torture and the pleasure taken in it, a crowd might easily become excited to such an extent, as to vent its subversive, virile anger on the official representatives of the sovereign: '[In these executions], which ought to have shown only the terrifying power of the prince, there was a whole aspect of carnival, in which the roles were inverted, the powerful mocked and the criminals transformed into heroes' (Bakhtin 1987: 114). By participating in the shared act of seeing a spectacle of cruelty, the crowd had its own power as potential organism of power reinforced. It was this power that erupted during the French

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[57] The second half of the nineteenth century saw the birth of both Sherlock Holmes and Poe's C. Auguste Dupin of the 'Purloined Letter' fame, the first literary detectives.

[58] An interesting inscription in the famous diary of Samuel Pepys on 13 October 1660, conveys how 'ordinary' these displays were: 'I went out to Charing Cross, to see Major-General Harrison hanged, drawn and quartered. He looked as cheerful as any man could do under that condition' (Sutherland 1978: 243).

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Revolution,[59] as what Foucault had called 'a sort of constantly recommended liturgy of combat and sacrifice' (quoted by Miller 1992: 481).

In contrast to this, most contemporary societies that seek to institute 'less cruelty, less suffering, more gentleness, more respect, more humanity' (Foucault 1977: 16) aim at a perfection of power that would, paradoxically, 'render its actual exercise useless' (Foucault 1977: 69). 'The people', now robbed of its 'old pride in its crimes' (Foucault 1977: 138), were deprived of the shared pleasure that traversing of the law entailed. The outlaw now became the deviant, a case to be studied, and if possible, rehabilitated. In modernity, deprived of a shared public stage of cruel dramatics, and subject to no less severe disciplinary regimens that seek to painlessly dissociate power from the body', dissipating savage impulses by acting through the dimension of *depth* 'on the heart, the thought, the will, inclinations' (Foucault 1977: 299), man finds his capacity for freedom diminished. Driven inward, cut off from the old links to the punishing Christian conscience that externalized itself in the great atrocities of religious persecutions, cruelty now turns from 'jousts to phantasms' (Foucault 1977: 193). On the outside, in modern society, bodies may appear tamed. But as Foucault makes clear right throughout his history of sexuality, beneath the smooth skin, bodies, and especially souls, seethe and boil: now hidden desires for assertion 'isolated, intensified, incorporated', finally making its re-appearance in a plethora of perversions. The theatre of cruelty migrated inwards. 'Phantasms', Foucault contends, 'topologizes the materiality of the body' (Williams 1984: 69). The capacity to phantasize is both a blessing and a curse, it gives 'disturbing nocturnal powers', but remains beyond the reach of disciplining powers, a lawless law unto itself, a dark secret with all the 'ambiguity of chaos and akin to madness' (Miller 1992: 481). Foucault sees this as the last reserve of freedom. By refusing access to it, chaos harbours the possibility of giving birth to a dancing star. It is always possible, says Foucault, to ask of the adult 'how much of the child he still has in him, what secret madness dwells within him, what fundamental crime he wishes to commit' (Foucault 1977: 193). For Foucault holds that only happiness and unhappiness can be inscribed in the register of the imagination, not duty, nor virtue.

The world of dreams, insofar as it becomes the last, secret redoute of the primordial desire to inflict pain, the imagination itself undergoes a metamorphosis. As

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[59] Foucault's comment on the French Revolution occurs in the context of his explaining his fascination with the Iranian Revolution.

Foucault suggests in *Madness and Civilization,* sadism, far from being just another manifestation of ancient Eros, is a very specific phenomenon that appeared towards the end of the eighteenth century. '[It] constitutes one of the greatest transformations in the western imagination: unreason transformed into the delirium of the heart, madness of desire, the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless presumption of appetite' (Foucault 1965: 116). Since cruelty has been abolished as public spectacle, it reappears as phantasms of butchery and violent domination, and finds expression in an increasingly darker language, and an 'infinite void opens beneath the feet of the person it attracts' (Foucault 1978: 28). There was no need to abolish the spectacle - in trying to avoid cruelty, modern societies are more cruel than ever. As Cixous puts it in Mireille Calle-Gruber's *Rootprints* (1997: 86): 'No need for blood on the stage, or patricide or matricide or regicide, no noisy events. The tragedy is not what we think it is. It is the secret subtle work that weaves every good, every link, every mine-own with its opposite, and every come-here with go-away. Every offering with every taking'.

It is this shadowy presence that remains finally incompatible with the most treasured principles of most modern societies. Judith Sklar, for example, states that cruelty should be regarded as the worst of vices (Sklar 1984: 138). It is no coincidence, that most contemporary advocates of banning any form of cruelty, are ultimately dependent on the universal humanism of the Enlightenment that Nietzsche and Foucault have made the target of their criticism. Edward Peters remarks towards the end of his sombre history of *Torture*: 'It may be possible to make torture disappear by making it effectively illegal, but it seems necessary to preserve the reason for making it illegal and dangerous - to preserve a notion of that *inner human dignity, common to us all,* that although not always so meticulously observed, is generally assumed in the public language, if not the unpublic actions, of most modern societies, and assumed, moreover, in a generally universal and democratic sense' (Peters 1985: 186). It will remain one of history's gravest ironies that, in the name of this endeavour, loosely categorized under the doctrine of 'humanism', cruelty in the twentieth century has not only been exacerbated, but taken to an entirely new level. This was not missed by Hannah Arendt.

Despite the similarities between Arendt and Jean-Jacques Rousseau - both are defenders of direct democracy, both returned to classical sources for inspiration, and both are lukewarm about the mechanism of representation - Rousseau became the apotheosis for what Arendt found to be wrong with contemporary politics. For Arendt, the

metamorphosis of the universal rational will to the 'will of the people' that occurs in Rousseau, is the ultimately anti-political act. The difficulty in trying to reconcile a form of communitarianism with the newly discovered individualism of the eighteenth century, forced Rousseau to eradicate what he saw as the 'disruptive effects of agonism' (Villa 1996: 74). His main tool in achieving this was the creation of the General Will, an attempt to reconcile the Hobbesian notion of a single, sovereign power with the desire to prevent the placement of this power in the hands of a single individual. Instead, the power is delivered to an artificially constructed collective body by means of the social contract, 'the reciprocal engagement between the public and its individual members' (Villa 1996: 75). This collective body poses the problem of the creation of an abstract generalized authority that may well act contra the interests of particular individuals. Rousseau offers but a Romantic solution to this problem: 'that citizens ensure that, as far as possible, that they look into their hearts and vote what they sincerely believe to be in the public interest' (Villa 1996: 75, my emphasis). Aiming at the General Will, at all times to be kept 'constant, unalterable and pure' (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990: 66), the generality of the Will constantly threatens to slip away because of the particularities generated by agonistic activity. The recovery of the General Will, as Villa (1996:75) points out, demands *constant interrogation*, both in the general assembly - where it took the form of the Terror of the French Revolution, and in the self, where, as we have seen, it took the form the confessing self. Moreover, no Will can ever claim to be sufficiently 'general'. As Arendt points out, such a will can only maintain itself at the expense of 'each will in particular' (Arendt 1961: 217). She states it more explicitly:

> In Rousseau's construction, the nation need not wait for an enemy to threaten its borders in order to 'rise like one man' and to bring about the union sacrée; the oneness of the action is guaranteed in so far as each citizen carries within himself the common enemy as well as the general interest which the common enemy brings into existence; for the common enemy is the particular interest or the particular will of each man. If only each particular person rises up against himself in his particularity, he will be able to arouse in himself his own antagonist, the general will, and thus he will become a true citizen of the national body politic…To participate in the body politic of the nation, each national must rise and remain *in constant rebellion against himself*. (Arendt 1963: 78)

The demand to produce a purified community, from which all forms of 'disturbing' particularity has been drained, is a particular variant of Cartesian introspectivity. In Rousseau, deliberation, as a private activity, turns into the self-interrogation of the 'torn soul'. As seen in Chapter 2, Rousseau attempts to efface the 'corrupting' effects of plurality by insulating the process of will-formation from the 'messiness' of the world of the agon and the exchange of opinions. In doing this, he systematically eliminates plurality and all its effects from the public sphere. Rousseau's entire project is guided by the unattainable ideals of *complete* consensus and unanimity. This reveals what Arendt identified as 'the pernicious and dangerous' (Arendt 1961:261) tendency to model politics on the notion of a free will.

Nietzsche's alternative to the self-violated self has traditionally been taken to be a complete dissolution of ego boundaries and the *principium individuationis*, a reading that increasingly dominates, thanks to dominance of post-structuaralism in Nietzsche interpretations. Peter Sloterdijk proposes such a model of a 'vaguer' subject, as 'something radical, cybernetic, eccentric, and Dionysic, as a site of sensibility within the ruling cycle of forces, as a point of alertness for the modulation of impersonal antagonisms, as a process of self-healing for primordial pain' (Sloterdijk 1989: x). This is a reading which, as Villa (1992: 289) points out, reveals the 'underhanded Christian' side of poststructuralism, the poststructuralism 'that takes Christianity to task for not being Christian enough'. Furthermore, it reveals the subtle persistence of the therapeutic ethos, which for all its claims to the defortification of the subject, persists in the very ascetic practices that it claims to subvert. Such a reading asks the reader to envisage a will-less surrender to a measureless plurality under the pretext that any form of identity presupposes a repression of alterity and a justification of the traditional subject. This reading is contradicted by Nietzsche's usage of the ancient Greek *agon* in *Homer's Contest*. While the agon is indispensable for the 'health of the city', to prevent men from becoming 'godless and vengeful', the practice of ostracism is indispensable for the agon. It promotes excellence by banishing those strong enough to stifle the action of the agon by dominating it completely.[60]

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[60] Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* can be read in this light as a tragedy that portrays not only the downfall of the main character, Brutus, but also as the first fall of Rome - a dramatization of the closing of that democratic space that provided so much inspiration for Arendt.

Why should no one be the best? Because then the contest would come to an end and the eternal source of life for the Hellenic state would be endangered…Originally [ostracism] is not a safety valve, but a means of stimulation: the individual who towers above the rest is eliminated, so that the contest of the forces may reawaken. [The Hellenic ideal of competition] loathes a monopoly of predominance, and fears the dangers of this, it desires as protective measure against genius - a second genius. (Nietzsche 1994: 192)

In a similar way, Machiavelli endorses republicanism because only this form of government is able to hold insatiable human desires (Honig 1994: 70) in a creative tension. Like Arendt, Machiavelli particularly admires the Roman concept of the *res publica* and its ability to 'allow the excitement of the ill-humors that agitate a state, to have a way prescribed by law for venting itself' (Honig 1994: 71). Without this form of discharge, the inevitable result would be endless conspiracies and coup d'etat, for what turns inward and generates neuroses in individuals, causes disintegration of democracy in republics.

Nietzsche likewise turns to law as a potential stabilizing measure. But what has originally been used by the lords and masters as a means of curbing the lowly excesses of the slaves, turns into a means of the will to revenge, and as Foucault shows, as a disciplinary means of breeding docile, tamed subjects. What makes the life of which Zarathustra speaks so difficult to understand, is the demand that the life that 'must surpass itself, must also be situated and contextualized if it is to exist at all' and, as Honig (1994: 73) points out, is often forced to do it institutionally.

A particular reading of Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* may clarify matters in this respect. According to Nietzsche, no living thing can be healthy, strong or productive, except by living within a certain horizon - a set of values and beliefs that are unconditionally, uncritically, accepted. 'No artist will paint his picture, no general win his victory, no nation gain its freedom', without such a horizon. The limiting factor needs to be loved 'infinitely more than it deserves to be loved' (Nietzsche 1957: 9). The absence of this factor is nihilism, and Nietzsche identifies at least four different stages of this condition. The first stage is the recognition of the absence of this meaning-giving horizon. In section 12 of *The Will to Power*, nihilism is recognized as 'the long *waste* of

strength, the agony of the *in vain*.' As Schrift (1988: 94) points out, any goal could have been posited, as long as something was to be achieved in the process.

The second form of nihilism is reached when 'one has posited a totality, a schematzation', that aims at achieving unity. Nietzsche holds that this metaphysical faith in unity gives man the feeling of 'being dependent upon something that is infinitely superior to him, and he sees himself as a kind of mode of the deity', and accordingly ascribes value to himself as a kind of representative of this deity. No such universal exists, however, and by losing faith in this unity, man is no longer able to sustain value in infinitely valuable wholes. Whereas the first form of unity was characterized by pessimism, this one is typified by skepticism.

The third form of nihilism can be called 'passive' nihilism (Schrift 1988: 57). Intimidated by the fact of meaningless becoming, no opportunity of a unity in which the individual can immerse himself, is offered. The Platonic escape of dismissing the world and of fabricating a whole, stable and *true* world behind the apparent one, disappears. Man realizes that this suprasensual world has been 'fabricated solely from psychological needs, and that he has absolutely no right to it, the last form of nihilism comes into being; it includes disbelief in any metaphysical worlds, and forbids itself any belief in a true world' (Nietzsche 1968: 110). The source of this passive nihilism is what Nietzsche refers to as 'faith in categories': we have, in pseudo-Platonic[61] fashion, measured the world according to categories that refer to an entirely fictitious realm.

In antithesis to the three incomplete or passive forms of nihilism stands what Nietzsche terms active nihilism. The very same symptoms could refer to either strength or weakness:

Nihilism. It is ambiguous.

A. Nihilism as sign of increased power of the spirit, as active nihilism.

B. Nihilism as decline and recession of power of the spirit, as passive nihilism.

<div align="right">(Nietzsche 1968: 22)</div>

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[61] The role of Plato in 'falsifying' the world is far more complex than appears at first sight, and this fact is also acknowledged by Nietzsche (1968: 85). It is not possible to examine this topic here in depth, but this will be done in later research.

The difference between active and passive nihilism lies in the fact that, while both forms of nihilism aims at devaluating the categories of aim, unity and reality, active nihilism is not restricted to destruction, but aims at the same time at opening up the possibility for creating new values. Nietzsche notes that 'every major growth is accompanied by a major crumbling and passing away: suffering, the symptoms of decline belong in the times of tremendous advances' (Nietzsche 1968: 112). With the abolition of the distinction between 'real' and 'apparent' worlds, men are faced with the challenge of overcoming themselves as they have hitherto existed, and embracing *Übermenschlichkeit*.[62] These would be the beings that have freed the sensuous from its depreciation of by pseudo-Platonists. At the same time, the *Übermensch* avoids the mistake of the positivists in that it does not simply invert the traditional metaphysical hierarchy and regard the 'apparent' world as real and the supersensuous as false. Instead, Nietzsche now demarcates the sensuous as 'perspectival-perceptual' (Schrift 1988: 49). In the prologue to *Beyond Good and Evil*, he states: 'The perspectival is the basic condition of true life. Everything asserts itself in its perspectives against other beings and other perspectives'. Thus, 'unity' is the (temporary) result of an agon of conflicting perspectives. By viewing life as the concatenation of perspectives, Nietzsche brings semblance to the order of the real. Truth, far from being fixed and constant, is but the petrification of a single perspective that has been unduly esteemed. And the loss of this perspective has hit man hard. 'The space between knowledge and action has never yet been breached in a single instant' (Nietzsche 1982: 16).[63]

Throughout his work, Nietzsche addresses the problem of a slave morality that contaminates modern culture, most thoroughly as we have seen in the *Genealogy* and in *Beyond Good and Evil,* but in his 1874 essay *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* he invokes this topic in a critique of historicism. In this essay he insists that great action is destroyed not only by the pacifying of the acting subject by the gaze of reason, but reason's urge to universalize destroys all possible realms of genuine action. Action needs protective, partially closed horizons, to unfold. According to Villa (1999: 110), 'the theme that knowledge kills action goes back as far as *The Birth of Tragedy'*, and

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[62]II use the word Übermenschlickeit instead of Übermensch, in order to stress that a quality, and not a readily identifiable subject, is indicated.

[63] Cf. *The Gay Science* s 335, where Nietzsche states that 'every action that has ever been done was done in an altogether unique and irretrievable way'.

'Socratism' can be understood as a will to truth that dissolves life-sustaining illusions. That is why, as Haar (1990: 19) points out, even *ressentiment* has its value. Generally defined by Nietzsche as 'the instinct for decadence', it is the negating aspect of life. Since every value expresses a point of view necessary for the growth and maintenance of a particular aspect of life, every sign of weakness also contains the possibility of weakness from recovery. Haar sees resentment as 'a defensive wall, a systematic protection against the unrelenting impulses of desire, egoism, aggression, cruelty, etc'. (Haar 1990: 19). Resentment could thus be seen as a necessary 'limiting' factor that keeps unbridled exercise of the impulse to rule at bay. And if there is one impulse that ought to be checked by a counterforce, it is the 'will to know'.

One of the defining 'tasks' of the *Übermensch* can thus be taken as having to create shadows where too much transparency has led to nihilism. Nietzsche might have wished the *Übermensch* to be a 'living horizon' against which new dramas could unfold themselves. For, as indicated in Chapter 2, it could be the shock of the 'attack of the amorphous'[64] that led to the flight inwards. Nietzsche is not the only philosopher, however, to realize the importance of the principle of measure.

Socrates is generally taken to be a prime example of destroyer of life-sustaining illusions, but a careful second reading may reveal him as a figure whose virtuosity may well qualify him as one of Nietzsche's 'great men' - a value-creator that inspired the elusive concept of the *Übermensch*. With Socrates, debate did not flounder, or result in mere relativism, as it did with the Sophists. As much as he appreciates the value of doxa, not any opinion would do. For Socrates, like Nietzsche, knew that the measurelessness of relativism could kill debate as readily as a rigidly defined episteme. If there is no rigidly definable, incorporeal, eternal, unchanging 'truth' as Nietzsche claims, all conceptions of wholeness or completeness, and indeed all meaning as such, must assume a particular, corporeal and historical form. This means that humans always fail at the mammoth endeavour of 'achieving truth', and initially Nietzsche reads Socrates as the vortex or turning point of so-called world history, who 'corrupted the typical Hellenic youth' (Nietzsche 1987: 85). Socrates destroyed tragic insight with his demand that everything be intelligible, but he created *a new illusion to replace tragic insight*: the illusion that man could not only attain knowledge, but also correct his existence with the knowledge

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[64] A reference to Hannah Pitkin's 'The Attack of the Blob'.

he managed to achieve. As destroyer of tragedy, Socrates seems to represent a negative, destructive and critical force, but we are presented with a wonderful form of compensation: the phenomenon known as the '*daimon* of Socrates' - an ironic force that always '*dissuades*' (Nietzsche 1967: 88). Nietzsche comments that far from being a destructive influence, Socrates seems to create a new operational framework that stimulates in a new way:

> For if we imagine the whole incalculable sum of energy used up for this world not in service of knowledge, but for the practical, i.e. egoistic aims of peoples and individuals, then we realize that in that case universal wars of annihilation and continual migrations of peoples would probably have weakened the instinctive lust for life to such an extent that suicide would have become a general custom…a practical pessimism that [has been] in the world wherever it did not appear in some form, especially as religion and science. (Nietzsche 1967: 96).

Even if Nietzsche yearned for a 'Socrates who practices music' (Nietzsche 1967: 94), Socrates, as Zuckert (1985: 215) notes, by initiating his search for knowledge, gave men a new reason to live. In Socrates, then, the stage and the actor fuse: he sets the conditions for a new kind of 'play', even if his dialectic does not quite reach the heights of tragedy in its prime. At least Socrates, by living his dialectic, momentarily kept the action-stifling impulses of theory at bay.

Chapter 4

The Redemption in Language.

-                          It is the spectator, and not the life, that art really mirrors.

Oscar Wilde The Picture of Dorian Gray.

The turn to language in post-structuralist theory is at the same time a turn to tragedy. Contemporary theory repeats one of tragedy's most salient forms: the realization of the limitations and fragility of every conceivable form of mastery, especially the impossibility of the endeavour that aims at *total* knowledge, that only redeems itself in the realization that it could only have failed. And in no domain was this more visible than in the history of hermeneutics.

After Schleiermacher, the interpreter was initially seen to benefit from the temporal distance separating him from the original writer. It enabled him 'to understand the text at first as well, and then *better* than the author' (Schleiermacher 1977: 95 my emphasis). In trying to establish a general hermeneutics, as opposed to the regional biblical, juridical and philological hermeneutics, Schleiermacher sought to uncover the principles that operated universally through all the disciplines. In Schleiermacher's view, this task was essentially psychological: the interpreter must project himself 'inside' the author's mind, and reconstruct the author's original imposition in a universal sense. For a long time, hermeneutics found its justification in the overcoming of obvious difficulties and failures of understanding. Schleiermacher soon realized that the mere awareness of inconsistencies and obscurities is no guarantee that the text has been correctly understood. Linge (in Gadamer 1976: ix) puts it thus: 'Misunderstanding arises naturally because of changes in word meanings, world views and so on that have taken place in the time that separates the author from the interpreter. Intervening historical developments are a snare that will inevitably entangle understanding, unless their effects are neutralized. Hermeneutic principles are therefore called upon not just when we experience difficulties, but always'. Schleiermacher found the remedy for a possible misunderstanding in the method of attempting to carefully reconstruct the historical situation or context from which the text sprung. Only a critical and methodological interpretation could possibly uncover the author's true meaning, and the only legitimate critique could come from the author's own assumptions. A typical Romantic prejudice is

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here at work: If the Romantic artist ceased to imitate life and began to express divine truth or the inner flame of genius - as Herder put it: 'The artist is become a creator God' - the task of the Romantic hermeneuticist was to amplify the voice of the author, or to reconstruct the 'original' meaning of the work at hand. The desire for transparency becomes the main drive behind this activity as well. It is interesting to note, in this context, that the victory of *homo faber* is evident in even the abstract discipline of hermeneutics: Albeit a reconstruction, the terminology of the Romantic hermeneuticist clearly reveals the Platonistic prejudice against acting and play in favour of the author as the 'maker' of a text.

Connecting or ascribing a text to a certain 'author' may serve to underwrite the ways in which relations of power operate within given societies. In his chronicle of the changing meanings of the word 'author' through the ages, Foucault shows that until the seventeenth century, the scientific text was legitimated by the celebrity and the signature of its author[65]. Since then, scientific truth became formalized. Methodological procedures for verifying truth were developed, and the name of the author was no longer central to truth claims or the meaning of the text. Scientific truth became more 'public'[66] and impersonal.

In literature almost the exact opposite took place. 'During the Middle Ages, the texts we now call literary (stories, epics, comedies, tragedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorized without any question about the identity of the author, their anonymity caused no difficulties, since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status' (Foucault in Rabinow 1984: 25). The late eighteenth century saw the birth of Literature with a capital L. It was now an autonomous activity, highly valued, and occupied an important position on the intellectual stage. And the authority of the author kept growing. As is obvious, even in the age of the videosphere, the evaluation, standing and reputation of the author determines the position of the work. A text with an 'author' will receive far more attention than one that cannot be traced to a person whose credentials as an authority on a particular domain of 'truth' cannot be verified. The author is (for the time being) still

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[65] Those texts that we now call scientific - those dealing with cosmology and the heavens, medicine and illness, natural science and geography - during the Middle Ages were accepted as 'true' only when marked with the name of their author.

[66] Used here not in Arendt's sense of the word, but to indicate that scientific knowledge was no longer seen as the 'private property' of the discoverer.

alive and well. For Foucault, the practice of appending the author's name to a text means that a system of power is perpetuated wherein truth can be located, analyzed, disseminated and 'owned' by certain individuals who are awarded the status of 'authorities'. The role of 'author' means that there continue to be individuals who have to bear the burden of truth, who, as 'authorities on true discourse' determine how their texts are to be received.

According to Foucault, the most important motive for dispensing with the author is that it is 'one of the possible specifications of the subject' (Foucault 1977: 138). Both the subject and the author are functions of relations of power, with others, and as indicated, also with ourselves. Disciplinary and confessional practices work to create subjects with static, unified, 'true' selves, a process in which writing plays an important part. The 'truth' of the individual is 'deciphered' by putting it into discourse, into mechanisms of confession, and the documentation of individuals through disciplinary practices like surveillance and examination. In addition, as we have seen, the construction of the self by power through the requirement of its putting its 'truth' in discourse is forgotten, as the ubiquity of this practice makes it appear as natural and universal that a subject has to exist with an inner truth. Discipline binds us to our own individuality by documenting it and asserting it as the 'truth' of one's nature and character, while confession enjoins us to find our 'true' self deep inside and express it to others. Confession and discipline also function to create individuals who are *responsible* for their own actions, and as has been indicated in chapter 3, also a kind of autonomous power as to whether or not to act according to this truth. The subject created in this fashion is not simply the subject *with* an inner truth, but as Alcoff (1990: 114) states, a subject *in* truth, a truthful subject. This version of the self is not the universal, final product of nature, but as it becomes increasingly clear, a cultural construct invoking more and more resistance, due to its constraining tendencies. Foucault complains that the view of the subject as possessing an inner truth, having originated through practices of power 'forces the subject back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way' (Foucault 1983: 212). By insisting that the self has a truth to be discovered within, one that is truly one's own and must therefore be adhered to, one becomes caught within the constraints of a static 'truth'. The choice as to whether to adhere to this truth may exist for the modern autonomous subject, but the status of this

'truth' as truth brings about a pressure to conform to it, both from outside and inside the subject.

Foucault's description of the constrained subject can, by implication, be applied to the author. As Nietzsche (1968a: 124) put it: 'in the face of any authority, one is not allowed to think, [instead] one has to *obey*!' Like the author of the self, the author of texts may feel constrained by an author-function that insists upon, searches for, demands and expects conformity to a 'truth' of who the author 'really' is.[67] Foucault expresses his personal frustrations at these expectations by claiming to 'tear' himself from himself, as to 'prevent [himself] from always being the same' […] When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before' (Foucault 1991: 32, 27). In addition, he claims that the function of an intellectual is not only to modify the thought of others, but 'one's own as well' (Foucault 1976: 461). To comment that his work has changed over the years, he replied: 'Well, do you think that I have worked like this all these years to say the same thing and not to be changed?' (Foucault 1996: 379).

Like Foucault, Derrida turned to Nietzsche to address the authoritarian domination that accompanied the modernist concept of the subject as a privileged centre of discourse, and the hallowed 'source' of the meaning of his texts. As we have seen in chapter 3, Nietzsche questions the adequacy of linguistic expression to make sense of reality, and as one of the three chief protagonists of the so-called 'hermeneutics of suspicion,' he suspects all claims to a single truth. Moreover, traditional metaphysics seems to place the subject in the position of origin, using its modes of perception and reflection to legitimate knowledge and the acquisition thereof. Nietzsche challenges this peculiar visual contract, this 'occularcentrism' (Jay 1993: 10) that characterizes Western thought. Nietzsche's perspectivism can be construed as an invitation to re-think our ability to penetrate the world epistemologically. He asks of his readers to recognize the limits to what can be made transparent:

> *to see differently*… to think of an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something, so it is an absurdity and a non-concept of the mind that is demanded.

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[67] Both the asceticism of authors like J.M. Coetzee and J.D. Salinger, and the 'play-acting' of George Bernard Shaw can be seen as reactions to the 'author-function' in society.

> There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; the more affects
> we allow to speak about a thing, the more eyes, various eyes we are able to use
> for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our
> 'objectivity'. (Nietzsche 1994: 92)

In its desire to rationalize knowledge and order relations between the world and ourselves, the will to know suppresses all that can be considered disruptive, subversive or impure. At the same time the will itself exists in multiple forms, as a plurality of drives, forces, sensations and effects, that refuse to be domesticated. The subject is identified as origin of meaning only through a process of differentiation and reduction, a course through which the will is designated as a psychological property. Metaphysical knowledge, as Nietzsche has indicated, reflects, responds to and repeats the anxieties and desires of the subject for purity and stability in meaning - a drive to create the world in its own image. The persistent attempts to penetrate the self in order to isolate and extract the 'impure', the 'undisciplined' or the 'irrational' had effects that stretched far into the social and political arena. As we have seen, Nietzsche has shown that concepts of morality and notions of good and evil arose originally not through any objective calculus of utility, but out of a *Pathos der Distanz* towards the lowly elements of society, which were deemed to be 'bad', the opposite of good (*agathos*). The etymological roots of 'the good' - across the major Western European languages at least[68] - is always associated with what is aristocratic, noble, or of a higher order in general: 'It signifies who one is, who possesses reality, who is actual, who is true' (Nietzsche 1994: 29). The notion of the 'good' is dependent on its opposite, the 'bad' or as decadence gained momentum, 'evil', if it is to maintain conceptual, and by implication, political power: 'It seeks its opposite only as to affirm itself more gracefully and triumphantly' (Nietzsche 1994: 37). This logic forms the backbone to traditional metaphysical thought: Both Nietzsche and Derrida demonstrate how certain privileged concepts, posited as properties of the subject, came to mirror established norms of truth and objectivity, and thus became fossilized into 'knowledge'. As Foucault concurred, all knowledge derives from a perspectivism which has as its source the will to power, truth and mastery.

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[68] One example will suffice: The English word 'good' is derived from the common Teutonic root *góod*, that translates as 'of high rank and valour' (O.E.D.). In addition, it must be added that the English word indicating 'deity', God, shares the same etymological root.

Throughout his work, but specifically in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida critically examines the status of the subject and the metaphysical dichotomies upon which it depends. By following Nietzsche, in developing his own genealogy of concepts, Derrida is able to show that the thinking subject is inextricably bound to language. If thought is assumed to precede language, then Derrida exposes the ways in which consciousness can be said to act as a 'vessel' for language. His readings of Husserl, Saussure and Rousseau indicate that the subject who, through a process of self-reflection upon the object of knowledge - especially when that object is the inner world of consciousness itself - can also be viewed as holding an ontological relation to speech. Nearly every philosophical position places this speaking subject at the origin of representation, and it is the stability of this relation that deconstruction contests.

Technically more of a structuralist than a post-structuralist, Jacques Lacan takes issue not only with the idea of psychological depth, but also with the attempt at achieving pure self-transparency, 'insofar as it maintains the subject within the horizon of present to self in general' (Nancy 1992: 81). In addition, his subversion of the subject raises Descartes' demon, because 'every emission of speech is always, up to a certain point, under the necessity to err' (Lacan as quoted by Palmer 1997). If the attributes of knowledge and subjectivity were for Descartes permanence, substantiality and identity, and for Rousseau 'true', for Lacan these become associated with provisionality, uncertainty and contingency. Lacan radicalizes the Freudian endeavour of placing the subject's speech, slips, and recollections under scrutiny. Lacan, like Derrida, draws on Saussure's theory that the structure of language and the construction of meaning are the result of a constitutive algorithm: the signifier as sound image or material attribute of language, and the signified as the concept of a particular sign. Saussure holds that these signs exist in a relation of reciprocal difference, and that language itself is an arbitrary system of meaning shifting arbitrarily between different referents. Since language seems to settle its terms of reference under certain 'stable' signs, Saussure holds that the sign and the signifier appears to have a reciprocal interdependence within a given linguistic system.

Lacan loosened the noose of signification and widens the scope of its structural effects. He establishes what he famously called the 'incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (Lacan in Palmer 1997), or the non-correspondence between word and thing. 'This aporia of reference' destroys the representational function of the sign. As

Bowie puts it: 'The algorithmic bar between signifier and signified resists meaning' (Bowie 1994: 21). Furthermore, the signified is no longer associated with the concept of the object, but is closely associated with the plethora of dominant social meanings, norms and prejudices that make up a community. The signifier is diachronic and polysemic, and operates with a certain autonomy, in separation from the process of signification. Language, made up from a network of elements and relations operating according to a synchronic structure, can be known *only in its general form*, and not through specific signs. Furthermore, language is anterior to any subject, and it is structure that confers meaning on the speech of the subject. Thus, 'The form of language defines subjectivity' (Lacan in Lemaire 1977: 71). The signifier acts as a shield between self and self, making a genuinely penetrating *psyche*[69]-analysis impossible.

Derrida's deconstruction of self-presence, and its boundedness with the phoneme, identifies Husserl as well as Saussure as submitting to a logic that undermines their preoccupation with language as a synchronic and expressive phenomenon. Considering the origins of language, Saussure was pushed to reflect upon the status of writing in the consideration of the sign. According to Derrida, Saussure, like Rousseau before him, reduces writing to a representation of speech, and understands it as a dangerous force that subverts sensibility and the alleged 'unity' of the sign and the self. For Rousseau, writing is a contamination, a barrier to pure self-presence and a 'crisis in signification'. He condemns writing as a destructive force, and even as a disease of speech. Rousseau points to the 'primitive' subject's gesturing to express what he wanted, and holds this to be a 'pure' transparent way of communicating, without the 'falsifying' tendencies of the written word. Later in the 'Discourse on the Origin of Inequality' Rousseau links the written word to the development of culture and knowledge. According to his Romantic paradigm, a 'true' human community exists only where direct, undeceptive communication exists, and like Socrates, he believes that this can only happen in a living exchange of ideas.[70] But writing helped to destroy the organic community and its face-to face encounters. The latter is replaced with vast networks of communication, and the

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[69] This is a reference to the usage of *psyche* in Chapter 1, p. 3.
[70] It must be recalled that his conception of democracy was based on his (selective) memory of the town meetings of the small Swiss cantons. This shows an interesting correspondence with Arendt's usage of the town meetings of the early Americans, but surprisingly enough, Rousseau shows no awareness of the theatrical dimension to such meetings.

increasing anonymity[71] that follows leads to an increasing abuse of power and loss of recourse to justice. The division in the relationship between speech and writing, between the one as 'natural' and interior and the other as 'unnatural' and exterior led both Rousseau and Saussure to an account of the *internal* structure of language that sees sign and sense as able to form a natural unity. Rousseau identifies an 'original' capacity for speech that separates man from the various animal species and enabled development and self-perfectibility on the part of man. He sees speech as a natural, expressive essence of subjectivity: it is based on genuine need and 'passion' in subjectivity, and as is generally the case with naturalisms, claims to secure the presence of the self to itself. According to Payne (1993: 147), both Rousseau and Saussure rely upon a 'naturalistic' psychology that brings with it the unavoidable problems of sense, intuition, and self-presence'. Neither Rousseau nor Saussure was able, according to Derrida, to see the concept of writing and the principle of inscription within speech itself. Writing and speech both share the same essential features - there is no *concept* of writing that essentially distinguishes it from speech. Both depend on iterability and relationality for what they are. Derrida calls the conglomerate of semiotic features common to both speech and writing (features that are so essential to each other they absorb the differences that separate the one from the other) arche-writing (arche-écriture). Arche-writing is the system of cultural signs that will always be anterior to speech and all that becomes constituted as a sign. This marks the relationship with the other, the movement of temporalization, and language and writing as such. Derrida undermines the unity of the sign, and 'menaces substantiality' (Derrida 1974: 162). He considers the movement of signification to be a dynamic process, and the attempt at producing a transcendental signified occurs only by reducing and suppressing arche-writing to the narrow archmetaphysical concept of mirrored speech. For Derrida, writing is not synonymous with the written word, but stands for whatever 'eludes, subverts, or opposes the discourse of reason' (Norris 100: p.73).

What Rousseau lacked, Nietzsche provided. For Derrida, Niezsche serves not only as an exemplar of undecidability, but as an example of an author who, divided against himself, sets the text free. In an unprecedented affirmation of the activity of interpretation, Nietzsche expressed an antipathy against anything, including the author, that could act as inhibitor of the play of the text. 'When his book opens its mouth, the

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[71] Here Rousseau's ideas have interesting correlates with Arendt's work, but the exploration of these is beyond the scope of this work.

author must shut his' (Nietzsche 1986: 140). Once a text has been written, it acquires a life of its own, and becomes a playing field, or, perhaps in more appropriate Nietzschean terms, a battlefield of contesting meanings. Throughout his oeuvre, but especially in Ecce Homo, Nietzsche openly questions the privileged position of the author within the field of interpretation. In the opening sentence of *'Why I write such Good Books'* he explicitly states: 'I am one thing, my writings another'. Nietzsche thus invites his readers to join into the game of interpretation, to bring their own perspectives into the task of evaluation. Nietzsche thus abandons his position of author-ity in favour of one that would provoke a healthy, *agonistic*, performative attitude by his readers.

Language, then, as echoed by Saussure, 'is not a function of the speaking subject' (Derrida 1988: 148). If this is the case, neither confession, nor autobiography is really a possibility, since it can neither reflect the speaker's intentions, nor can the reader (or hearer) be guaranteed a statement free from irony. Confession could be a ruse, and autobiography a mask. Language resists disclosure. In *Signature, Event, Context* (Derrida 1971), Derrida opposes the notion of a definable context for any spoken or written act, as defined by the speech act theories of J.L. Austin. The theme of the lecture was the Event of the signature as exemplifying the 'iterability' of signs, or the potential for a text to change under the influence of different Events, or in the event of its being inserted into a different context. Austin's aim in proposing this theory was, in the words of Staten (1984: 113) 'to provide the ethical underpinning of felicitous speech acts, or language which clearly reflects the speaker's intention'. For this purpose he classified speech acts as performative when they perform an action through language, and as constative when they merely convey information. This cannot but fail. In the first instance, Austin's division of speech acts into performative and constative categories do not hold, since the two are not mutually exclusive. There can be no strict correspondence between what the signature acknowledges as being said, and what is said. He admits, for example, that his own conference paper is *contrefait* (counterfeit), because he verifies it at another Event, namely that of the written publication. In addition, Derrida asks whether any context can ever be absolutely known, or sufficiently known to warrant any assumption that communication can take place in a univocal fashion. Furthermore, can any context ever be absolutely *determinate* for a given speech act? Derrida holds that the principle of iterability makes speech acts infelicitous by their very nature. The coming of the Event is a way to acknowledge the complex network that is involved in the production of 'texts' -

a more generic term than Austin's 'speech acts' - a term that presumes in traditional Rousseauian fashion, the priority of spoken words. Derrida invokes his earlier concept of the 'supplement' in conceiving a new way for intellectuals to conceptualize the way 'the outside penetrates and thus determines the inside' (Derrida 1990: 152). According to Graf (in Derrida 1990: 159), this feature is operative in what he calls 'the deniability of texts', that he explains as 'the position that you try to separate yourself from [that] tends to reappear as a repressed motif in your own text'. For this reason it is possible to state that autobiography and confession are almost superfluous, as Nietzsche has indicated, every speaker or writer cannot but engage in it. In this respect, Nietzsche anticipates certain psychoanalytic tendencies by suggesting that a philosophical text should be treated as 'a kind of *involuntary* and personal memoir' (Nietzsche 1966: 21).

The value of Derrida for our purpose, lies in the fact that he dispenses with *respomsibility*. In an essay on Mallarmé, he states: 'a text is made in order to dispense with references' (Derrida as quoted by MacGill 1988: 285). Like with his much quoted but still enigmatic aphorism 'there is nothing on the outside of the text' (Derrida 1994), he means to exclude all appeals to authors or to the 'thing itself' - 'the thing always escapes', he notes at the end of *Speech and Phenomena*. Even the subject, says Derrida, is nothing but a linguistic or textual effect that manifests itself in the play of *différance*. And no textual effect can be made transparent, for any such attempt is already inscribed in textuality: *Il n'ya pas de hors texte*. This should obviously not be taken as a kind of 'linguistic idealism' (Anderson 1995: 89), but rather that what has come to be known since the Renaissance as the 'subject' can in no way be exempted from the general dynamics of *différence* and its ubiquitous textuality. The fact that 'the speaking or signifying subject could not be present to itself as speaking or signifying, without the play of linguistic or semiological *différence*' (Derrida 1982: 16) means that *différence* envelops the subject *before* itself, and forever acts to undermine and subvert the very process of becoming a subject in the first place. In addition, this failure at complete constitution cannot simply be said to precede the subject, but 'accompanies' and co-exist *with* the subject. Chronological, or teleological usage is here futile. *Différence* cannot be claimed as the origin of any kind of philosophical activity, it cannot be the intention or the intuition of any transcendental subject. Even the structure of a question like 'What is *différence*?' betrays its traditional metaphysical prejudice that expects the constitution of an answer by an original, knowing subject. It remains in the propositional mode, and

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assumes that something like substantial consciousness without a remainder, a residue or an other is possible. The movement of *différence* does not allow such simplicities, nor does it simply happen to the subject - 'it produces a subject' (Derrida 1967: 92). As Derrida explicitly states:

> Nothing - no present and in-*different* being - thus precedes *différence* and spacing. There is no subject who is agent, and master of *différence*, who would not eventually and empirically be overtaken by *différence*. Subjectivity - like objectivity - is an effect of *différence*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différence*. This is why the a of *différance* also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation - in a word, the relationship to the present, the relationship to a present reality, to a being - are always deferred. The economic aspect of *différance*, which brings into play a certain, not conscious, calculation in a field of forces, is inseparable from the more narrowly semiotic aspects of différance. It confirms that the subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends on the movement of differences, that the subject is not present, nor above all present to itself before *différence*, that the subject is constituted only in being divided from itself… (Derrida 1981:28).

Consciousness forms the apotheosis of the metaphysical privileging of presence. That personal identity is nothing more than a convenient (if oppressive) fiction, is hardly new. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume accepts the implications of the fact that the idea of an enduring self facilitates our dealings with other people as well as with the world – and ourselves – but adds that the idea is philosophically unsound. Looking into his own mind, Hume could discover no enduring impression on which he could base the attribution of an enduring identity from one moment to the next: 'For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or the other of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never observe anything except the perception'[72] (Hume 1965: 252). He concludes that the 'self' is just a bundle of

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[72] Here is a clear anticipation of Husserl and Bretano's concept of intentionality.

perceptions and that the idea of personal identity is fabricated once the mind reflects on past impressions and takes resemblance there as a sign of identity. For support of this latter fiction, the idea of an enduring substance, soul, or self, is illicitly proposed as the ground of every resemblance. Hume's critique of the self remains contemporary: as we have seen, our self-understanding is significantly determined by economic and libidinal forces beyond our control. For both structuralists and post-structuralists, the self is nothing but a surface effect whose meaning must forever lie outside itself in the various codes and language games that precede and maintain it. The important point is that no substantial conception of the self can be accepted uncritically, and this has important consequences for autobiographical and confessional strategies. Insofar as both St Augustine and Rousseau are dependent on just such accounts, one is forced to conclude that from a linguistic point of view, their work appears slightly naive. Autobiography, after all, involves an attempt at unity, a retrieval of the self from its dispersal into the world. This gives rise to the fiction of an enduring self that maintains a singular identity. The very idea of the individual is defined by that what is forever undivided (in-*dividuum*), and thus conceptually irreducible.

The disruption of consciousness by Freud and Nietzsche is thus for Derrida a disruption of the founding concern of Western metaphysics. Just as logocentricism led to a suppression of writing, the conception of a subject of full presence and self-transparency implies a violent suppression of the irreducible plethora of difference to be found in any self. The speaking subject cannot but pass through *différence* in order to produce itself. Any claim to mastery is always forestalled, postponed, or interrupted. The subject can neither be stabilized nor guaranteed. This would only be possible if the subject's historicity could be undone. It should thus be considered an absolute impossibility. Deconstruction recognizes, in other words, that the subject's condition of possibility is also the condition of its *im*possibility.

If this is the case, deconstruction likewise recognizes that these conditions are also the conditions for its freedom. The constitution of the self also implies an opening of itself to the contingency of the world and the play of self-deferral. The gesture that summons the subject to know itself is also the gesture that 'establishes its ex-centric existence' (Llewelyn 1986: 119), and, importantly for our purposes, also the gesture that makes the stasis, nihilism, and unbearable burden of absolute self-knowledge an ultimate impossibility. Subjectivity is dynamic: it undergoes a perpetual play of constitution, and

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'a constitutive loss of self' (Lacoue-Labarthe 1993: 82). Derrida employs the term *desistance* to indicate 'the imprint of the ineluctable that constitutes the subject' (Derrida in Lacoue-Labarthe 1989: 4). *Desistence* is present even before the subject becomes the subject of 'a reflection, a decision, an action or a passion' (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990: 83). And, one might add, also before being made subject to confession.

Throughout history, different philosophical models formed the horizon for the construction of a particular kind of subject. Whether phenomenological, dialectic or transcendental, for the deconstructivist they all share a commitment to the containment and ordering of what they perceive to be a threatening, disruptive other. By taking a particular facet of Being (Heidegger), as given these systems repress residues, which allow for the emergence of a subject as author of sense and meaning. Yet it is these very residues that prevent the subject from being consumed by his own subjectivity. The site of subjectivity that awaits 'disciplining' is so complex that some secret corner is bound to escape the Foucaultian 'gaze'. This 'reserve', kept intact via the very metaphorical and metonymic structure of language, is the element that keeps the mask in its place. There is no need to sink to the levels of anonymity that Foucault demands, writing cannot but *enforce* anonymity.

If the failure of the inquiring subject may be construed as a saving grace, a *felix culpa*, the violent dimension to this should not be forgotten. As we have seen, it is one of the leading themes in Nietzsche's oeuvre to criticize the repressive tendency of Western metaphysics to equalize what is not equal - the violent indifference to what constitutes it as 'a system of adiaphoristic reduction' (Van der Walt 1995: 267). Through the notion of *différence*, Derrida tries to rekindle a regard for the singular and the unique that the history of metaphysics smothers. This rekindling, however, is bound to expire to cinders. For not even deconstruction can avoid the violence involved in the abstracting tendencies of language. By its very generalizing nature, language creates distance between itself and the particular. As Goosen (1998: 67) points out, far from generating an ironic aestheticism, deconstruction in all its many guises is shot through with a sensitivity towards the inevitability of committing violence. Likewise, deconstruction shows a tragic awareness that every attempt to avoid metaphysical or linguistic violence, contains the pre-conditions for it. Even where there is an apparent absence of violence, 'in the most reassuring and disarming discussion and persuasion, force and violence are present' (Derrida in Critchley 1996: 83).

Derrida, however, warns in an interview (*Fragmente* 1999: 47) that deconstruction should not be too readily equated with tragedy, for structurally speaking, tragedy implies closure and finality, which is the very antithesis of deconstruction. Nevertheless, it is possible to read *Antigone* as the tragedy in which the *hyper*tragic theme of irretrievable loss manifests itself. For Antigone there is no redemptive Colonus. The loss of Polineikes is absolute, and any attempt at restitution is futile. Mourning is the only option. For as Goosen (1998: 69) shows, deconstruction is nothing *but* mourning. And a failed mourning at that, since any claim at 'success' in this regard would imply a further violation of the other through internalization and assimilation - a mere reduction to the archival.

Perhaps this is why deconstruction shows a certain impatience with hermeneutics. If there is a tragic dimension to the hermeneutic tradition, from a deconstructive perspective it is not tragic *enough.* For Caputo in '*Cold Hermeneutics*' hermeneutics is like Jonathan Swift's state of happiness, 'which is a perpetual possession of being well deceived' (Caputo 1986: 270), and guilty of nostalgia for phenomenological immanence. This continues to be a problem only for so long as Gadamer's radical shift is ignored, and meaning continues to be taken in terms of an object to be appropriated.

Against the notion of a self-contained work of art and an original meaning, 'the intention of the author', Hans-Georg Gadamer proceeded from an analysis of the aesthetic experience to a re-evaluation of the type of understanding involved in the human sciences and ultimately in every form of human experience expressed by language. According to Gadamer, meaning is the space or opening in which whatever calls for understanding makes its appearance as the matter of thinking. And this matter (*Sache*) appears in the form of a question. 'In the comic confusion between question and answer that Plato describes, there is the profound recognition of the priority of the question in all knowledge and discourse that really reveals something of an object…' (Gadamer 1980: 23). The omnipresent questions, however, are never formally stated: They are questions of horror, finitude and death. They encroach and envelop, and one remains perpetually exposed to them. In encountering them - for one could never hope to answer them - the finitude, historicality and situatedness of understanding itself is confronted. And that is hermeneutics.

After Gadamer, understanding becomes the event in which one encounters the other in its otherness, not as an object from a different place and another time, but as that

which resists the grasp of knowledge and requires one to loosen one's hold or to open one's fist.[73] The other is that which refuses to be objectified. Whether the other is taken ethically, as a person (as with Buber and Levinas), or contemplatively, as the subject matter of an inquiry (like Derrida with the question of language), or politically, as a in judging his performance as an actor, or therapeutically when one tries to reconstruct a dream (Lacan and Freud), in all these cases the refusal of the other to be contained in the prepared conceptual apparatus is always there. At the same time familiarization is attempted, 'self-estrangement takes place' (Gadamer 1980: 266).

For Gadamer, experience is no longer a mere inductive process in its usual empiricist sense of reception, response and the confirmation or falsification of knowledge. It is closer to what Burns (1988: 24) calls living through an event - 'more *Erlebnis* than *Empfindung*, but also more *Erfahrung* than *Erlebnis*,' because rather than being teleological, it has the structure of reversal.

Gadamer calls *Erfahrung* 'skepticism in action' (Gadamer 1980: 3), because it throws what one knows - what one is, and as will be shown in the discussion on Arendt, even what one *was* - into the open realm of exposure where everything is *other* than the usual. Experiencing, or 'undergoing'[74] an event differs from being in possession of something objective and determinate. Experience is always experience of limits and refusal. Nothing displays the futility of the utopian dream of complete linguistic competence better than the attempt to communicate experience. Sometimes, the horizons simply re-fuse, without the aid of deconstruction.

In Arendtian terms, the human self, in contrast to objects, cannot be identified by *what* it is, only by *who* one is. 'The self is the protagonist of the story we tell, but not necessarily its author or producer' (Arendt 1958: 184). The narrative structure of identity and of action means that the past is continually being retold, continually being rewoven like Penelope's weaving, and reunited with the present. And this reevaluation, reassessment and reconfiguration - in other words *judgement* - 'are ontological conditions for the kind of beings we are' (Behabib 1996: 92).

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[73] It is no accident that the name of the literary figure that wanted to hold all the knowledge of the world in his hand, translates as *Faust* ('fist').

[74] The Greek word *kataben* is closely associated with the concept of 'gaining experience'. The first sentence of the *Republic,* 'I went down' is associated with 'crossing a line', or a watershed experience.

If judgement is not always reserved - and it cannot always be - it can be amended or revised, and added to. That is why Arendt compared the activity of the storyteller to that of the pearl-diver[75] or the collector:

> The figure of the collector, as old-fashioned as that of the *flâneur*, could assume eminently modern features in Benjamin because history itself - that break in tradition which took place at the beginning of the century - had already relieved him of this task of destruction and he only needed to bend down and select his precious fragments from the pile of debris (Arendt 1968a: 200).

By consciously leaving out the poet, who sings the praise of things whose 'eternal summer shall not fade,'[76] Arendt emphasizes the point that the modern storyteller cannot hope for such things, or such a place. The loss of a city, as Brecht showed, was more than just the loss of a physical environment, it was the loss of 'tradition and home, and generationally transmitted remembrance' (Benhabib 1996: 95). In short, the loss of a world. If the loss of a world in which the concept of totality dictated the search for meaning dried up the desire to write poetry,[77] the storyteller can still dig through the rubble for gems to bring to the surface. From Walter Benjamin's fragmentary historiography, Arendt takes the idea that the poet or storyteller can 'recover the lost potential of the past in the hope that they may find actualization in the present' (d'Entrèves 1994: 4). Not only Benjamin, but also Heidegger is decisive for Arendt in likening the task of the judge to a hermeneutics of recovery. A deconstructive reading of tradition allows a judge to recover the primordial experiences (*Urphänomene*), that have become occluded, or covered by the 'distorting encrustations of tradition' (d'Entrèves 1994: 4).

But no perfect reconstruction is ever possible, and no matter how meticulously details are pieced together, some fragments will remain behind. Consequently, some trauma will always accompany this kind of experience. Gadamer emphasizes in a number of his Plato essays, that insight cannot be separated from bewilderment. As in the case of

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[75] This image is derived from *The Tempest*, I.ii.

[76] This phrase is derived from Shakespeare's famous Sonnet 16: *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day*. In this poem the poet, in typical Renaissance fashion, compares the eternal with the ephemeral and holds the fickleness of the world of appearance in contempt.

[77] Adorno's famous injunction that it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz, comes to mind here.

Arendt's actor upon the stage, for the Gadamerian reader there is as much exposure[78] as disclosure. The negativity of the hermeneutical experience is never merely nugatory, it is a negativity that places the reader in the domain of the question. For Gadamer this ties in with the irreducability of tradition to the mechanisms of interpretation or the museum, and the openness of tradition to the future. If tradition did not exceed the forms that attempted to enclose it, it would, in the words of Burns (1982: 195) 'cease to be a tradition and become a mere archive'. In a similar vein, it is possible to say that 'the law' exceeds any number of possible interpretations of the law. Both identity and tradition resist closure and is uncontainable within finite constrictions, much in the same sense as Levinas' sense of Infinity. Levinas (as quoted by Hand 1989: 48) states: 'To think the infinite, the transcendent, the stranger, is hence not to think an object. But to think what does not have the lineaments of an object, is in reality to do better than to think.'

The form of storytelling most appropriate to our situation (after the disaster that was the twentieth century), is also the one that shows up the negative dimension of the hermeneutical experience in its purest form. This form is tragedy. Aeschylus's motto *pathéi mathós* - learning through suffering, is deceptively simple. Traditionally, Oedipus acquires self-knowledge when he learns his true identity. But according to Cavell (1979), Oedipus never lacked self-knowledge - self-knowledge was never *enough*. Oedipus knew the meaning of his name, 'riddle-solver'[79]: 'wise above all men to read/Life's riddles and the ways of heaven' (lines 33-34). The name will ring only too true. A paradox occurs when Oedipus is asked to live up to his name and save Thebes from the plague. This time, his success occurs at the expense of self-estrangement: The story of Oedipus is about implacable reality of Fate, the Otherness that cannot be inscribed in his self-understanding. After his blinding, Oedipus is no longer *recognizable*: as a man who underwent a radical change he can no longer recognize himself, nor can he see his children, and, as Cavell points out, 'recognition means kinship' (Cavell 1979: 125). Oedipus was only able to solve the Sphinx's riddle by seeing himself in the answer.[80] The action of the trilogy takes Oedipus to the other side, to the limits of self-understanding, to where understanding, and by implication language, fails. Living as completely *other* as Oedipus, is impossible in the *polis*:

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[78] The word in this instance does not refer to the complete exposure of the contemporary subject, but refers to the reader's vulnerability.
[79] He took the name after solving the riddle of the Sphinx.

Drive me at once beyond your bounds where I

Shall be alone and no one speak to me. (Aeschylus: lines 1375-76).

According to Cavell, in tragedy we discover the truth of skepticism, which is that 'the human creature's basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as a whole, is not that of knowing, anyway not that what we think of as knowing' (Cavell 1979: 324).

The progress in tragedy does not lead to understanding, but to exposure. Nearly all the great renaissance plays start out with what we might call a 'will to certainty' that is a desire to be *certain* of the world. Like the skeptic, the tragic hero finds that 'the world vanishes exactly in the effort to make it present. (Cavell 1979: 323). The lesson to be learnt from this is that the world refuses to be subjected in this way. And neither do men, despite all the indignities suffered by the modern subject. Cavell adds a novel twist to the standard definition of the skeptic, which normally means that that since we cannot know that the world exists, perhaps no world exists. Rather, what his skepticism should suggest is that, since we cannot know that the world exists, its presence to us cannot be a function of knowing. The world is to be accepted, as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but to be acknowledged.

And this means all the aspects that appear to us. As we have seen, in antiquity, it was the philosophers, notably Plato, who thought that philosophy, and withdrawal from the world, could safeguard against tragedy. Plato tried his best to create an anti-tragic figure in Socrates: rationally self-sufficient, impervious to events, and sealed of from adversity. It will be recalled that this did not mean that horrific events could not befall the good or just man, but that these events could not deprive him of his self-possession. In the *Symposium*, Socrates stands for hours motionless in the snow, apparently impervious to the cold and discomfort. In contrast to this, the tragic hero, for example from one of Shakespeare's plays, experiences tragic learning as a radical divestiture, leaving him in a state of radical exposure, as if 'the whole project of presentness were reversed' (Schantzer 1963:149). Consider, for example, Lear:

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[80] The reader must be reminded here that the answer is 'the human being'.

Why thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more than a poor bare forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings, come, unbutton here. (III.iv.105-113, Cavell 1991:313)

It is of cardinal importance to realize that the impossibility of assimilating such a horrifying intimation into one's universe of meaning is not due to any flaws in one's power of assimilation. Nor would there be any point in shifting from what Miller (1998: 288) calls 'a universe of meaning' to another such universe in the hope of finding one that cannot be breached by intimations of horror. The differences between such frameworks are less important than is the fact that every structure, in order to operate as such, must create that very distinction between outside and inside that makes the rupture of itself by the outside a possibility. The only kind of structure that could achieve the purpose for which all structuring is designed, would be a paradoxical one that includes the outside within itself, an all encompassing structure that leaves nothing at the outside - a structure that Levinas would call a 'totality' (Levinas in Hand 1989: 91).

Nietzsche's overcoming of the constraints developed by disciplinary processes of interiorization, leads to an overstatement of the 'spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving' (Villa 1992: 291) element in world-creation. The world, devoid of intrinsic meaning according to this view, exists only as a 'sign chain' that presents endless opportunity for the Apollonian imposition of form. Villa oversimplifies Nietzsche's aestheticism (holding that it divides the actor and the spectator, rendering the spectator, with his vital function of keeping action alive, superfluous), and can therefore not be taken as having done justice to this complex topic, but it must be added Nietzsche's account of action was not entirely sufficient for Arendt's purpose. For this reason she turned to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Briefly put, Arendt takes Kant's account of the universalizability of subjective aesthetic judgements of taste as the model for the formation of valid political judgements as opinions in an actual political community.

Judgement is at the same time the most crucial and the most elusive of all the human faculties. It is elusive in the sense that it lacks the strict criteria of validity that

apply to other human abilities. Willing can be assessed in terms of 'its resoluteness and or the capacity that determine our actions', and thinking can be appraised in terms of 'consistency, logic, soundness, and coherence'. But judgement - broadly defined as 'the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly' (Arendt 1978: 139) - while sharing some of the mentioned features, is not encompassed by them. Judgement, as the most *political* of man's faculties, comprises for Arendt the formation, clarification, and testing of opinions through free discourse between equals in the public realm.

In her attempt to develop judgment as a quintessentially political faculty, Arendt at first sight presents two apparently irreconcilable theories of judgment, one for the actor, judging in order to act - and one for the spectator, a form of judgment that allows him to make sense of the fragments of the past. The difficulty in situating is further compounded by the fact that these two theories do not fall into easily classifiable categories that, for example, correspond to earlier and later work. Many commentators claim that judgement appears to be relevant only 'at times of crises, when mainstream standards seem to provide no guidance' (Ferrara 1998: 114). Beiner (1982: 104), however, sees Arendt's concern with the judging spectator simply as 'an extension of her definition of politics in terms of virtuosity and performance'. It is possible, furthermore, to see Arendt's theory of political judgement as fulfilling the dramatic potential implied in acting, and employing the tension between the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* and the Kantian theory of aesthetic judgement in a creative fashion.

Contrary to Nietzsche, in whom appearance tends to disappear 'as one more expression of an overflowing life' (Villa 1992: 293), Kant distinguishes between judging determinatively (where the universal is given), and reflectively, where the particular is given, and a rule remains to be established. Aesthetic judgements are reflective, because they concern representations as representations, instead of representations of a given concept. This kind of judgement is accompanied by a sort of *epoche*, a bracketing of the natural attitude and its concern for things in a functional or utilitarian sense. As meager as Kant's aesthetics may appear to a Nietzschean, for Arendt it has the merit of focussing attention on the fact that works of art are made for appearance's sake. True aesthetic judgement then implies the achievement of disinterestedness, a bracketing of all mundane interests.

As we have seen, it is essential to adopt a similar attitude towards the political to allow it to appear as politics. For a genuine agonistic politics, life's necessities must be

banished to the private realm. Deeds in the public realm should be judged according to aesthetic criteria, since 'taste judges the world in its appearances and its worldliness…Neither the life interests of the individual nor the moral interests of the self are involved here. For judgements of taste, the world is the primary thing, not men, neither man's life, nor his self' (Arendt 1977: 148).

Judgement in the political realm enables political actors to decide what course of action to undertake in particular circumstances, what kind of objectives are worthy of pursuit, as well as who is either to praise or to be blamed for past actions. The degree of 'objectivity' that characterizes practical judgement, Arendt is careful to point out, does not arise from being in agreement with oneself, nor in absolute agreement in a Habermassian fashion, but in being able to 'let the mind go visiting'. The 'ability to see things from not only one's own point of view, but from the perspective all those who happen to be present' (Arendt 1961: 221) via an enlarged mentality (*eine erweirtete Denkungsart*) is truly political, since it enables man to orientate himself in the common world of the political realm. As Villa (1992: 295) points out, this requires both 'distance and imagination'. It is imagination - what Kant refers to as the 'free play of the faculties' that enables one to place oneself into the shoes of another, and in so doing, abstract from the limitations that inevitably accompany our own judgement as being vulnerable to the radical contingency of the world.

There is clearly a link between Arendt's Kant-inspired notions of representative judgements made possible through disinterested contemplation, and Nietzsche's perspectivism, but Arendt employs this idea to focus specifically on the purely public dimension of the phenomenon. Furthermore, whereas Nietzsche, despite his possibilities for democratic politics, emphasized the perspective of the elite, Arendt appeals to 'common sense', the *sensus communis*. This Kantian term refers to a kind of sixth sense, common to us all, that makes the very existence in a community possible in the first place, the *communicability* of taste judgements. In the absence of objective criteria for taste judgements, the expression of approval or disapproval, satisfaction or dissatisfaction appeals to the common sense of one's peers. Although it is aimed at achieving agreement, unlike the more rigid standards of universal truth, it never forces agreement, and where their validity is in question, they can only be redeemed through persuasive means. Despite this flexibility, judgement, with all the risks attached to such an act (for both the judge and the judged), keeps happening.

The disadvantaged position of the author relative to the interpreter, that we have discussed at the beginning of the chapter, finds a hermeneutical parallel in the position the agent relative to the narrator. As we have seen,[81] even the hero of heroes, Achilles, was bound to stories for his immortality. These stories, for their part, only come into existence by virtue of their being part of the open-ended, ubiquitous 'web of human relationships'. It is impossible for any act to remain untouched by some form of artificial record if it is to survive. Arendt writes:

> …the public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators, not by the actors or the makers. And this critic and spectator sits in every actor or fabricator; without this critical, judging faculty the doer or the maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived…He [the spectator] does not share the faculty of genius, originality, with the maker, or the faculty of novelty with the actor; the faculty they have in common is the faculty of judgement. (Arendt 1982: 63)

The 'second' dimension of tragedy in action appears at the very moment judgement is attempted. According to Arendt, 'Kant accords examples the same role in judgement that the intuitions called schemata have for experienced cognition' (Arendt 1982: 84). This raises the following problematic: examples, as Ferraro (1998: 120) points out, are usually far more open-ended than schemata. Is Achilles *really* courageous, or merely hot-headed? The Socratic question posed in the *Laches* makes an eternal recurrence. As Ferarro indicates, an Eichmann aware of Arendt's 'banality of evil' thesis, might have defended himself as an Abraham-like personification of obedience. This is precisely where the freedom of judgement is to be located: where the analogy between example and schemata breaks down and judgement becomes autonomous. Arendt was aware of this possibility. After all, she called judgement 'the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking' (Arendt 1978: 193). In addition, in order to free politics from the severity and difficulties of moral judgement (as her judgement of Eichmann illustrates), she suggests an *aesthetic* rather than a moral measure for judgement in the public realm.

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[81] See Chapter 1.

That this is essential, becomes evident when we consider another feature of judgement that proves to be at once its blessing and its curse.

Even when we have no reason to doubt the validity of an example, no example can provide us with *all* the necessary and sufficient conditions for a specific virtue, such as goodness. Even St Francis did not exhaust all the possibilities. Examples tend to provide us with a holistic image, and are so open-ended and continue to be open to interpretation. As Ferarra states: 'Our ability to judge should thus not be equated with the ability to compare lists of discrete and isolated traits, but must be understood as the ability to identify *a certain unity of purpose*, a certain point underlying a temporally extended sequence of doings, as well as to grasp as many similarities as possible between the two contexts within which the exemplary and the given action took place' (Ferrara 1989:123). And as has been shown so far, the options for constructing a narrative ideal are endless: Where interpretation is involved - and it always is - no 'real' St Francis, or even Eichmann, can ever make their appearance. For example, where traditional interpreters have always understood Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses as depicting Moses as calming down after an outburst at the sight of the corruption of his people, Freud has offered a rival interpretation: he suggests that Moses, about to spring up in rage, forces himself to remain calm and controlled, an example of the kind of repression without which no society (despite claims by libertarians to the contrary), can exist.

In addition to the difficulties and possibilities stated thus far, it must be borne in mind that as far as examples are concerned, we are exposed not to action, but to *texts*.[82] And, even if we were to witness action first-hand, the conditions of natality and plurality attached to it would ensure that the same aporia are encountered. This happens especially when we encounter the failure of language to state *who* one is:

> The moment we want to say *who* someone is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is […], the impossibility, as it were, to solidify into words the living essence of the person as it shows itself in the flux of action and speech, has great bearing upon the whole realm of human affairs. (Arendt 1958: 181)

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[82] Even if we *were* present to witness acts of historical importance, like the execution of Socrates, it would still exhibit the problems and privileges attached to textuality, since we exist linguistically, and are doomed to be perpetually interpreting.

Any attempt to describe who a person is, hides even more than it shows. For this reason, one must concur with Van der Hoek (2000: 183) that any attempt at description holds the danger of stereotyping. She quotes Arendt's comparison with the ancient oracles approvingly:

> The notorious unreliable manifestations of ancient oracles, which, according to Heraclitus, neither reveal nor hide in words, but give manifest signs. (Arendt 1958: 182)

In other words, the 'who' someone is escapes any attempt to be conceptualized in epistemological language, and like the traumatic event, can best be expressed in the story. There is no reason to assume that narrative strategies must imply seamless continuity and unambiguous closure. To speak of the 'unity of a life' does not mean that it is unified by an overall master design, but rather that the whole is *invoked*, rather than represented. The influence of Heidegger is clearly visible in Arendt's concern for the particular. Arendt makes the point that 'action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it is all about than the participants' (Arendt 1958: 171). In an almost Derridian turn of phrase, Arendt stresses that '[t]he objects of our judgements are particulars that open themselves to our purview' and by refusing to do justice to the particular, we run the risk that 'we will not open ourselves fully to the phenomenal richness of the appearances that make themselves available for our judgement' (Arendt 1982: 111). But no one can avoid doing violence to the particular. No matter how fair one tries to be, no one can do justice to both the Trojans *and* the Achaeans. Not all the time. Sometimes even Homer sleeps.[83]

Arendt turned to Roman historiography for a contrasting example to the Kantian and Heglian prejudice that, in the absence of an overall purpose or natural design, actions per se appear meaningless, accidental and futile (Kant in Beck 1963: 12). In the Roman concept of history, context and causality remain important, but is 'seen in a light provided by the event itself, illuminating *a certain segment* of human affairs' (Arendt 1961: 64 my emphasis). Instead of necessarily providing accurate, and according to modern standards, 'good' historical narration, the Romans provided their descendants with what Hammer

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[83] A reference to line 359 of Horace's *Ars Poetica*: '*Indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus'*.

(2002: 135) calls 'a sense of the past as spectacle'. No event has intrinsic meaning, but acquires its meaning through impressions, reactions, and conclusions of spectators. In early Roman historiography, Polybius (1982: 3), for example, stresses the value of 'vividness' and 'animation' in historical writing. For Livy, history is a record of deeds worthy of memory *(memoria digmum)*, and histiography a 'conspicuous monument' (*monumentum lustre*), that offer lessons of every kind of experience imaginable. Hammer (2002: 134) points out that 'monument' is derived from the Indo-European root *men*, which means 'to think', and the causative suffix *-yo,* which suggests the meaning of 'something that makes you think'.[84] It must be stated at this point that Livy is by no means engaging in a form of Nietzschean monumental history. He does not attempt to 'set up the events themselves before the eyes of the reader' as an eighteenth-century Romantic might have done, but following the 'visible traces the events have left behind' (Feldhar 1998: 6). For the Roman historian there is no careful reconstruction of the event, and he is aware that his account may be 'contradicted or supplemented by another narrator' (Feldhar 1998: 117). The theatricality of the public realm is continued in the narrative style: the event is illuminated by appealing to the actions and reactions of the spectators who witnessed the events, rather than to claim to be the 'objective' and neutral report of historical truth. After the death of the actor, the mask lives on as *character* in a narrative. According to the principle of iterability, no retelling or new usage of a story can ever be identical. When the actor is transposed into a storied self, he remains masked and as elusive as ever.

The written monument that emerges in this process is not silent, but lives as the readers become, in their turn, 'spectators' or witnesses to the event. Through these multiple spectators, the words and deeds of actors acquire meaning, and history is mediated through multiple perspectives. Again, there is a clear resonance with Arendt's use of theatre. She praises the worldly dimension of Livy's explicit descriptions of the reactions of Roman citizens at turning points in their history. Livy describes the reaction of the crowd at the sight of Lucretia's body, that moves from wonderment and whispers, to finally, indignation and the overthrow of the king. Arendt stresses the *worldly* character of such descriptions, because, as we have seen, it underlies the phenomenality of human existence. In a time where 'human artifice is increasingly swamped by transient

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[84] 'Monument' is of course also related to the Latin word *monere*, which means 'to remind'.

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consumer goods and subject to the rhythms of production and consumption' (Villa 1999: 134), the recovery of praxis is of cardinal importance. But the loss of worldliness manifests itself in theory as well. Alluding to Nietzsche's concept of monumental history, Arendt shows 'how we have faithfully preserved and further articulated' concepts of authority, 'until they became empty platitudes' (Arendt 1961: 26).

In trying to avoid the constraints of a single identity as 'author', Foucault, at the beginning of the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, requests of his readers not to demand to know who he is, nor to demand that he remains consistent: 'I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face.[85] Do not ask me who I am, and do not ask me to remain the same' (Foucault 1972: 17). If, after the much touted death of the author, contemporary writing leaves 'an opening into which the writing subject endlessly disappears' (Foucault 177: 115), a mask is left behind. There is no need for the author to sink to the depths of the absolute anonimity that Foucault posits as alternative to the responsible author. As we have seen in our discussion on Homer - the very name 'Homer' translates as 'piecer-together' - in chapter 1, the author is as difficult to pin down as the characters in his story. Yet, there remains a trace,[86] a conglomerate of impressions by other authors that testifies to the fact that there once *was* a Homer. The storyteller is thus situated between the absolute author and the anonymous 'someone' playing the authorial role. Accordingly, a text like the *Odyssey* continues to attract commentators who appropriate it as a vehicle for thinking about contemporary problems of self, and the frameworks in which the self finds itself. In contrast to Homer, Dante's Ulysses does not pass through the perils of the Sirens and other dangers to 'close the circle' and return home a strengthened man. Instead, Dante portrays a tragic Ulysses who is headed for destruction because he represents an old form of wickedness, namely an insatiable desire to cross established limits, and by so doing, refuses to submit to God's plan. This Ulysses ends up wrecked against the mountain of Eden. Dante's failed Ulysses exemplifies the shift in techniques of legitimization that characterizes each new era. No longer an irrepressible hero, the medieval Ulysses helps to reassert the primacy of a self subordinated to the divine order. For James Joyce the re-opening of the Homeric circle takes on an even more radical form. Instead of the narrative of a person, even one as depthless as the 'original' Homeric Odysseus, each event is, in the words of Champagne

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[85] As we have seen, Nietzsche also takes up the pen in order to don a mask.
[86] Shelly's poem '*Ozymandias*' comes to mind here: 'In the sand, half-sunk/ a shattered visage lies…'

(1995: 61) a 'space-block time of words'. But even in Joyce there remains a vague semblance of a story: Ulysses is still wandering, albeit in a more modest way. And he still reaches a destination, even if it is doubtful whether it is final. The mere usage of a proper name, 'Ulysses' points to a certain structural limit to interpretation, albeit a negotiable limit.

If the subject, like the author, is declared to an effect of a located discourse and practice, the identity of the subject becomes the ground for a political philosophy of conflict that recognizes both the inevitability of open-ended change and the creative possibilities associated with the absence of a pre-determined logic for change - the absence of a pre-determined subject. And the most durable assumption at work here, is that the constitution of the political subject is no 'constitution' as it has been understood up until fairly recently, but rather the 'appearance' of a political identity that will always be tenuous, tentative and conflictual. This will be the case if it is remembered not to attempt to ferret out the 'truth' once and for all, but to have *more* history, *more* judgement, and more stories. Of both the Achaeans and the Trojans.

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Summary

Title: The Moral Subject vs. the Political Actor: The Political Price of Interiorization.
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Degree: Magister Artium.

This dissertation is an attempt to examine the political implications of the ethos of self-persecution that accompanied the rise of modern man. The attempt at achieving self-transparency and to locate a final, deep 'truth' within the depths of the subject, which began in the apparently harmless search for God through acts of confession, grew into the merciless persecution of the auto-voyeuristic subject. I argue that the horror that complete self-transparency would imply, is mercifully kept at bay by the opacity of language, that makes complete penetration to the 'final' self impossible. I illustrate the possibilities of redemption from self-persecution by referring to the work of thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Friedrich Nietzsche and the post-structuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida.

Chapter 1 is an attempt to show that what we understand by 'the subject' is by no means static or universal, different ages and cultures developed radically different conceptions of self - alternatives that could provide the necessary inspiration for the revival of a flagging political tradition. One such alternative is self-conception in antiquity. The usage of the word 'subject' is inappropriate to refer to any pre-Christian Greek concept of self, because no single word refers to Homeric Man as a unity. Instead, Homer, who employs no non-material language, depicts parts of characters that are always more than the whole. There is not even a single word that could roughly be taken as a synonym for 'mind'. The Homeric self was an assemblage of various narratives and impressions, without an inner core or 'self', loosely held together by the broad narrative that is an individual's life. For this reason, it could offer an alternative politics to an age weary of the discipline that accompanies the rigidly defined modernist subject. I deal with the ambiguity and slipperiness of the classical subject, and illustrate its complex 'superficiality' at the hand of a number of relevant Greek concepts including *splachma, poiēsis*, *daemon*, *psuché*, *phrenes*, *nōōs*, *thumos* and *atē*.

If there was no rigid distinction between self and world in the ancient Athens, the same cannot be said of the public and private domains into which the *polis* was divided. Difference was spatially, not morally defined. After her horrific experience with totalitarianism in Nazi Germany during the 1930's, Hannah Arendt drew on the Greeks to show that the public space was the unique space of appearance where a public actor could show off his *virtù* on stage in front of his peers. Her usage of masks indicate the *impersonal* dimension to acting. Far from wanting to give us a theory of self-*expression,* she constructed a philosophy that is in many ways the opposite of the Rousseauian politics of authenticity. I explore the ways in which Arendt questioned the traditional philosophical hierarchy between the *vita contemplative* and the *vita activa*, and her re-evaluation of the activities of the *vita activa*, namely labour, work and action.

In addition to my brief exposition on the Homeric world, I briefly examine the shift from acting to thinking man as it occurs in the *Republic*. I address Plato's reaction to the political decay in which Athens found itself after the Golden Age of Pericles. I argue that, already in the *Republic*, there are signs of a certain impatience towards the hidden, and a desire to 'bring things to the light', a desire that would never leave Western man again, but would grow into an all-consuming passion. After the hermeneutical turn we know that no literary work allows a definitive interpretation. This is especially true of great masterworks, and the *Republic* is no exception. Although I think that Arendt is justified in locating in Plato one of the sources for the anti-political character of our philosophical tradition, it is necessary to distinguish between 'Plato', and Plato*nism*. Anticipating the argument put forward in chapter 4, I argue that the multivocity inherent in Plato may make him more political than Arendt initially took him to be.

Chapter 2 focus on the turn inward. Augustine, through his notion of the confessing-self, seeks to formulate an ethos that does not allow everything to revert back to the self. The self turns away from the lust to dominate the world and into the depths of the soul where it seeks to fashion even the most fleeting desires in obedience to God's truth and the standards of His morality. At this stage in the development of the self, there is no question of self-transparency - the relationship to the transcendent makes it an impossibility. For all or Augustine's profound insight into depth - remembering, willing and unifying the scattered self in confession, the inner Augustine remains a battlefield. In this respect, Augustine's confessing-self inadvertently provides a beacon of warning to an ethos that demands self-transparency at all costs.

In the second part of *chapter 2,* I compare the *Confessions* of Augustine with those of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Living during the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's motives are radically different from that of Augustine in the fifth century. .

The revelation of self, hesitantly presented in Augustine, takes a different turn fourteen centuries later. Gone is the link with the transcendent. Augustine confessed to God, Rousseau sometimes to a filled public house, packed with enemies, sometimes merely to the shifting selves he refused to acknowledge. Augustine sought truth, Rousseau, sincerity. For Augustine the self would represent a barrier to God, Rousseau publicly created a private self. Rousseau's purpose is rather to unburden himself of shame, and to justify what he deems weak. In doing this, the 'defined self' - a self that can fall back upon himself without reference to what is perceived as a 'hostile order' - comes into being.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's analysis of the 'normalizing' tendencies that characterizes much of the concrete functioning of power in modernity, I briefly summarize his critique of modern power as it operates through 'panoptic power' and confessional strategies which assert that we harbour 'deep truths' within ourselves that we must carefully decipher and follow. I then focus specifically on the concept of the 'autopticon', and how power operates at its greatest efficiency by strategies of self-surveillance. When Foucault's theoretical work is read in terms of his genealogies, his work acquires a Nietzschean profundity.

In contrast to Augustine, for whom depth is the dimension of freedom, Foucault sees depth as the dimension of subjugation. It is this dimension in which the other is rooted out and the subject is constituted in terms of hegemonic norms and the standard of self-transparency. That we somehow fail to get to the 'bottom of things' by no means discourage the therapeutic society, it merely ensures the persistence of endless subjugation.

But Foucault was not the first to identify the self-tortured subject. This honour belongs to Nietzsche, and his response to the naked, unmasked subject of philosophy forms the topic of *chapter 3*. Nietzsche's genealogy of *Herkunft* is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile, it fragments what was thought unified, it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself. And, one might add, it shows the folly of looking for a 'deep',

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liberating truth within the self when in fact, nothing but surfaces for the inscription of the social order, for the application and imposition of power exists. This is precisely what Nietzsche points to as his genealogy demonstrates the oppressive use of subjectivity as a construct of oppression in what he terms a 'hangman's metaphysics'. In addition to an analysis of Nietzsche's criticism of the modern subject, I point to his anticipation of the cure to the problem of self-transparency, namely an acceptance of the redemptive potential to be found in language.

This forms the topic of *chapter 4*. In chapter 4 I argue that the *vita lingua* contains the possibility for at least a certain degree of relief from our culture of surveillance. Language, by its very opacity, makes the ideal of (self)transparency an utopian illusion. Every attempt to come to a final conclusion about a text is bound to fail. This aspect makes our linguistic engagement with the world tragic, yet at the same time allows for a merciful, messianic dimension that might save us from the horrific nihilism that the granting of the Enlightenment wish would entail. I draw again on Arendt, this time for her conception of the storyteller, to find a viable middle ground between the death of the author and the absolute author of the Romantic era that acted as a guarantee for the truth of his text. The linguistic turn certainly requires an altered conception of the self, but there is no need to sacrifice the self to an entirely autonomous and impersonal language system In addition, I refer to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida, to demonstrate the alternatives suggested by the very anti-utopian nature of language.

The fact that we exist *linguistically*, a fact that appeared in more positivistic age as a curse, is now the very feature that saves us from the hell and obscenity of absolute (self)transparency. If language is indeed as opaque as Nietzsche, Lacan, Derrida and others have claimed, intentionality can play no determining role in the establishment of meaning. Nietzsche explicitly proclaimed the virtual impossibility of having his texts understood. To understand his texts the way Nietzsche understood them, one would have to *be* Nietzsche. And perhaps, one hastens to add, perhaps not even then: If this is the case, the question arises as to *what* a confession really reveals, and even if it does not conceal rather than reveal, makes its appearance. If the author 'disappears' behind his text, textuality appears in our time to have replaced the lost mask of antiquity and the *ancien regime*.

Opsomming

Titel: Die Morele Subjek vs. die Politieke Akteur: Die Politieke Prys van Interiorisering.
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Hierdie verhandeling is 'n ondersoek na die politieke implikasies van die etos van self-vervolging, so eie aan die moderne mens. Die poging om self-deursigtigheid te bereik en 'n finale 'diep' self in die dieptes van die subjek te vind, het begin die oënskynlik skadelose soektog na God deur dade van belydenis. Dit het gelei tot die matelose vervolging van die autovoyeuristiese subjek deur homself. Ek maak die stelling dat die onhoudbare angs wat werklike self-deursigtigheid in die hand sou werk, genadiglik verhoed word deur die ondeursigtigheid van taal, wat penetrasie tot die 'finale self' onmoontlik maak. Hierdie stelling word geillustreer deur na die werk van Hannah Arendt, Friedrich Nietzsche, en sekere post-strukturalistiese denkers soos Jacques Derrida en Jacques Lacan.

Hoofstuk 1 is 'n poging om te illustreer dat wat ons onder 'subjek' verstaan, geensins staties of universeel is nie, en dat verskillende eras en kulture radikaal ander self-konsepsies ontwikkel het, alternatiewe wat moontlik inspirasie vir 'n kwynende politieke tradisie kan bied. Een so 'n alternatief is te vinde in die antieke era. Die gebruik van die woord 'subjek' is onvanpas na enige voor-Christelike Griekse self-konsepsie te verwys, omdat daar geen enkele woord is wat na die Homeriese mens as 'n geheel verwys nie. Instede daarvan, gebruik Homerus geen nie-materialistiese taal nie en beeld dele van die self uit wat altyd meer is as die geheel. Daar is nie eers 'n enkele woord wat as 'bewussyn' vertaal kan wod nie. Die Homeriese self is 'n versameling van indrukke en narratiewe sonder 'n innerlike kern of 'self', wat losweg bymekaargehou word deur die breë narratief wat 'n individu se lewe opmaak. Vir hierdie rede kan dit moontlik 'n politieke alternatief bied vir 'n era uitgeput deur die dissipline wat die rigied gedefineerde modernistiese subjek vergesel. Die veelsinnigheid 'glibberigheid' van die klassieke 'subjek' word behandel, en sy komplekse 'oppervlakkigheid' word geïllustreer aan die

hand van 'n aantal relevante Griekse begripppe, soos *splanchma, poiēsis, daemon, psychē, phrenes, nōōs* en *atē.*

Alhoewel daar geen rigiede onderskeid was tussen self en wêreld in antieke Athene nie, kan dieselfde nie gesê word van die publieke en private domeine waarin die *polis* verdeel was nie. Verskil in die politieke sfeer is ruimtelik, en nie moreel nie, aangedui. Na haar skokkende ervaring in Nazi-Duitsland gedurende die 1930's, het Hannah Arendt van die Grieke gebruik gemaak om aan te dui dat die politieke ruimte die unieke domein van verskyning was waar 'n akteur sy *virtù* in die geselskap van sy gelykes kan demonstreer. haar gebruik van maskers dui op die *onpersoonlike* aard van handel. Sy bied geensins 'n Rousseauiaanse politiek van self-ekspressie nie, veel eerder 'n filosofie wat in elke opsig die teenoorgestelde is van die romantiese etos van outentisiteit. Verder word die maniere waarop Arendt die tradisionele filosofiese hierargie tussen die *vita contemplativa* en die *vita activa* bevraagteken het, asook haar herwaardering van die aktiwiteite van die *vita aktiva*, naamlik arbeid, werk en handeling

Aansluitend by die kort uiteensetting van die Homeriese mens, is 'n kort ondersoek na die verskuiwing van die handelende mens na die denkende mens, soos dit in Plato se *Republiek* voorkom. Ek neem Plato se reaksie op die politieke verval waarin Athene homself bevind het na die Goue Era van Perikles on oënskou. Reeds in die *Repu*bliek is daar sprake van 'n sekere ongeduld teenoor die verskuilde, en 'n begeerte om 'dinge aan die lig te bring', 'n begeerte wat die Westerse mens nooit weer so verlaat nie, maar sou groei tot 'n alles-verterende passie. Na die 'hermeneutiese draai' weet ons dat geen teks ooit slegs een interpretasie toelaat nie, en dit is veral waar van groot meesterwerke soos die *Republiek.* Alhoewel ek van mening is dat Arendt geregverdig is in haar interpretasie van die *Republiek* as een van die bronne van ons anti-politiese denktradisie, dink ek tog dat dit noodsaaklik is om te onderskei tussen Plato, en Plato*nisme.* By antisipasie van die argument van hoofstuk vier, maak ek die stelling dat Plato moontlik meer polities was as wat Arendt hom voor krediet gegee het.

Hoofstuk 2 fokus op die draai na binne. Augustinus, deur sy konsep van die belydende self, poog om 'n vorm van self daar te stel wat nie alles tot die self herlei nie. Hierdie self draai weg van die drang om die wêreld te beheer, en na die dieptes van die innerlike, waar self die mees verbygaande begeerte vervorm word om gehoorsaam te wes aan God en Sy moraliteit. Op hierdie stadium in die weolusie van die self is daar egter nog nie sprake van self-deursigtigheid nie - die verhouding met God maak dit

onmoontlik. Ten spyte van Augustinus se groot insig in die dieptes van die self -herinnering, die wil, en die versameling van die verspeide self en vorming van die fragmente in 'n eenheid, bly Augustinus steeds 'n innerlike slagveld. In hierdie opsig, bly Augustinus 'n waarskuwing vir 'n ethos wat self-deursigtigheid ten alle koste nastreef.

In die tweede gedeelte van *hoofstuk 2* word die belydenisse van Augustinus met dié van Jean Jacques Rousseau vergelyk. As 'n agtiende-eeuse filosoof is sy denke radikaal anders as dié van Augustinus in die vyfde eeu. Self-openbaring, huiwerig uitgebeeld deur Augustinus, verskyn in 'n radikaal ander vorm ongeveer eeue later. Weg is die band met die transendente. Augustinus het teenoor God bely, Rousseau teenoor 'n gehoor. Augustinus het waarheid gesoek, Rousseau outensiteit. Vir Augustinus sou die self 'n hindernis op die weg na God wees, Rousseau skep in die publiek 'n sterk-gedefineerde private self. Rousseau se doel is eerder om homself van skaamte te ontlas, en dit te regverdig wat hy as swak beskou. Hierdeur kom die 'gedefinieerde self' - 'n self wat op homself kan terugval sonder verwysing na 'n 'vyandige' publieke order - tot stand.

Michel Foucault se analise van die 'normaliserende' tendense wat die konkrete operasie van mag kenmerk in laat moderniteit, vorm die onderwerp van 'n aansluitende bespreking. Hierdie 'panoptiese' mag en strategieë van belydenis berus op die opvatting van 'n 'diep' waarheid wat in die self te vinde is wat versigtig ontleed en gehoorsaam moet word. Ek fokus dan spesifiek op die konsep van die 'autoptikon', en hoe mag op sy mees doeltreffendste operreer deur stratgieë van self-beskouing. Waar Foucault se werk in hierdie verband met sy genealogieë verbind word, verkry dit 'n Nietzscheaanse rykheid.

Teenoor Augustinus, vir wie diepte die dimensie van bevryding is, is dit vir Foucault die dimensie van onderdrukking. Dit is die dimensie waar die ander uitgewerk word en die subjek in terme van hegemoniese norme en die standaard van self-deursigtigheid vasgestel word. Dat ons altyd bly faal om deur te dring tot die 'fondasie van dinge' deur te dring, plaas geensins 'n demper op die terapeutiese samelewing nie, maar lei eerder tot die volhou van eindelose onderdrukking.

Foucault was egter nie die eerste om die self-gemartelde subjek te identifiseer nie. Hierdie eer behoort aan Friedrich Nietzsche, en sy reaksie op die ontblote, ontmaskerde self van moderniteit vorm die hooftema van *hoofstuk 3*. Nietzsche se genealogie van *Herkunft* is nie die legging van fondasies nie, dit wys eerder op die heterogeniteit van dit wat as identies met homself beskou is. Dit wys ook op die nutteloosheid van 'n soeke na

die 'diep self, wanneer daar in werklikheid niks anders as oppervlaktes vir die inskripsie van die sosiale orde, vir die uitoefening van mag, bestaan nie. Dit is presies waarop Nietzsche se genealogie wys, 'n aanduiding van subjektiwiteit as 'n konstruksie van ondrukking, in wat hy 'n 'laksman se metafisika' noem. Ek wys ook op Nietzsche se antisipasie van die 'kuur' vir die drang na (self)deursigtigheid, naamlik 'n aanvaarding van die verlossende potensiaal van taal.

Hierdie onderwerp word voortgesit in *hoofstuk 4*. Hier word die stelling gemaak dat die *vita lingua* ten minst die moontlikheid bied van verligting van ons kultuur van voyeurisme. Taal, deur die blote aard daarvan, maak (self)deursigtigheid, en die drang daarna, 'n utopiese illusie. Elke poging om tot die finale beslissing oor die betekenis van 'n teks te kom, is gedoem. Hierdie aspek verleen 'n tragiese dimensie aan ons talige betrokkenheid met die wêreld, maar bied ook 'n sekere messiaanse potensiaal van verlossing van die nagmerrie wat sou volg op die vervulling van die Verligtingsideaal van 'n totaal deursigtige wêreld. Daar word weereens van Arendt gebruik gemaak, hierdie keer van haar opvattings oor die storieverteller, om 'n houdbare gemene deler tussen die dood van die outeur en die absolute outeur van die Romantiek te vind. Die linguistiese draai vereis 'n definitiewe verandering in selfopvatting, maar dit is nie nodig om die self heeltemal op te offer in die naam van 'n totaal anonieme en outonome taalsisteem nie. Daar word ook na die denke van Hans-Georg Gadamer en Jacques Derrida verwys om die uitgangspunt verder te illustreer.

Die onvermoë van taal om die werklikheid deursigtig te maak, 'n feit wat deur die positiwiste betreur is, is nou juis die feit wat ons van die obsene hel van totale self-deursigtigheid red. as taal inderdaad so deursigtig is as wat Nietzsche, Derrida, ens. volhou, kan intensies nie die fondasie vorm vir die vasstelling van betekenis nie. Om sy tekste soos hyself te verstaan, sou 'n mens Nietzsche self moes wees, en miskien, moet 'n mens byvoeg, sal selfs dit nie voldoende wees nie. As dit die geval is, ontstaan die vraag oor wat 'n belydenis nou *eintlik* openbaar, en of dit nie eintlik meer verhul as ontbloot nie. As die auteur agter sy teks verdwyn, wil dit voorkom asof tekstualiteit in ons tyd die verlore masker van die *ancien regime* vervang.