Beyond the Academic and Intellectual Worlds

In the following, I would like to present some central aspects of Hannah Arendt's thinking and work that identify her as a non-academic and non-intellectual. In doing so, I would like to take up the criticism often levelled at her and turn it in a positive way. The criticism not only concerns her report *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, her supposedly conservative nostalgia for the Greek polis, or her critique of the social as anti-political, but also targets her method: for example, according to Benhabib her political theory lacks normativity, her historiography lacks the necessary objectivity according to Voegelin, and her philosophy lacks stringency according to Honneth. Moreover, her account of European colonialism in Africa is Eurocentric, if not racist.[1]

This critique presupposes standards of the academic which Arendt in fact did not adhere to: to pursue political theory on the basis of social science, to adopt the standpoint of objectivity, and to maintain the boundaries of the disciplines. Despite this, Arendt is currently in danger of being made into a classic,[2] whereby her thinking is treated as a quarry and adapted to one's own position, and she is consulted as a new authority in the face of global crises: "What would Hannah say?"[3] Regardless of whether the judgement is approving or disapproving, a cohesive edifice of thought is the criterion in such cases for engaging with Arendt.

As we shall see, this academic structure of thought and rules is anti-political. Not only does political thought and action differ from such academic thought and

1 Seyla Benhabib: *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Lanham Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2003; Hannah Arendt: A Reply to Eric Voegelin, in: *Essays in Understanding*, 1930–1954, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company 1994, pp. 401–408; Axel Honneth: Vorwort zu Judith N. Shklar: *Der Liberalismus der Furcht*, Berlin: Matthes & Seitz 2014; Richard H. King / Dan Stone (eds.): *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*, New York: Berghahn Books Inc 2007.

2 For example, the book *Hannah Arendt: Hidden Tradition – Untimely Actuality?* is advertised by its publisher as follows: "Hannah Arendt has long since gone from being a controversial thinker to a classic of modern political theory. In an inimitable way, she has taken the rupture of German philosophical thought in the 1920s into her wider intellectual life and translated it into a political theory of the 20th century." http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/232059 (2019.11.6)

3 Jeremy Waldron: What would Hannah say? In: *New York Review of Books*, March 15, 2007.

action, but, according to Arendt, political-theoretical thought must also differ from it. This is not only Arendt's opinion, but also the opinion of the political scientists John Dunn, John Gunnell and Bonnie Honig. Since the 1980s, all three have lamented "the post-modern suspicion … (of) the canon of great works"[4] and the displacement of politics in political theory.[5] Kant, Rawls and Sandel, according to Bonnie Honig,

> confine politics (conceptually and territorially) to the juridical, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities. They assume that the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over, and done with, to free modern subjects and their sets of arrangements of political conflict and instability.[6]

It does not look as if these criticisms have led to a rethinking of political theory. The academic habitus survives these objections with ease, in Germany also because in political science the subject of the history of political ideas is increasingly being eroded.

In the following, I will outline how Arendt's work differs from academic norms and conventions by focusing on the following points: her concept of personality, her change of perspective from the modern subject to the inter-subjects of the in-between, her discursive method and poetic thought, the radicality of her thinking and the role of emotions, and finally her critique of the world of intellectuals.

Arendt's Concept of Personality

"Better to be wrong with Plato than to be right with these people – this is the political principle in which the person matters", Arendt noted in her *Denktagebuch*[7] She is not only concerned with the institutions of freedom, the securing of public space and the enabling of politics. It is always also about the agents themselves, the persons on whom the realisation and defence of freedom depend. It is about truth, but even more about trust and reliability.

The importance of the person can be seen throughout Arendt's work and is a logical part of her description of the *vita activa* and the location of the *in-between*. The person appears in the form of the thinking and judging human being in contrast to

4 John Dunn: The History of Political Theory, in: *The History of Political Theory and other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 26; John G. Gunnell: *Between Philosophy and Politics. The Alienation of Political Theory*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1986.

5 Bonnie Honig: *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press 1993.

6 Ibid., p. 2.

7 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*, Munich Piper 2002, p 595.

the thoughtless non-person of Eichmann and the moral collapse of "decent society"; "to speak about a moral personality is almost redundancy".[8] The person is the precondition for forgiveness; only a person can be forgiven, not a crime. The person is the precondition for their appearance in the public space of action, for the revelation of the *who* of the agent as distinct from the *what* of a person's qualities. Only a person has integrity, which is, among other things, the prerequisite for the successful use of artistic talent. In her lecture *On Evil*, Arendt explained:

> The point about these highly cultivated murderers is that there has been not a single one of them who wrote a poem worth remembering or a piece of music worth listening to or painted a picture that anybody would care to hang on his walls. More than thoughtfulness is needed to write a good poem or piece of music, or to paint a picture – you need special gifts. But no gifts will withstand the loss of integrity which you lose when you have lost this most common capacity for thought and remembrance.[9]

It is the person who performs an action who is not merely moved by motives and oriented towards goals, nor is it remembered because of them, but because of the memorability of the deed, that is, the virtuosity and performativity.[10] Judging as a faculty of a concrete imagination also presupposes a person of integrity, as does storytelling that creates meaning and, finally, the personal assumption of responsibility as the price of interpersonal freedom, without which a community could not maintain its freedom.

Judgement and taste, morality and artistic quality are equally based on independent thought and judgement. Following Arendt, we can conclude that aesthetic terms also apply to the evaluation of non-artistic action: the "beautiful" or "ugly" gesture or speech, or the "inner beauty" of a person of integrity. According to Kant, this is a harmony of the powers of cognition, both in terms of inner proportions and in terms of the free juxtaposition of the powers of cognition and their mutual enlivenment; a harmony that occurs between form and content, as well as between imagination and understanding, without it being a matter of rational cognitive judgement.

Arendt's portraits of *Men in Dark Times* are always about qualities that make up personalities, for example the non-conformist actions of her friend Waldemar Gurian, rector of the University of Notre Dame and founder of *The Review of Politics*, which still exists today. These are examples and exemplary actions of people described by Arendt not as theorists – of politics, literature, culture, or philosophy –

8 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, in: *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York: Schocken 2003, p. 95.

9 Ibid., p. 97.

10 Cf. Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday 1958, p. 166f.

but as thinking and acting persons, such as Rosa Luxemburg, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, or Karl Jaspers.

In her laudation for Jaspers on the occasion of the awarding of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in Frankfurt in 1958, Arendt explained that the prize was for the person and his work, but the eulogy, in the Roman tradition, was for the person, that is, "the dignity that pertains to a man insofar as he is more than everything he does or creates." It is about the *who* of Karl Jaspers as a thinking and acting citizen, not about the *what* as a philosopher. This *who* appears inseparable from the work in public. "To recognize and to celebrate this dignity is not the business of experts and colleagues in a profession," Arendt continues, "it is the public that must judge a life which has been exposed to the public view and proved itself in the public realm."[11]

This position is by no means an exception due to the close friendship between Arendt and Jaspers. When Arendt was awarded the Emerson-Thoreau Medal for her work by the *American Academy of Arts and Sciences in* 1969, she paid tribute to Ralph Waldo Emerson in a way that comes close to describing herself. She had always thought of Emerson as an American Montaigne until she "with great joy, only recently, (realised) how close Emerson himself felt to Montaigne."[12] Both, according to Arendt, were humanists rather than philosophers and they:

> wrote essays rather than systems, aphorisms rather than books … Both thought chiefly, exclusively, about human matters, and both lived a life of thought. … This kind of thinking can no more become a profession than living itself, hence, this is not the *vita contemplativa*, the philosopher's way of life who has made thinking his profession. Philosophers, as a rule, are rather serious animals; whereas what is so striking in both Emerson and Montaigne is their *serenity*, a serenity that is in no ways conformist or complacent.[13]

Thus we find in Emerson wisdom in which "are profound insights and observations which we have lost to our detriment, and which we may be well advised to unearth again now, when we are forced to rethink what the humanities are all about. For this great humanist, the humanities were simply those disciplines that dealt with language (which does not mean linguistics), and in the centre of all thoughts about language, he found the poet" – as Arendt herself. And she quotes him quite approvingly: "Language is fossil poetry."[14]

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11 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio. In: *Men in Dark Times*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1968, p. 72.

12 Hannah Arendt: Emerson Address, in: *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb, Stanford: Stanford University 2007, p. 282.

13 Ibid., p. 283.

14 Ibid., p. 283f.

Finally, Arendt declares that she is more interested in the world than in political theory. She is an author, not a commentator:

> The authors are *auctores*, that is (they) augment the world. We move in a world which is augmented by the authors. We cannot do without them, because they behave in an altogether different way from the commentators. The world in which the commentator moves is the world of books. This difference becomes visible in a person like Machiavelli. Machiavelli was interested in Italy, not in political theory, not even his own. Only the commentator is interested in political theory per se.[15]

This behaviour "in a completely different way" means not withdrawing like the philosophers, but seeing oneself as a thinking and judging, critical spectator on the sidelines of political events. Arendt described this position in her unfinished late work *The Life of the Mind* and presented and practically demonstrated it with her essays as "exercises in political thinking" and her essays on questions of her time.

The Change of Perspective from the Modern Subject to the Inter-subjects in the In-between

Arendt's book *The Human Condition* represents a fierce confrontation with modern subjectivism since Descartes, and its rejection. It is astonishing that this fundamental, existential change of perspective towards the in-between of an interhumanity has not yet been duly addressed, for this is accompanied by a redefinition of political phenomena such as power, violence, authority, or freedom from the perspective of interhumanity. Without this new perspective, a distinction between power and violence would not even be possible. The fact that these two phenomena were never distinguished in modern times is all the more surprising to Arendt because they are fundamental to modern politics.

The perspective of the in-between pervades the whole work: it underlies the inner dialogue, the enlarged mentality, the concept of the world, common sense as the mediation of a common world, those who act and judge together, the common formation of power, the formation of self-governments with the constitutions and laws that make them possible and at the same time protect them, the division and entanglement of power, the federation of peoples and states – and the oppositions that are based on the exclusion of the in-between: thoughtlessness, logic, loss of world, disorientation, abandonment, functionaryism, violence, sovereignty, domination, and expansionism.

15 Hannah Arendt: *History of Political Theory* (1955), unpublished, The Hannah Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1105600982/ (2022/11/1)

Heinrich Blücher, Arendt's husband, compared Cézanne's later painting with Heidegger's thought, which also characterises Arendt's position: painter and thinker are in perspective at the centre of the image and of thought. In her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt noted:

> Ad Heidegger's Interpretations: The new consists in the following: Heidegger not only assumes (as others did before him) that every work carries within it something that is specifically unsaid to it, but that this unsaid constitutes its very core (psychologically speaking, it is the reason for its emergence: because this One was unsayable, everything else was written), that is, as it were, the empty space lying in the middle, around which everything revolves and which organises everything else. Heidegger places himself in this space, that is, in the middle of the work, where its author is precisely not, as if this were the space left out for the reader or listener. From here, the work is transformed back from the resultant dead to a living speech that can be responded to. The result is a dialogue in which the reader is no longer on the outside but is involved right in the middle. The sharpness or rigour of this procedure lies in the fact that this place 'objectively' really exists and can be discovered in every great work. The 'arbitrary' part is that only one individual can ever sit in the square – with their limited ears and ability to talk back. But that only means that the quality of the interpretations depends on the quality of the interpreter – a matter of course.
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> The appearance of arbitrariness and violence only arises from our unaccustomedness: just as in modern painting (Heinrich's interpretation of Cézanne) everything looks 'distorted' because we are used to painters painting the world 'from the outside', that is, three-dimensionally, whereas modern painting has the painter sitting in the middle of the picture and thus has the six human dimensions: Height – depth, right – left, front – back, all projected onto the surface, which is the human being for itself – so in Heidegger's interpretations, other dimensions emerge into which the work, seen from the listener's recessed middle space, disassembles. In order not to become dizzy in these dimensions, which can only arise at all in the moment of the reading listener, Heidegger uses the guiding word, as it were the 'Open sesame', which was the unsaid word in the omitted space, thus can only be found there, but then opens up everything to the listener in the way the empty middle had originally organised the whole.[16]

16 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 353f. Heinrich Blücher explained in his lecture on "Fundamentals of a Philosophy of Art – on the Understanding of Artistic Experience": "Cezanne in his lonely position of being the first artist who was really aware of man's changed position in the world had one great purpose: to put unity and order back into the chaos of nature he saw about him – which was the thing about the Impressionists that troubled him so much. What really disturbed him in Impressionist paintings (which had for him the only optical value) was that he became aware of the feeling in them of the dissolution of nature into

The middle that is left empty is Arendt's in-between with its multiple perspectives. It is taken in the awareness of the extreme of its annihilation, total rule based on ideology, the logical movement of an idea, and the breaking of tradition. Totalitarianism as "ideocracy", as Arendt remarked in a discussion.[17] There is no longer the modern central perspective, no longer the authority of tradition from Plato, Kant to Weber, but instead there is the 'hidden tradition' and Benjamin's pearl diver. As for him, it is also true for us to take from the past what seems useful to us; so too for Jaspers, who wants to dissolve the dogmatic metaphysical demands of the philosophical systems of the past into trains of thought "which meet and cross, communicate with each other and eventually retain only what is universally communicative."[18] Truth therefore also only exists in communication. The spatiality of human relations is fundamental here: for action, the shared responsibility of those acting and the definition of freedom as "freedom for", not "freedom from", and likewise for thinking and judging. "Jaspers' thought is spatial because it forever remains in reference to the world and the people in it."[19]

This means for judging:

> (T)he more people's positions I can make present in my thought and hence take into account in my judgment, the more *representative* it will be. The validity of such

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the mere process of energy. In this he saw chaos as he saw chaos in nature itself … the experience of permanently being amidst things, an experience Cezanne himself felt of masses and people and nature crowding in on him. This he was able to achieve by a unification of perspectives (which explains why his so-called distortions were necessary) and by creating for the beholder a feeling of space that was finite and full – by creating as space where air became a solid substance, where atmosphere as a solid and finite became the new space of man, where if the feeling within space was given, it was given as limited space, where still-lifes had almost wider space than landscapes." (https://www.bard.edu/bluecher/lectures/phil_art/philart-pf.htm (12/2/2022)). Cf. also: "The central perspective is not simply abolished, but only rendered ineffective (in very manifold ways) to such an extent that the picture no longer appears as a space for the viewer's imagination, but as a pure space of existence of the picture things." (Walter Hess Zum Verständnis der Texte, in Paul Cézanne *Über die Kunst*. Gespräche mit Gasquet, Mittenwald Mäander Kunstverlag 1980, p. 129; Fritz Novotny *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive*. Vienna: A. Schroll 1938; Michael Quante: Philosophisches Interview, in: *fiph Journal*, Hanover, No. 23, April 2014, p 5. On the connection between central perspective and the perspectival worldview of the modern era, see Philipp H. Lepenies: *Art, Politics, and Development. How Linear Perspective Shaped Policies in the Western World*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2014.

17 Carl J. Friedrich (ed.): *Totalitarianism. Proceedings of a Conference held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences March 1953*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1954, p. 134.

18 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World? in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 90.

19 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 79.

> judgements would be neither objective and universal, nor subjective, depending on personal whim, but intersubjective or representative.[20]

The interest in this intersubjectivity is not a scientific one, but an existential one. The world we inhabit is a common one, which is why Arendt adds inter-interest in the relationship to others and solidarity as indispensable elements alongside the aspect of responsibility for everything that happens on our behalf. In her lecture on "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy", she illustrates the principle of intersubjective judgement with the example of the inhabitants of a slum, whose points of view must be included. And "according to the implications of Jaspers' philosophy", Arendt says approvingly, "nothing should ever happen in politics which would be contrary to the actually existing solidarity of mankind."[21]

The Discursive Method and its Poetic Thought

We have heard of the primacy of the person over truth, of humanists over philosophers, of communication over logic and of the political world over political theory. In her 1953 essay "Understanding and Politics", she thought further about the problem of her recently published book on totalitarianism, the problem of understanding political-historical events that are not subject to causality and regularity. The problem of modern science is to work with methods that are supposed to be universally valid and repeatable and whose results must be verifiable and valid at all times. Science is about the what, not the who of human actors. Therefore, science is only a tool that can be used in a limited way. "True understanding," Arendt wrote,

> always returns to the judgements and prejudices which preceded and guided the strictly scientific inquiry. The sciences can only illuminate, but neither prove nor disprove, the uncritical preliminary understanding from which they start. If the scientist, misguided by the very labor and his inquiry, begins to pose himself as an expert in politics and to despise the general understanding from which he started, he loses immediately the Ariadne thread of common sense which alone will guide him securely through the labyrinth of his own results[22].

From this perspective, scientists who trust their science alone seem to be at high risk of losing the orientation of humanity. Thinking, according to Arendt, "arises in the element of the unknowable"[23]. It has nothing to do with the will to know, nor with

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20 Hannah Arendt: Some Questions of Moral Philosophy, op. cit., p. 141.

21 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World? In: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 93.

22 Hannah Arendt: Understanding and Politics, in: *Essays on Understanding 1933–1954*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company1994, p. 311.

23 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 261.

faith or logic, but with understanding. As with Heidegger, truth was regarded by her as an impulse, not a result of thinking. No compulsion of the will, no authority of faith and no subjective logic independent of experience[24] is compatible with this understanding; on the contrary, any compulsion puts an immediate end to an understanding thinking. Understanding consists of thinking one thing after another and can only take place as "free thinking" that pursues "no ends", has "no objects" and produces "no results", but creates "meaning". "Thinking", Arendt noted in her *Denktagebuch*, is "'interrogating' (reason), namely 'sense interrogating' or sensing actions".[25]

Just as Arendt advocates not leaving the question of truth to the scientists, she also advocates not leaving thinking to the philosophers and literature to the experts. In her essay on Bertolt Brecht, she writes:

> The voice of the poets, however, concerns all of us, not only critics and scholars; it concerns us in our private lies and also insofar as we are citizens. We don't need to deal with *engagé* poets in order to feel justified in talking about them from a political viewpoint, as citizens.[26]

Towards the end of her life, Arendt said: "I would like to say that everything I did and everything I wrote – all that is tentative."[27] This is her method: to think for herself, to think each thing through and to develop these thoughts in the conversation she enjoyed so much with her husband Heinrich Blücher and her friend Jaspers. Writing down these trains of thought leads to the essay, a form that characterises all her writings, including her books. They do not contain systems, they are not teaching material, Arendt does not want to instruct. "The road of the theoretician who tells his students what to think and how to act … My God! These are adults! We are not in the nursery!"[28]

In the secondary literature, the unity of content, method and stylistic device in Arendt has only recently been pointed out. Her statement of the break with tradition and the departure from an essentialist, timeless thinking corresponds to her method of thinking in time, "which employs neither history nor coercive logic as crutches"[29], but preserves phenomena before concepts and avoids historical determinism. Steve Buckler explains that "Arendt's anti-traditional standpoint … is consciously one that seeks to avoid providing precepts that might be invoked as the ba-

24 Ibid., p. 342.

25 Ibid., p. 183f.

26 Hannah Arendt: Bertolt Brecht, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 210f.

27 Hannah Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, in: Melvyn A. Hill: *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1979, p. 338.

28 Ibid., p. 310.

29 Hannah Arendt: On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 8.

sis for a new 'tradition' that would supply, in the form of decisive formulations, a cognitive replacement for the old one."[30] And Ari Helmeri-Hyvönen emphasises the unity of the anti-systematic and anti-static movements of thought with the stylistic devices of metaphors and the use of fragments of thought.[31] It is, according to Buckler, a "non-definitive, discursive theoretical formation"[32], which "poses a potent challenge to established ways of theorising politics and presents a refreshing alternative to what have arguably become sterile debates."[33]

Arendt's interest in language, her agreement with Emerson's "Language is fossil poetry", consisting of coagulated metaphors, is part of her method of thinking. For Arendt, it was always about speaking with language (poetic), not through language (instrumental). What Arendt praised in Benjamin applied to herself: that in the face of the questionability of the past, he had to come across language, "for in it the past contained ineradicably, thwarting all attempts to get rid of it once and for all."[34] And that it would have been in Benjamin's mind to "trace(s) the abstract concept *Vernunft* (reason) back to its origin in the verb *vernehmen* (to perceive, to hear), it may be thought that a word from the sphere of the superstructure has been given back its sensual substructure."[35] Since Homer, such a metaphor, which is immediately obvious and requires no interpretation, has borne "that element of the poetic which conveys cognition"[36]. In *The Life of the Mind*, however, Arendt also writes that "all philosophic … language … is metaphorical"[37].

That is why Arendt's work is permeated with linguistic images and metaphors, especially *The Human Condition*, in order to give the thought its own expression, to communicate precisely *through* language, not *with* language.[38] Thus, as an example for many, she noted in her *Denktagebuch* the linguistic image: "By fleeing from poli-

30 Steve Buckler: *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2011, p. 34.

31 Ari Helmeri-Hyvönen: Tentative Lessons of Experience: Arendt, Essayism, and "The Social" Reconsidered, in: *Political Theory*, 2014, Vol. 42(5) 569–589.s

32 Steve Buckler: op. cit. p. 55.

33 Ibid., p. 4.

34 Hannah Arendt: Walter Benjamin, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 204.

35 Ibid., p. 165f.

36 Ibid., p. 166.

37 Hannah Arendt: *The Life of the Mind*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1978, One/Thinking, p. 102.

38 As an example for many: "Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object; without the human artificed to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes." (Hannah Arendt: *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 183)

tics, we are dragging the desert everywhere – religion, philosophy, art. We are ruining the oases!"[39]

Her statement that she wanted her writing to understand and not to have an effect is echoed in Benjamin's abhorrence of wanting to have an effect through language in the propaganda battles of the First World War:

> Every action that lies in the expansive tendency of the word-to-word series seems to me dreadful and all the more disastrous where this whole relation of word and deed is spreading, as it is with us, in ever increasing measure as a mechanism for the realisation of the right absolute.I can understand scripture in general by poetic, prophetic, factual, as far as the effect is concerned, but in any case only magical, that is, un-means-able. Every salutary, indeed every not inwardly devastating effect of Scripture rests in its (the word's, the language's) mystery.[40]

Which is why Karl Kraus considered silence the only possible action at the time:

> He who encourages deeds with words desecrates words and deeds and is doubly despicable. This occupation is not extinct. Those who now have nothing to say because actions are speaking continue to talk. Let him who has something to say come forward and be silent![41]

Arendt's unity of thought, language and form can be outlined more precisely in dialogue with Benjamin and Kraus. In the "Epistemo-critical prologue" to *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin describes thinking which is constantly renewed, as a form of philosophising that seeks knowledge, not proof, that always goes back to the matter itself and, with its "continuous pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation", in which "the truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter." The "fragments of thought" obtained in this way can best be represented in the form of the tract, which in their accumulation form a mosaic. "In their supreme, western, form the mosaic and the treatise are products of the Middle Ages; it is their affinity which makes their comparison possible."[42] Arendt's "exercises in political thinking" correspond to this; they are tracts that, in the words of Benjamin, form a picture like a mosaic.

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39 Hannah Arendt: *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 524.

40 Walter Benjamin: Letter to Martin Buber, July 1916, in: The correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940 / edited and annotated by Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno; translated by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, p. 80

41 Karl Kraus: In dieser großen Zeit, in: *Die Fackel*. Heft 404, Vienna, December 1914.

42 Walter Benjamin: *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, London-New York: Verso 1998, p. 28f.

If it is true that Arendt's location is that of a centre which is left empty, around which revolve the concepts that are not explained in detail, such as the desire to act, or the end in itself of acting, which is tantamount to claiming that "storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it"[43], then there is also a certain closeness to Benjamin's "sphere of the wordless", of the magical: "Only the intense direction of words into the core of the innermost silencing achieves true effect."[44]

What is then expressed in language is more than what we can say. Adan Kovacsics points out that Wittgenstein, as an attentive reader of Karl Kraus, also expressed himself along these lines: "That which expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by language." (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.121) And: "There is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical." (6.522)[45]

To approach Arendt's work with scientific methods is bound to fail. Either the work is criticised as scientifically insufficient or, like other classics, it is "treated in seminars, made the subject of qualification theses or even researched itself"[46], that is, in any case made the object of science.

Equally misleading is the question "What would Hannah say?" Buckler rightly emphasises that Arendt's work is not a blueprint for recurrent applications but, on the contrary, a rare example of the open thinking that everyone must undertake for themselves:

> The responsibility, then, is to think in a politically oriented manner, avoiding the temptation to resort to abstraction and so leaving the realm of action to its own unreflective devices.[47]

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43 Hannah Arendt: Isak Dinesen, in: *Men in Dark Times*, op. cit., p. 105.

44 Walter Benjamin: Brief an Martin Buber, op. cit., p. 127.

45 Cf. Adan Kovacsics: *Guerra y Lenguaje*, Barcelona: Acantilado 2007, p. 89.

46 Michael Quante: Philosophisches Interview, op. cit., p. 5. Agnes Heller's sarcastic criticism of the usual forms of reception fits this. She noted that fashion from time to time unleashes all the "scientific 'termites' and intellectual 'itinerant locusts'" on a few texts "so that they can live off their interpretation. This is followed by hundreds of thousands of theses and dissertations on the same author and the same text at all the universities on the planet, hundreds of conferences are held, and the rest is known to us. After a few years, maybe even sooner, the whole thing comes to a halt because the text no longer offers anything new intellectually, since everything has already been said once. This is what I call hermeneutic exhaustion, oversaturation or overload." (Agnes Heller Warum Hannah Arendt gerade heute? In Hans-Peter Burmeister und Christoph Huettig (eds.) *Die Welt des Politischen. Hannah Arendts Anstöße zur gegenwärtigen politischen Theorie*, Loccum Loccumer Protokolle 60/95, 1996, p. 12. (Translated by WH)

47 Steve Buckler: *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory*, op. cit., p. 159.

Jeremy Waldron is concerned with learning what independent thinking might look like, for example, through Arendt's columns in *Aufbau* magazine on the situation in Palestine in the 1940s:

> Reading these columns, it is just possible that we will learn something about *how to* respond to events – step back, look behind the slogans, listen to the other side, be aware on either side that you may be being lied to. But we will certainly not learn what our response should be. The tribute that is owed to the particularity of Arendt's work is not imitation and it is not the application of some lessons we are supposed to have learned; it is our own resolve to think things through here and now, as she thought about them there and then.[48]

It is no wonder that Arendt, who did not belong to this world of science and did not herself want to systematically explain its place, could only explain: "I am nowhere. I am really not in the mainstream of present or any other political thought. But not because I want to be so original – it so happens that I somehow don't fit."[49]

The Radicality of their Thinking and the Role of Emotions

Cognition moves mind *and* soul, reason *and* feelings. According to Mary McCarthy, this became visible in Arendt as a theatrical trait. "And this power of being seized and worked upon, often with a start, widened eyes, "Ach!" (before a picture, a work of architecture, some deed of infamy), set her apart from the rest of us like a high electrical charge."[50] According to Alfred Kazin Arendt "talked philosophy as if she were standing up alone in a foreign county and in a foreign tongue against powerful forces of error. She confronted you with the truth; she confronted you with her friendship, she confronted Heinrich (Blücher, WH) even when she joined him in the most passionate seminar I would ever witness between a man and a woman living together"[51].

Arendt's emotions are emotions of the mind: laughter, anger, passionate criticism. They run through her work. Thus, she was accused of writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with *ira et studio*, a clear scholarly misconduct. Arendt responded to this by referring to the unity of content and form using the example of the misery of English miners at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution:

> If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and

48 Jeremy Waldron: What would Hannah say? op. cit., p. 12.

49 Hannah Arendt: On Hannah Arendt, op. cit., p. 336.

50 Mary McCarthy: Saying Good-by to Hannah. New York Review of Books, January 22, 1976

51 Alfred Kazin: *New York Jew*, New York: Knopf 1978, p. 198.

> have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities. … This has nothing to do with sentimentality or moralizing … To describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be 'objective', but to condone them.[52]

In *Denktagebuch* she noted:

> Only when poverty has been made "objective", i.e. dehumanised, i.e. torn out of the context of public life, i.e. out of the human context of solidarity, i.e. denatured (stripped of its, poverty's, peculiar nature), does one arrive at the moronic demand of freedom from value. (*Wertfreiheit*, WH)[53]

Thus Arendt also praised Lessing's political emotions, his laughter, his anger and his passions. She had to laugh when reading Eichmann's interrogation,[54] she unintentionally struck an "ironic" tone in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and she initially linked judging to the "understanding heart" (Solomon), a legacy of the Enlightenment, as the observation of the essayist and diplomat Melchior Grimm (1723–1807) shows: "The prerequisite for a distinct and accomplished taste is that one has a keen mind, a feeling soul and a righteous heart."[55] Arendt also had these three elements. They are indispensable even in the extended way of thinking that Arendt later described only formally, following Kant.

The Non-intellectual

Arendt was not only not a philosopher of the conventional kind, but also not the supposed other, an intellectual or a *public intellectual*. For Arendt, intellectuals were mostly academically trained people who marketed their knowledge and were prepared to sacrifice any humanity in the process. They were the ones who, according

52 Hannah Arendt: Reply to Eric Voegelin, in: *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*, op. cit., p. 404f. In a new preface in 1966 to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt explained that shortly after the Second World War it was impossible to write *sine ira et studio* given the "mood of those years". (p. vii f.)

53 Hannah Arendt: *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 89.

54 Hannah Arendt: "What remains? The Language Remains." A Conversation with Günter Gaus, in: Peter Baehr (ed.): *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, New York: Penguin 2000, p. 25. Likewise, she agreed with Brecht in "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui": "I found in Brecht the following remark: The great political criminals must be exposed, especially to laughter. They are not great political criminals, but people who permitted great political crimes, which is something entirely different." (Interview with Roger Errera, in: Hannah Arendt: *Thinking without a Banister*, New York: Schocken 2018, p. 504.

55 Melchior Grimm *Paris zündet die Lichter an. Literarische Korrespondenz*, Leipzig Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung 1977, p. 121. (Translated by WH)

to Arendt in her interview with Günter Gaus, unlike ordinary people, fell for Hitler, who came up with "fantastic things" in order to be there. They were, according to Arendt in a letter to Jaspers, "after all, 'intellectuals', which is a far worse breed than representatives of interests"[56], because there were no limits to interests for their opportunism:

> This new class of intellectuals who, as literati and bureaucrats, as scholars and scientists, no less than as critics and providers of entertainment … have proved more than once in recent times that they are more susceptible to whatever happens to be 'public opinion' and less capable of judging for themselves than almost any other social group.[57]

And in her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt poured scorn on the quality of the intellectual's thought performance: "The specifically outrageous-opposite thing about the intellectual is that even his worst stuff is still better than he is".[58] As we have already seen, Arendt spoke of the characteristics of the "highly cultivated murderers", the absence of personality and integrity. They formed Hitler's elite.[59] Of course, not all intellectuals belonged to this elite, but the transitions were fluid.[60] It is thus the *who* of intellectuals, their unconscionability and lack of judgement, that Arendt places at the centre of her critique, producing, in the words of Jeremy Waldron, "clichés and jargon, stock phrases and analogies, dogmatic adherence to established bodies of theory and ideology, the petrification of ideas, these are all devices designed to relieve the mind of the burden of thought, while maintaining an impression of intellectual cultivation."[61] Arendt laughingly agrees with the novel *The Golden Fruits* by Nathalie Sarraute, in which she sees the intellectuals of her time portrayed in an apt comedy. They represent the "élite of good taste and refinement", "intellectuals boasting of the highest standards, who pretend to care about nothing, certainly talk about nothing but things of the highest spiritual order".[62] The falseness of these intellec-

56 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1992, p. 635 (April 18, 1966).

57 Hannah Arendt: European Humanism and the Jewish Catastrophe: Hannah Arendt's Answers to Questions Discussed in a Maariv Round Table, in: *HannahArendt.net*, vol. 4, No. 1, p. 13.

58 Hannah Arendt *Denktagebuch*, op. cit., p. 149f.

59 Cf. Christian Ingrao: *Croire et détruire. Les intellectuelles dans la machine de guerre SS*, Paris: Librairie Artème Fayard, 2010.

60 Ibid., p. 149f.

61 Jeremy Waldron: What would Hannah say? Op. cit.

62 Hannah Arendt: Review of Nathalie Sarraute, "The Golden Fruits", in: *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, op. cit., pp. 214–222. In her interview with Joachim Fest, she explains how New York intellectuals changed their minds about Arendt's book on Eichmann: "They completely forgot that they had even read the book before. If you want to pursue this phenomenon … you really have to read 'The Golden Fruits' by Nathalie Sarraute, she presented it as a

tuals, according to Arendt, "touches one of the most delicate and, at the same time, indispensable elements of human relationships, the element of common taste … The feeling of natural kinship in the midst of a world, to which we all come as strangers, is monstrously distorted in the society of the refined who have made passwords and talismans, means of social organisation, out of a common world of objects".[63]

It is therefore more than inappropriate to call Arendt a *public intellectual* just because she caused a sensation with her book on Eichmann in Jerusalem and took a political stand with her essays on the *Crises of the Republic.* She did not do this as an intellectual, but as a *citizen.* Her entire oeuvre, her writings, statements and letters express this position as a critically judging citizen. It is therefore no wonder that she preferred the simple dockworker Eric Hoffer in Berkeley far ahead of her intellectual colleagues. He was a "real oasis" for her as an independent thinker and writer.[64]

Learning and judging, following Arendt, consists in emancipating oneself from guiding and at the same time restricting mental banisters. "I always thought that one has to start thinking as though nobody had thought before, and then start learning from everybody else"[65] – also from Arendt.

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comedy." (Hannah Arendt and Joachim Fest *Eichmann war von empörender Dummheit*. Munich: Piper. 2011, p. 58)

63 Ibid., p. 221f.

64 Hannah Arendt / Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence*, op. cit., p. 257 (March 26, 1955).

65 Hannah Arendt on Hannah Arendt, op. cit., p. 337.