Being and Appearance, Process and Medium

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In a lecture that appeared in the journal S*ocial Research* in 1971 and of which Hannah Arendt also included large parts in the "Introduction" to her unfinished three-volume work *The Life of the Mind,* Arendt speaks of the "discrepancy between words, the medium in which we think, and the world of appearance, the medium in which we live."[01] She goes on to ask whether the discovery of this discrepancy was not the beginning of philosophy and metaphysics, except that in the beginning, for example with Heraclitus and Parmenides, the path to true being was seen in thinking, "be it as *nous* or as *logos,*" while over time the emphasis shifted from speech to appearance, "hence to sense perception and the implements with which we can extend and sharpen our bodily senses." However, by speaking of a discrepancy between two media and not of a juxtaposition of two realms of being or two human faculties, she points to a third, in which words and appearances resemble or combine with one another: the term medium, common to both determinations, refers neither to determinable objects that are perceived by our senses nor to truths withdrawn from perception, but to ways of relationality, to paths, procedures, external tools or inner capacities through which we relate to the world and to others. Arendt thus points to a way out of the juxtaposition of thinking and perceiving, as well as out of the differentiation of content and form, which are always already interwoven in the creation of relationships. Accordingly, the alternative between a primacy of thinking and a primacy of perception also dissolves. In *The Life of the Mind,* Arendt will therefore speak of a "primacy of appearance."[02] Living beings exist in a constant relationship and exchange with the world; the senses and cognition, perception and thinking are prerequisites for this exchange. Life cannot therefore precede appearance, it

01
Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971), 419.

02
Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Wallstein Verlag, 2024), 30.

coincides with it: "In this world, into which we appear from a nowhere and from which we disappear into a nowhere, Being and Appearing coincide."[03] With this thesis, further differentiations—such as those between the general and the particular or between semblance and reason—become blurred, even though there may well be poles or weightings in the process of appearance. In her late work, Arendt also programmatically expresses this necessity of rethinking the relationship between the individual and the general, because life is always a singular event that encompasses thinking and perception. I will begin my discussion by turning back to her earlier work, *The Human Condition* (1958), and with the concept of the medium, which has been neglected so far, before discussing the consequences that arise for a political theory of thinking and action in her later work.

03
Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 27.

04
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 190.

The Medium of Appearance

It is well known that the concept of appearance in *The Human Condition* is mainly associated with the notion of the space of appearance. It is not yet used in explicit connection with the term medium. The latter, however, appears in two argumentative contexts. The first concerns the deconstruction of the juxtaposition of passivity and activity in a thinking of processuality: "the actor always moves along and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a 'doer' but always and at the same time a 'sufferer.'" Acting and suffering belong together like two sides of the same coin, because the story that begins with an action also includes the consequences of the action. "These consequences are boundless, because action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes."[04] The phrase 'acts into a medium' is as unusual as it is remarkable. It indicates that action is situated both outside and within the medium, that it takes place in a medium, but does not have or must not have its origin in it, instead having its starting point, impulse or intention in, 'so to speak,' a nowhere. It is thus conceived as ultimately groundless or unfounded and, in this respect, is associated with freedom. Here, passivity and activity mean that action is related to a medium as well as within a medium. Activity and passivity thus prove to be

the difference of a spatial temporality that takes place in the medium itself. While the medium is continuous, thinking and action are discontinuous and event-like. This interrupting dimension of the event is developed most poignantly by Arendt in her concept of natality. With this relationship between the continuity of the medium and the discontinuity of the event of thinking and action, Arendt places both in a process-philosophical framework. The action itself may be highly indeterminate, but it realizes itself as an event that enters into other events without a limitation of this process being determinable. The idea of a chain reaction is not in contrast to the indeterminacy of the action itself. The spatial and temporal infinity is far too complex to define action as determinate; the event is a singular phenomenon, but one that in turn gives rise to new events, new concrescences.[05] Arendt makes the process-philosophical horizon explicit at a later point in *The Human Condition,* when she speaks, with direct reference to Alfred North Whitehead, of the replacement of the concept of being by that of process:

> In the place of the concept of Being we now find the concept of Process. And whereas it is in the nature of Being to appear and thus disclose itself, it is in the nature of Process to remain invisible, to be something whose existence can only be inferred from the presence of certain phenomena.[06]

Being and process are not separate occurrences; appearance is part of the process into which it is incorporated, and yet it is not determined by the process. It points to the medial dimension of the process, in which it is taken up by a new event, a new appearance. In the German edition of the book, which she prepared herself, Arendt then adds to the quoted phrase that every action "acts into a medium" the determination that it will "strike into the medium of the infinite fabric of human affairs."[07] The novel choice of verb reinforces the autonomous, disruptive and singular character of the action, while the additional stipulation that it is the medium of human affairs emphasizes the communicative character. The mediality of the action is the communicative dimension associated with the singular, non-general nature of the action.

05
Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (Free Press, 1978).

06
Arendt, *Human Condition,* 296–97.

07
Hannah Arendt, *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben* (Piper, 1999), 236–37.

The Medium of Promise

The second context in which Arendt uses the concept of the medium in *The Human Condition* is that of the promise. Here, too, she uses the concept to express the peculiar relationship between limitation and boundlessness that is akin to processuality. The "faculty of promising" and, as she adds in the German edition, the ability "to keep" promises,[08] serves "to master this twofold darkness of human affairs" that results from the indeterminability of the consequences of human action and man's "inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing)"[09] She calls this "the price human beings pay for freedom" and "for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all." Once again, the singularity of the act is at stake in the medium of the promise, although here it is supplemented by the dimension of worldliness, which in turn is plural and thus ultimately always singular. Unlike in societies based on sovereignty, which legitimize their rule through something outside the human sphere, in societies based on agreements and contracts—and thus ultimately on the promise—the only bond is freedom. Freedom thus becomes possible as a "positive mode of action," as Arendt adds in the German edition.[10]

> The danger and the advantage inherent in all bodies politic that rely on contracts and treaties is that they, unlike those that rely on rule and sovereignty, leave the unpredictability of human affairs and the unreliability of men as they are, using them merely as the medium, as it were, into which certain islands of predictability are thrown and in which certain guideposts of reliability are erected.[11]

Precisely because Arendt marks a certain impropriety in the use of the term 'medium' here with the phrase 'as it were,' it is important to understand what exactly she is referring to. As in the context of the relation between continuity and discontinuity in the medium of the infinite fabric of human affairs, the medium of the promise is also about a relationship between limitation and unlimitedness, between determinacy and indeterminacy, between passivity and activity and between singularity and communicability. The promise creates

08 Arendt, *Vita activa*, 312.

09 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244.

10 Arendt, *Vita activa*, 312.

11 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 244.

a new space-time relationship because it introduces a specific and new discontinuity into the flow of the process. It is a discontinuity made possible by memory, which is constitutive of social relationships and their binding force. Unlike in societies in which discontinuity is supported by the dimension of a principle transcending human relationships, for example by a divine or otherwise sovereign institution, this is a dimension of discontinuity that arises through action and lies entirely within the responsibility of the individual.

Promises are acts and events that influence the processual dynamics of continuity and discontinuity. Yet the transformation remains fragile. The relationships it creates are bonds that counter unpredictability only to the extent that they are held and not broken. Their ground is, as it were, their abyss. There is therefore something like a groundless or non-original origin of the social and political, which becomes the basis of coexistence in societies based on contract and not on sovereignty. They utilize social power, a faculty that sovereignty suppresses or at least leaves unused. Uncertainty gives rise not to security but rather to a social obligation that can be disregarded:

> The moment promises lose their character as isolated islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty, that is, when this faculty is misused to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path secured in all directions, they lose their binding power and the whole enterprise becomes self-defeating.[12]

The medium of the promise creates something new in the space of uncertainty, something that binds or connects, but it only works as long as its own fragility is recognized and respected: it is a capacity to create islands of another temporality in the flow of time without damming the flow of time itself, as well as a capacity to create places and paths without negating the infinity of space.

12 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 24.

Medium and Space of Appearance and Concealment

While Arendt speaks of a medium of appearance in *The Life of the Mind,* she does not take up this term in her discussion of the concept of appearance in *The Human Condition,* where she instead uses the term space(s) of appearance. However, although this term may be self-explanatory, it tends to draw too much attention to the spatial dimensions of appearance at the expense of temporal dimensions, which are so central to Arendt's thinking on processuality. It can be assumed that Arendt became aware of this problem at the latest through the reception of her book. To this day, her concept of spaces of appearance is often associated with the distinction between the private and the public. However, Arendt emphasizes in the first chapters of *The Human Condition* that this distinction is no longer valid in modern times. Arendt relates "the distinction between a private and a public sphere of life" to "the rise of the ancient city-state," but explicitly describes "the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public" as a "relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincides with the emergence of the modern age."[13] The "decisive division between the public and private realms, between the polis and the sphere of household and family, and, finally, between activities related to a common world and those related to the maintenance of life … is entirely blurred." As it appears in *The Life of the Mind,* the concept of the private is not opposed to a space of the public but to inner sensations and dreams.[14] An apparently topographical distinction has been replaced by a distinction of relationality, one that is no longer about the separation between the domestic and the political but about the connection between the self-related and the social or worldly.

13 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 28.

14 Arendt, *Life of the Mind,* 53, 55, 107.

Like processuality, relationality is not visible; it has no objective form. The processuality that is constitutive for the realm of the social is a dimension of social relatedness or the intersubjective, which does not present itself through categories or determinations of value but is inherent to the appearance and singular in its eventfulness. Formulated from a process-philosophical perspective, the singularity of the event and the generality of the social do not stand opposed to one another, because the event of action or the appearance

is understood as a singular way of taking up, actualizing and crystalizing the unlimited eventfulness in the medium of human relationships, an actualization of the past and of anticipated effectivity. This actualization can also be grasped as judgment. We will see that Arendt is looking for exactly this when she turns to the question of the capacity of judgment, as analyzed by Kant in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in the last part of her *The Life of the Mind*.

15 Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 107.

But this question runs through this work from the very beginning. In its first volume, Arendt writes that aesthetic judgment, "as Kant knew so well," draws "its metaphorical language from the sense of taste ... the most intimate, the most private and most idiosyncratic of senses, somehow the opposite of sight and its 'noble' distance."[15] The judgment, however, claims "general agreement." The generality is potential, but as such it is never fully actualized. I will return to Arendt's explicit reflections on the faculty of judgment. The question, then, is what relationality is effective in judgment itself, or, formulated in the context of process-philosophical figures of thought, how the actualization of the social dimension enters into something that is so closely connected with the intimate dimensions of sensuality, with the inner senses, as an aesthetic judgment.

This can no longer be thought about in terms of the concept of space because judgment, even if it is interruption and thus has spatial quality, has a fundamentally temporal dimension: it is at the same time memory and an appeal to what is to come. (This is why the current boom in talk of so-called memory spaces also easily distracts from the actual problem of the actualizing temporality of judgment). Let us, however, dwell on the question of appearance, which cannot be separated from judgment, even if it presupposes it in the logical sense. The precondition for judgment is the spatialization of the social, the appearance of an interruption in the flow of continuity. I assume that it was precisely this element that motivated Arendt to speak of spaces of appearance.

Nevertheless, a closer reading of *The Human Condition* reveals that already here the space of appearances is not linked to any specific topographical or technical conditions, but rather, like the medium of the promise, creates islands in the flow of the medium of the network of human affairs, refers

to a potentiality that "comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action."[16] 'To come into being' does not mean that potentiality is transformed into a factuality, which could be said of a possibility that is realized; potentiality remains potentiality even then—because it remains inherent in speech and action, because it is something that is carried along and that does not itself appear in speech and action. And yet it remains bound to the appearance.

The space of appearance "predates and precedes all forms of constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized." Like the medium of appearance, the space of appearance is a condition of the constitution of the public realm, but it is not something that is realized in the latter, because the quality of potentiality is inherent in speech and action.

> Its particularity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being … but disappears … with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and forever.[17]

In the space of appearance, no object appears, but rather an event appears that, because it is a social event, is always connected to intersubjectivity.

The fact that public space can precisely have the effect of preventing appearance, of suppressing the social dimension of experience, makes it abundantly clear how problematic it is to equate public space with the space of appearance. Appearance is associated with seeing, thinking and judging, not with the public. This is undoubtedly one of the conclusions Arendt draws from the experience of political and social development in Germany, which she understands as a collapse of thinking—not of the public sphere, which National Socialism knew how to use to great effect. The necessity of expanding the theory of appearance, as developed in *The Human Condition,* into a theory of the life of the mind is clearly stated by Arendt herself in the preparatory work and also in the introduction to *The Life of the Mind.*

16 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 199.

17 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 199.

Referring to her 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,* she writes that she associated the phrase "the banality of evil" with "no theory or doctrine but something quite factual," describing the phenomenon that misdeeds of gigantic proportions were carried out by someone whose only special characteristic was something completely negative: "it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think." Thus, the question arose:

> Could this activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining and reflecting upon whatever happens to come to pass, regardless of specific content and quite independent of results, could this activity be of such a nature that it 'conditions' men against evil-doing? (The very word con-science, at any rate, points in this direction insofar as it means 'to know with and by myself', a kind of knowledge that is actualized in every thinking process).[18]

The "sadists and perverts" who "stood in the limelight in the publicity of these trials, in our context they are of less interest."[19] In "Auschwitz on Trial," her essay on the Frankfurt trials of 1963–1965, she writes: "The clinical normality of the defendants notwithstanding, the chief human factor in Auschwitz was sadism, and sadism is basically sexual."[20] However, "the true moral issue did not arise with the behavior of the Nazis but of those who 'coordinated' themselves [*sich gleichschalteten*] and did not act out of conviction."[21] Arendt uses the verb *gleichschalten* in the active voice, no doubt in deliberate contrast to the passive use in the formula of *'Gleichschaltung durch den nationalsozialistischen Machtapparat'* (coordination through the National-Socialist apparatus of power) used by so many historians. The question of evil does not arise as a psychological problem of individuals or groups, but results from the observation of a breakdown of judgment affecting large parts of society, an "almost universal breakdown, not of personal responsibility, but of personal *judgment* in the early stages of the Nazi regime," arising "with the phenomenon of 'coordination', that is, not with fear-inspired hypocrisy, but with this very early eagerness not to miss the train of History."

18 Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 418–19.

19 Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (Schocken, 2003), 59.

20 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment,* 252.

21 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment,* 54.

> In brief, what disturbed us was the behavior not of our enemies but of our friends, who had nothing to bring this situation about. They were not responsible for the Nazis, they were only impressed by the Nazi success and unable to pit their own judgment against the verdict of History, as they read it. … I think the early moral disintegration in German society, hardly perceptible to the outsider, was like a kind of dress rehearsal for its total breakdown, which was to occur during the war years.[22]

22 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment,* 24–25.

If social relationality comes into effect in the event of appearance, then what Arendt describes here for the initial period of the National Socialist government in Germany is the extensive suppression of appearance by acts performed in the public space. Arendt describes this moral disintegration as a dress rehearsal, an unusual metaphor chosen, no doubt, with some care: Arendt does not speak of a prelude or even of a rehearsal, both of which would be terms in which the action lay with those she calls enemies. By contrast, those who take part in a dress rehearsal don a new habit themselves, rehearse a new role, occupy it at least provisionally. They are not spectators, the 'coordination' goes hand in hand with an inability to bring their own and singular judgment into play against what they saw as the judgment of history—an apparently general judgment.

Finally, this extraordinary metaphor of the dress rehearsal points to the exemplary nature of theatrical thinking for the space of appearance. If it is true that, in the space of appearance, one not only communicates something through acting and speaking, but "in all this also always oneself at the same time," what does it mean for the idea of the space of appearance if adaptation to the 'moral' order is tantamount to a dress rehearsal? It is about social concealment of oneself to oneself, not the concealment of sadism, the exhibition of which was one of the central techniques of National Socialism. The concept of the space of appearance requires a supplement or extension in which the social and political are linked with the individual capacity for thought and judgment.

This is the project that Arendt pursues in *The Life of the Mind*. Its third and concluding part, which unfortunately remains largely fragmentary, is dedicated to judgment.

Since Kant sees judging in line with the faculty of pure reason and practical understanding as a faculty of its own, "we shall have to ascribe to it its own modus operandi, its own way of proceeding."[23] This is based on the collaboration of two individual faculties, that of the imagination and that of the *sensus communis.*

23 Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 199.

24 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 199.

25 Arendt, *Human Condition*, 181–83.

Mimēsis, Imagination and the Original Split

The space of appearance is related to the social realm, not to the public space. It is "the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly."[24] This social realm is made possible not by the existence of a collective but by the relationship of one singular individual to another. "The manifestation of who the speaker and doer unexchangeably is, though it is plainly visible, retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward unequivocal verbal expression." Even if "most words and deeds are about some worldly objective reality," there is always something more,

> a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent. Since this disclosure of the subject is an integral part of all, even the most 'objective' intercourse, the physical, worldly in-between … is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly *to* one another.[25]

The theme of imagination is not explicitly developed in *The Human Condition,* but it is inherent in the process of thinking intersubjectively. As relationality, intersubjectivity is a constitutive part of appearance and worldliness. The clearest passage in which Arendt develops this idea in her earlier writing is in her thoughts on *mimēsis,* which basically anticipates the question of imagination. Since "the specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of acting and speaking," it cannot be directly evaluated, it "can be represented and 'reified' only through a kind of repetition, the imitation or *mimēsis.*" Arendt thus sees the

significance and necessity of *mimēsis* in its ability to transfigure something barely perceptible in the flow of time into a metastable scene or image. According to Aristotle, *mimēsis* "prevails in all arts but is actually appropriate only to the drama ... Only the actors and speakers who re-enact the story's plot can convey the full meaning, not so much of the story itself, but of the 'heroes' who reveal themselves in it." In this, the doubling in the imitative play of the actors on the one hand and the chorus on the other is constitutive for the Greek tragedy. While the identities of the agents of the story remain intangible, the universal meaning of the tragedy "is revealed by the chorus, which does not imitate and whose comments are pure poetry ... This is why the theater is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art."[26]

Worldliness presupposes intersubjectivity. But intersubjectivity is tied to an inner dissociation that is closely connected to the imagination. Intersubjectivity is a reference to the other, which presupposes a reference to oneself. Neither the self nor the other is immediate; both are inconceivable without imagination. This applies to all thinking: "*Every mental act rests on the mind's faculty to have present to itself what is absent from the senses.*"[27] The subject is never fully present to itself because consciousness is connected with imagination and thus with a fundamental split. When the ego says "I am I," it carries a difference within itself, an "original split." "As long as I am conscious, that is, conscious of myself, I am identical with myself only for others to whom I appear as one and the same. For myself, articulating this being-conscious-of-myself, I am inevitably two-in-one." A search for identity that hopes to overcome this split would result in a loss of consciousness and thus also of the relationship to the other:

> Human consciousness suggests that difference and otherness, which are such outstanding characteristics of the world of appearances as it is given to man as his habitat among a plurality of things, are the very conditions for the existence of man's ego as well. For this ego, the I-am-I, experiences difference in identity precisely when it is not related to the things that appear but only to itself.[28]

26 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 187–88.

27 Arendt, *Life of the Mind,* 75.

28 Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 442.

Arendt points out that Plato's definition of thinking as a "soundless dialogue with oneself" and Socrates' ideal of inner harmony presuppose a dissociation. Consciousness is not the same as thinking, "but without it thinking would be impossible. What thinking actualizes in its process is the difference given in consciousness."[29] If difference and alterity are the outstanding features of the world of appearances, then the same is true for the human self. When the self refers to itself, it experiences a difference in identity. But this, too, requires imagination, because the thinking ego "does not appear to others and unlike the self in self-awareness, it does not appear to itself, and yet it is not nothing."[30]

The inner sensations take place in a relentless succession, which "prevents each of them from assuming a lasting, identifiable shape." Arendt approvingly quotes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible:* "The 'psychism' is opaque to itself." Therefore, "inner sensations" and emotions can only be "unworldly."[31] When we talk about psychic experiences, Arendt argues, we never talk about the experiences themselves, but always about what "we think about it when we reflect upon it."[32]

Negation and Disavowal

In *The Life of the Mind,* Arendt states that psychoanalysis is a science that deals with the affections of the soul, with "the ever-changing moods, the ups and downs of our psychic life,"[33] but not with thinking and judging. This is partly understandable when viewed against the background of certain lines of tradition in psychoanalysis. In particular, the post-World War II North American discussion, dominated by ego-psychology, disregarded the fundamental distinction in Sigmund Freud's theory between primary and secondary processes, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. However, this difference corresponds in many ways to Arendt's distinction between inner sensations and consciousness, soul and thinking. This also goes for the distinction between appearance and concealment, which is contained in the dynamics that follow the psychoanalytic distinction between the conscious and the unconscious. The problem or weakness of Arendt's argument is not the separation of feeling and thinking

29 Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 442.

30 Arendt, *Life of the Mind,* 48.

31 Arendt, *Life of the Mind,* 45.

32 Arendt, *Life of the Mind,* 38.

33 Arendt, *Life of the Mind,* 41.

itself, but the omission of reflection on the dynamics of this separation. However, these dynamics can be particularly significant when it comes to the question of judgment and the intersubjective relationship that is effective in it. What we think about inner sensations is, as Arendt herself says, strongly determined by the imagination with which we relate to ourselves. And this, in turn, is also related to how we want to reveal ourselves to the other.

Indeed, the dimensions of this dynamic become particularly clear in the light of Freud's theory of judgment, as he outlines it in the 1925 text "Negation" in particular. Here, Freud distinguishes between a judgment function that follows the pleasure principle and an intellectual one. He understands the former as a judgment of taste in the sense of "the oldest—the oral—instinctual impulses …: 'I should like to eat this,' or 'I should like to spit it out.' That is to say: 'It shall be inside me' or 'it shall be outside me.'"[34] In other words, the "original pleasure-ego" makes pure subjective decisions, it "wants to introject into the self everything that is good and eject from itself everything that is bad. What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical." The "function of intellectual judgment [*der intellektuellen Urteilsfunktion*]" is distinguished from this "affective process" in that it no longer passes judgment on the basis of direct sensory perception but on the basis of an idea, that is, a product of the imagination. Freud reminds us that all representations that originate from perceptions are repetitions. "Thus originally the mere existence of a presentation [*Vorstellung*] was a guarantee of the reality of what was presented." Freud uses the German word *'Vorstellung,'* which can be translated as presentation in the sense of (theatrical) performance as well as in the more philosophical sense of imagination. But following Freud's understanding of the mental processes, it is obvious that he means the latter. Imagination is different from sensory perception; it arises only through a thought process that refers, figuratively and by remembering, to something that is not itself present but is formed only through the imagination. "The first and immediate aim, therefore, of reality testing is, not to *find* an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented [*dem Vorgestellten*], but to *refind* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there."[35]

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Sigmund Freud, "Negation," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud: Volume 19* (Hogarth Press, [1925] 1961): 237.

35
Freud, "Negation," 237–38.

The intellectual function of judgment thus occurs at the level of imagination (*Vorstellung*). But it not only serves to judge the presence or absence of the imagined in reality; it also serves the judgment of taste because it arises from "the interplay of the primary drives [*Triebregungen*]"[36] and, to a certain extent, draws on this play. "Judging is a continuation, along lines of expediency, of the original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself, according to the pleasure principle." What Freud calls negation now arises from this dual function, which the faculty of judgment first acquires as thinking, that is, in the secondary process. Now, the intellectual function of judgment separates reality testing and taste in negation. In the examples that Freud cites from his therapeutic practice, this happens when something that the ego does not want to assimilate, although it has taken note of something repressed in the imagination, denies reality. It can thus expel it again. This is a process of thinking, as Freud emphasizes again at the end of his essay, because his analytical experience has taught him that "we never discover a 'no' in the unconscious."[37]

Freud's most extensive reflections on the process of denial or disavowal can be found in the text "Fetishism," written two years after "Negation." They implicitly presuppose Freud's remarks on negation, except that here the point is to cling to an object that one finds pleasing in one's imagination while at the same time acknowledging that it no longer exists or has been lost. The imagination thus splits the object in such a way that the subject can both take "full account" of the intellectual judgment of its loss and of the desire to possess and assimilate it.[38] This process of thinking thus undermines one of the three "maxims of common sense" that Kant postulates as prerequisites for the ability to judge at all: "Always to think in accord with oneself."[39] What is denied must have been perceived, so the disavowal is also a process of thinking and not of the unconscious or the primary process. In his late work *Outline of Psycho-Analysis,* published from his posthumous papers, Freud also writes that in the process of disavowal, in which the "rejection" of reality is "always supplemented by an acknowledgment; two contrary and independent attitudes arise and result in the situation of there being a splitting of the ego." Negation and disavowal

36 Freud, "Negation," 237–38 [translation amended].

37 Freud, "Negation," 239.

38 Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud: Volume 21* (Hogarth Press, [1927] 1961), 156.

39 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 174 [B 159].

are both processes of thinking: processes of a failure to think, to realize the soundless dialogue with oneself. But while negation manages to deny a notion of reality to such an extent that it can be preserved in the unconscious, in denial two contradicting notions coexist in thinking or in the ego. "The difference between this case and the other … is essentially a topical or structural one, and it is not always easy to decide in an individual instance with which of the two possibilities one is dealing." Both are "efforts of defense," efforts to conceal from the ego and the other something that belongs to the realm of appearance in speech and action.[40]

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Sigmund Freud, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud: Volume 23* (Hogarth Press, [1940] 1964), 204.

Freud's models of psychic structures or the topics are functional models that are intended to help describe the dynamics of the conflicting demands with which the subject must learn to deal. The relationship to the other person, on whose help the person is dependent from the first day on, the relationship to the other person as an object of desire, the relationship to the self as self-preservation, the relationship to the self as an ego ideal acquired in interaction and as a memory of experience, the relationship to the self as an acquired superego through identification, and finally the regulation of affects and drives form a complex structure, whose interplay is precarious and can often only be maintained in an illusory way through negation and dissociation in the form of repression or disavowal. Both interrupt the communication between these demands, undermining the subject's inner dialogue and thus also their inner harmony.

Negation and disavowal are not pathological processes per se, just as dissociations are everyday phenomena. The two are banal. The capacity for aesthetic judgment, on the other hand, is a highly complex mental process of synthesis of imagination and reference to the other, of self-reference and alterity. While Arendt is no less interested in mental processes than Freud, she focuses on the processes directed towards the other rather than the internal processes between 'I and I.' These are complementary perspectives, they enrich each other. If they are seen in a binocular way, it becomes clear that the scandal of psychoanalysis and the scandal of Arendt's thinking about judgment arise at the same stumbling block: in both cases, the lack of judgment concerns the problem that othering very often includes the scheme of the

pathological into which it is so easy to settle vis-à-vis the other. The core of othering consists of a judgment that proceeds in a subsuming manner. The distinction between norm and deviation is the prime example of this procedure. But how might a way of thinking that avoids this proceed? What is aesthetic judgment when it becomes effective outside the narrower field of art? One crucial way of addressing this is exemplary or paradigmatic thinking. Its theory is also the vanishing point that we will find in Arendt's discussion of Kant's theory of judgment.

41 Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 32–33.

42 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 237.

Sensus Communis

In a process-philosophical sense, every appearance is characterized by a relation to the other as well as to oneself. Even if one disregards the specific problem of negation and disavowal, every appearance is also a concealment, because an appearance is connected with a decision: "[A]ppearances never only reveal, they also conceal … they do not only expose, they also protect from exposure, and, as far as their ground is concerned, this protection may even be their most important function."[41] Whitehead's philosophy of process also takes this into account. He speaks of a negative prehension, which excludes data from the synthesis that leads to an event.[42] This corresponds to Arendt's statement that in every action and the judgment on which it is based, a limitation is necessarily set to the infinity of the fabric of relationships, however unpredictable its consequences may prove to be. The relation to the other is necessarily part of this decision, to the extent that appearing itself can take on the function of concealing. So how can we think of a judgment that does not produce the relation to the other primarily negatively, primarily in a concealing or denying way, but rather enables a surplus of social relationship, a surplus of worldly relationality in the first place? That is the question that arises for a political theory of judgment.

Arendt sees this as the question that drives Kant's reflection on judgment, which is why she understands Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* as his actual, albeit unwritten, theory of the political and also gives her lectures on Kant's work the title *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. The difficulty that arises here is that Kant's understanding

of judgment is initially framed, in his *Critique of Pure Reason,* as the establishment of a relationship between the particular and the general, but a dynamic of judgment that relates to something new and to the realm of the socially expansive cannot proceed from a general that has revealed itself as an established value or established knowledge. Kant therefore introduces a new faculty in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* that of aesthetic judgment.

Kant essentially distinguishes three faculties of judgment. The first is 'the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the general.' Of this, Kant says that it "subsumes the particular under it" and proceeds "determining."[43] A second faculty proceeds reflexively. It is active when we are dealing with the "manifold of forms in nature," for which we "cannot borrow" a universal from experience because "as empirical, they may seem to be contingent in accordance with the insight of our understanding," so that we must nevertheless, in accordance with the requirement of the concept of nature, regard them "as necessary on a principle of the unity of the manifold, even if this principle is unknown to us." This reflective faculty of judgment "can only give itself such a transcendental principle a law." The third faculty of judgment, which Kant calls the aesthetic faculty, can certainly refer to the "real of an empirical concept" and be objective in this respect, but since it cannot refer to general concepts or laws, norms or regulations, it is based solely on "the relation to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, by means of which nothing at all in the object is designated, but in which the subject feels itself as it is affected by the representation."[44] Kant thus links aesthetic judgment not directly with sensory perception, but with the capability of the imagination and self-reflection. "For we can generally say, whether it is the beauty of nature or of art that is at issue: that is beautiful which pleases in the mere judging (neither in sensation nor through a concept)."[45] Quoting this sentence, Arendt continues: "It is not important whether or not it pleases in perception; what pleases merely in perception is gratifying but not beautiful. It pleases in representation, for now the imagination has prepared it so that I can reflect on it. This is 'the operation of reflection.'" Taste is an inner, non-objective sense, but there is a "nonsubjective element in the nonobjective senses" which is

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Kant, *Judgment*, 67 [B XXVII].

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Kant, *Judgment*, 89 [B 3].

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Kant, *Judgment*, 185 [B 180].

> intersubjectivity. (You must be alone in order to think; you need company to enjoy a meal.) Judgment, and especially judgments of taste, always reflect upon others and their taste, take their possible judgments into account. This is necessary because I am human and cannot live outside the company of men.[46]

Aesthetic judgment, whose specific capacity Arendt extends to the political, is as distinct from the subsumption of a singular phenomenon under a general concept as it is from reflective judgment, which inquires into the laws of phenomena. It is both singular and social, perception and thought;[47] it is connected not only with the imagination but also with what Kant calls *sensus communis.* This is not the application of general rules, but something that holds itself between the singular and the general, establishing a connection between the singular phenomenon and a manifold of social and wordly relations. Judgment in this sense follows the manner of the judgment of taste. The beautiful is a sensation and a quality belonging to the object only insofar as it can evoke this sensation in us. As a sensation, however, it cannot be subsumed under a general concept, which is why we cannot argue about a judgment of taste.

Kant claims "that in the judgment of taste nothing is postulated except such a universal voice [*allgemeine Stimme*]," which "lays claim to the consent of everyone."[48] But what is a universal voice? It is not a law, not a rule, not a single sound. A general voice, it could be said, can only exist as a chord, as a resonance of many voices. It is the result not of an accumulation of individual sounds, but of an interference, a tuning of many voices, which in their sound, like the strings of a polyphonic instrument, also absorb the vibrations of other voices. Such tuning in the sense of resonating with the other and at the same time with oneself is also subject to Kant's idea of tuning in and tuning out: "The judgment of taste ascribes assent to everyone [*sinnet jedermann Einstimmung an*]."[49] Or, also: the judgment of taste "only ascribes this agreement to everyone [*sinnet nur jedermann diese Einstimmung an*], as a case of the rule with regard to which it expects confirmation not from concepts but only from the consent of others."[50] The judgment of taste is therefore something genuinely social, based not on a given

46 Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 67.

47 Arendt, *Lectures,* 82.

48 Kant, *Judgment,* 101 [B 26].

49 Kant, *Judgment,* 121 [B 63].

50 Kant, *Judgment,* 101 [B 26].

generality, but itself expressing a capacity for communication, a sense of intersubjectivity, and even more: a claim, a request. The verb *'ansinnen'* was as rarely used in Kant's time as in ours; the word *'sinnen'* addresses both the movement in one direction and the connection between perception and contemplation, the question of the meaning of events. As a noun, an *'Ansinnen'* also means something like a request addressed to another. When Arendt points out that the common sense was understood by Thomas Aquinas as the sense of the attunement of the five senses, as "a kind of 'sixth sense'"[51] it takes on the meaning of the intersubjective as the sense of the desire, which can be understood as an implicit claim to the inclusion of the other in one's own judgment, precisely as attunement. In the aesthetic faculty, therefore, something is at work that can never be fully realized or actualized, something that 'senses' (*sinnet*) as potentiality but never arrives.

Insofar as it concerns art, this potentiality of intersubjectivity can be seen in the process of production as well as in the process of reception. What characterizes art is that it does not show something known, does not represent concepts, but suggests a mental process. How can this be part of the political sphere?

If "the universal communicability of a feeling presupposes a common sense [*gemeinschaftlichen Sinn*]," Kant writes further, then this "must be able to be assumed with good reason … as the necessary condition of the general communicability of our cognition."[52] The necessary condition of the universal communicability is a medium or something that is inherent to all mediality as potentiality. This "idea of a communal sense [*gemeinschaftlichen Sinnes*]" implies, according to Kant, that "this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgment of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else." This "faculty for judging a priori the communicability of the feelings that are combined with a given representation (without the mediation of a concept)" is "combined with something else in order to be able to connect with satisfaction on an object a further pleasure in its existence (as that in which interest consists)." The fact that the judgment of taste is without "noticeable interest" means that "the idea of its universal communicability almost infinitely increases its value."[53]

51 Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 54.

52 Kant, *Judgment*, 123 [B 157].

53 Kant, *Judgment*, 174–77 [B 157–64].

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Arendt, *Lectures,* 67 and 123–24.

The 'pleasure in the existence of an object,' of which Kant speaks, connects the object of judgment with communicability in a way that also includes the object itself. A pleasure in the existence of an object that is 'without perceptible interest' cannot refer to possession or utility but includes both a pleasure in the intersubjective communicability of a feeling and a cognition as well as a pleasure in the phenomenality of the world or its objecthood. When Kant writes that the idea of general communicability increases its value 'almost infinitely,' he exactly highlights the potentiality as that which will never be fulfilled as such.

In this, the *sensus communis* is the furthest removed from a common sense related to values, norms and propriety, because it is linked to the pleasure in the difference of the other and the unknown, to curiosity. The world of appearance is a world permeated by the *sensus communis,* a world that we actively share through our imagination but never possess. In Arendt's concept of worldliness, there is a clear echo of this figure of thought.

The Exemplary Nature of Appearance

Arendt links her reading of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* with another of Kant's works, in which she sees a judgment expressed by him about the world of appearances that follows the faculty of aesthetic judgment but is to be understood as a political one: Kant's remarks on the French Revolution.[54] Arendt refers to a passage from Kant's *The Controversy of the Faculties* from 1798, in which he sees in the French Revolution an 'anticipatory sign' of a better, republican form of government that makes it possible

> to predict to the human race—even without prophetic insight—according to the aspects and omens [*Vorzeichen*] of our day, the attainment of this goal. That is, I predict its progress toward the better which, from now on, turns out to be no longer completely retrogressive. For such a phenomenon in human history will *not be forgotten,* because it has revealed a tendency and faculty in human nature for improvement such that no politician, affecting wisdom, might have conjured out

> of the course of things hitherto existing… But so far as time is concerned, it can promise this only indefinitely and as a contingent occurrence.[55]

Kant makes this judgment explicitly as a spectator—and not an isolated one, but one who finds himself connected, finds "in the hearts [*Gemütern*] of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm."[56] This applies to the "experiment" of the revolution, which "may succeed or miscarry." Kant calls the French Revolution phenomenon, experiment, game and anticipatory sign. The ancient Greek *phainómenon* initially means nothing other than something that shows itself, something that appears. But how does a historical event or a series of historical events become a manifestation, a phenomenon? Two operations of the imagination are at work here. The phenomenon is to a certain extent doubled, without it being possible to separate what is doubled, because the phenomenon arises from interference. One operation of the imagination is the transformation of a series of events into a relationality of singular events, a figure in the unlimited field of human relations that does not result from their chronological sequence, but potentially even runs against it, because what appears is independent of the success of the 'experiment.' The second operation is that this net of relations 'uncovers' something, i.e., also makes it appear, which itself has no other form than this event itself. It is something that exemplifies the event and thus turns the 'game' into an experiment. Kant calls this the "tendency and faculty in human nature for improvement."[57] A faculty can only manifest itself in an event or in actions and words. It is not a law or a rule, it is a potency and therefore cannot be separated from the singular phenomenon itself. It has no universality as something realized, but it has the potency to enter into other events as an increased richness of relations. Other events may be similar to the French Revolution in that this faculty also appears in them, but this similarity is not established through a rule because the faculty itself cannot manifest itself beyond an event as a singular constellation, cannot exist beyond a singular network of actions and words.

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Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of the Faculties (1798)," in *Religion and Rational Theory,* Immanuel Kant (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 304.

56
Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties,* 302.

57
Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties,* 304.

What do Arendt's considerations have to do with this? Let's take another step back and take a closer look at how Arendt understands the *sensus communi*s. Social relations have no objective character, but something becomes imaginable in the medium of appearance that is not only subjective. Something non-subjective is effective within it, something that appears without appearing and in this sense is a potentiality through which we may become 'members of a community': "If common sense, the sense through which we are members of a community, is the mother of judgment, then not even a painting or a poem, let alone a moral issue, can be judged without invoking and weighing silently the judgments of others, to which I refer just as I refer to the schema of the bridge to recognize other bridges."[58]

In her lecture, Arendt had previously introduced a differentiation that distinguishes between the singular appearance of an object and the schema with which we determine an object. In the representation or the imagination at work in it, two different images interfere: the image that the perception of the singular bridge recalls, and the image that can be understood as the schema of a bridge. "This second schematic bridge never appears before my bodily eyes; the moment I put it down on paper it becomes a particular bridge, it is no longer a mere schema." This capacity of representation is fundamental to knowledge that is shared with others. First of all, Arendt concludes from this that "the schemata that appear in knowledge become examples in judgement."[59]

When she transfers aesthetic judgment to the field of morality, she presupposes the assumption "that the field of human intercourse and conduct and the phenomena we confront in it are somehow of the same nature."[60] But how can abstract schemata be found in them that are comparable in their function to the schema of a bridge? What can take the place of schemata that allows a transfer without sacrificing the singularity of the phenomenon? What is it that could enable an intersubjectively shared perception such as that of an object as a bridge for the network of relationships of human affairs or the space of appearance? Let us go back to what we were able to experience with Arendt as the central moment of Greek tragedy, the capacity of *mimēsis*. *Mimēsis* differs from empathy in that it does not so much claim to

58 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 141–42.

59 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 139–40.

60 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 138.

take the place of another as that it applies to a constellation. However, a constellation never appears as such; it can only be perceived in a singular situation. The singular action is always part of a situation, and it is only from here that the perception of the singular event broadens itself to the wider field of the net of human affairs.

Arendt becomes aware of this problem in the course of her discussion of Kant's text on the power of judgment, as we find it in the notes to her lectures and seminars from 1966–68. In the course of her discussion, she expands the two images of representation to include a third: this time using the example of the table, Arendt differentiates between a schematic table, which has all the necessary properties of a table, an abstract table, which takes into account the "minimum qualities common to all of them," and "an example of how tables should be constructed and how they should look."[61] With this third image, she introduces the aesthetic dimension and thus also the *sensus communis* into the idea of the example—without, however, further developing this 'should' and the ethical quality of aesthetic judgment addressed by it. If no general law, no independently existing value motivates this 'should,' it must be effective as a special and proper power of the singular appearance or the singular event. This force does not proceed from a general rule embodied by the example, nor from an abstract schema, but from a scenic constellation, the figuration of a tension that emerges in the mesh of relations without being visible as either an object or a rule, but as a communication of the elements that are part of the figuration.

Such an example is not limited to art. As Arendt explains, many concepts developed by historiography and political science have this exemplary character: "Achilles for courage, Solon for insight (wisdom), etc. Or take the instances of Caesarism or Bonapartism."[62] Last but not least, literary figures such as Macbeth, Henri IV or King Lear also have an exemplary character. What Arendt says about the science of history and politics also applies to psychoanalysis, which can easily be shown by the significance that such figures as Oedipus or Electra, Michelangelo or individual case histories had and still have in Freudian theory.

61 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 144.

62 Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 144.

When we understand a story as exemplary, we associate it not only with a particular person in his or her singular identity, but rather with a complex structure of actions and suffering, of activity and passivity that concretizes in the appearance of a figure in an infinite network of conditions. Arendt had already referred to the figure of Achilles in *The Human Condition.* Achilles may be an exemplary figure for his courage, but this has little to do with a subjectivity that we empathize with. Not even that which "for the individual may be the utmost effort beyond which there can be no further" makes him an exemplary figure: "What gives the story of Achilles its paradigmatic significance is that it shows in a nutshell that *eudaimonia* can be bought only at the price of life."[63] Even in Achilles, the exemplary is connected not only with his action, but with a singularity that does more than create a new pattern that could be imitated, but reports "in a uniquely concrete way" of something that itself has no objectivity, consisting rather in a notion of *eudaimonia,* a correspondence between the acting self and the self, the deed and its history, perception of the self and its perception by the other. Homer's narrative is imitation not in that it identifies or strives to live like Achilles, but in that it creates a figure, an image or a thought for a highly complex constellation that can be thought. As readers of Homer, we share a mental space. In it, judgment is added to an apparition just as little as the apparition has an illustrative character. There may be other examples of the idea of *eudaimonia,* but it is itself something that can only be thought and communicated as a singular example.

Arendt ascribes 'paradigmatic significance' to this story of Homer. Giorgio Agamben, who is very familiar with Arendt's writings, defines the paradigm as something that appears "when an element suspends and simultaneously exhibits its belonging to an ensemble, with the result that it is impossible to distinguish between the character of the example and that of the particularity within it."[64] A constellation that takes on a figure in the example, that can be remembered, has no generality that can be understood as the difference between being and appearance or between law and

63 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 194.

64 Giorgio Agamben, *On the Signature of All Things: On Method* (Zone Books, 2009), 37.

illustration. Rather like a promise, it is an island in the flow of time, one that is always newly and differently constellated and yet shows similarities to other constellations.

Appearance is a medium because it combines singularity and communication or communicability. That which appears, which is perceptible by our inner and outer senses, can only be something singular and yet at the same time it must be more in order to become shareable, in order to enter into communication with the other, the self and the intersubjective other. The paradigm is itself a paradigm of appearance. It does not take its path via a universal, it only goes from appearance to appearance, even if it is more than what appears, because it carries a meaningful constellation with it: a constellation cannot be fixed in a concept because it is complex, not fixed in its limitations, like islands in time that float and change their edges. We feel and think with these constellations, but always differently. We can look at certain works of art over and over again, read certain poems or novels over and over again, listen to certain pieces of music over and over again. We recognize them, but each encounter is new. It is the same with people; in this sense they are apparitions as soon as we have begun to perceive them in their singularity. Political events have the quality of appearance, too. They may be past, but never entirely. And ultimately, the same is true of thinking itself, the life of the mind. It is a process, an intertwining of continuity and event: "The need to think can be satisfied only through thinking, and the thoughts which I had yesterday will be satisfying this need today only to the extent that I can think them anew."[65]

65 Arendt, *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, 422.