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Arendt's Notion of Performative Self-Disclosure

This article examines Hannah Arendt's notion of disclosure, a notion essential to her theory of freedom and political action. Arendt writes that action discloses *who* its actor is, as well as the *world* that situates action. Our discussion unfolds against the backdrop of Arendt's diagnosis of the modern breakdown of the unity of tradition, authority, and religion, as well as her account of totalitarianism and modern technology. For Arendt, these came to signal that "anything could be done" and that the previous limits to human action, understood according to traditional morality and metaphysics, were no longer authoritative. Arendt sees a breakdown of traditional meanings of action. She questions how new processes and events may be intelligibly judged, how meaningful action can be regenerated, and the necessary humanly constituted conditions for the disclosure of the *who* of actors, something Arendt deems the basis of human dignity. Arendt's notion of disclosure is best illuminated through her political metaphor of performance art and her writing on the notion of the *daimon*, both recast from ancient Greek thought. Her concept of disclosure helps us rethink the subject, not as a sovereign self-transparent subject whose work and action express an authentic individual essence, but rather as a decentered actor whose work and action, in plurality with others, reveals meaningful dimensions of the world and of one's situation in historical time.

Productive vs. Performative Political Metaphors

While both productive and performance art have served as metaphors for politics, Arendt argues that the tradition of Western thought generally favours the fabrication model. She posits that the result of the Platonic analogy between politics and making, and the tradition of political thought that it shapes right up until Marx, represents a loss of the essence of politics, an essence Arendt understands as the freedom of spontaneous action, the beginning of new processes and human relationships, and the public appearance of great deeds and words. There are many aspects of productive art that are analogous to the philosophic tradition's understanding of politics. Fabrication, generally speaking, begins with an imagined form that the artist refers to before, during, and after the work process. In Plato, Arendt sees a philosopher's escape from the contingent and uncertain realm of human affairs to the eternal realm of *eidos* and then an application of these forms to the earthly realm of politics, as measures and standards for behaviour, and the basis of sovereign rule of communities. In the making of laws to improve human behaviour according to rationally set measures, the political craftsman produces tangible results according to a recognized end. The uncertainty and futility of action is overcome by the stability of 'making' according to a pre-conceived ideal.

The classic image of productive art implies a singular artist, one who directs the creative process from beginning to end. Similarly, the modern philosophical relegation of freedom to a disposition of the will manifests politically as an equation of freedom with sovereignty, which requires the self and others to submit to a sovereign will. This model of a ruling element that commands subordinates was carried by Plato from the Greek

household and model for artistic mastery and applied to his image of the ideal city and the imaginary of the soul.

The logic of fabrication further implies a positing of ends that organize and justify their means. All stages of the production process itself are essentially undertaken as means to the end of the final product (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 125). Arendt argues that the *poiesis* model is incarnated in modernity as technical rationality, with its tendency to instrumentally schematize the world, as means to ends posited by a sovereign will. Man as the *disposer* of means, as self-willing *homo faber*, becomes the final measure of the value of nature and things. No activity is seen as performed for its own sake, while utility becomes the very content of meaning. Fabrication works on natural material, which requires a violent transformation of the given material (122). Arendt writes that the traditional understanding of human affairs as a sphere of making, with its necessary violence to given natural or human material, is taken up in the imaginaries of modern political revolutions, with their proposition that a new body politic can be made, that history can be made, through necessary violence (204). The metaphor also appears in Arendt's critique of totalitarian ideology. Nazism can be read as the fulfillment of the plastic art of the state, or as national aestheticism, the forming of the *volk* according to an ideal of the complete art work. When the human beings are considered as raw material, the creation of a finished work requires the violent suppression of plurality and aspiration to omnipotence (Canovan 27).

Productive art leaves a finished work at the end of the process, one that becomes part of the world of things, and lasts without significant further work, while the creative process comes to an end with the completion of the product. Arendt is particularly careful to distinguish the essence of freedom from this aspect of fabrication. She argues that freedom cannot be guaranteed merely by a well-founded constitution, but rather that freedom is the activity of continuous 'augmentation' of this constitution, following its foundation. Fabrication generally takes place behind closed doors, so that while the finished product appears to the public in the gallery, the artist himself and the creative process need not appear in public. The *who* of the artist never publicly appears, and is never disclosed. According to Arendt, anonymity is characteristic of the depoliticization of decisions and events within mass consumer society, their appearance as products of anonymous and inevitable processes, exempt of criticism. Another reading of this aspect of the metaphor signifies that the activity of politics can be deferred, or represented, rather than actively performed oneself. The purpose of politics is, in this case, not in performative participation, but rather in achieving a final state of affairs.

Arendt argues that freedom requires that we renounce the sovereignty that characterizes politics understood according to the model of making. The equation of freedom to an attribute of the sovereign will is one of the causes of the equation of power with oppression, or rule over others. Arendt holds that since a plurality of unique individuals lives on the earth, freedom and sovereignty are so little identical that they cannot even exist simultaneously. To illuminate her theory of non-sovereign freedom, Arendt appeals to an alternate metaphor from the world of art, that of performance.

Arendt recasts the performing arts metaphor from its appearance in pre-Socratic Greek writers such as Thucydides and Homer, but also in certain moments of Aristotle, in which his account of *praxis* contains its own *telos*. In "What is Freedom?" Arendt writes: "[T]he Greeks always used such metaphors as flute-playing, dancing, healing, and

seafaring to distinguish political from other activities, that is...they drew their analogies from those arts in which virtuosity of performance is decisive” (Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 153). Arendt’s notion of action implies the performance of great deeds and their accompaniment by great words. She holds that deeds without words fail to disclose the meaning of action and usually revert to wordless violence to attain their ends, in a way that fails to disclose any truth about the world or about the agent of action.

Arendt insists that action occurs in the context of plurality, which she posits as the essential condition of human life. She writes that plurality has the twofold character of equality and distinction among human beings (HC 10). To relate this to the performance metaphor, every performer is unique in how they play, while every spectator observes the performance from a different perspective. Plurality is essential to Arendt’s notion that individuation can occur through action, that a unique *who* can be disclosed in action and for history, and can consequently be held responsible for their actions. Further, each spectator, because they are unique, is responsible for their own judgment. The possibility of individuation, which depends on plurality, raises human life to a level of dignity over and above its existence as mere anonymous biological life.

The condition of plurality also implies that a multitude of people with divergent wills and cross-purposes act out their lives in such a way that innumerable unique relationships are formed between them. The “web of human relationships” forms the “subjective in-between” of deeds and words that “overlays” the “objective in-between” of physical entities and interests (162-63). This is the general context in which all deeds and words, as action, are performed. There is an unpredictable and contingent aspect of acting under conditions of plurality. Following the performance metaphor, the more improvisation, or the freer one is to play something new, unexpected, and unscripted, the greater the risk of dissonance between players. It is impossible for one beginner to fully control the outcome of his action, since action can create unpredictable relationships. When an actor inserts himself into the web of human relationships, through beginning a new process, its repercussions are felt within this pre-existing and contextualizing set of relations, the medium that provides the action with its reality and objectivity. It is from the multiple effects of actors on one another, within the web, that intelligible life narratives emerge. However, because the actor can never ultimately master all that occurs in the dynamic of the web into which his act is thrown, his act rarely achieves its precise purpose (163). Under conditions of plurality, the actor as beginner following the Greek *archein* and the Latin *agere*, is not he who sees what he started through to its end, from a position of sovereignty. The actor is the subject and sufferer of his life story, he is not its author or producer, does not stand in relation to the outcome of his story as one who masters it (164).

Another feature of action, related directly to the performative metaphor, is that it shows the actor’s *virtu*, in the Machiavellian sense of his attunement to past events and present conditions, which can be understood as aspects of *fortuna*, as opportunities that the world has revealed. In the preparatory notes of lectures that Arendt gave on Machiavelli at the University of California, Berkeley, 1955, Arendt relates that Machiavelli’s notion of *fortuna* acts as the constellation of world circumstances without which *virtu* remains unrealized, while *virtu* is a form of play with these circumstances, by which something new is established (Arendt, Machiavelli lectures, Image 10). Part of one’s virtuosity is being attuned to unexpected changes that can cause unprecedented

situations that are difficult to get our bearings on, when we are caught up in the unfolding of the performance itself. The actor must be able to act within a contextual situation which itself is not transparent. Compared to fabrication, whose end is a final product, action as performative virtuosity contains its end, or *telos*, within its own unfolding process (BPF 153). Dancing, play-acting, and musical performances, on their own, leave no product once the curtains close. What appears in the performance is inseparable from the performance itself - it is the *virtuosity* demonstrated in performing well that is the end. Arendt tries to rearticulate the essence of political action, in its living performance of deeds and speech, as similar to performance art, an activity for its own sake whose end is inseparable from its doing. Here Arendt appeals to Aristotle's notion of *energeia* as activity whose *telos* of 'living well' is not pursued as an end outside of its own performance, and leaves no other work behind, but rather exhausts and actualizes itself in the performance (HC 185). The performance metaphor illuminates the notion of action's unique self-containedness, its unity of end and energy, and the dignity of the activity itself, which does not find its end in any reification or separate work.

According to Markell, Arendt restores the concept of activity to Aristotle's *energeia*, so that to be actual is not to realize a potential set of dormant qualities within the individual, but rather to be engaged in activity that reconceives its possibilities as it proceeds, re-attuning to the changing situation that calls for response (Markell 11). In this image of virtuous attunement, Arendt denies a self that is the fully actualized embodiment of human potentiality. Contrarily, the notion of a self-transparent self who has reached full actualization prior to his action provides the ground for the division inherent to sovereign rule between ruler and ruled, between one who is actualized and one who still needs to be brought from potentiality to actuality (11).

The performance metaphor helps illuminate another fundamental aspect of Arendt's notion of freedom as action, that it is actualized not as a disposition of the actor's will, psyche, or feelings (dispositions internal to the actor), but rather that it is actualized in the external space of intersubjective appearance. To perform and to begin require a conception of freedom related not only to a subjective will that is free insofar as it is determined by a universal law, but rather relates to the objective possibility to spontaneously act. Arendt states that freedom is based not on an *I-Will*, or an *I-Know*, but an *I-Can*. In performance, it is not enough that the performer intend or *will* their performance to be great, but he must *perform* well, since only what appears on stage has public reality. Arendt argues that people are free, that they make freedom appear, only as long as they act. Action cannot be differed to representatives; instead, freedom consists in an actor's direct engagement (BPF 146). Following Montesquieu, the philosophical freedom of the *I-will* is independent of circumstances and the actual attainment of goals that the will sets, whereas political freedom consists in *being able* to do what one ought to will, so that both exterior and interior circumstances must be fitting for the realization of political freedom (161). Arendt holds that political freedom does not appear in the realm of thought or of feeling, but rather in the shared political world of human interaction, through action, as a demonstrable fact (145, 149). She recalls that in the Greek life of the *polis*, freedom implied an objective status, a tangible reality or condition within the world, manifested in relations with others. It was a status enabling one to move, to appear before one's political equals, to interact with them in deed and in speech.

This was the condition for felicity, *eudaimonia*, “which was an objective status depending first of all upon wealth and health” (HC 30).

To return to our metaphor, performance requires a theatre where players and spectators meet. Arendt recalls the model of the *polis* as such a space in which freedom as performative virtuosity can appear and where aspect of the shared world can become disclosed before a plurality of others. Action is world disclosive, and has a revelatory capacity to become historical, since it takes place between discursive subjects who overlay the world of durable things and make it a place of appearance and meaning (162). Great deeds and speech disclose the significance of a historical time and the everyday relationships of that time. They have an extraordinary and exemplary quality that call for remembrance. Remembrance can only occur within the theatre of the public space. This constructed theatre, the work of *homo faber*, provides an artificial, delineated, and momentary space whose conventional furnishings contextualize the speech and acts that occur within it, rendering them intelligible enough for the spectators to judge their meaning and worth. At this level, work and action are co-dependent. For Arendt, living together in a common world is to relate with one another in a manner mediated by our relation to the in-between of fabricated things. While the actor retrieves a level of identity through his relation to stabilizing objects (120), his relation to this in-between, vis-à-vis another person, establishes his *inter-est* (162).

The theatre stands as an artifact that relates current players and spectators to those who have attended before and will in the future, so that the meaning of the performances may be transmitted through generations and continually referred back to. Trans-generational permanence is the condition of fame, or earthly immortality, but also of the intelligibility of action as *natality*, the beginning of new possibilities and processes. A new birth and a new deed must enter a world of shared meanings, so that the act takes place within a situation, a context, only through which the act may be remembered. Only by continually playing and witnessing does the mere potential of the theatre as a public place remain alive and actual. Unlike the physical theatre that survives as a finished work after the actuality of its fabrication process, the overlaying space of appearance is kept alive only through the *power* engendered in the actual coming together of people. It requires not only the work of *homo faber*, but also of acting men. This power cannot be stored up, but only exists in its performance (178).

The notion that the theatre of action must be a relatively stable space brings us to a critical moment in the political thought of Arendt, a complex relationship between two types of action, that which initially *founds* the space of appearance and that which is *subsequently performed within* the founded space of appearance. In Machiavelli, Arendt identifies a double standard that reveals much of the complexity of Arendt’s own considerations of action, the spaces that are created to house it, and *who* is disclosed through it. Arendt notes that for Machiavelli, different actions are necessary in two different situations. The first situation is in founding a public space where glory is possible, calling something new into existence, establishing the *arche* of a political people. This moment is critical in Arendt’s own thought, with regards to action as the foundation and preservation of political bodies, the theatres of remembrance and history (HC 10). Machiavelli saw political action in the light of fabrication only in this predicament of foundation, where political man is seen “in the image of the artist, whose

material are men” (Machiavelli lectures, Image 13). According to Machiavelli, such a foundation is most reliable when it is the work of one individual builder.

In the second situation, the foundation is already laid: “Now the world and men belong together and smile at each other. Man is at home, he can trust the world to preserve the glory and his greatness” (Image 13). For Machiavelli, action was what made men immortal, what demonstrated their greatness, but only if their acts had “room to rest” (Image 9). In this situation,

one has to obey the law and...the whole people is engaged in keeping it and therefore one can shine & be great *simply by belonging to this people*; no spectacular rise from one sphere into the other, from private into the world of action (the nobles) is required. *This changes everything.* (Image 6) [my emphasis]

Arendt diverges from Machiavelli in important ways. First, she sees foundation, if it is to last, as not the work of a solitary figure who violently works on the raw material of men, but rather as the work of many acting men, through the making of promises, as established in a constitution. Further, while the making of promises ‘creates’ a space of appearance, its work essentially depends on performative discourse, on action. Great words, or words that promise, have a performative ability to create a situation in their very utterance. A space of appearance can be created through the right kind of speech. In this way, the distinction between *ergon* and *energeia* becomes blurred. What is also decisive in Arendt is that unlike a work that outlasts its productive process, the space of appearance continues to depend on subsequent performative acts, subsequent deeds, speech, and promises, to maintain it. Further, this foundation must be made in such an ‘augmentable’ way that subsequent actors can freely respond to their own situations, their own *fortuna*, within the parameters of the constituted space. Markell writes that Arendt transcends the opposition in democratic theory between institutional stability and the spirit of novelty, openness, subordination, and revisability (Markell 2). When action is seen only as the foundation and legitimation of rule, it ceases to be the basis of freedom, the basis of initiating. Kateb argues that Arendt does not see the establishing of a constitution as ‘making’ in the sense directed by means and ends. Kateb interprets this to mean that the constitution is not a program or policy, not a model for a utopian society, not lawgiving in the Platonic or Rousseauist sense: “Rather, it is the creation of a frame of institutions for indefinite future possibilities of political action, and the frame itself is changed by what it contains – by the experience it shapes and accommodates” (Kateb 19). Kateb sees the content of deliberative political action as not only concerned with foundation, but also protection against internal erosion (18). Action in this regard is speech among equals about public matters, speech that renders one’s reflexive judgment about a shared state of affairs whose meaning is undetermined. It is debate about the ends and meaning of the political community and thus discloses the actor’s notion of the kind of community he sees himself as part of. In this way action is circular, a constant rearticulation or augmentation of the constitution, understood as a shared political way of life.

But does there remain a contradiction here, one between Arendt’s exclusion of any notion of rule from genuine political action, on one hand, and her emphasis on the importance of revolutionary creation of institutionalized political spaces, on the other? The crux of the contradiction lay in what we might call the original violence or class exploitation at the base of all spaces of appearance, of all political freedom. Certainly,

Arendt's critique of violence and the fabrication model of freedom as sovereignty are dedicated to an alternative model of non-violent action. We might ask, however, what Arendt's final verdict is on the contradiction between the need for pre-political violence to establish freedom, and the space for freedom created by the foundation, the space created for equals who neither rule, nor are ruled? Is this an irresolvable contradiction?

Disclosing the Who

The preceding section has attempted to show Arendt's concern for the institutional conditions for disclosive action. This is important for our purpose of examining the ways in which performative action discloses the unique *who* of the actor. Arendt holds that action is only meaningful through the glorification of this *who*, which she posits as the basis of human dignity. For Arendt, the agonal spirit of the Greek polis exemplifies the spirit of initiatory self-presentation, where men individuated themselves, through deeds and words, before others (HC 156). Arendt suggests that the existential achievement of action is the disclosure of the *who* as a form of redemptive reconciliation to one's existence (187). Disclosure is not achieved through internal self-knowing or through the preservation of an authentic personality against social pressure, but rather through a public presentation of a defined and coherent self. The actor stylizes himself for public display, and changes himself and his surroundings as he acts, thus showing himself as more than what he knew he was (Kateb 10). His self-knowing, to the extent that it is possible, comes mainly from recognition from without. Villa reads that the self prior to action, understood biologically and psychologically, is fragmented and dispersed, lacking objective or worldly unity and reality (Villa 90). It is marked by a multiplicity of conflicting drives, needs, feelings, wills, and not-wills. Ultimately, even human motives are hidden not only from spectators, but from the actor's own introspection (BPF 144). The unified *who* is thus not a given, but rather an achievement. Public appearance and discourse with others calls the divided self out from its divided interiority, so that he may speak and act as one recognizable voice. This recognized shape is the achievement of a distinct style of action or virtuosity. For Arendt, it is the stylized actor, the public *persona* that appears before others in public, that constitutes the reality, the being, of the actor. Arendt holds that the disclosure of the *who* is implicit in everything the actor says and does, and cannot be completely willfully concealed from the view of others. The *who* cannot, ultimately, be controlled and disposed of as the actor wills, so that while the *who* may appear clearly to others, the actor himself never knows exactly whom he discloses, despite his best attempts at conscious self-stylization (HC 159-60). There is thus a curious aporia in the disclosure of the *who*, between the actor's initiatory, self-stylized performance that self-consciously attempts to present one's 'virtuosity' to the public, on one hand, and the ultimate impossibility or failure of the actor to control *who* he discloses in the performance, on the other hand. Even for those who encounter an actor, either as engaged with them in the web of relationships or as an observing spectator, it is impossible to fully conceptually reify, without remainder, the way in which the *who* appears "in the flux of action and speech" (161).

So, *who* is disclosed, exactly? Following Heidegger, Arendt insists that the *who* is separate from the *what* of the self. Within the category of the *what*, Arendt includes the actor's talents or shortcomings, the person's function in the totality of social production, their biological traits, objects that represent their life's work, and even their moral intentions. Arendt presses the distinction between the existential *who* and the

categorical *what* to further distinguish properly political affairs as those which deal with a plurality of *whos* that political actors can never ultimately dispose of, as stable entities, according to a principle of reason or will: “It excludes in principle our ever being able to handle these affairs as we handle things whose nature is at our disposal because we can name them” (162). Given the plurality of unique *whos*, the logic of *techne*, which depends on stable and namable entities, is inadequate for fully reckoning with the complexity and dignity of human affairs.

The identification of the *who* of action is not an identification of human essence, but rather entails an identification of decentering conditions that situate action as response. Following the Machiavellian notions of *virtu* and *fortuna*, we may read Arendt’s notion of the *who* as disclosed in the dynamic between the actor’s unique deeds and speech and the world conditions (political, temporal, spatial) that he responds to. The impossibility to identify a human essence is due in part to the historicized conditionality of human co-existence (11). Arendt argues that humanity’s nature is precisely to be conditioned by its changing relationship with the earth’s changing, objective thing-character. This view of human existence is historicized, and Arendt is deeply aware of the fragility of the exercise of particular human capacities and activities, the way in which a possible activity, or mode of being, can be concealed or distorted by a historical age.

The role of the *spectator* is fundamental to the performative arts metaphor as it relates to the witnessing and judging of disclosive action. The spectator is essential to the public space in which the *who* of the actor, and the relationships within the *world*, are disclosed. Arendt suggests that the word ‘public’ signifies that what appears there constitutes reality, in that it garners the widest possible spectatorship. What is performed is seen and heard by the many, from a plurality of perspectives, whose exchange of opinion and judgment constitutes the multifaceted reality of the performance (45, 52-53). Performance depends on spectators to witness the deeds and words, the playing well, so that the *persona* of the player lives on after he is gone, and a story is left behind, one that saves the actor and his act from futility. Spectators witness the actor’s deeds and speech, judges them, and then retrospectively reifies these in the form of a narrative, the life story, for tangible recollection. Thus, the *polis*, public place, or space of appearance, is like the theatre that houses action, and politics is revealed as an activity of collective remembrance. In his early Marburg lectures, which Arendt attended, Heidegger recalls that *theoria* comes from *theoros*, which “means the one who looks upon something as it shows itself, who sees what is given to see [...] the one who goes to the festival, the one who is present as a *spectator* at the great dramas and festivals – whence the word ‘theater.’” (Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 44) The spectator not only tells the story that commemorates the actor, but also judges what acts and personas are worth remembering and how it is to be remembered. Arendt tries to revive the dignity and critical force of *doxa*, understood as the opinion of the spectator. It is the plurality of spectators who judge what is great or relevant, while they relegate the rest to the private realm, or simply let it be forgotten, concealed. An act’s greatness, according to Kristeva’s reading of Arendt, “is a uniquely political question because the heart of the web of human relationships is where we shall define what is uncommon, what is extraordinary” (Kristeva 72). Arendt recalls that the Greek word *doxa* means not only *fame* or *splendour*, but also *opinion* (Canovan 142).

The plurality of spectator perspectives is crucial, as according to Arendt, “[t]he end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective” (HC 53). Canovan reminds us that Arendt sees free speech not as freedom of expression, but as the freedom to grasp reality from different perspectives in relation to a common world (Canovan 113). The dangers of only viewing an act from one perspective, akin to the dissolving of plurality within the public space, are recalled throughout Arendt’s work. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt describes the self-perpetuating totalitarian logic that projects and protects a single, often irrational, perspective on the significance of current affairs, while isolating individuals so that they can no longer share their plural perspectives, no longer properly think. Implicit in Arendt’s critique of sovereignty is an identification of the affront to political freedom brought about when a sovereign body safeguards and perpetuates a single authoritative interpretation of the meaning of a given act or object. There is a related danger in contemporary consumer society, treated primarily in *The Human Condition*, of perceiving all acts and objects by the measures of use or exchange value. Arendt equally cautions her readers of the dangers of singleness of perspective within philosophies of history and historical materialism, the ways in which the interpretation of an act can be quickly subsumed by its contribution (or lack thereof) to the historical advance of human freedom or justice.

Thus *doxa*, as plural public opinion, decides what is delivered over to *fame*, collective remembrance. According to Arendt, before the Socratic school’s elevation of the *vita contemplativa*, and before the fall of Rome and rise to prominence of the Christian notion of an immortal individual soul, the striving for earthly fame and immortality through remembered deeds was the primary motive of political life, a motive that placed it highest on the age’s hierarchy of activities (HC 20-21). The mortality of men consists in living a “recognizable life-story from birth to death” along a rectilinear line, out of the circular movement biological life and “in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order” (19). While Arendt explains the pre-Socratic Greek notion of human striving to immortality in the terms of Heraclitus, the following passage reads like a condensation of her own defense of the importance of the *vita activa* and of its remembrance:

The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things – works and deeds and words – which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves. By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave non-perishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a “divine” nature. (19)

According to Kristeva, the most important aspect of the spectator’s retrospective narrative-testimony is to identify the *who* of the story, and to condense the action into a moment of accomplishment that serves as an exemplary space. Identifying the *who* and the moment of accomplishment preserves their dignity, redeems them, while providing an *example* by which actors and spectators of the present and future may initiate or judge other deeds and words. Kristeva gives one account of how living action, *energeia*, becomes retrospectively reified as an example:

[F]or a true story to become a recounted story, two related events must occur. First, there needs to be an in-between that leads the way to

memory and testimony. Second, the type of narrative must be determined by an in-between that provides the logic of memorization as a means of detachment from lived experience *ex post facto*. Only when both conditions occur can the “happening” be turned into “shared thought” through the articulation of a “plot.” (Kristeva 73)

For such an exemplary story to be told, intimate and internal dispositions and volitions need to be objectified. Arendt argues that subjective senses, thoughts, and experiences are uncertain, lack reality, until they become transformed for public appearance, deprivatized and deindividualized, through speech or artistic transposition (HC 46). Between the actor’s living way of being and the works of historiography and art that serve as remembrance, there are a number of phases of reification. First, thought transforms merely subjective feeling from ‘mute inarticulacy’ into reified concepts that communicate what was before ‘imprisoned’ in the self (148). Art works, in a further mediated stage of reification, in their relative permanence, give human thoughts and actions a representation of their own. However, the price for this remembrance is that in their reified forms, what Arendt calls the “dead-letter” (148), art works remain at a distance, fail to fully express or embody, the initial thought or intuition of the actor or maker.

Arendt proposes that the most fitting art for manifesting the *who* retrospectively is drama, and Greek tragedy in particular. This is so because it combines *mimesis*, which repeats the actor’s self-disclosive action and speech in its living flux, gestural *mimesis* that discloses the hero’s action in a way free of reification, with plot and the poetry of the chorus, which renders the universal content and meaning of the actor’s life story, offering an account of the action’s situation, *fortuna* as it opens the world up to the hero (167). Kristeva writes: “If narrative is to become a means of disclosure and not simply remain stuck in reification, it must be acted out” (Kristeva 74). Further, Kristeva suggests that the theatrical representation of tragedy is valuable to public life, in its staging of exemplary conflicts with a view to resolving them publicly, through the observation of *mesotes* in the use of *phronesis* (79).

Compared to fabrication, where the *eidōs* serves as criteria by which to judge the final product, “the light that illuminates processes of action, and therefore all historical processes, appears only at their end” (HC 171). Only at the end of the actor’s life, when the curtains have closed, does the *who* become fully tangible through the spectator’s story. It is the spectator, not the actor, who ‘makes’ the story. The notion that there is no identifiable author of action apart from the retrospective spectator lies at the very root of Arendt’s critique of modern philosophies of history. Since there is no identifiable author in one actor’s life-story, so there is none in history. Arendt argues that philosophies that posit an author of history are a modern version of Plato’s notion of human affairs appearing as though they were controlled by a god behind the scenes, behind the backs of acting men (165). Through the idea of an author behind the scenes, the real story resulting from action inserted into the web of human relationships is “misconstrued as a fictional story, where indeed an author pulls the strings and directs the play” (165). Like a work of art, a fictional story has a clearly identifiable maker, whereas the real story of an actor’s life is not made, and has no maker (165-66).

The *Daimon* and the *Who*

There exists in Greek pre-Socratic religion a being with a privileged perspective that can tell us more about what Arendt means by the *who*. But its perspective looks out from behind our backs, as it were. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes:

[I]t is more than likely that the “who,” which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimon* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters. (159-60)

The *daimon* is a mediator between the gods and mortals, and a giver of advice in the manner of the Oracles. Arendt notes: “Socrates used the same word as Heraclitus, *semainein* (‘to show and give signs’), for the manifestation of his *daimonion*” (351n). Kristeva notes that the manifest signs of the Oracles were “condensed, incomplete, and atomized” in a way that gives rise to the “infinite action of interpretation” (Kristeva 74). Like the *daimon* of ancient Greece, the *who* is disclosed behind the back of the actor, visible only to spectators, but never fully controlled by the actor. According to Waterfield, this personal deity is likely Pythagorean in origin (Waterfield in Plato, *Republic*, 418n) and was understood as “the *genius* or guardian spirit of your life - which, ultimately, makes you the particular individual you are, with your predilections and life-pattern” (457n). In the *Symposium*, the priestess Diotima, speaking to Socrates, alludes to the *daimon*’s mediating role in communication between the divine and humans (Plato, *Symposium*, 44). In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates tells the jury at his trial in Athens that on that day, his *daimon*, usually so vocal, never once objected to his course of action (Plato, *Apology*, 65). This experience, according to Socrates, “does not result from mere earthly causes,” since “fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods” (67).

Would Arendt agree? Does her reference to the *daimon* that accompanies humans in action imply that action is in some way a moment of access to the divine? Turning first to Heidegger offers additional insight to the *daimon*, its relating man to the divine in the phenomenon of disclosure. In his 1942-43 Freiburg lectures on Parmenides, Heidegger explains the *daimon* in the context of the Greek experience of man’s ecstatic or decentered role in the unconcealment of Being. The divine, or *daimon*, looks out into the ordinary, points, and gives signs to man. It is the ‘uncanny’ that looks into the unconcealed, and presents itself in the ordinary (Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 117). The *daimon* makes a claim on man, as he who is historically destined to help clear the way for Being to appear. This notion bears a close relation to Arendt’s point that action is always both a disclosure of the *who* and also a disclosure of the *world*. According to Heidegger, this is man’s destiny because he is the bearer of *logos* and *mythos*. It is only through speech and legend that the divine, that all Being, is disclosed and secured in its disclosure (114).

In a course on Plato delivered at Columbia in 1960, Arendt relates the *daimon* to *theos*, “the divine working principle” (Arendt, Plato seminar, Image 1). By Arendt’s reading, Socrates’ *daimon* is a sign sent by Apollo, the God of the oracles, and makes Socrates examine his own life, a life in service to the God through activity and full awakensness. Elsewhere in these lectures, Arendt wonders of the *daimon*: “Is it conscience?” (Image 1) Arendt concludes in her lectures that the *daimon*, as the divine principle for Socrates, is precisely the capacity to think, the ‘two-in-one’ as a thinking dialogue between me and myself.

There are potentially conflicting notions of the *daimon* in this literature. On one hand, the *daimon* remains behind the shoulder of the actor. This implies the decentered, non-sovereign nature of self-disclosure and its retrospective, narrative unfolding. On the other hand, the *daimon* is mentioned in the same breath as the two-in-one of conscience. If we think of Socrates, he alone was in communication with his *daimon*, and others had no access to it. Arendt describes Socrates' two-in-one, which later times called *conscience*, as the fellow who awaits Socrates at home, with whom he converses in quiet (Arendt, *Life of the Mind* 190). If the *daimon* does have a close relation to conscience, so that conscience consists of the *who* we disclose in action - a contestable claim - it is worth revisiting what Arendt understands by this two-in-one. In *Life of the Mind*, Arendt proposes that thought is marked by duality, a conversation between myself and I, an activity of asking and answering (185). This internal conversation enters the world of appearance as 'judging'. To Arendt, it is judging right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, that makes thinking manifest in the world of appearances (193). One of her most eloquent explanations of *performing* one's thought before others, the public disclosure of the *who*, can be found in her eulogy for her teacher, Karl Jaspers. Here Arendt links the two-in-one of conscience to a public test of one's judgments in the partaking of *humanitas*, which is to "answer before mankind for every thought" (Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 75). This passage goes far in revealing the relation between the Socratic, conscientious *daimon* of the two-in-one, the performative public disclosure of the *who*, and the way in which this disclosure is decentered, both by the opinion of spectators who judge its meaning, and by the world situation to which it responds.

This *daimon* – which has nothing demonic about it - this personal element in man, can only appear where a public space exists; that is the deeper significance of the public realm, which extends far beyond what we ordinarily mean by political life. To the extent that this public space is also a spiritual realm, there is manifest in it what the Romans called *humanitas*. By that they meant something that was the very height of humanness because it was valid without being objective. It is precisely what Kant and then Jaspers mean by *Humanität*, the valid personality which, once acquired, never leaves a man, even through all other gifts of body and mind may succumb to the destructiveness of time. *Humanitas* is never acquired in solitude and never by giving one's work to the public. It can be achieved only by one who has thrown his life and his person in the "venture into the public realm" – in the course of which he risks revealing something which is not "subjective" and which for that very reason he can neither recognize nor control. (73-74)

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