A TASTE FOR NEW MEANING
HANNAH ARENDT AND EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

by

GRAHAM GILES

B.A., Queen’s University, 1986
B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 2006

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Cross-Faculty Inquiry in Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 2007

© Graham Giles, 2007
ABSTRACT

This thesis brings the work of twentieth century political philosopher Hannah Arendt to a consideration of educational thought. It argues for and seeks to demonstrate ways in which Arendt's oeuvre provokes and vitalizes educational thought as it concerns pluralism, ethics, democracy, knowledge, meaning and critique. In seeking "new landscapes to think from" for education, it invites Arendt's phenomenological recovery of the political, the public realm, to disturb particular forms of thought that give shape to contemporary education. It specifically engages the problematics of modernity, in its expressions as the liberal self, instrumental rationality and alienating structures of authority. The author argues that these reiterate the bankruptcy of meaning which Arendt calls "worldlessness," and that this concern is of deep and continuing significance to education. In a reconsideration of understanding and meaning beyond the automatism and ubiquity of the liberal self, this thesis then considers how thinking, judging, action and speech, as Arendt posits them, may call upon education to better enact its "promise to the world" of freedom and human dignity.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... ii  

TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................................... iii  

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................................... v  

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 1  
1.1 A Disturbance Between the Earth and the World......................................................... 1  
1.2 To Think What We Do and To Set Right Anew ......................................................... 9  
1.3 The “Conscious Pariah” ............................................................................................... 15  
1.4 The World and the Counterworld .............................................................................. 24  
1.5 Action and Causality ................................................................................................. 32  
1.6 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 38  

CHAPTER 2 – THE PUBLIC WORLD ............................................................................... 40  
2.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................ 40  
2.2 The Public Realm & the Virtuosity of the New ......................................................... 42  
2.3 ‘What’ Appears, or ‘Who’? ....................................................................................... 52  
2.4 Love and the Good .................................................................................................... 58  
2.5 Action’s Virtues and Faculties ................................................................................... 65  
2.6 Estrangement and Being – The Phenomenology of the Knight’s Move ................. 72  
2.7 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 86  

CHAPTER 3 - THINKING ................................................................................................. 88  
3.1 Introduction: A Breeze through a Room of Open Windows ........................................ 88  
3.2 Evil ............................................................................................................................... 94  
3.3 The “Pointless” Quest for Meaning .......................................................................... 99  
3.4 Multiplicities Within and Without .......................................................................... 113  
3.5 Unfreezing Fixity: The Danger of Thinking .............................................................. 119  
3.6 A Purgative of Opinions .......................................................................................... 123  
3.7 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 129  

CHAPTER 4 - JUDGING .................................................................................................... 134  
4.1 Thinking, Knowing and the Limits of all Things ...................................................... 134  
4.2 On Factual Truth ...................................................................................................... 139  
4.3 A Matter of Opinion ................................................................................................ 142  
4.4 A Matter of Taste ..................................................................................................... 150  
4.5 Significance Imposed or Imagine That! .................................................................... 158  


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>The Particular</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Communicative Validity &amp; Cosmopolitanism</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Exemplary Validity</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 5 - THE STORYTELLER</strong></td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Bergson’s Children</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>To Begin</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would foremost wish to gratefully acknowledge the wonderful support of Dr. Anne Phelan of the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education.

As well he wishes to gratefully acknowledge the support Dr. Graeme Chalmers, Dr. Jo-Anne Dillabough and Cristina Delgado Vintimilla, all of the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education and that of his family to whom this work is dedicated.

The support from the Social Science and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) in the form of a Canada Graduate Scholarship (2007-2008) is also gratefully acknowledged.
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Once man-made, historical processes have become automatic, they are no less ruinous than the natural life process that drives our organism and which, in its own terms, that is, biologically, leads from being to non-being, from birth to death.

(Arendt, 1968a, p. 167)

1.1 A Disturbance Between the Earth and the World

Twentieth century political philosopher Hannah Arendt creates a disturbance in the fabric of the familiar. She troubles comfort and confidence with the apocalyptic portent of the “end of the common world” (qtd. in Villa, 1997, p. 200) from which arose the horrors of totalitarianism, revolutionary self-defeat and the moral confusion of the subsequent (and present) epoch. Still she calls from down the years, from the heady and horrible post-war years of the last century. Among so many wounds still raw and burning, the urgency of the question “what went wrong” held open for a time doors to new sorts of thinking about the common human predicament, thinking loosened from the grip of civilization’s barbarous continuities, open to the abyssal “gap between past and future” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 14). Arendt seized that moment in her time, and indeed of all time as recurrent challenge. She leaves a legacy of multifaceted and reconfiguring illumination for dark times, a sort of pretense against pretension itself, and the ghost of a guardian as sure as it is careful. Hers is a strong and considered voice of conscience which resonates in those for whom such monstrous violences remain perplexing, for whom the gaping maw of the
past haunts and dogs in irresolution, for whom the echoes of self delusional cruelty persist in human affairs and taint every optimism. Arendt’s perturbations evoke the persistence of the imprisonment of assumptions, abstractions, functionalisms, categories and formulae. She shows how these perennially conspire to promulgate in myriad, self-validating simulacra whose progenitors include the “skillfully manufactured un-reality” (Arendt, 1966, p. 445) which permitted the Nazi death camps. In doing this she disturbs complacency, memory, alibi and the self-satisfaction of an ethos bound to its own sense of progress, an idea which, in some of the last words she ever wrote, “contradicts…man’s dignity” (Arendt 1978c, p. 272). In asking “what is to prevent these new stories, images and non-facts from becoming an adequate substitute for reality and factuality?” (Hansen, 1993, p. 110), Arendt calls modern liberal history to account, disturbs its hidden logics and indicates another way. Hers is no program, and never could be distilled as such. It is perhaps a sensitivity and initiative, a grand opening in thought, whose animus is at once a reconciliation with reality and with the habitually mislaid fact that it all could have been, and may at any moment become, otherwise. To read Arendt is to walk among giants of thought and literary achievement. Among many others, hers is an invitation to keep the company of Pericles, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Cicero, Herodotus, Homer, Seneca, Duns Scotus, Dante, Montesquieu, Descartes, Milton, Goethe, Kant, Hobbes, Nietzsche, Weber, Faulkner, Dinesen, Kafka, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Heisenberg. The resulting arguments and syntheses, crystallizations of her “passion for seeing” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 130), are as curious as they are penetrating; they rise catacoustic from the deepest silence of human aspiration to subvert the accepted and create something entirely
new. That this would be at once substantially indebted to such an unlikely pairing as Jesus and Machiavelli is typical of the gift of her prismatic brilliance.

This thesis invites Arendt’s disturbances to trouble the conceptual architecture which informs education and educational thought. It seeks to join others who wish to widen the remit of conceptual critique in educational research to, in this case, invite Arendtian critique to politico-philosophical research methodology.¹ The assertion of a conceptual work as research contests prevailing forms of research in education, ones which suggest that research is a matter of finding the right data, or at least that there is no research without it. Conscious and deliberate in my departure and, I believe, appropriate to Arendt’s thematics, my purpose is to discover and reveal in Arendt’s oeuvre springboards to “discover new landscapes to think from” (J. Dillabough, personal communication, August 23, 2007) for the enrichment of educational thought and, as important, to inspire the courage to take the risks they require. These are the risks in the proliferation of meaning, the risks of the “dialogue of understanding” (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 323) which obtain not when knowledge is accumulated, but when it is transcended (p. 311), coalescing into new forms which could not previously have been imagined. As success in this register would to some extent be unrecognizable, I necessarily invite my reader to join me in assuming the twin obligations of risk and judgment, both of which are of central significance in Arendt’s political philosophy. This trepidant invitation I extend in the immodest aspiration to contribute to the renewal of educational thought.

As education owes its structures of thought to the ethos which stages it, this thesis presumes a broad conceptual engagement. It will engage in questions of the relations among politics and being, appearance and judging, and thinking and action, all in view of the intellectual inheritances of modernity. Arendt reconsiders a remarkably broad series of related conceptual forms and understandings, animated by the shock of repulsion evoked by Weisel's challenge to “never forget” the “fabrication of corpses” (qtd. in Dietz, 2001, p. 86) in the shadows of a not long past dark chapter’s night. Her concern engages the conditions for atrocity in the modern age, reluctant to allow the stunned sympathy of incomprehension to permit disengagement. She wrote “I have no right not to find answers” (qtd. in Feldman 2000, p. 30), a declaration whose invoked possibility (that there are answers) is focused in the typically Arendtian (1978a) caution that “uncovering destroys a deception; it does not discover anything authentically appearing” (p. 39). For Arendt the traverse from critical uncovering to authentic appearance is a perilous one, vulnerable to the conflation of liberation and freedom. It is one almost certain to reassert alienation and error if approached in the assurance of calculation or the conceit of hubris—which she calls the “the political temptation par excellence” (Arendt, 1958, p. 191). Responsibility for Arendt is often less focused on solving problems than on deepening understanding of them, and engaging what Derrida (2004) calls their “unthought axiomatics” (p. 117). The presumption to “solve” frequently is as much a threat as the problem itself by virtue of what unthinking conceptual forms it conceals, reiterates and sustains. Arendt (1966) outlines what may be considered the interrogative approach which propels this thesis' investigations: “it may have been useful to find the origin, and to contemplate the forms, of those new movements which pretend to have
discovered the solutions to our problems” (p. 631-632). The movements to which Arendt refers are expressions of what it is possible to think. Considered this way, one may begin to see ways to think otherwise. Assuming there always are myriad “otherwises” in which to think, I shall consider the ways contemporary conceptual dispositions (habits, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions), and particularly some of those bequeathed to liberal education, may contribute to or detract from Arendt’s preeminent concern, the “solution” above all others, of human freedom. Arendt (1958) calls the forms of conceptual movements the ‘banisters’ of thought,

categories and formulas that are deeply ingrained in our mind but whose basis of experience has long been forgotten and whose plausibility resides in their intellectual consistency rather than in their adequacy to actual events. (p. 144)

Egan (2002) situates this concern within the orbit of educational discourse, arguing that “all the research findings in the world are educationally blind” (p. 181) for they rest on presuppositions from which devolve particular views of education:

It’s not the lack of a “research base” of knowledge about development and learning that is hindering educators’ wider success; rather, our main problem is our poverty in conceptions of education. (p. 180)
According to Egan, learning and development are “not about education” (p. 182). In Arendtian terms they are products of the telos of modernity, one which it may be useful to contemplate to better inform the critical culture of educational thought. The concern this thesis brings to the question of education, broadly considered, is with educational thought’s ‘banisters,’ with how, for example, means and ends may be inseparable, how forms of thought or rationality are instituted at the expense of human dignity, how desire and intention may obliterate their objects, how newness is denied and plurality undermined. This work also moves with Arendt beyond the conceptual, to inquire into how processes of knowledge and thought threaten freedom how, for example, they may “compel faith by proofs” (Arendt, 1968b, p. 7) in progressive enclosures of meaning and ontological divestiture. Opening to fundamental questions is important to the natality of education in a pluralistic society, where pluralism always includes the ineffable, the stranger, as Derrida (1994) says, the “absolute surprise of the arrivant” (p. 65). In this aspiration, this work tries to evoke the vigilant force of Arendt’s (1968a) attention to the problems of human freedom, that it may attain the promise to become “a new thing in an old world” (p. 192). Its example, inspiration and a provocation aspire to help skirt complicity with the machinations of educational thought, whose expression, despite the best of intentions, may too readily be an “environment [that] seems designed to promote Eichmannism” (Coulter & Wiens, 2002, p. 23).

I shall characterize the form of this work as expansive and itinerant; a Benjaminian bricolage of hyperbolic conceptual critique which invites Arendt’s thinking and inevitably reflects its character. It is conceived with respect for Schlegel’s advice
that "a theory of the novel should itself be a novel" (qtd. in Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989, p. 165). Derrida (1991/2001) alludes to some of the forces which this work seeks to arouse:

In France or in the West, in philosophical, juridico-political, aesthetic, and other types of research, what takes the form of techniques, rules, procedures, is indeed a very delimited configuration; it is carried—and therefore exceeded—by much broader, more obscure and powerful processes, between the earth and the world. (p. 68)

As a non-didactic philosophic-literary instance, this thesis is a move toward the building of a generous scholarship, one which opens forms of thought "between the earth and the world," prises apart the given and its presupposed regulatory conceptual forms in order to re-imagine possibility. In Arendtian terms, it is a "visiting" of sorts, to which I submit as medium in thought—for "the process of understanding is clearly...a process of self-understanding" (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 310). It will visit worlds of thought which stage education, the one world that Arendt maintains humanity shares and locations where the two intersect, diverge and converge, in order to activate and provoke questions, inspire political initiative, and in some small way reassert human dignity. The somewhat renegade open method of the visitor is also that of the witness, to the proliferation of meaning their incursion induces. The visitor's witness must then be made into a representation of phenomenological integrity if it is to be meaningful to others. This is a form which aspires, attempts, essays to evoke and embody the staggering richness and diversity of meaning of a shared existence. Seeking to instantiate the Arendtian moment
in research is then a move against the automatism of living processes in the uniquely human power of their interruption. Against the counter-fundamentalist cant of the day, this is a matter of faith, which Arendt (1968a) calls the human capacity which corresponds to freedom (p. 166). Its human alternative is the force of will. Whether this work is sufficient in some small way to move mountains is highly unlikely, if however it may be said that it does not withdraw from a world disfigured by will in the search for meaningful questions, its modest promise to education may be fulfilled.

I should like to undertake an initial visitation, as an orientation of sorts in language which inaugurates an entire system of public education. The tensions among its various aspirations will be a thematic of this thesis, an example of a contestable and conflicted conceptual impetus to education, and one which I believe begs the sort of engagement Arendt inspires. The following is from the British Columbia School Act, as quoted the “Ministry Vision and Mission” (accessed July 17, 2007):

The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

While certainly the coincidence of the words ministry, vision and mission have a strangely evangelical effect, what strikes this reader is the latitude of this legislated guiding statement; within an otherwise rather utilitarian encapsulation, it consists of a
broad opening. Among liberal and economic functionalisms, there resides a manifest invitation to curiously grand ideas such as potential and pluralism. These, as I will argue in what follows, welcome and may require Arendtian comment by way of her conceptions of power (in appearing together) and the human condition (of natality and plurality) (Arendt, 1958). To take seriously this statement of legislated purpose, in the name of its own articulated vision, in the name of its concern for democracy and human dignity, is to find ways to challenge and inform understandings of the confines, effects and promise of such operative notions as pluralism, democracy, society, the individual and potential as well as the dispositions by which they are imagined, fostered and sustained. Arendt's concern for human freedom, arising as it does from a clear appraisal of the unprecedented ruin of Western imperialism's totalitarian apogee, speaks to and enhances all of these conceptions. She repeatedly shows how in the haste to the consolation of settled answers there resides a betrayal of the very principles of possible deliverance from human cruelty and stupidity, principles whose actuality might "prevent catastrophes...in the rare moments when the chips are down" (Arendt 1971/2003, p. 189). Arendt considers this the nub of politics, which she calls human living together. The next step may now be taken in a discussion of the impulses which for Arendt could be considered the bases of an ethics of interruption.

1.2 To Think What We Do and To Set Right Anew

One may glean from Arendt two impulses as perennial necessities for a conscientious approach to political life. They are at once deceptively simple and as limitless as the human capacity for understanding. The first is "nothing more than to think what we are

---

2 This Arendt (1954/2005) says Kant "magnificently defined" as the absence of judgment (p. 313).
doing” (1958, p. 6). To think what we are doing in an Arendtian sense means to carefully consider thinking as an expression of what it is possible to think given the moral and cultural inheritances to which thought is subject, and in which its forms are forged. The benefit Arendt fosters in this attentiveness accrues to the ethical richness of frameworks of thought, which she calls “the most elementary articulations of the human condition” (p. 6). These are conceptual matters whose validity substantially obtains in their limitation and recognition as such, as “thought-things” (1978b, p. 56). Arendt’s phenomenology presumes that there is a world beyond human conceptual grasp which is “abolished” if misconstrued as such as, for example, when referred to the creation of a “counterworld” of idea, spirit, soul or to a socialized, developmental functionalization of life “processes”. In the thrall of what Brown (2001) calls “liberalism’s promise of abstract personhood” (p. 13), the abolished world is lost to “the Promethean desire for a completely anthropologized real” (Villa, 1997, p. 185). To succumb to the “strange illusion that man...has created himself” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 37) is to exchange “the only character of the world by which to gauge its reality...[in] its being common to us all” (Arendt, 1958, p. 208) for an illusory “guiding thread of reason” (1978b, p. 155) by which “all is ego” (p. 156). From one of Arendt’s (1968a) many considerations of the peculiarly human counter world this passage illuminates this transcendental dispossession as a conceptual matter:

If we assume that something like an independent realm of pure ideas exists, all notions and concepts cannot but be interrelated, because then they owe their origin to the same source: a human mind seen in its
extreme subjectivity, forever playing with its own images, unaffected by experience and with no relation to the world, whether the world is conceived as nature or as history. (p. 69)

Brown (2001) elaborates the self-reinforcement of such dispossession with respect to understanding of history: “having lost our faith in history we reify and prosecute its effects in one another, even as we reduce our own complexity to those misnamed effects” (p. 30). Arendt asks what sort of worlds are created by and in thinking (or its absence) and how these may be political or anti-political, that is, how they may or may not be concerned with matters pertaining to human living together, to sharing the world which appears between individuals and manifests as an infinite diversity. To think what we do is a dispossession of the world (as the self) to invite repossession by the world, for “we are of the world and not merely in it” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 22).³ Arendt (1968a) challenges the colonization of reality by the “machinery of intentions and of organized means” (p. 78) in “modern society” (p. 40), by which a “ubiquitous functionalization…has deprived one of its most elementary characteristics—the instilling of wonder at that which is as it is” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 40). To think what we do is for Arendt very much in service of and indebted to “wonder at what is,” whose eclipse in unselfconscious abstraction lies at the root of modern disaffection and alienation: “Clearly, what is needed is not to change the world or men but to change their way of “evaluating” it, their way, in other words, of thinking and reflecting about it” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 170). Einstein more bluntly made a similar observation, perhaps better highlighting the intractability of the problem, “nuclear

³ For the subject specifically, this is perhaps to claim that “we do not live, but that we are lived” (Reik qtd. in Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989, p. 166).
weapons have changed everything, except our modes of thought" (qtd. in Glover, 1999, p. 89).

For Arendt (1968a) as well the importance of this charge has taken on renewed urgency since the assumption of self-annihilating technologies, to which she adds alarm about the emergence of totalitarianism’s self-perpetuating and world-obscuring structures of authority (p. 97). If there is a non-egological domain of being, the question of what and how one is thinking is surely presupposed in the question of what one is doing, what is and has been done. The simpler this may appear, the more beholden the view may be to recalcitrant mental forms whose first effect is to deny their own constitutive agency. For Arendt (1968a), “traditional” or inherited modes of “Western man’s thought” (p. 25) about the world and humanity were shattered by the totalitarianisms of the last century. This nadir indicates the culmination of a deterioration by which, since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “the very framework within which understanding and judging could arise is gone” (Arendt, 1954/2005, p 316). In this one faces a crisis as well as an opportunity in thinking what we do. It is a deeply critical one, as required by the inertial burden of conceptual prejudice, the facticity of the given and the habituated human aversion to “the possibility of tragedy,” one so habitually denied “until [we are] overwhelmed by it” (Euben, 2001, p. 161).

The second political impulse for Arendt (1968a) is preservative: “To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew” (Arendt 1968a, p. 192). To constantly set right anew is to think against the prejudicial fear, or what Arendt calls “mortality,” that all must be as it is lest, following Hobbes, it is to be swallowed by the Leviathan. It is to instantiate both the right and the
new, which are nearly one for Arendt, as constituents of freedom. It is to recall the fragility of freedom, and to evoke the question of human dignity in recognition of the ease with which it has been, is and will be dismissed. For all of this Arendt calls for a multiplicitous project. On the one hand, to set right anew requires a deconstructive and historiographical disposition “to excavate and reveal what has been doubly hidden by contemporary experience and inherited categories” (Villa, 2001, p. 9) and on the other to initiate appearance in the world in order to “actualize” (Arendt, 1958, p. 208) the reality of which the world consists. The tendency to naturalize unreality requires persistent preoccupation, alive in the modesty of the limitations of thought and the contingency of appearance in a plural world. In compulsive resistance to naturalization,4 (for what else could “constantly” connote?) Arendtian critique proceeds from premises that much more is unknown than given to presumption, that what can be known and thought is preordained by their existing forms, that these perpetuate endemic expulsions of meaning and significance and that provisional re-integrations are always necessary due to what Villa (1997) calls “the irreducibility of mechanisms of exclusion...of any discursive community” (p. 199). The need to set right anew challenges anti-political tropes of liberal capitalism which reassert world-alienation—as distinct from Marx’s alienation of the self (Arendt, 1958, p. 254)—in the persistent and totalizing “fiction of a normal world” (1968a, p. 99). Liberalism’s universalist pretensions are seen to persist in permitting and aligning with the “antidemocratic, inegalitarian tendencies of consumer capitalism” (Hansen, 1993, p. 90).5 The moral circumstances of late twentieth and early

---

4 As Derrida (2002b) argues, “naturalizing always...amounts to neutralizing” (p. 69).

5 Which seem to have lent a hand to neglecting Jasper’s prescient and topically poignant conclusion that “democracy that conquers abandons itself” (qtd. in Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 208)
twenty-first century Europe and North America are borne of a modernity whose narrative posits an autonomous, self determining agent, suprahistorical in a concept of history which consists in intelligible concatenations of events in whose weave are revealed or distilled answers, explanations and demonstrations about the present state of reality and human affairs. The liberal presuppositional framework bears the marks of "the deistic interpretation of an absolute, divine legislator [which] legitimated the humanistic idea of radical self-determination" (Ingram, 1996, p. 243). At every turn, Arendt challenges such assumptions (of both over and under-determination) and the ways they invest being with emptiness' worldless solitude, from which it is clearly not too long a stride to the institution of human superfluity and so many consequent horrors. Such enclosures arise in the eclipse of the tragic (in the classical sense) but boundless actuality of the public world, a domain conceived by the Greeks as a political necessity, as, in fact politics itself, and the realm of inexhaustible human energetics. In its eclipse, the corpus which then is risen from horizon to horizon is indistinguishable from anything which one might identify as real is that of the liberal self. In ubiquity, its only recourse then becomes, as Nietzsche trenchantly argues, the exhaustible mortal energies, Faustian, utopian or otherwise, of the (self)imprisoned. Villa (1997) argues that Arendt’s use of Heidegger’s conceptualization of the metaphysics of modernity as “the subjectivication of the real” (p. 183) should be seen an “essential touchstone for Arendt’s reading of the modern epoch” (p. 183). To set right anew is to explore this particular injury to the world while affirming it as a world worth preserving, as somewhere fit for us all. It seems at once a deeply thoughtful and thoroughly active engagement, and one which may not be deferred, except at the twin cost of reality and human dignity:
This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew. (Arendt, 1968a, p. 13)

To take up this infinitely particular instance of being to the enrichment of educational thought, to find new ways to evaluate evaluating in resisting the automatic habitus of self-reification’s well trodden path, I will consider, elaborate and try to lend relevance to the stance of what Arendt calls the “conscious pariah.”

1.3 The “Conscious Pariah”

While a pariah is undoubtedly an outsider, one driven to the margins by exception to monism, a conscious pariah (in the sense of self-conscious), is aware of the artificiality of the inside-outside division, adopting instead a “hermeneutical denial of transcendence” (Ingram, 1996, p. 248). This stance would be required by the reality of a world, to use Aristotle’s observation, of “many workable regimes” (in Hansen, 1993, p. 89) each of whose singular, and thus exclusive, reality would be presupposed in its instantiation. Arendt (1958) observes of such regimes that “the trouble with these forms...is not that they are cruel, which often they are not, but rather that they work too well” (p. 221). Could they then be refinements of and not reactions to the conditions which led to the
subjugation of millions to totalitarian worldlessness? Arendt is not optimistic, or at least any optimism she gains is won at the cost of reconciliation with pessimism (Hansen, 1993, p. 216): “it may even be that the true predicaments of our time will assume their authentic form—though not necessarily the cruelest—only when totalitarianism has become a thing of the past” (1968b, p. 21). It is relevant that an absence of apparent cruelty characterizes the loss of the world, as it is also for Arendt that evil may consist in banality. Forms of subjection arrive unannounced and contort consciousness toward denial before their symptoms become apparent. Once they do, it is usually already too late, even to name them (this was Trotsky’s fate). What anchors a working social order is the moral weight of sheer facticity, and to imagine otherwise, as Arendt argues one must to sustain plurality, is to not belong, to emerge in the interstices and, with thoughtful humility (and even aporetic sensitivity), penetrate the known:

An unnaturally “natural” political universe...can be very difficult to challenge in the name of what can only appear to everyday consciousness as a highly speculative, and thus false, alternative. (Hansen, 1993, p. 90)

As such, for Arendt meaningful resistance obtains in fleeting instances of being in “islands of freedom” with others, in a critical “fugitive existence” (in Villa, 1997, p. 200) which seeks to evade conceptual coagulation and the prejudice of taking the given for granted, the assumption that it could not be otherwise. This notion of critical resistance is one which “may be sustained by an understanding of the conditions that act against natality and the practices that protect it” (Levinson, 1997, p. 442). It is “a form of
imaginative recovery” (Boym, 2005, p. 582) which distinguishes itself from any fantasy of an actual one in order to set right anew, or sustain natality. It accomplishes this despite the lack of command, or even full understanding “in such a way that we do not dictate the terms of the transformation” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 192-193). As an experiment in thinking, acting or judging, the conscious pariah departs from the familiar and presses the past “into the service of establishing the strangeness of the present” (Kateb, 1984, p. 149) in order to “begin something new or unheard-of” (Arendt, 1958, p. 6). Along with plurality, for Arendt natality is definitive but not determinative of the human condition. Toward its actualization, the conscious pariah is aware that “resistance becomes the primary vehicle of spontaneity” (Villa, 1997, p. 201). For thought to be spontaneous and natal it would need invite modes of rationality that defy, but not deny, rigorous logics, in intercessions that puncture the “horizon of the same and foreseeable” (Caputo, 1996, p. 42). This horizon contains imaginary forms, discourses, methods and practices whose citational effect may be very different from their recognizable claims. Such effects are perpetuated by the habitus of “a tacitly but ubiquitously policed order that characterize both disciplinary society and a society saturated by policy” (Brown, 2001, p. 111), by answers which are presupposed by their questions and forms which both questions and answers, as means and ends, express and conduct. Villa (1997) elaborates

what Arendt learned from the experience of totalitarianism was that all human capacities—particularly the capacity for action and judgment—crucially depend upon the conditions of their exercise and that it is indeed
possible to uproot capacities that may appear to be part of our "nature."

(p. 202)

To uproot thus stands in service of the natal condition of beginning and consequent plurality. It explicitly opposes liberal institutions which posit autonomous conceit as a moral precondition of freedom. In Arendtian terms, the latter view fails to acknowledge how its own instance, its own view of freedom, at once presupposes the absence of a common world and reiterates the naturalization of conditions hostile to it, which denigrate world in favor of counter world.6

Clearly there are anti-establishment and anti-assimilationist predispositions in Arendtian critique. The presumption to stand outside and yet remain among is a necessary arrogance of Arendtian judgment which stands, so to say, in the name of so many who could or can not: "the presumption of judgment is an arrogance we must accept" (Sharpe, 1999, p. 79). In a relatively early essay called the Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition, Arendt examines various stances opposed to that of the "parvenu", the one who needs to belong.7 For her, the task of overcoming world-alienation is not to find ways to belong, but to, in effect, sidestep or redefine the question such that the answer is not the consolation the question presupposes but a response to the condition by which it arose. Foremost among these fugitive subjectivities is that of the "pariah," the outcast, the one who spurns the licenses of the naturalized. As she later wrote about Benjamin’s

6 More recently, Baudrillard (2005) has elaborated this concept with Arendtian resonance, as a "retroversion" in which "meaning destroys itself" (p. 15).

7 This is an ancient form which in modernity has pressed the prejudices of tribalism into the service of the normalizing "trap" of the homogenous modern nation state, a subjecting totality whose project was clear as early as the first parliament of the new Kingdom of Italy, in which a speaker declared, "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians" (qtd. in Glover, 1999, p. 143).
Hommes de Lettres, this “intellectual attitude rested upon...absolute refusal to be integrated, politically or socially” (Arendt, 1968c, p. 27). Yet the pariah is necessarily inscribed and constituted by the forms they purport to stand beyond, which they seek to illuminate in difference, to critique and name. Thus, as “conscious” pariah, the necessary arrogance of judgment (for Arendt one could say the meek inherit very little) is tempered in constant tension with the modesty of self-critique. For the validity of dimension this requires the appearance of and engagement with others. This “political” alternative, which Arendt considered “the only viable one” (Pitkin, 1998, p. 63, emphasis in original), resists normative forces which exclude difference and particularity in meaning’s enclosure (as truth), and also the ways in which the self-relegation of this status similarly does so. The consciousness of the pariah is an imaginative, multiplex necessity and the only stance in the thinking activity by which first conscience, and then the tensions of judgment are realized. The conscious pariah maintains engagement in both the world and the self without conflating the two:

Becoming a conscious pariah, he sheds...the old mentality of enslaved peoples, the belief that it does not pay to fight back, that one must dodge and escape in order to survive. (qtd. in Pitkin, 1998, p. 64)

This stance assumes some of the self-delimiting quality necessary to withstand “historically inclement weather” (p. 65) and “accepting responsibility for one self, even though one did not create that self” (p. 66) by assuming neither belonging nor exemption, but instead presuming to both “define and defy” (Boym, 2005, p. 587) the autonomy of
the liberal self. Britzman (1998) asks an exemplary question in this respect: “what if how one reads the world turned upon the interest in thinking against one’s thoughts, in creating a queer space where old certainties made no sense?” (p. 85). The creation of such a queer space, and appearing in the world impelled by its initiatives, are instances of the conscious pariah’s political engagement.

The conscious pariah’s relation to educational thought is indicated, for example, in the BC School Act’s mission statement where it concerns pluralism. This we should, for present purposes, consider a question, or ask of it Nietzsche’s question of whether “a purpose [is] a symptom of occurrences, not their cause?” (qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 168). Does the pluralism in this purpose effect plurality, or merely reflect a waning aspiration to it? How might it appear to manifest as each? A conscious pariah knows that the moment the condition is seen to be acquired, it is likely lost, knows that the present is predominantly a construct of the past’s nostalgia for the future. Whether the melting pot or the mosaic is the metaphor, to accord to oneself its accomplishment is to betray its aspiration. Arendt’s thought tries to safeguard human activity from lapsing into unconsciousness, from becoming a sort of sleepwalking automatism. In educational thought perhaps her caution about another type of pariah is apt by contrast. The “Lord of Dreams” celebrates “his pariah alienation not just from the empty conventions of respectable society but from “all the works of man,” as if these could take care of themselves” (Pitkin, 1998, p. 63),

his natural universalism remains an abstraction, incapable either of practical, political enactment or even of sustaining a culture on which a
poet might draw. He is thus, despite his creativity...a ‘product of nature,’
at the mercy of events, like a plant dependent on the weather. And the
twentieth century has brought the sort of politically inclement weather that
64-65)

Castoriadis (1991b) is more acerbic on the same point: “He who says that he wants to be
free and, at the same time, proclaims his lack of interest in his society’s institutions,
should be sent back to grammar school.” A vigorous engagement in the question of the
political is why Arendt matters to education. It is to trace an alternate path with neither
selfishness nor self sacrifice, consciously standing within and without a both natal and
belated self—for “the thinker precedes his thinking” (Jaspers qtd. in Arendt, 1946/2005,
p. 185)—in a temporality unmoored from the command of the deterministic will, a force
“by which everything that is appears to be necessary” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 168). The
conscious pariah’s historicity is postmodern, it rejects the imposition on it of “the age-old
attempt to escape from the frustrations and fragility of human action by construing it in
the image of making” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 79). Instead it is situated and manifold, it
consists in instances, deeds, and events, interruptions to movements and cycles and not
the processes abstracted from them (p. 43). This historical consciousness is the
conscious pariah’s empowerment against historical determinism, as Brown (2001)
clarifies:

8 This is the “profusion of entangled events” of Foucault’s genealogy, of history “fraught with accidents,
haphazard conflicts, and unrelated events” (qtd. in Brown, 2001, p. 112), and a view perhaps to some
degree of unacknowledged debt to Arendt.
If everything about us is the effect of historical accident rather than will or design, then we are, paradoxically, both more severely historical and more plastic than we might otherwise seem. (Brown, 2001, p. 87)

In education, the hopeful and malleable historicism of the conscious pariah’s stance of resistant critique would be required by an Arendtian reading of legislative aspirations to promote pluralism and by the broader responsibility to not engender docility of the sort which has looked away as others were led away. Nietzsche, in whom Arendt (1958) credits an “extraordinary sensibility to moral phenomena” (p. 245), underscores this concern: “Insanity in individuals is something rare—but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule” (1989, p. 130). So, Arendt’s conscious pariah never settles for belonging. It is a stance which remains uncomfortable with structures of understanding, and the recognition by which it is constituted, for the love of the world and responsibility to human dignity. It resigns from what Nietzsche calls the “great stupidity” of a steadfast understanding of self (Bingham, 2001, p. 345). It is a critical stance which again anticipates late or post-modern critique, exemplified further in an additional passage from Brown (2001):

The conventional (Platonic, Christian, Marxist and liberal) equation of truth and goodness on one side and power and oppression on the other has been disrupted both by the late modern decentering, multiplication, and

---

9 The reference here is to First They Came for the Jews, attributed to Pastor Martin Niemöller (1946), one version of which I quote here: First they came for the Jews/and I did not speak out/because I was not a Jew./Then they came for the Communists/and I did not speak out/because I was not a Communist./Then they came for the trade unionists/and I did not speak out/because I was not a trade unionist./Then they came for me/and there was no one left/to speak out for me.
The complexity of this critical landscape is what informs the hermeneutic stance of the conscious pariah with and within the conceptual landscape which stages education. It is at times a vertiginous path to tread, one which provokes at the level of ontology and always risks unrecognizability before sedimented views, before and within a world too often presumed known, a world given but not to be taken for granted. However, understanding and recognition are not the same, and a risk like the conscious pariah’s which aspires to the singular promise of uniqueness is

not definable and not seduced by the great temptation of recognition which, in no matter what form, can only recognize us as such and such, that is, as something which we fundamentally are not. (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 14)

At once groping and presumptuous, the conscious pariah’s stance reflects the condition into which it is “thrown”, to use Heidegger’s metaphor (qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 181). It is one which both demands attestation\(^{10}\) and refuses its prerequisites. Now that some ethical impulses and a critical orientation are outlined, I will explore two of the central

\(^{10}\) For Paul Ricoeur (1992) “attestation defines the sort of certainty that hermeneutics may claim” (p. 21) absent radical foundation and in “the fragmentation that follows from the polysemy of the question ‘who?’ [which] gives to attestation its own special fragility, to which is added the vulnerability of a discourse aware of its own lack of foundation” (p. 22). In this, the hermeneutics of the conscious pariah is particularly resonant with Arendt’s notion of subjectivity (see S. 2.3).
problems of modernity which Arendt engages: Those of the willing self, and of causality.

1.4 The World and the Counterworld

_We grant each other the right to retreat into our own worlds of meaning._

(Arendt, 1968a, p. 95)

In _The Human Condition_ (1958), Arendt delineates human activity into three broad categories: Labour, work and action. In these, to varying degrees, are constituted the dimensions of human existence and its moral and ethical implications. To simplify rather grossly, labour is concerned with the necessities of life, work with human fabrication and artifice and action the actualization of the fullness of reality by way of the appearance of human distinctiveness among others. To elaborate an earlier point, Arendt (1968a) follows Nietzsche's view that modernity has "abolished the true world" (p. 30) in marking the inflation of the private sphere of human life in labour and work to the neglect of a meaningful public one in what she calls action and its corollary, speech. Arendt views the private sphere, which she sees as having come to displace meaningful public life, as grounded foremost in need and mortality. It is in "...the enchantment of small things" (Arendt, 1958, p. 52) that a delusional consolation in human vanity is sustained in an illusory "counterworld" (p. 54) of fatalistic emptiness, in the name of transcendent meaning and its promise deferred of eternal life. This is elsewhere described as a sort of anthropomorphic conceit (Arendt, 1978b, p. 165) in the "pervasive subjectivication"
(Villa, 1997, p. 184) of the world that characterizes the modern mentality, whose locus of meaning is hidden from view, suspended in an ether of self-sustaining abstraction. The resulting retreat from the public life Arendt identifies encourages the inflation of a realm of transcendent inner significance where the hubristic recourse to sovereignty is a naturalized threat to the kind of aesthetically oriented conception of freedom Arendt advances. She is saying that, lost within our selves (as essential or immovable subjects) or the world as the soul, self or other abstraction (no matter how dearly held), there is no common world by which to gauge reality. Without a common world, there is no way to unfold as fluid beings in relation to the meaningful experiences of others whom we must confront. Within this darkness are appropriated presumptive identities in communal notions of society, moral ones of goodness and functional ones of utility. These are derivative primarily of three retreats from the glare of the appearing world: “an essentially Christian attitude” (Arendt, 1958, p. 35) of worldless transcendence, the single, non-human subject in the rise of the “social” in the statistical conflations of “mass society” (p. 46) and the processural immanence of scientific rationality (1978a, p. 24).

The modern interposition of the “intimacy of the heart” (Arendt, 1958, p. 39) into worldly affairs and its consequent aspiration to a “good life” (p. 37) co-opts the rule of the will, the commanding faculty of this “inward domain” (1968a, p. 145) to effect the realization of their visions. The human will for Arendt (1958), by virtue of its invisibility, its “essentially non-human quality” (p. 76) is a destructive faculty unchecked in its capacity as “the seat of power” of the modern self (1968a, p. 160). The will can only will what it has itself created, “it commands not something else but itself” (Augustine qtd. in Arendt, 1968a, p. 161). This negates the space the world offers to
“men” (1958, p. 77) and destroys the conditions and capacity for the appearance of anything new—the very moment of freedom—from common appearance: “The moment men willed freedom, they lost their capacity to be free” (1968a, p. 162, emphasis in original). For Arendt, if the will is subservient to other faculties such as thinking and judging, its tendency to assert its monarchic sovereignty is constrained.

What can seem a “soulless” analysis of the paucity of human inner life is fuelled by the conviction that best intentions and appeals to “the heart” have been shown wanting in preventing, and in fact are more likely to be found promoting, violence, self-defeat and self-annihilation in modernity. For Arendt this is due, in the wake of totalitarianism’s savage destruction of tradition and modernity’s subsequent ontological vacuum, to the destruction of the possibility, by neglect and design, for the emergence of a common world. She employs psychoanalytic language to describe the retreat into the stifling unreality of the modern liberal self. It is the consequence of fear, desire, need, anxiety, consolation, alienation and the intolerance of confusion—and then secondarily the frustration of attempts to master reality, to overcome the will’s frustration, to reassert control in values and morality, as the “love [that] grew out of hatred” which Nietzsche (1994) adroitly dismantled in *On the Genealogy of Morality*.11 In a large measure, Arendt interprets modernity as the fulfillment of Nietzsche’s nightmarish prophecy of chaos in the wake of the modern loss of traditional structures of meaning. Hence she aims for a sort of resurrection of political life wherein, as imagined by the Greeks, “freedom...[is] experienced in spontaneity” (p. 166) divested of the imprimatur of the despotic willing self.

11 This he calls the “slaves’ revolt in morality...which has only been lost sight of because – it was victorious...” (p. 19).
Absent the inuring sovereignties of the netherworld's monarchy, what Arendt (1958) conceives of as "the new" can be expected to appear in "startling unexpectedness" (p. 178). The new arrives to the world with each new beginning, with each birth, and may appear in action and speech among others or in other instances of judging, and in the interruptions of radical interrogations of past, present or future of a conscious pariah's interventions. Each of these is a detour from the known; they change the knower in trajectories that alter by and through heuristic destabilization, hermeneutic suspicion and their sojourn in the wide valley of the basic wonder at being. Although Arendt (1968a) argues that the odds are overwhelming that tomorrow will be like today (which invites the calculated risks of the relative security of a pragmatic caution), it remains "a counsel of realism to look for the unforeseeable and unpredictable" (p. 170). The difficulty and challenge of this newness is that it "can never survive the fleeting moment of the deed" (Arendt, 1958, p. 75). Only stories remain as ever emergent movements toward foundation which retain both contingency and truth in the ineffability of poetic syntax and the inscription of doxic remembrance. If "this is" is the existential stance of wonder, "this was" is its instance, the story's particularity, of that which in time disappears from view. Their value however, is apt to be denigrated before more stolid legacies of work and labour, the apparent permanence of human fabrication and its self-validating rationalisms—like the Judeo-Christian work ethic, or liberal capitalism's market values. Therefore, in flight from action's frailty, anonymity and ambiguity a problematic of modernity is the persistent move to "exchange the real world for an imaginary one" (p. 234) and suffer the world-alienation of an existence "abandoned to itself" (Arendt, 1978b, p. 196). With the perplexity of one who insists on repetition and the expectation
of a different result, modern liberal history, or the conflation of the self and the real, encourages the bewildering recurrence of the cannibalisms of “the illusion of happiness when roasted alive” (Arendt, 1958, p. 235). The invisible violence and negation which inheres in the resultant human superfluity is the result of the rise of values based in the self’s eclipse of the world, or in Nietzsche’s (1994) language the “ressentiment” (p. 21) of the impotent will, trapped within the purview of its own command. In this, Arendt’s notion of world alienation, to will is to alienate, and to assert oneself over others is to impose precisely what, writ large, the nation state and nationalism brought to unprecedented lows the long twentieth century. The perennial liberal dream of the restoration of the self—in Cartesian legitimacy, Christian grace or Empiricist disassociation—only ensures that the violence of its impotence does not stay invisible for long. This is because it elevates the self, even if in the conceit of its denigration, at the expense of the world; and the self’s preeminence requires violence to preserve, the violence of the negation of the other.12 In education the result is to “teach as though the world were other than it is” (Levinson, 1997, p. 443), an evasion of the reality of the world for one of the self whose will (to know, to succeed, to tolerate, to endure, to comply) remains in unquestioned ascendancy. I submit that it is a requirement of a commitment to pluralism (a world of others) to examine this difference of self and world, to pose it as a question, to deconstruct unitary liberal precepts and ways in which the self is totalized. Such an investigation may uncover, but perhaps not resolve, tensions whose exposure may, in the mysterious calculus of affect and intention, bear one to a new landscape of thought and action.

12 Whose ultimate, horrific and, in Arendtian terms, explicable expression was the Final Solution.
According to Arendt, this problematic of the will and the willing subject arises because of the lack of an enduring and significant way to appear and to make meaning in a world whose law is plurality (1978a, p. 19) and for which sovereignty of the will is the "very contradiction" (1958, p. 234). As the servant of other faculties, in the curbed presumption of non-appearance, the will provides initiative and the response of a responsibility which opens instead of obliterates. On its own, in the compass-less void of worldless retreat, its reach extends to ubiquity, but only in the "command [of] itself its own superior" (p. 177) and the installation of the rule of its own domain, of invisible selfhood and its many attendant transcendences. For Arendt, the world is neither the domain of life processes and resultant social orders (whose animating quality is necessity), nor that of the soul, whose unworldliness is a purposive refuge from the moral ambiguity of action in the appearing world. The willful flight from the common world expunges it, or renders of it oblivion in the neglect of disuse. In her introduction to Walter Benjamin’s *Illuminations*, Arendt (1968c) quotes him in evoking this absence and its blindness, the result of being “blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress” (p. 13):

But a storm is blowing in from Paradise [and] irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of ruins before him grows skyward. What we call progress is this storm. (p. 13, emphasis in original).
Arendt is referring also to the problems associated with the dominant paradigms of science and positivism and the servitude of their technologies to violence (this is not just to physical violence as in warfare, but to the performative violence of the command of the sovereign techne). The very language of progress emerges from a disillusioned Enlightenment ethos that takes as its unit of analysis the willing individual and not the public (as a locus of otherness and the new). This disillusionment itself is the result of imprisonment in the denial of plurality, the denial of the idea that “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). Arendt (1978a) later clarifies the guarantee of reality which is foregone in elevating an idea of the world over itself, in replacing the world with an idea or concept of it, so characteristic of the self-reifying neuroses of modernity:

In a world of appearances, filled with error and semblance, reality is guaranteed by this three-fold commonness: the five senses, utterly different from each other, have the same object in common; members of the same species have the context in common that endows every single object with its particular meaning; and all other sense-endowed beings, through perceiving this object from utterly different perspectives, agree on its identity. (p. 50)

From this phenomenological commonness arises what Arendt calls the “sensation of reality” (p. 50). The public is then the realm of human appearance which preserves the existence of the world in this sensation, in what Merleau-Ponty calls “perceptual faith.”
(qtd. in Arendt, 1978a, p. 41). An important question in this reading for education is how and to what extent this sensation may be evoked to inspire something akin to perceptual faith. The question may arise as to what is the "real" if not one's idea of it, and how might this distinction itself obscure or illuminate? The indeterminacy of this question may then induce a suspicion more broadly toward the possible confusion of what is given in consciousness and what is given in being, and if there is, or need be, a difference. For Arendt (1958), the qualities of natality and plurality comprise the human condition (p. 10) in the difference which characterizes being, in distinction from the sameness which making renders of it as a process or thinking a concept. Arendt is indebted to modern French philosophy (and Heidegger) for her phenomenology. Descombes (1980) clarifies the particular point as such: "Difference is necessary in order for identity to preserve itself as the first, if not the exclusive meaning of being" (p. 38). It is in this recognition that Arendt resurrects from the Greek notion of the polis the idea of the public realm as the salvation of the world from destructive forces of automaticity and the violence of its conformity, of its negation of difference, threats which so haunted the last century and continue to find new forms.

A broad problematic of retreat from the world into the willful oblivion of the liberal self affords a clear view of one way in which Arendt argues that the many forms of self-preoccupation comprise an ethic of negation—of the chance for the reality of a plural world. A second concerns some of the forms of the willing retreat from the frailty of action and a world of appearance, forms by which such retreat is perpetuated axiomatically.
1.5 Action and Causality

Along with plurality, the presence of an infinite diversity within and without the appearing individual, the human condition is characterized for Arendt by the phenomenon of natality, of newness or beginning. This obtains in the singular appearance of an individual in the world by virtue of "the new beginning inherent in birth," (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). For Arendt, natality is a far more politically relevant category than mortality, which only has the dubious benefit of greater durability (one may, in moving along the chain of rectilinear time, forget the curious mystery of one's birth and one's existence more generally, but death is less easily sidestepped). Natality, in concert with plurality, lends the interrogatory distinctions of critique significance and moral import—if we take birth as the event of distinctiveness and death that of sameness—and informs the conditions for the recognition of novelty and the unprecedented. Arendt (1968a) writes forcefully to this point, as though the preoccupation (latent or otherwise) with death and its ultimate equality diverts us from the artesian energies, the distinction of distinctiveness, of the new:

There exists...a silent agreement in most discussions among political and social scientists that we can ignore distinctions and proceed on the assumption that everything can eventually be called anything else. (p. 95)

In a natal world, a world where newness comes about, in a sense the secret of life is not, as some have said, that it ends, but rather that it begins: "men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin" (p. 246). That either might seem a secret
attests to the power of the fear of the unknown, which knows no greater exemplar than
death. Mortality for Arendt however belongs with necessity in the realm of private
matters, for to the reality of the appearing world it is disappearance. As Arendt imagines
it, the public is the space of appearance; it is the freedom for which one is born and of
which birth is first instance. This quality of newness persists in the condition of natality
which is actualized in every beginning afforded by the public realm, as action and speech.
These are often conflated, but should not be without recognition of their significant
difference and mutual dependence for Arendt. Kohn (2001) helps clarify the matter
somewhat by arguing that “speech-as-deed is explicitly distinguished from conveying
‘information or communication’” (p. 128) and to say speech is ‘persuasive’ is also to say
too little. Rotman (2002) describes speech as “the affective medium and semiotic
envelope of the body” (p. 94) which better if somewhat technically encapsulates this
aspect of the singularity of the appearing individual (what Arendt calls her or his ‘who’).
Socrates is more direct: “Speak, in order that I may see you” (qtd. in Lacoue-Labarthe,

For Arendt, neither the impacts nor antecedents of action and speech can ever be
fully known to the appearing individual. This is the “terrible” paradox of “needing a
shared world to render our fermenta meaningful, yet simultaneously lacking the resources
necessary for its constitution or securement” (Curtis, 1997, p. 32). Arendt (1958) wrote
that only in “the performance itself and not in motivation or achievement” (p. 206), may
one aspire to the dignity of distinctiveness and meaning in the world. Very significant to
anyone concerned with education in political matters, or the political significance of
educational thought, meaningful action and speech for Arendt obtain “outside the
categorical framework of means and ends” (p. 238). These instrumentalities of 
“murderous consequences” (p. 229) presuppose violence to preserve the illusion of being 
able to undo action and exist in the paradoxical relation in that the former is unable to 
escape the latter: “the definition of an end being precisely the justification of the means” 
(p. 229). As what Nietzsche (1994) calls “Brahminism as crystal ball and fixed idea” (p. 
17), Arendt (1978b) decries instrumentality as a particular sort of determinative 
rationality which specifies that “every act, the moment it enters the world, falls into a 
network of causes, and thus appears in a sequence of occurrences explicable only in the 
context of causality” (p. 164). Causality in this sense, as “an altogether alien and 
falsifying category in the historical sciences” (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 319), becomes the 
hammer to all of history’s nails. Following this and in the context of what Hansen (1993) 
calls the destruction of the real, is the production of “the ‘existential illusion’ that in 
historical perspective everything assumes a causal inevitability” (p. 110). In a causal 
universe, “conformism and automatism rule” (p. 115) which disenfranchise, in either 
obedience to perceived inevitabilities or rejection of perceived intractabilities. The 
authoritarian implications of habituated causality are not given wide notice in education, 
which is not surprising given the legacy of scientific management to which most modern 
could be paraphrasing this in writing that “the trauma of education is its incapacity to 
respond adequately to its own history of ‘bad faith and cruelty” (p. 36). The trauma is 
perpetuated in “the violence of innocence” (p. 36), re-representations of a mechanistic 
universe which fail to indicate, for example, the accidental character of history or
subjectivity, fail to consider “identity not as explanation but as antagonistic and fragile, as history and as relationality” (p. 97). The imprisonment in circularity is apparent.

One of the ironies of modernity which Arendt’s thought helps illuminate is that the sovereign presumptions of mastery, to which we owe the modern orientation according to the principle of causality, render the agency of the willing individual impotent. They strip him or her of the power to interrupt apparent inevitabilities, interruptions which, for Arendt, are both the instance of their humanity and the reality of the common world. Against such inevitabilities, the resistance of the conscious pariah situates itself as already situated and, risking an appearance which invites judgment, thereby is available to conjure the mysterious alchemies of power which arise in the plurality of appearance among others.

In education, the rule of the practical over the theoretical bears within it the anti-political aspect of the western tradition’s philosophical aversion to the contingency of worldly affairs in favour of the truth of a realm of ideas. That the “practical” should harbour the truth, or that it should obtain in any particular domain, is a trope perhaps ironically devolved from the Platonic notion of truth “given” in the purity of the conceptual realm. The irony exists in the anti-intellectualization of what began as abstraction, one whose expression is perhaps as much impatience with the interruptive quality of thinking. One writer describes “the burdensome legacy of ‘practicality’, a code word that implies the sublimation of theory to the instrumentalization of teaching through the privileging of methodologies, techniques, practices.” (Weiner qtd. in Laverty, 2006, p. 34). Arendt treads a third path, one of caution against both unthinking aversions to and prejudices about thinking’s abstraction. She also puts instrumentalization in a
broader context of anti-intellectualism in modernity as an article of faith in science and progress, a monotheistic faith inscribed, in education, in images as diverse as the perfect practitioner, the reconfigurable (yet knowable) self and the self perfection of the state—against which the clamour of the public realm must seem its failure. Whether as causality or practicality, common throughout Arendt’s (1968a) thought is her unfailing wariness of “the automatism…inherent in all processes…to which man is subject” which can “only spell ruin to human life” (p. 168). For Arendt, this ruin is a palpable reality of modernity with which one must, to retain humanity and some measure of integrity, reconcile. Part of such reconciliation is in seeing beyond the horror of so much incomprehensible suffering to the moral disaffection, the disfiguring of the human condition which staged it.

With respect to action, in specifically human achievement, Arendt (1958) argues that “the end is not pursued but lies in the action itself” (p. 206). Since action is a phenomenon of the otherness, the alterity of plurality and natality, it requires the conviction of “complete incapacity to foretell the consequences of any deed or even to have reliable knowledge of its motives” (p. 233). This respects and dignifies the complexity of human appearance in the world and the eventual nature of reality. It troubles uncritical acceptance of modes of thought devoid or intolerant of ambiguity. In one instance, Arendt (1970) puts the point thus

Predictions of the future are never anything but projections of present automatic processes and procedures, that is, of occurrences that are likely to come to pass if men do not act and if nothing unexpected happens;
every action, for better or worse, and every accident necessarily destroys the whole pattern in whose frame the prediction moves and where it finds its evidence. (p. 7)

For Arendt (1958), in action and speech exists the sole avenue to meaning without the chimerical miasma of the inward domain: “reality comes from being seen” (p. 198), is “guaranteed by the presence of others” (p. 199). It is only durably extant in the character of the stories which remain (p. 236). She definitively declaims: “there is nothing higher than to attain this actuality” (p. 207). That such a reality may obtain in what Euben (2001) calls “the performance conditions of tragedy” (p. 159) and is entirely morally ambiguous are what make acting and suffering “opposite sides of the same coin” (Arendt, 1958, p. 190). Against action’s “inherent unpredictability” (p. 191) and “moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents” (p. 220) are the modern age’s pragmatic conviction that “man can know what he makes” (p. 228), the Christian one that s/he can be ‘good’ and the liberal one that maintains the sovereign illusions of an autonomous and transparent self. If limited to these presumptions, humanity not only can never exceed itself in a future of the accomplishment of oblivion (and the reverse), but not doing so is ultimate self-defeat as the doom of never beginning anything new, frozen in the bathos of that apparent inevitability. That the liberating alternative would be a tragic one may hardly be appealing, particularly to a sensibility habituated to the consolatory assurances of liberal insularity and the extant if tatterdemalion legacies of the modern liberal state. But the appearing world promises not a vision of eternal peace (won at the cost of a lifetime’s hysteria), nor an intelligible concatenation of processes and events but one of
boundless richness, narrative depth and, if not community, a sort of solidarity in the
inspiration of the wonder of being and the reassurance of not being alone: “Do thy self
no harm; for we are all here” (Acts, 16:28, qtd. in Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 210).

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to evoke Arendt’s context and provocation, elaborate an
Arendtian stance in relation to it and then to invite it meaningfully and self consciously
into a widening concept of educational thought by virtue of two of the problematics of
modernity which Arendt traces and critiques. In combining her conceptualization of the
retreat to the domain of the will with that of the eclipsing imposition of causal
presumption, my hope has been to make clearer some of the tensions which inform
Arendt’s related concerns for the reality of the appearing world and human significance.
The actualization of such a world instantiates human dignity, in both inimitable
individuality and irreducible commonality. This reality and significance occasion
resistance against the seductions of world-destroying forces of habit and desensitization,
convenience and belonging, against the “industrialization of the spirit” (Hansen, 1993, p.
118) which permits prejudicial exclusions and accretions of systematic and sublimated
violence. My access, and that which I argue Arendtian critique in the stance of a
conscious pariah requires, follows that which Arendt observes in Kafka: “he first had to
anticipate the destruction of a misconstructed world” (qtd. in Hansen, 1993, p. 217) to
imagine it otherwise. The conjoined legacies of the post-Enlightenment liberal nation-
state, scientific rationalism and reactionary Christian retrenchments into a well-
established counter world are deeply riven within themselves. The rupture of tradition

13 Or, as Foucault (1972) puts it, “there is negative work to be carried out first” (p. 21).
which consists in modernity may be seen as underwriting a crisis of meaning whose violences are more sublimated than surmounted, and finding new forms of expression as the world becomes again. As sure as they persist in forms of contemporary thought the blood of the ghosts of their self-validating excess, a residue of human self defeat in modernity, haunts what historical memory remains. These habits and structures of thought, these ways of existing, generate a sort of madness whose suffocated perplexity welcomes only the relief of oblivion. Education is a place where the demons of human living together are nourished or exorcised, even as it is that of introduction to a new and beautiful world of actuality, story and appearance. Arendt informs and sustains this besieged understanding and its responsibilities, and she bridges them to an alternate view, one which emerges beyond the apparent tensions of modernity, which neither revokes nor transcends them but rather redefines them in a fashion particular to her genius. To pursue this aspect of her thought, this moment of deliverance of a sort, I turn to Arendt's notion of the public as instance of and space for significance and meaning, in order to move ahead with an Arendtian response to the challenges of the age and its promise in a critical approach to educational thought.
CHAPTER 2 – THE PUBLIC WORLD

How does newness come into the world? How is it born?
Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?
How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine?
Is a birth always a fall?
Do angels have wings? Can men fly?

(Rushdie, 1988, p. 8)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines questions about Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization of the public world, its qualities and significance as a phenomenological reconstruction of political existence. It then moves forward to explore in greater detail the question of the subject and individuality in an Arendtian public. After a pause to examine in some depth Arendt’s critiques of two instances of anti-political worldlessness of particular relevance to education, it turns to the faculties, dispositions and ontological estrangement requisite to preserve the possibility of a meaningfully public world and the freedom this engenders. In following this course, this chapter aims to provide a reading of such conceptions relevance for the world of education broadly considered. As part of this aim, I will argue that Arendt’s conceptions expand the boundaries of what we imagine education to be.

Arendt’s concern that the moral impoverishment which led to two world wars and the emergence of the new political form of totalitarianism can not be simply wished away, and that even solemn remembrance of victims neglects requisite acknowledgment of the machinations by which new and appalling capacities arose for their development.
To read Arendt is to feel the urgency of finding a new way of living together. It is to acknowledge the bankruptcy of what we now take for “tradition” and the destructiveness of the continuing license granted unchecked willing, and its suprahistorical expression of a causal linearity which obliterates the past before conceptual idols of progress. What is pertinent to education is its centrality as a place of possibility in this drama. Education is the space of first encounter with a broader world whose confounding belatedness and bewildering newness may conjoin in possibility for those arriving to it. Education is the stage from which the play of the world may be manifested, represented and told, that it may be sustained against its mechanization for the perpetuation of life, which for Arendt is emptiness:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. (Arendt, 1968a, p. 196)

In wrestling with this responsibility, does one not commit to examine more closely the questions of pluralism and potential cited in one instance as among the “purposes” of public schooling? These one may recall concern the development of “individual potential” and the acquisition of “knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society.” While seemingly unable to avoid the mechanisms of implied social engineering, these words, this law, also continues to be a conceptual invitation, a duty of consideration. For do they not, along with their
development and acquisition, require also consideration of what such things as pluralism and potential are? Is one not then enjoined to commit to understanding the relations between education and the socio-political milieu which stages it? Arendt creates a novel conceptual edifice for this purpose, one invited by the stance of the conscious pariah in that it neither reifies nor adverts; it refuses to subsume the moment of the new and then releases its sublime if wanton gift.

2.2 The Public Realm & the Virtuosity of the New

Arendt’s idea of the public realm is ambiguous, and this is necessary for two reasons. First, she sees it as invariably a greater matter than that of human conception, as of a meaning resistant to enclosure by human cognition and second, because of its a-temporality which resists the ordering of rectilinear causality. Appearance in the public in a sense is the breath of being, its realization with and in that which is not itself, that which is other: “Being seen and heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position” (Arendt, 1958, p. 57). As such, the meaning of appearance in the public is beyond the reach of the understanding of any single agent, is bound up in the difference of otherness and may only be evoked by way of the allusive poetry of meaningful stories. In their artistry may dwell the exegeses of the particularity and boundlessness of human significance, as a narrative redemption from “man’s…predicament of meaninglessness” (p. 236). For Arendt, the modern age has eschewed the aspiration to immortality of such stories and for those whose activities might populate them in denigration as vanity (even arguably while increasingly turning to
them for distraction and amusement). After the rupture of tradition in modernity, Arendt’s project is to reanimate what may be considered the fundamental political question: “what makes it worthwhile for men to live together?” (p. 198). Her answer, against matters of production or accomplishment, and antipodean to the martial huddling together before Hobbes’ Leviathan, obtains by way of “sharing of words and deeds” (p. 197). This is a matter of being in the fullness of its potentiality, which for her consists in the aesthetics of self-disclosure, or appearance. This is an ontological instance in which being is derived of and in otherness in what is a plural reality. Arendt distinguishes the “objective” necessity of money as the common denominator for the fulfillment of needs in the private realm from its analogue in the reality of the public realm which “relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised” (p. 57, emphasis added). There is a deep and pervasive caution in Arendt’s writing about the inability to devise a common denominator in the highest realm of human actuality. It is a clarion call which sounds again and again within Arendt’s work, surfacing from within what Canovan calls Arendt’s “hidden continent of thought” (qtd. in Villa, 2001, p. 1). This continent, in my view, is sustained by one of Arendt’s earliest preoccupations (and the subject of her doctoral dissertation), the concept of love in St. Augustine. For Arendt (1966), Augustine’s type of love is that which binds humanity to the world—although it does not inform the tenor of its engagements—by way of a promise be a part of a bigger story than that of the self:

14 This Nietzsche’s (1974) madman heralded: “God is dead!” (p. 181) in anticipation of the twentieth century’s “mounting chaos and horrendous wars, fueled both by a growing nationalism and the fruits of science and technology, each emblematic of a kind of “metaphysical nostalgia”’ (Milchman & Rosenberg, 2007, p. 44) which is very resonant with Arendt’s idea of the flight from common existence.
This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, ‘Tolo ut sis (I want you to be),’ without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation. (Arendt, 1966, p. 301)

As the way to answer this affirmation, and to point the way from the burning thicket of modern liberalism, Arendt conceives of the public realm in the manner of the Greek ideal of the polis, which she maintains has rarely been meaningfully aspired to in human history. For the Greeks, the public realm of the polis was “a space of appearance in the widest sense” (Arendt, 1958, p. 198), “a definite space secured in which actions could take place” (p. 194). Its foremost aim of which was to make “the extraordinary an ordinary occurrence in everyday life” (p. 197). Concomitant to its aims are the existential quandaries of an ignorance of the fullness of motivations, the unforseeability of consequences and the anonymity of authors (p. 233, 220). Action and speech require others for meaning and are thus characterized by the otherness they instantiate, an otherness to a necessary degree opaque to itself, and resistant to the commanding will. Arendt follows Nietzsche (1994) in repudiating self-knowledge in the domain of deepest

15 Dietz (2001) interprets Arendt’s oeuvre in light of a reading of Nietzsche’s reconsideration of Thucydides, in the transfiguration of the historian from bearer-of-witness to theorist-as-healer, for whom the “act of facing up to reality” also “deflects the injurious impulse” in the “act of creating a luminous and healing illusion that allows for a convalescence from pain and suffering, guilt and recrimination, as well as moving on” (p. 92).
meaning: “We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers, we ourselves, to ourselves, and there is good reason for this” (p. 3). Rather than devolving from the common and celebrated selective attention to Nietzsche’s nihilistic monomania, in Arendt, this claim supports the view that to know oneself is both to some degree to deny the other and, most important, to deny the world created in and through the interplay of otherness. In this world of significance among others, in its “web of relationships and...enacted stories” (Arendt, 1958, p. 181), action and speech are characterized by haphazardness and contingency, but more significantly by the “frailty” of intersubjectivity which arises in world not “made” by men (p. 228). Frailty characterizes the instance of richest meaning, beings’ moment of significance is also its most vulnerable. This is however a vulnerability to stand against fear’s solitary bulwarks, defenses whose nature it is to stand apart. Their removal from the world is the response of an individuation brought about by the will, which “always tends to assert an “I-myself” against an indefinite “they” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 195).

Others echo Arendt’s effort to rethink community beyond modernity’s sovereign rule of autonomous ipseity, where difference devoid of appearance is solipsistic sameness: “Nothing indeed can be more frightening than the notion of solipsistic freedom” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 195-196). For Judith Butler (2004), this is the idea of the common condition of vulnerability within a shared “otherness” (p. 25), from which there is no way to collapse the distinction between the other and oneself (p. 25). Nancy (2000) has written beautifully in this vein as well, elaborating the concept of “being singular plural” (p. 1): “Everything, then, passes between us” (p. 5). For Arendt (1978b) it is a mistake to presume this a matter of dialogue, the ontology of the appearing world not
being reducible to an exchange of ideas, to shared speech. For her the “plural We” (p. 200) requires a “consent [that] entails the recognition that no man can act alone” (p. 201) and is consistent from one instance to the next only in the trait of their genesis, in the moment of actualization of a “We” (p. 202). We may here recall that for Arendt (1958), “to act, in its most general sense, means…to begin” (p. 177) and this is made possible in the limited but inexhaustible power of human plurality where the “We” may be realized, in the public realm.

Because for Arendt (1958) the defining episode in modern history was the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany, she is at pains to examine the ways in which a meaningful public is destroyed allowed to “wither” (p. 72) away. It is abundantly clear from her work that the wages of such displacement are paid in human dignity, which is the integrity of a diversity of unique beings. For these an appearing public realm affords the only protection against self-destructive certainties and an-aesthetic insensitivities of many kinds. The moral inertia of the institutionalization of dignity’s evacuation has now been seen for what it can create. Arendt’s (1968a) concern in this respect is Montaigne’s: “the reverse of truth has a thousand shapes and a boundless field” (qtd. p. 253). Absent the actuality of a common world, modernity’s potentiality continues to dream, even as it underwrites horror: “We had fed the heart on fantasies/the heart’s grown brutal from the fare” (Yeats qtd. in Glover, 1999, p. 117).

The use of the words actualization and actuality devolve from Aristotle’s distinction between it and potentiality, a distinction from which Arendt draws in conceiving of appearing reality. For Aristotle (2007), actuality is to potentiality as “someone waking is to someone sleeping, as someone seeing is to a sighted person with his eyes closed, as that which has been shaped out of some matter is to the matter from which it has been shaped.” For Arendt (1968a) “everything that goes on inside oneself is a ‘potentiality’” (p. 247). Additionally, actualization is more appropriate term than realization for the public realm because of the preferable sense in the former of a quality bestowed, being given with and among others, against that of the latter of recognition, to make of something a reality, whose suggestions of recognition and fabrication are inapt.
Arendt (1958) argues that it is from the burdens of the public’s elusive evanescence that flight is induced, amid eternal reverberations of Christian “worldlessness” (p. 53), to the chimerical “darkness of the human heart” (p. 244), where the will enforces reductive consolations of denial as ideology, social convention or dogma and the self-validating “coercive force of [its] logicality” (Arendt, 1966, p. 470). She argues that modernity in the West is the inheritor of an anti-political tradition which promotes refuge for such invisible worldlessness as remedy for the world’s haphazardness, even still as the guarantor of moral legitimacy. In Arendtian terms, this delimits and deprives humanity of the world and, reciprocally, the world of the uniquely distinctive appearance of humanity, of individual and uniquely appearing people (or “men” as Arendt was wont to call them in keeping with her time). Thus, humanity and the world oblige distinctive appearance for dignity and reality, and the love Arendt draws from Augustine’s thought obtains in the initiative to create such a world, not deny it in attempts to direct its transformations and flee its frailty. The absence of such initiative and the world it creates begets the privation of reality. Reality as such is publicity (as in the condition of being public), in appearance, in the “disclosure of the agent” (Arendt, 1958, p. 180) whose singularity becomes extant only to the view of others, in the only irreducibly plural reality possible. In “the basic error of all materialism...to overlook the inevitability with which men disclose themselves as subjects” (p. 183), a whole political tradition was devised and sustained based in life’s divesture from the world of appearance’s reality. For Arendt, the treasure which is mislaid is the “reality [that] comes from being seen” (p. 198). The reification (p. 184) of the counter world of the flight from freedom is the denial of humanity’s sole laudable sameness: In the “utter diversity” (p.
57) of the public realm. This is the only ground for human freedom, where the beginnings of action in a common reality may overcome fear’s flight from appearing being’s haphazardness and moral ambiguity. Arendt argues that without a public the human community divests itself of meaning in the frustrated alienation of imagined commonalities of “private interests” (p. 69). These obviate the reality of the common world, which then is unrecognizable insomuch as it becomes nothing one could indicate, recall or allude to, so that it soon disappears into inconsequentiality, swept away among the pieces of memory which no longer fit. For Arendt, reality is not guaranteed by “common nature” but that “everybody is always concerned with the same object” (p. 58), a common world which is not something which is, but something one does. One might say this world requires the performative aesthetic of risk for love of beauty and meaning in the public realm, in the courage to depart the self’s needs’ circle of doubt, certitude and consolation. This actualizes it as a sort of crystallization of meaning where “being and appearing coincide” (1978a, p. 19). Curtis (1997) elaborates:

however intense or real our feelings and our inner life may seem, however poignant and piercing, a full sense of reality is possible only in a world capable of supporting, sustaining, and stimulating multiple and conflicting voices and strivings. (p. 31)

The responsibilities of the public realm, as the human responses which inaugurate it are not very complicated—though we have been finding that what resists these are. Its possibilities are boundless, though not circumscribed by human understanding. Its ambit
offers education a broadened sense of public purpose and responsibility to human dignity. It is broadly what may be imagined as the purpose of democracy. Against forced notions of community, the public realm allows one to imagine a space for freedom by virtue of the reality of its commonality. It is one which foremost resists its own defeat in the generality of the habitual or end-oriented efficacies, even as it forever eludes permanence. The conscious pariah could never underestimate the challenge of the task of sustaining the frailty of action, aware of his or her opacity to his or her self. Ominously, Arendt writes of the power that manifests in the “We” of the public realm that nothing in our history has been so short-lived as trust in power, nothing more lasting than the Platonic and Christian distrust of the splendor attending its space of appearance, nothing—finally in the modern age—more common than the conviction that “power corrupts.” (Arendt, 1958, p. 204-205)

This caution indicates the necessity to not consider the public realm a given, nor something to be made, so far is the common (world) from common (place). It is not easy to see beyond seeing, and to act without knowing in the senses that Arendt provokes, in order to imagine and actualize a public in this non-trivial sense. To intimate that a quotidian conception of the public is a privative ubiquity is an unsettling challenge to everyday notions. To those who take the concern for the inheritance of democracy seriously however, it may well be that the idea of the public as Arendt conceives it is recognized as emaciated, to the benefit of its potential in worldly affairs. To appreciate
that everyday conceptions owe in their a-historicism a debt to every routine myopia which ever permitted evil to manifest may help animate the ethical gravity of Arendt's summons to the public realm. Without this call from the past, without what Benjamin calls the "angel of history" (qtd. in Arendt 1968c, p. 12) whose presence a meaningful public may secure, the public realm would seem surely unnecessary, and invariably does, each day and everywhere. The "inexorable despotism of necessity" (Arendt, 1968a, p. 32) which characterizes the private domain is then seen as adequate and appropriate, for so long as freedom is seen as the elimination of necessity. Arendt's conception of a public realm threatens the assurance of the libratory impulse and defers any easy utopianisms to which education, in its assumed responsibility to social justice, is subject. In another profound tension Arendt brings to education, she cautions that any form of social engineering, in the name of whatever end or laudable vision of justice, may eclipse or otherwise suppress the possibility of an appearing public—to the lasting detriment of the aim itself. An alternate sort of radicality instead posits a broader reality as the basis of human freedom, one in which libratory initiatives undoubtedly exist but cannot presume to dictate the course of the transformations they inspire. The broader problem of the sustenance of the conditions for human freedom requires the realization that "the elimination of necessity, far from resulting automatically in the establishment of freedom, only blurs the distinguishing line between [them]" (Arendt, 1958, p. 71).17 Beyond the

17 Freedom in this sense is to be clearly delineated from the idea, from Epictetus, that "free is he who lives as he wishes" (qtd. in Arendt, 1968, p. 147), in which freedom is "attribute of will and thought much rather than of action" (p. 155). This is freedom in the contemporary liberal sense which admits no common world and subsists among the vanities of parochialism and the wager of dis-implication among peoples. For Arendt as for Montesquieu and the Ancients "it was obvious that an agent could no longer be called free when he lacked the capacity to do" (p. 161), freedom and action are inseparable: "Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe" (p. 167). The freedom from of liberation is not to be mistake from freedom to act, or begin—
"mere liberation" (1978b, p. 206) to which one may aspire with respect to the many pressing and clearly legitimate problems of necessity, the public realm is imagined as the space for the “virtuosity” (1968a, p. 163) of the new, which steals into a world it creates carrying all of its promise, but no guarantees. Despite the lack of guarantees, such promise is all which may secure the world from worldless solipsism, expressions of which arise in myriad forms of social dysfunction, all the way to the totalitarian extreme. In education, the concern is that such dysfunction may, in regimes reverberating with unsettling echoes of the administrative taxonomy of humanity, be misconstrued as “maladjustment” to what is really a fictitious world. For Arendt, its foundational fiction continues to reinforce itself in modernity, as a world which has not reconciled itself to the fact which animated her deepest sense of urgency, which is simply that there is something wrong with a world in which Auschwitz could and did happen. This far greater “maladjustment” Arendt traces back thousands of years and, if her story is to be given credence, it is not one to be wished away in a mere sixty, in the wishful conflation of catharsis and cure. The public realm is Arendt’s address to Western civilization’s millennia-long drift of imprisonment in its own images, dreaming the dream that they are true.

---

18 This, by contrast, makes almost touching the innocence of Kant’s (1963) disarming perplexity, “in the end, one does not know what to think of the human race, so conceited in its gifts” (p. 250). Adorno (2003) describes Auschwitz as “the barbarism all education strives against” (p. 19), warning with Freud however that “civilization itself produces anticivilization and increasingly reinforces it” (emphasis added) and “one speaks of the threat of a relapse into barbarism. But it is not a threat—Auschwitz was this relapse, and barbarism continues as long as the fundamental conditions that favored that relapse continue largely unchanged. That is the whole horror” (p. 19, emphasis in original).
2.3 ‘What’ Appears, or ‘Who’?

*If nothing more were at stake here than to use action as a means to an end, it is obvious that the same end could be much more easily attained in mute violence.* (Arendt, 1958, p. 179)

If a public realm is a space of appearance, the question follows as to what or who appears therein. What becomes of recognition and subjectivity and how is the experience of publicity to be understood? To intimate that the question itself contains presuppositions of an individualistic liberal ethos may initially create a space of possibility for understanding, in what Foucault (1984) calls a “limit-attitude,” (p. 45), the affirmation of the erasure of modernity’s omniscience, as Derrida (2002c, p. 342) would say. The necessity of such a space for thinking through Arendt’s idea of the public realm arises from the fact that it could never appear to the mind “as it is,” it is to risk the charge of obscuratinism in the name of conceptual humility, in the Arendtian recognition that conceptual ubiquity is what allowed the trouble in the first place.

A public domain may be created “wherever people gather together” (Arendt, 1958, p. 199) in a plurality which admits “the disclosure of the ‘who’ in contradistinction to the ‘what’ (qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings) which he may display or hide” (p. 179). Akin to what Bolas (1995) calls “the swift trace of his idiom” (p. 25), the ‘who’ is “implicit in everything somebody says or does but remains hidden from the person himself” (Arendt, 1958, p. 179). This imperative of self revelation implies a trust in a public domain in which this ‘who’ may be manifested, a trust “in the world as a place fit
for human appearance” (p. 204), a very different notion from the market utility whose haughty stances of commercial surety pressure education to be its guarantor. The prerequisites of appearing in the public realm are a certain initiative and thinking engagement, as what Arendt called judging or judgment, which evinces forgiveness and promise-making, in the discerning imagination of the judgment of others. As such, an enlarging mentality is willing to give itself to the galling risks of participation in the unexpected by which it is disclosed. This is both a political and ontological necessity, for the common world is for Arendt the sole reality, without it a life in private, of the privation from the reality of the common world, is pre-conscious a-political un-reality.

Without a common reality made possible by the disclosure of human diversity Arendt is clear that the result is the doom of world-alienation and its destructive licenses, its maelstrom of hate. Agamben (1993) provides a meaningful counterpoint: “the only evil consists instead in the decision to remain in a deficit of existence, to appropriate the power to not-be as a substance and a foundation beyond existence” (p. 44). As I have discussed in consideration of the conscious pariah’s stance of resistance, there are many paths to this Agamben’s evil to “not-be” in Arendt’s argument, and very few to its dispatch.

Prefigured by the “the passionate drive to show one’s self” (Arendt, 1958, p. 194), in the initiative to appear—“from which no human being can refrain and still be human” (p. 176)—the ontological is political, and vice versa. For Arendt, the impulse to appear

---

19 This is a tension in education in the conceptual terrain of the idea of potential which raises questions of how and in what success is to be recognized, that is, what is the realization of potential and, as important, can recognition at once be its betrayal?

20 The idea of consciousness will be elaborated in the next chapter with respect to thinking. It should be added that Arendt idea of the privative speaks to the loss of the public. A common view of totalitarianism is that it consists in the loss of the private world, a nightmarish dystopia which may be read as a liberal reading of loss, one which does not imagine the anti-political preconditions which lead to that final erasure.
with others—as for Nietzsche’s repudiation of the will, the will to not will as a “Yes-sayer” (in Arendt, 1978c, p. 172) to life—contrasts “assuming that fear of violent death...is the basic human motivation” (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 93) as for Hobbes. Against the monumental certainty of death, human natality, in Derridian (2002a) terms, is “a game of blind man’s bluff” (p. 64), in not knowing “exactly why or in what” (Arendt, 1958, p. 193) it is to be alive. This is what Kant calls “the enigma of being alive” (qtd. in Arendt 1978, p. 5) and its contingency impels the realization of a public realm in concert with others, to attest to the fact of existence in a visible way. The human reality Arendt asserts is not what a normative liberal ontology prescribes it to be. Instead of obtaining in autonomous self-willing agents, of selves as vessels of significance, bellwethers of the real, reality consists in the publicity of the “space between” in a “web of relationships” (1958, p. 181). This public space is among actors who both share the appearing world in common and are each implicated in the other by virtue of a shared alterity in it, a fact the diversity of the appearing world confirms. For Arendt “meaningful stories” (p. 236) are the legacy of such public “visiting” (1978c, p. 257). The appeal of pedagogies of narrativity and listening can trace some of their significance to this legacy of the public realm. In the natality of action, which realizes and requires the public realm, the unexpected’s accidents and revelations and the satisfying interpersonal integrity of meaningful appearance persist in a narrative sense of totality. Reminiscent of this intimation, which may be thought to index appearance in the public as a register of the world, Didier Maleuvre (2005) writes of art as giving “the sense that reality is whole and not broken” (p. 90) without succumbing to universalistic utopianism. As distinct from the yearning for a sense of wholeness—by which partiality, as well as necessarily
provisional universals for that matter, may be obliterated—this is a sense of general significance which arises from particularity’s realization of itself, of its being in the world, a particularity which in this case is self-disclosure, the disclosure of one’s ‘who.’ There is no compelling reason of which I am aware why the first avowed purpose of schooling, realization of individual “potential,” should not be read in this light, as of the ethics of one’s unique appearing ‘who’ instead of as buttressing the abstraction which Nietzsche (1994) called “that little changeling the subject” (p. 45)—whose logics lead to its abandonment to the careless hands of liberal capitalism. This reading is particularly compelling to the extent that one is convinced that “being and appearing coincide” (Arendt 1978a, p. 19) and that, better than to willfully engineer within a conceptual self-ideal, one may more meaningfully, and with more reality, follow Socrates’ advice to “be as you wish to appear” (qtd. in Arendt, 1978a, p. 37) and follow what emerges from that.

Arendt (1958) was fond of the Greek metaphor of theatrical or musical performance for the appearance of the ‘who,’ this most political instance of being (p. 207) because of its singularity and its instantiation of a beginning. In this sense, in the public realm individuals are together very much like jazz musicians, improvisers who seek what has been colloquially called “the zone,” a spontaneous accord wherein the prevailing sense is of following and not creating, of discovery and not command, of leading together without ruling, without sovereignty, in a shared heuristics of performative exploration. Unintelligible to what Derrida (2004) calls “end-oriented” (p. 141) rationality—recognition to which devolves only from use, as a means—the phenomenon, which in this case is being, manifests only in the way it is manifested, the thing is the way of the thing, its stylization is what defines its character as a ‘who.’
However the public realm is exemplified or indicated metaphorically, it advances and sustains a promise of being beyond the known, of being and becoming in the domain of the surprise of newness, in the thrall of what Derrida (2003) calls the "event" (p. 451). Arendt (1968a) uses the same language to characterize the human interruption of the automatism of "natural processes" in "infinite improbability,"

History, in contradistinction to nature, is full of events; here the miracle of accident and infinite improbability occurs so frequently that it seems strange to speak of miracles at all. (p. 170)

The motif by which one affirms the miraculous of the world is one's 'who,' the irreducible particularity in the stylization of being as appearing in the world. In its disclosure one gains none of the comfort of the habitual, the familiar, the recognizable or the confidence of the imposition of willful regimes of truth and rulership. The confidence of the public realm is of an altogether different order. Curtis (1997) calls it "ontological reassurance" (p. 28). Borne of the experience of freedom but not its authorship, this results from action and speech in "the quest for individuation and distinction against backgrounds of homogenization and normalization" (Honig, 1995, p. 159). It is the concreteness of a process of identification by which, in the Lacanian/Zizekian sense, one's identity—as how one appears—structures one. It is thus a poetic place of beginning which one heeds in the course of a life which visits the world, and it makes of the world a cornucopia of beginnings, in the cool sun of natal reality.
Thwarted as a matter of habit, necessity, fear and attendant conceptual architectures which deny the “legendary gap between the no-more and the not-yet” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 204), the public realm would be perennially vulnerable and should be proverbial, should persist as a meaningful story of its own (which it does of course as a unifying purpose behind Arendt’s whole oeuvre). Adorno (1967/2003) likewise decries “the claustrophobia of humanity in the administered world” (p. 21), an apt evocation of life without a common world to lend it meaning, and the self-reinforcing energetics of hope it generates. A persistent tension in Arendt’s (1978b) thought—and which also belongs in education—reflects that which she identifies in human affairs, one between the arbitrariness of beginnings in the public realm, with its attendant “thinking the unthinkable” (p. 208), against the myriad forces of naturalization arrayed in opposition. It is clear that, for her, overdetermination is not terminal:

Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself. (Arendt, 1958, p. 191)

The ‘who’ then is the human instance of the insertion of newness, it is the way Arendt’s thought embraces “radical contingency without leaving us with the impossible task of choosing between a nonexistent subject and a subjected subject” (Gambetti, 2005, p. 427). It is a way to understand agency beyond instrumentality and the mode of conceptualizing a non-liberal instance of freedom. It is the population of a public realm
whose aesthetic particularity resists any generalizing or functionalizing on the too-familiar track to human superfluity.

2.4 Love and the Good

The public is always at risk because the public is a risk. I turn now to two instances of thought whereby Arendt argues the public is eclipsed by private matters. These are ideas that structure thinking and promulgate moral and ethical notions of subjectivity which, perhaps counterintuitively (and this is exactly why I raise the matters), unseat the familiarity of liberal normativity and open the possibility to something new. The point is not so much that such critique be demonstrable but that it may create a gap between deeply held verities and something different and new. Again, the justification for this is that deeply held verities owe their *veritas* to a ruptured tradition, one which failed, and continues to fail to meet with significant resistance the surging evil of which humanity is clearly capable. For Arendt, to think one is out of the woods is to have forgotten what they look like. As if to reinforce this, Glover (1999) observes of the fin de siècle moral climate that “there is little reason to think that torture is in retreat...the festival of cruelty is in full swing” (p. 33). A consensual that is not inscribed with its own partiality is destructive of it. It is in this recognition that I move to consider the anti-political

---

21 It is not uncommon to still look back at major events of the twentieth century in simplistic good/evil binaries; this is a view which conveniently overlooks profuse moral complexity, even in the apparently just causes. For example, one might consider the allied blockade of Germany in the First World War—the inauguration of modern warfare’s killing at a distance—which through May 1919 the British government estimated killed 800,000. Likewise, as it became less and less necessary, the policy of area bombing in the Second World War followed a logic of automatism and moral disassociation (and political calculus, in the rationale that killing the innocent—for could German children be considered otherwise?—partially satisfied Stalin's demand for a second front) (Glover, 1999). The closer one looks, the more difficult it is to sustain the moral simplicities of good and evil.
elements in love and the good and how they may stage whole universes of anti-political thought in education.

In the world of education, the notion of responsibility may commonly evoke the idea of care, and even those most preoccupied with the human dimensions of the educative project will speak of it in a manner approaching cant. I provide two quotations here to elaborate dangers of this (or any) notion held in the automaticity of the obvious, self-evident or fundamental, first from Arendt who wrote about it in attempting to understand Eichmann:

Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us from reality. (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 160)

And second from Gitlin (2005), who elaborates and extends the notion beautifully in his consideration of conceptions of identity:

The automatic recourse to a slogan, as if it were tantamount to a value or argument, is frequently a measure of the need to suppress a difficulty or a vagueness underneath. Cant is the hardening of the aura around a concept. Cant automates thought, substitutes for deeper assessments, creates the illusion of firmness where there are only intricacies, freezes a fluid reality. Cant is sincere, usually, and its sincerity also protects against scrutiny. Cant comforts. And cant tends to corrupt its opposition into
countercant...cant makes for efficient simplifications, but only at the price of rigidity. Cant is what we have when we think we know more than we do. Its opposite is curiosity. (p. 400)

A significant component of her power as a theorist is Arendt’s critique of the assumptions which inform good intentions. It is—contrary to conservative repudiations of challenges to a tradition-sustained status quo—motivated by her preoccupation with the possibility for conditions of a meaningful public and the human freedom of which it consists. To the extent to which the idea of care for an educator foregrounds the invisible, presumed part of a person, commonly thought of as the soul, or a presumed inner humanistic “goodness,” it may be negating the possibility for freedom:

Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead and uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit for public appearance.

(Arendt, 1958, p. 50)

The danger of the reinforcement of what Arendt calls “the modern discovery of intimacy” (p. 69) is that it “will always come to pass at the expense of the assurance of the reality of the world and men” (p. 50). Nowhere could this be more in evidence that the willful moralism of the idea of “being good.” It may be useful to acknowledge in education that
the idea of being good reduces being itself to an idea of itself, imprisons it within the 

solipsistic cage Arendt and others (see Castoriadis, C., 1991) charge with world 

alienation. In the idea that one can be good is perpetrated the notion that where one is 

remains apart from where one appears, maintains the division Nietzsche criticized as 

between the deed and the doer. As I would suspect it would be for Arendt, this for him is 

to separate the “lightning from its flash” (Nietzsche, 1994, p. 28). This separation invites 

the disconnected self-pity of the one who did ill but meant well, it—ironically for what is 

installed as a matter of responsibility—invites the disavowal of responsibility in the name 

of good intentions. An opposing conception of responsibility would foreground the 

action or deed itself and reduce that for ensuing consequences—whose emphasis is, to an 

Arendtian reading, the founding of infinite guilt. The elevation of meaning well is 

symptomatic of what Britzman (1998) calls “the educational insistence that feelings are 

the royal road to attitudinal change” (p. 84). She also decries the “splitting” effected by 

the good, of “putting good inside and bad outside,” not solely because of its exclusionary 

aspect, but because it “renders any estrangement with ambivalence intolerable” (p. 133), 

it mistakes what T.S. Eliot (1952) called “still point of the turning world” (p. 117) for a 

fixed one.

Arendt (1958) insists that love of wisdom and of goodness “come to an immediate 

end whenever it is assumed that man can be wise and be good” (p. 75), as will the 

arbitrariness of action, and thus the possibility of meaningful appearance. In the 

complexity of the appearing world, there is a “ruinous quality of doing good” (p. 77) for 

goodness “corrupts its own terms” (p. 77) and will carry its corruption wherever it goes. 

This curious argument, a fine example of the counter-intuitiveness and pariah's
restlessness which characterize much of Arendt’s thought, dismantles only the pretensions of doing good and not the love for it, which may motivate action but never determine its meaning.

There is a compelling passage from a letter Arendt wrote a friend and former student four months before her death which exemplifies this aspect of her thinking. It will be useful to quote here at length:

The only thing which disturbs me in your letter is your remark about wanting “to be a very good person.” I don’t quite know what do you mean when you say “good,” but I know that the wish to be “good” is an even greater temptation than the wish to be “wise.” This is precisely what we cannot be. “Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” is the maxim that rules this whole realm. You probably know the Talmudic story about the 36 righteous men for the sake of whom God does not destroy the world. No one knows who they are, least of all they themselves. Every kind of self-knowledge is here absolutely ruinous. So, if you try to reflect try not to reflect on yourself, “Don’t trust the teller, trust the tale.” (Arendt, 1975)

Instead of requiring being “good” in a world painted with the many beiges of transcendent subjectivity, an Arendtian-inspired educator would more likely look to the advice of Machiavelli, which Arendt herself does in this regard:
Never mind how you are, this is of no relevance in the world...if you can manage to appear to others as you would wish to be, that is all that can possibly be required by the judges of this world. (qtd. in Kohn, 2001, p. 122)

The bind of course is that one cannot know how one appears, cannot recognize oneself in that appearance, “I have always believed no one can know himself, for no one appears to himself as he appears to others” (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 7). Yet to require such validation is to miss the point, or rather to substitute the point of view of the individual self for that of the world. This is both an effect and a cause of the idea that one can be good. This idea also creates a tension between responsibility to individual potential (to become a good person) and democratic plurality (to be good in respect of the other), a tension whose difficulty is indexed in fidelity to the liberal self. It is an intractable bind, and a recipe for moral helplessness for lack of a common world to mediate and ultimately destroy such hopeful simplicities. An ethics of the common world of appearances will not resolve moral difficulty so much as perhaps ameliorate the effects of the moral injuries of liberalism.

There is little doubt that for many well meaning educators to be good is seen as an act of love, which is surely, the thinking goes, its own justification. The difficulty of this connection is that it leaves no space for the world into which the young will emerge. Both love’s passion and its myopic chauvinism—in presupposing to impute recognizability to its object—admit no conception of relations among others as characterized by difference, which love cannot but destroy. Lacan describes (qtd. in
Leader & Groves, 1995) the tendency of the object, in Arendt's case the world, to be destroyed by the demand, in this case of the loving subject. Britzman (1998) elaborates the point with respect to what she calls love's "vicissitudes of narcissism" by which love "can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone's removal" (p. 99). Arendt (1958) writes that love

is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but anti-political, perhaps the most powerful of all anti-political human forces. (p. 242)

The question of love's implication in the common world is an important one because it troubles the force of its acceptance and creates a conceptual openness to thinking otherwise. This for Arendt respects the frailty of action in the appearing world. To consider love's anti-political dimension is to reveal the extent of the vulnerability of the public realm and the hermeneutic depth of the task to vouchsafe its possibility.

Mindful of the aspiration to surmount egological prejudice, to strive in the hope for deliverance in a public's "possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself" (p. 58), Arendt wishes to restrain love as a meaningful public force. In this instance, because of its inability to sustain difference and solidarity, she would probably disagree with John Lennon that it is "all you need," or at least qualify that it may be all you need but what the world needs is another question altogether. To that point, Arendt argues that "what love is in its own narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs" (p. 243). I now pursue this invitation to return my
pariah's recursions to those qualities and dispositions which animate and sustain an Arendtian public realm.

2.5 Action's Virtues and Faculties

For Arendt, action and speech, those activities which create and sustain a public, require the virtues of courage and respect. These are actualized, or made real, in the inherent risk of self-disclosure by virtue of trust in the power of the public realm. They have no object but the world itself, humanity's only common object and that space not of, but between people. Individuals deserve respect not because it is earned in accomplishment but because we are here, in the sharing of the same existential plight of appearing and passing away, and because such recognition is a condition of possibility for the appearance of the public realm. The courage to accord respect as such is of the world and not for humankind, it acts on the perceptual faith described in the last chapter, it acts as if the world it needs to exist does so in order to be available to bring it into being. This is an existentially different conception of respect from that which is earned or won, and it is not evoked to the exclusion of the need to discriminate and judge. It rather makes them more possible and valid, informed as they are by the commonness of the human condition's indissoluble but fragile foreignness. It is more generous than respect won or gained for these, like love, can turn too harshly upon perceived trespasses. It is a respect which trusts the world and the story, and not the other—for whom it wishes love but requires respect. Only the world can bear the burden of this respect. Respect for the world as a place fit for human appearance is an understanding kindness of the humanity obliged to suffer it.
As such, the arrangement of governance particularly amenable to the common world Arendt imagines is democracy, whose commonness is both means and end. Mencken (1977) argued as much in observing that “the cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy” (p. 4). One may glean from the uncommonness of this statement how conflated the public weal has become with responsibility to human need, to the neglect or denigration of the institutions of human coexistence. A broad contemporary disposition prefers to view trust and power as antithetical, a wariness of misrecognition based in the telos of liberal expectation, whether foiled or fulfilled. Arendt (1958) argues against the conflation, symptomatic of the flight from the public realm, of power (as the potentiality of being together), strength (of the individual) and the violence of force (of the state) (p. 200-201). Neglected and overrun by the sovereign excesses of strength and the violence it requires to enforce its singular will, and where again “everything can eventually be called anything else” and thereby subjugated by recognition, the power of common appearance in action and speech is drained, defeated and denied. Against these purposive demurrals in Faustian bargains stands spontaneity, whose courage instantiates the “most elementary manifestation of human freedom” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 96). Its testament is to the unexpected, the interrupted and the interfered with, and in accordance with the inevitable unforeseen, which is to be expected for it “occurs regularly” in the reality of appearance (Arendt, 1958, p. 247). From this artesian quality of appearance, Arendt (1958) evokes the unique quality of action “to begin something new” as “the miracle that saves the world” (p. 47) for “infinite improbability occurs so frequently that it seems strange to speak of miracles at all” (1968a, p. 170). The significance of events is a matter

---

22 One may see in the conflation of politics and economics (as “political economy”) in the eighteenth century this association, one which led to the ascendancy of the modern field of economics.
of human intervention in automatic processes, and the energies of the uncanny, coincidental and unexpected which it releases. Arendt (1958) writes that action's "true result" is "the relationship it should have established" (p. 196). Democracy's openness to the limitless othernesses of pluralism and natality welcomes such possibility, and it therefore invites a respect not as much for but of the world, and the power it represents to sustain the actuality of the public realm (p. 200).

Respect, a kind of "friendship without intimacy or closeness" (p. 243), maintains what Arendt calls the "in-between which relates us to and separates us from others" (p. 242). It is a challenge to education to imagine how to make power as Arendt (1978b) conceives it recognizable, for the simple fact that it is not and could not be: "there is nothing left for the "beginner" to hold on to" (p. 208). It is not something one may ease into, as sure as courage cannot be won without defying something. There is no hedging one's bets in the gamble of appearance, no conditional respect for the public realm. For an educator called to this challenge, the necessity for respect takes on a deeper significance than more common discourses of tolerance for difference or equality of sameness. It takes on an almost talismanic aspect which, in tension with the initiatives of courage, conjures the power to "break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary" (p. 203) for "it is disaster, not salvation, which always happens automatically and therefore always must appear irresistible" (1968a, p. 170). Respect and courage require and inspire both the initiative to give oneself to beginnings and to interrupt them by thinking, a tenuous heuristic Arendt calls judging—whose meaningfulness is contingent, situated and elusive (recall Arendt's reference to the Talmudic parable of the 36 righteous men). Judging then cannot, like trust in the public
realm itself, be other than a matter of faith, faith that to make patent what is latent prevents it from being "literally dead to the world" (Arendt, 1958, p. 176).

The two faculties which necessarily attend action and speech for Arendt are those of forgiveness and making promises (p. 237, 239). The public realm, which may appear and disappear spontaneously wherever people gather, may only be actualized through the agreements and bonds of making promises and the willingness to forgive others for the consequences of their actions (otherwise as Arendt points out, no one would ever dare more than a single action). The necessity for forgiveness is perhaps obvious given the character of action, whose threefold frustrations are the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of its processes and the anonymity of its authors (p. 219). In some of her more beautiful writing, in a vein unique to Arendt as a political philosopher, she credits as the "discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs" (p. 238) Jesus of Nazareth. She calls the very human faculty of forgiveness as "the necessary corrective for the inevitable damages resulting from action" (p. 239), a duty required because people who act will always "know not what they do" (p. 239). One could view forgiveness as a sort of index of action, in the absence of the need for the former, there probably is none of the latter. To presume absence of self knowledge as a matter of being human in a plural world may be to release a great deal of pressure in environments of institutional education already so regimented and administered, so confused among notions of authority and management. Naturally this would invite fears of permissiveness (the sovereign self's withdrawal pangs), fears which, like all fears, need be put to the tests of action and judgment in the challenge of a responsibility to the public realm. The ambivalence of authority in education is in that, with the legitimation
of the commercial forms of late capitalism, it takes on the language and demeanor of management, of forms legitimated by economic arrangements for which the young are to be readied—recall here the third purpose of schooling in British Columbia—or into which they are to be disciplined. That this would not be more clearly in tension with other views of the purposes and responsibilities of education (like potential and plurality) may be seen as testament to the human capacity, absent thought and judgment, to draw everything together in the romance of one world, in the singularity of the reified liberal self, omniscient in its own simulacrum.\textsuperscript{23} This, as I have been arguing, is no world at all, but a sort of echo chamber in which the louder the cry of being issues, the more it drowns itself out. Arendt (1958) maintains that the unique quality of forgiveness is that it is the only response which “does not merely re-act, but acts anew” (p. 241) with the attendant power of action and the unexpected. Forgiveness in this sense releases “one world” to rebellion of its multiplicity, its unrecognizable abundance. In this, it contains recognition that “action almost never achieves its purpose” (p. 184) and is characterized by errancy. Young-Bruehl (2006) describes a compelling instance of the power of forgiveness as action in the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation commission. The singularity of its difficulties and accomplishments recommend much for education’s necessary struggles for ethical compass.

Making promises as Arendt argues action requires is not for the purpose unfolding a plan, but rather for the creation of the space of appearances which binds humanity to the reality of the world. To promise is to value action’s beginning with a follow through, to honour it by not disavowing its impacts—however partially they may be appreciated or

\textsuperscript{23} Arendt’s (1958) description of Rousseau and the “Romanticists” is relevant here, whose discovery of intimacy as rebellion of the heart against its perversions by society is tantamount to a flight toward the open space proscribed still, but by the conformity of worldlessness (p. 37).
fully they require the intervention of forgiveness. A promise is how people join themselves together with and through action, one too often dismissed once some accomplishment is secured. An anti-political instance of a promise, what may be more aptly called a guarantee, would be to secure a particular outcome, as in to construct something or to attain a learning objective, whereas a political one would be to sustain the simple fact of remaining together in solidarity, not of the doing, but in what humanly appears in and through it. This is the ethical tenor the world, meaning and often justice require, it is thus that the promise of human dignity can be fulfilled, moment to moment and in every day.

For an example of the force of the misperception of possibility in promising, the difficulties which can be the bane of cooperative learning may be seen as due to the misunderstanding of the tensions between action and promise making, between the conditions for creating meaning together and their limitations, and the responsibilities this interplay requires. In many cases, the remedy is seen in thinking of “process” over “product,” but even this characterization reduces the significance of appearing and thinking with others to something mechanistic, something worldless and abstracted. Arendt (1968a) calls this the preoccupation with the “how” over that with the “what” (p. 57). To take this a step further, it is instead in view of the “what” (the world and its enacted stories) that the “who” may appear. The process mentality subscribes to a collective view of work that rests “not on equality but on sameness,” a sameness before an end, of being inscribed by an end and thus as a means. When being becomes a means

---

24 This is what Arendt (1958) calls the “sheer stupid vanity” of the “inverted order between man and his products” (p. 211).

of any kind, the only result becomes "the actual loss of all awareness of individuality and identity" (Arendt, 1958, p. 213). To animate collaboration with the magic of appearing together—and the sense of the forgiveness and promise making this requires—is a significant challenge to take from Arendt, the beginning of which arrives as a matter of thought, a flicker of disturbance, a hesitation in consciousness, a disequilibrium or an impulse, and above all a disavowal of expectation and recognition. In education, that indeed can be a very high ledge to leap off.

Arendt (1958) argues that the inability to have complete faith in oneself is "the price we pay for freedom" (p. 244). In action and speech, those human activities beyond end-orientation by subjects beyond subjectivication, this shifting scene activates the need for judging in the identification of the unprecedented and the new—and in salvation from automatism. It requires forgiveness for their frailty and errancy, and for unknowingness, and also promises in agreements to follow through with each other, to remain together to actualize a limited reality of power in a paradoxically multiple single world, so repeatedly in danger in the modern age of collapsing on itself, or of never being more than a ghost which haunts the continuing Enlightenment project. As ever for Arendt, the object of all of this vitality and obscurity is the world, the world in which one appears, and not in which one merely believes. This worldliness requires a sort of faith beyond belief; for poised over an abyss one need relinquish none of the agency and initiative a singular being accrues. These may instead sustain thinking and judging for the love of the appearing beauty of what is and may be—if accommodated to the power of being together which cultivates it. Such accommodations are paid in concert with others by way of respect, courage, forgiveness and making promises.
In a liberal “moral ambience” (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 97), the pre-eminent concern for self knowledge and students’ interests diminish the necessity for others, for those without whom they would have no meaning, without those who could forgive necessary trespasses. But it is much more than to educate in the loneliness of a crowd to inspire the faculties and dispositions for freedom, and to not make promises pointless.

2.6 Estrangement and Being – The Phenomenology of the Knight’s Move

Such a catalogue of virtues and faculties would seem to lend themselves to a program, a code perhaps, or a statement of principles for the sustenance of the public world, an elusive guardian faithful enough to stem humanity’s apparent proclivity for a telos of self-defeat. The public realm and the consequences of the freedom it provides are ontological, matters of being which are, in an Arendtian argument, beyond engineering or standardization. Although they may be practiced, Arendt argued that they could not be formalized and taught because, while the new might be indicated (as by the Lacanian signifier of the very impossibility of signifying something), it necessarily cannot be known in advance. Again like the event for Derrida (see Giles & Vintimilla, 2007), to prescribe conditions for its recognition is to deny its possibility. In concert with the hermeneutics of the conscious pariah, the phenomenology of estrangement affords indicative, allusive and inferential access to the ontological condition of freedom in the public realm. It is a way to prefigure the initiative to appear by sustaining the trust in the appearing world as a matter of perceptual faith. For Arendt (1954/2005), this is a matter of reconciliation with one’s status as a stranger in the world:
Understanding is unending and therefore cannot produce final results. It is the specifically human way of being alive; for every person needs to be reconciled to a world into which he was born a stranger and in which, to the extent of his distinct uniqueness, he always remains a stranger. (p. 308)

To approach the present, the “gap” between past and future, without presentism and in the humility of beings conscious of the interlocutory agency of their consciousness, is to engage with the question of being in the present, in and of itself (as the new in the public realm) and as a history of itself, of its being passing away, inscribed with and constituted by what was. The “device” of estrangement, its “cognitive ambivalence and play” (Boym, 2005, p. 586) then becomes what Brown (2001) calls “effective history” which “studies what is closest, but in abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it as a distance” (p. 108). Such “ontology of the present” (p. 109) could not be effected other than as a stranger, which is simultaneously a “tactic of dissent, and a form of alternative self-fashioning” (Boym, 2005, p. 606). One is a stranger because of the conditions of plurality and natality, and this is the only possible enduring basis for human solidarity.

The question arises however, of how estrangement does not withdraw from the world in which it seeks to defamiliarize the naturalized. How does the distance not prevail such that the paradox of seizing at a distance results in all distance, no seizing? Or such that only the distance is seized, wherein begins another self-validating and worldless retreat, one in which the distance itself is mistaken for the real, as Arendt (1968a) identifies as characteristic of the “tremendous structures of the human artifice we
Svetlana Boym (2005) compares estrangement for Arendt with that of the Russian Formalists, and makes a helpful distinction in this regard:

Estrangement from the world has its origins in the Stoic conception of inner freedom and in the Christian conception of freedom and salvation as well as in romantic subjectivity and introspection. It suggests distancing from political and worldly affairs. On the other hand, estrangement for the world is an acknowledgment of the integral human plurality that we must recognize within us and within others. This is a way of seeing the world anew, a possibility of a new beginning that is fundamental for aesthetic experience, critical judgment, and political action. (p. 602, emphasis in original)

Prominent in this distinction are echoes of the two pariah stances described in the introduction. The concept of estrangement as the “ground for plurality” (p. 600) in the appearing world is what draws the ethically dissident conscious pariah from the oblivion of the retreat of the lord of dreams. This she or he undertakes not only as a matter of political responsibility but, in aesthetic terms, as an “exercise in wonder” (p. 587) to renew the common world and its boundless meaning, rather than to glorify the uncommon one of the truth of self.26

Dana Villa (1997) observes that “our capacity for spontaneous action and judgment resides, ultimately, upon a worldly form of estrangement” (p. 198). By

26 This is certainly not to suggest there is not plenty to meaningfully wonder about in the self, but that it is rather a solitary darkness whose significance derives to the extent that it has a common world to become deprivatized in and through, an actualization of far vaster import.
"worldly" I shall take him to mean "estrangement for," noting again the fragility of such capacities, which Villa argues are dependent upon their suspension by a thread no thicker than "a looser, more aestheticised attachment to being" (p. 186). Arendt (1978c) writes "the only objects that seem purposeless are aesthetic objects, on one side, and men, on the other" (p. 271), both, she writes, are "good for nothing" (p. 272). What a curious notion from an influential modern political philosopher, one so preoccupied with the problem of human superfluity! It is of what Nietzsche (1994) calls "that power of attraction which everything contradictory and antithetical has" (p. 6). Its curiosity is also an index of the extent to which significance is measured by utility, a modern conceit related to and supportive of market functionalism. The significance of the human is not "for" anything else, it is, as with all being, simply because it is. The possible unintelligibility of this idea is an important marker in this inquiry, it may trouble sedimentation of habitus, the expression of being’s subjection to the horizontal "same", the extent to which "creation presupposes itself" (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 94) and "the mind can understand only what it has created" (Dilthey qtd. in Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 57). For the utility of the mind in this sense, in a definite echo of the impotence of the commanding will, is to accord itself utility and thence to value its accomplishment, to self-validate it as meaningful and significant. Yet how could being be otherwise, if not of and for itself? The question may be turned back on itself as well, as did Nietzsche (1994) in asking "what value do [values] themselves have?" (p. 7), if one asks in this instance of what use is use? The metanarratives of modernity teeter and creak at their foundations before such interrogation. Arendt (1946/2005) is clear about her ontological declinations, which

---

27 This is also a point at which Arendt’s existential theism irritates religious critics, some of whom reject a worldly significance unmediated by a “sacramental faith in the marriage of heaven and earth” (McCarraher, 2006).
consistently gravitate from (but do not invert) the humanism of modernity's replacement of God by Man:

Human beings live and act with each other; and in doing so, they neither pursue the phantom of Self nor live in the arrogant illusion that they constitute Being itself. (Arendt, 1946/2005, p. 186)

For Arendt, such being for humans obtains largely as an instance of appearance among distinctive individuals (and secondarily in reflections on it which lead to a judging return to appearing, to re-visiting and attesting to a singularity). As a political matter, which for Arendt action and judgment most significantly are, Rancière (1999) anticipates the pragmatic complaint that politics is instead about accommodation in an essential clash of fixities, identities, interests, civilizations, "there never has been any 'aestheticization' of politics in the modern age because politics is aesthetic in principle" (p. 58). In the public realm, being is both a political and aesthetic matter. Arendt (1968a) wrote that "the common element connecting art and politics is that they both are phenomena of the public world" (p. 218), where they are aesthetic matters, concerns of relations among appearing form and deceptive semblance. For Castoriadis (1991a), the aesthetic dimension of politics is "commonality through or across non-identity" (p. 93), non-subjective and consisting in the particularity of individuality, a view informed by Arendt. As with the question of the 'who,' the relation of the aesthetics of politics and being are very significant to judging, wherein Kant—although not, as later for Arendt, as a political matter—claimed "egoism is overcome" (in D’Entrèves, 2001, p. 251). As we shall see in
more detail in chapter four, this is a matter of the imagination and taste, and the ultimately democratic quality of “disinterested delight” (Arendt, 1978c, p. 270) whose love of beauty renews the common world and asks its nebulous affirmation—which Arendt (1968b), in a less secular mood, would call its “blessing” (p. 97). This engagement in an ontological condition of aesthetic plurality is enabled by estrangement, by the attitude of the stranger, of the other (1968c, p. 43), for it initiates in modesty a conscious pariah’s incursions of self-disclosure and understanding. In a sense for Arendt as well, estrangement is also an honest reconciliation to a world one does not know within as without.

With respect to appearance and the public realm, as the shared public moment appears and disappears, it is being created and destroyed in the creation of new forms whose meaning one may only ever intimate partially, however temporarily may its circumstances be sustained through covenants. Through appearing, as Goethe writes, “all must into nothing fall, if it will persist in being” (qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 194). This sense or intimation is a quality of perceptual faith and its release, in Heidegger’s paradoxical “will not to will” (qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 188), becomes occasions where a public is actualized. This “unconcealment” (p. 189)—to continue in Heideggerian terms—is the wellspring of *thaumadzein*, which Arendt calls “the wonder that everything is as it is” (1958, p. 249) and in which, as Aristotle wrote, is to begin to philosophize (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 16). It is an estrangement from familiar forms of appearing and being, a laying bare, but not abolition, of boundaries. It is what Arendt (1946/2005)

---

28 At times this is explicit, as in the form of the question “what just happened?” so apparent was the moment’s departure. This then may begin the story of the receding instant which also may, in the telling, instantiate its own eventual particularity along with other uncertain and echoing effects. There is in this a deep vein of significance for education in the proliferation of meaning, the opening of critical and ontological openings.
further calls a "border situation" which "can develop only in the shared life of human beings inhabiting a given world common to them all" (p. 186). This explicates the tension of needing others for estrangement, and by whom it is made meaningful but by which one also must risk alienation and isolation in the bewildering arbitrariness of action and the inevitable disorientations of plurality. Arendt (1958) writes that "Kant had the courage to acquit man from the consequences of his deed, insisting solely on the purity of his motives, and this saved him from losing faith in man and his potential greatness" (p. 235). Estrangement in a plural world avoids the plunge into existential absurdity and a reactionary disposition; it "keeps the faith" so to speak. For Arendt, this rare and, some might say, esoteric experience attends the very instance of worldly reality. Arendt's "miraculous" is unfamiliar, strange and commonplace, it is like what Nancy (2000) calls a "sudden and headlong precipitation where the strangeness of a singularity is concentrated" (p. 8). For Arendt (1958) it is the decisive centrality of the meaning of human appearance in the plurality of the world, it is the "specifically human achievement" (p. 207). It is also one too apt to be subsumed, and thus presupposed into oblivion, by categories and formulae given to and adopted in understanding, by the primacy of the metaphorical actor behind the scenes (p. 185), and by the conviction that "man's products may be more and essentially greater than himself" (p. 210). To withstand and not succumb to the fear this miraculous strangeness engenders is the liminal courage and the estrangement the conscious pariah requires, the pretence of knowing the facticity of a common world, but not its quality—a judgment then left to the storyteller, who reflects back the human "who" (p. 186). It is also to avoid the confusion of the fear of political life and the desire to be freed of its burden, which could only lead
to either the oblivion of dreams or what Villa (1997) calls "existential resentment" which "drives modern humanity to take itself so far out of the world, to ascribe to itself a position from which the world might be mastered, remade, and disposed of" (p. 184).

The performing arts may most often exemplify and evoke it, this being at once of and not of the world, but one need not only look to the arts for exemplars of the public realm's worldly power. At any time, with an un-prescribed and likely somewhat estranged combination of courage, respect, wonder, forgiveness and a willingness to follow through what is begun, a public appears may appear through imaginative interaction among others. Like a wave lifting behind the unsuspecting, the "energia or ('actuality')" (Aristotle qtd. in Arendt, 1958, p. 206) of the public realm overtakes and leaves only perplexity and significance in its wake, only the sense in the story that remains that "it was."

In education, I argue that there must be engagement with the question of the fear inspired by the necessary estrangement from and in the world. The excess to avoid in preparing young people for the demands of the public consists in the tendency to shelter them from its arbitrariness to the point where the ability to appear meaningfully dissipates. This can be attempted for example by incorporating such notions in programs of learning, by thematizing them as questions, by evoking learning in multiple registers and, as we shall examine in more detail in later chapters, by resisting settled answers in favor of new questions and the stories they always tell. A further risk to estrangement in education, and to vitality in general, is in the denial of the energies of natality for fear of the amoral boundlessness of plurality. In this, understandably concerned and caring authorities may run the risk of foreclosing the conditions by which judging orient
itself—the ultimate political imperative in a plural world. Beyond the alluring convenience of “ends,” of outcomes and prescriptions, one must confront the ways in which the ethical necessity to protect the young from the “melancholy haphazardness” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 89) of action and appearance may readily become the urge to deny its realm altogether. This is a baby-with-the-bathwater sort of dismissal, and testament to the challenges to educators of the complex necessities of judgment in a pluralistic milieu.

Two types of thought should be considered critically with respect to the distinction of alienation and estrangement to better inform the conceptual remit of education by way of Arendtian critique. First is the “essentially religious idea that humanity exists to be at home in the world” (Villa, 1997, p. 185). Villa elaborates with respect to the “looser attachment” described earlier, that it “often stands in opposition to the yearning for community, for unalienated existence” (p. 188). There is no reason to believe either that young people cannot tolerate the ambiguity of the world or that they are not animated by it, if released from the monarchy of condescension implied by standardized curricula and the attendant liberal pieties of institutional education. This is certainly not to incite a release from the care into which they are entrusted. It is however, to confront a patina of community thinly spread over the commercial imperatives of adaptive interchangeability called “lifelong learning.” It is to interrogate the ethic of labour market conformity, enshrined as necessity in a refuge of belonging—in this case to an economic system, or as a seller in a (labour) market—in subjectifying processes of what Arendt would consider fabrication (in this case of consumers of “learning”) which, when applied to humans, has been shown to produce horrific results. It is to incite discomfort at the human superfluity of functionalism in service of the “images” of
consumer society and to ask how the labour market may or may not agree with other avowed purposes of public education. For by and large, the world of public schooling—which, as Jackson (1968/2004) argues, is characterized by “the fact of prolonged exposure [to] repetition, redundancy, and ritualistic action” (p. 95)—is no world in which we should want to ever be at home. Foucault has shown how “the structure and practices of the modern military developed in parallel with those of schools” (Edgoose, 2001, p. 124). They are institutions whose sympathetic origins leave complex and troubled traces subsumed beneath the normative fictions of the everyday, traces which left at least one poor student “‘school sick’ as one would say seasick” (Derrida, 2001, p. 58) for a lifetime. The hope that institutional schooling should provide a home works against the emergence of the non-conformist, resistant individuality Arendt would argue the public and freedom require. This is how a commentator like Alfie Kohn, a speaker much in demand among educators and administrators, can declare to grateful acclaim that “the best teachers actively ignore or subvert curriculum.” If a precondition of the freedom of the public realm is estrangement, then the preoccupation of education with private matters such as security, setting aside the afterthought of what is vaguely imagined education for democratic citizenship, is privative. This means it deprives the young of experience of and practice in the faculties required for appearance in the public in favor of the need to be at home in the name of well being, security or self-esteem. This threatens to manifest at the expense of the ontological consideration which Arendt shares with Nietzsche (1994) in what he calls the truthfulness of “one who is, who has reality”

29 And to which the author also must confess susceptibility.

30 Address to British Columbia Secondary Teachers of English Language Annual Conference, October, 2006.
(p. 15, emphasis in original). Not that these are not laudable and necessary concerns in the education of young people, but one can begin to see in an Arendtian analysis—a de-subjectivizing one, one from the perspective of the world—how these can become self-defeating if they deny or denigrate or de-prioritize the publicity of the world and the natal promise each child’s ‘who’ may bring to it. The idea that what all sensuous creatures share in common is appearances in which they then display identity in the actualization of difference leads one to a very different sense of the world than taken for granted in late modernity. It is from this sense of the human condition that one may be moved to foster and provoke what Curtis calls the “aesthetic-existentialist drive” to meet what she calls the “the paramount challenge...to save human particularity” (p. 34). As a political matter, which for Arendt “ultimately means sharing the earth with other people” (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 52), education can then justifiably take up the challenge more explicitly to “cultivate our pleasure in the feeling of reality intensified through constant attentiveness to the awe or wonder of human particularity” (Curtis, 1997, p. 34). To the “unitary view” of functionalism (Arendt, 1978a, p. 27) or liberal universalism, or Christian monism, this will always appear strange, a strangeness infinitely preferable to what Char called the “sad opaqueness” (qtd. in Arendt, 1968a, p. 3) of a private life centred on nothing but itself. This strangeness however is the rumor of the public, one education should avow, but may never contain—as sure as the danger that being at home in the world can lead to having missed it altogether.

The second sort of thinking about which and Arendtian reading of education would advise caution is “the totalitarian belief that everything is possible” (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 58). In a letter to Karl Jaspers, Arendt observed that until now this belief
seems to have proved that everything can be destroyed. It is surely not difficult to see how it could be seen as anti-political in an Arendtian sense where reality and its possibilities are contingent on the agreement of others—wherein appreciating its impossibility, its “terrifying dimension” (Žižek, 1989, p. 5), may be as or more important than the opposite. The notion that everything is possible has in common with the previous idea of being at home in the world a religious utopianism. Like many such dreams, it also permits abuse and subjection against better judgment. It is more symptomatic of a will to believe than an assessment of possibility in a world of others. It is patently absurd, of course (I will never, for example, be a ballet student from Thailand or win the Stanley Cup alone) but, more significantly, makes of “everything that exists...only a temporary obstacle” (Arendt, 1966, p. 387). Misappropriation of stories of great victories over impossible circumstances notwithstanding, this belief can lend education the surreal quality of farcical self-delusion. Everything is possible is a modern conceit and a liberal delusion, a refusal of limitation in the boundlessness of the self, which allies possibility with strength (of the individual) and not with power (of the public). In order to not unthinkingly adopt a belief—in the commendable service of the necessity for enthusiasm—which has underwritten despotic megalomania and totalitarian suffocation in the modern era, the more educative and critical suggestions would instead be “what appears inevitable is likely not” and “what is will not always be, and what will be is unimaginable.” In a more modest key, one attuned perhaps to the quite hum of the eternal before which human limitation evokes humility, Arendt instead, if rather lugubriously, is said to prefer to enthuse “rooted in the mud of tenuous compromises and the necessity of loss” (Schultz, 2001, p. 97). What is the necessity of loss to education?
To return to a metaphor from the arts, this is nothing more or less than what the Blues achieves, a sort of exaltation in the fact of loss, through and by which a deeper reconciliation of meaning obtains in the chiasm of a common plight.

Estrangement in these instances stands as a hedge against the denials of consolatory universalisms and the deferred promises of a market economy. It stands instead for the surprise of the moment which, turning back on itself reveals what it conceals like treasure. Estrangement will always threaten understanding given the human tendency to favour the comfort of its own generalities over the novelty of the diverse world and the difficult obscurity of its meanings. Estrangement is neither taken up with belonging nor aspiring within view of omnipotence or command. It is certainly not to forgo aspiration—just as appearance in the public is to not altogether forgo intention—but instead to inscribe it with the secret of contingency and the paradox that to be at home in the world is to not be too at home in it.

These themes revolve around the concept of estrangement in the work of a number of thoughtful and persuasive writers. Maxine Greene (1971/2004) writes of the existential significance and curricular relevance of “dislocations...when what was once familiar abruptly appears strange” (p. 140). She, like Elliot Eisner (2004) and Kieran Egan (1997), respecting the arts more generally, has championed the use of literature to transform the commonplace and awaken ontological sensitivity in education. Cristina Delgado’s work on the “pedagogy of the event” (forthcoming) similarly invites into the work of educators the particular, the ineffable and the yet-to-come in another sort of answer to the Arendtian public world’s call to “set right anew.” For such thinkers it is ethical to defamiliarize practices of education in engagements estranged from what is
"seemingly 'given'" or has become "sedimented" as fixed meaning and then "enforced" (Greene, 1971/2004, p. 144) as real—whether consciously or not—by parents, teachers and psychiatrists. Such enforcement, according to Gabbard (2003), and to continue the theme of suspicion about being at home in the world, is commonly a matter of market use-value, to which estrangement is a sort of betrayal—of a future on prescribed terms, of the consumer compact on which advertisers’ manipulations rely, of the complicity of the counterworld of significance in human affairs.

Public life is by definition political (concerned with being together) and the political for Arendt is ontological (in actualizing being by appearing). The appearing world is neither a matter of living—a private concern of necessity, security, consumption and the like—nor of the soul—a worldless nowhere place created, as Freud said, as a solution to the problem of death (in Bloom, 2005, p. 3), an idea echoed in numerous ways by Arendt. Natality and the otherness of plurality render the public domain “strange.” From this it is not too much of a feat of the imagination to conceptualize as an ethical and political necessity pedagogies of strangeness or estrangement as critique in research. These would adopt the conscious pariah stance in opposing the prevailing habitus of the enclosures of inertial conceptual encroachments which Arendt maintains “have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 4). Arendt (1968a) addresses the need for estrangement thus:

consideration of the principles of education must take into account this process of estrangement from the world; it can even admit that we are here presumably confronted by an automatic process, provided only that it does
not forget that it lies within the power of human thought and action to interrupt and arrest such processes. (p. 195)

Like the knight’s move in chess, estrangement approaches reality as if more were always indicated than could be perceived or imagined, without making of this apperception transcendence. It is a knight errant who moves aware of Heidegger’s teaching, “present [only] insofar as it lets itself belong to the non-present” (qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 193), to what lies beyond the next turn “so that the ‘descent’ (Abstieg) into the past coincides with the patient, thoughtful expectation of the arrival of the future, the ‘avenant’” (p. 175). Estrangement for the world enacts the phenomenology of the “knight’s serpentine road…the road of the brave” which permits our thoughtfully conscious pariah “to see further than the ‘honest pawns’ and the ‘dutifully single-minded kings’” (Shklovsky qtd. in Boym, 2005, p. 589).

2.7 Conclusion

Arendt’s public world and the ontological questions it provokes welcome the reality of action and speech and fulfill the promise of natal being by way of a conception of something which is not, nor ever could be a thought. In this chapter, I have reviewed some of Arendt’s conceptualizations and arguments about this world, the objective commonality of a public realm. I have also fore-grounded its implications for subjectivity in the indicative device she call one’s ‘who’ to help clarify Arendt’s contribution to problematics of identity in modernity. This is primarily one of a phenomenological individuality and secondarily of hermeneutic subjectivity, given
Arendt’s emphasis on the coincidence of appearance and being. Among such considerations I sketched how, for Arendt, this existential condition requires certain virtues, faculties and dispositions. These derive from and contribute to but do not determine the constitution of the public realm. They help situate an understanding of an Arendtian subject in the common world as she conceptualizes it. I have also attempted to exemplify Arendtian critique in arguments arising from considerations which stage attitudes and practices in education, illustrating her force and relevance as a theorist and also considering how other thinkers have take up these matters.

It is appropriate at this point to turn to that invisible and indispensable activity also by which Hannah Arendt charts a course to a just and meaningful public, one that she persistently provokes and incites and an activity which, although it may initiate appearance in the guise of defiant non-conformity, usually has no public presence whatsoever: Thinking.
CHAPTER 3 - THINKING

Few thinkers ever told us what made them think and even fewer have cared to describe and examine their thinking experience.

(Arendt 1971/2003, p. 176)

The wind of thought has the peculiarity of doing away with its own previous manifestations. (p. 173)

3.1 Introduction: A Breeze through a Room of Open Windows

This chapter considers the question of thinking as a requisite adjunct to appearance in the public realm. It does so in order that the views of Hannah Arendt might be brought within the horizon of the question of thinking in education, to make this question, for it is surely a question, more visible to a field dogged by pressures to demonstrable efficiencies and “solutions” to problems of management, diversity, and evaluation, among many others. As an ethical and ontological engagement in the interpretation and creation of meaning and the reconciliation with the reality of “what we do and what we suffer” (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 307)—a reconciliation Arendt calls understanding—the question of thinking should be an open and ongoing one. One can hardly come so far in an investigation of this sort and in the spirit in which it consists without turning to its medium, or that which it is presuming to represent. I would go so far as to say that the nature of my concern demands the raising of the question, so concerned is Arendtian method with conceptual modesty as a pillar of phenomenological integrity. The motif of
the stance of the conscious pariah which I have borrowed from Arendt significantly consists in the aspect of distancing, “to make the everyday seem anomalous” (Euben, 2001, p. 163), for the sake of the world’s renewal and to engage with the self as already given in opaque forms—opacities into which various lights need be refracted in the twin quests for meaning and agency. Alchemy of this sort also may obtain by thinking in certain ways, and considering thinking and thought in certain lights so as to transmute the familiarity of the everyday with the haecceity of the gap between past and future, the particularity and wonder of that proverbial instant and then whatever unprecedented developments then are seen to mark human affairs. To think about responsibility is to then think about thinking, to “haunt one’s own thoughts, to be haunted by thoughts” (Britzman, 1998, p. 30). It is not, nor ever could be, reducible to finding the proper data, the correct answer, or the truth. To think is to uncover how the questions which led to those data, answers or truths regulate and condition further thinking, and to consider what is excluded in so doing, particularly, for Arendt and I would add for education, with respect to the common world. To think is to want to understand, to embark on a journey which “never produced unequivocal results” (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 307). It results instead in what she calls meaning (p. 309), which, as with appearance, is an aesthetic and not a moral or epistemological matter.\textsuperscript{31} One may already begin to see a thematic parallel between the inner thinking landscape and the outer appearing one. It is an important one to which I will be repeatedly returning as I move further in this

\textsuperscript{31} Meaning results from understanding insomuch as it achieves a temporary accord with what appears to be. In this conceptualization, knowledge has a more static quality allied with what is know to be true, it is preceded and succeeded by understanding, whose quest for meaning must always transcend knowledge by redefining its terms. The humility which invites making knowledge meaningful recognizes that its transcendence necessitates new and unrecognizable forms (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 309-311). Arendt (1978a) refers to the separation and interrelation of “thinking’s quest for meaning and knowledge’s quest for truth” (p. 62) aligning the unending process of understanding with the former and the more limited one of explanation with the latter. For more on these conceptions, see S. 4.5.
consideration from the visible conditions of appearing to the invisible ones of thinking. The purpose of such tracing will become manifest in the next chapter on the activity of judging, which resides at the metaphorical intersection of the two seeming incompatibles of thinking and appearing. It is a measure of how such incompatibilities in tension are, for a thinker like Hannah Arendt, ontologically significant and ethically decisive.

Because humans both appear in the world and may consider the miraculous curiosity of this fact, I am compelled to take, at this midpoint of sorts, this detour, the interruption of which for Arendt is characteristic of thinking. This rupture in the progression of ideas about a world beyond concept and the boundlessness of action evokes and requires the conscious pariah’s other key quality, after the initiative to appear, his or her self-recursive hermeneutics of thought. In order to not “succumb to the strange illusion that man...has created himself” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 37), and countless other even stranger ones that devolve from its hidden premise, it is necessary always to think about what this invisible activity expresses in its form, habits and patterns and how these discipline and proscribe meaning and being. While I have devoted considerable space to the consideration of how certain conceptual inheritances deny the actuality of the public realm, I have hitherto given less to the question of what more fluid forms this consideration may otherwise consist, of how thinking may regulate or defeat itself and the loss this represents. For Arendt it is vitally important “to be aware of the line separating ordinary activities from...reflections on them” (1978b, p. 197) in order that the world is not lost in its apperception. But how is a thoughtful thinker to think of thinking? What languages may one use in considering the ways consideration moves? The necessity of such questions to an Arendtian critique is not confined to a responsibility to
the ways in which thought can eclipse and deny itself, though this is surely of grave
importance and the animating purpose behind the libratory impetus of the conscious
pariah's stance. For Arendt, these considerations about the thinking activity given to
each person are also crucially in service of a greater instance of freedom as the thinking
engagement in the appearing world—which she calls judging. Thus this chapter will
serve a twofold purpose as a thematic bridge between the one preceding and that which
follows, arguing on the one hand for the conceptualization of thinking in clear distinction
from the doing of action in the public realm, and on the other for it as an instance of it in
the thinker's return to appearing as judging. Arendt (1978b) takes from Heidegger this
second aspect of a tension in her thought as regards thinking: "it is Being itself that
forever changing, manifests itself in the thinking of the actor so that acting and thinking
coincide" (p. 180). That they would coincide is not to say that thinking and acting are the
same, this Arendt considered "rather dishonest" (qtd. in Hill, 1979, p. 304), but it is that
they can have similar effects in the world. The relation between the two constitutes
another boundary which for Arendt results from the discrimination of difference.
Difference is then that which wrests light from totalitarian sameness, whose force may be
felt whenever the "total" steals like a thief into the vapor of thought. It is important to
note that this is not to reject totalization in thought (a totalizing gesture of its own), but to
interrogate what its forms stage, the ways they exclude and foreclose, even in concepts as
compelling as human dignity or meaning.32

So then how is thinking considered in education? Of what use is this question?
What words come to mind when it is asked? Perhaps into thinking this question drift

32 Žižek (2000) is particularly forceful on this point in provoking the agonists of partiality with the blind
spot of its own totalizing tendency and asserting the ironic totalitarianism of the fantastic notion of
totalitarianism itself as an instance of what he calls a "massive onslaught of obscuratinism" (p. 1)!
such terms as wondering, considering, imagining, judging, representing, choosing, critique, dreaming, weighing, learning, experience, consciousness, analysis and questioning. Alternately, consider the experience of thinking in terms of what it may not seem to be: acting, knowing, obeying, acquiescing, performing and many others such that even their consideration can evoke the inertial relief of non-thought, such is the pervasion of human experience with the phenomenon's absence or presence. To think is to be a thinker, to not think is to be a non-thinker who, by definition, does not think he or she does not think. This is the trap of the absence of thought and one of the reasons Arendt required the contingency of the appearing world of others as provocation.

Mindful of the constitutive force of its demand, the argument of the conscious pariah returns to the question, the thought form which returns it to returning and opens it to opening, by virtue of its estrangement, its strangeness to itself. This permits space for the world in the mind. For though it may prescribe and enclose, a question always also opens and creates a space for uncertainty, even if only in the binary yes or no. Such questions may institute monarchies of their own, but they do crack the monadic singularity of silence. The opening of the question is that of the otherness of plurality, from the distinctly human “theory of mind” (Corballis, 2007, p. 244) which allows the mind to represent the possibility and contents of other, different minds. A question is a representative form of thinking which “captures and sustains” plurality (Sharpe, 1999, p. 126). These are some which arise from thinking with Hannah Arendt and which, in conversation with education, may serve to broaden understanding of its responsibility and potential: What is thinking and where are you when you do it? Is thinking one thing or

33 In this sense, the conscious pariah is undoubtedly a philosopher in the sense which Derrida (2002c) describes, “a philosopher is always someone for whom philosophy is not a given, someone who in essence must question the essence” (p. 332, emphasis in original).
many things? Why do or must we think? How is thinking different from knowing? Of what value each? How do they abrade or agree with desire? How does desire enact itself in thought? What is thinking to doing? What are the consequences of not thinking? What is given in thinking, how is it belated in itself? Does thinking constitute and discipline the subject and then subject the world? If so, how does it accomplish this and is its dominion ironclad? What is the responsibility of a thinker? Of what magic may thinking consist and how might that advert into more meaningful and just being-together? Is thinking's power somehow paradoxical, in that as it departs from utility it becomes useful? Is thinking's utility meaning? And what does it mean to think? Are we then, as Derrida (2004) asks, "dealing here with a circle or an abyss?" (p. 137). What do you think?

Some questions serve to retain others, placeholders for whole domains of thought. It is necessary to pose many like the foregoing in order to retain the opening of more specific ones in what education is, does or may consist in, that these remain open to unanticipated forms. This is a premise of this thesis, an aspect of its method and a reason for the presumption of its wide concern. Thus, my approach is to raise many diverse queries in response to the call of the sense of possibility and promise of education, from the unfolding stories of the past and those yet-to-come of the future. It is one that cannot neglect its own medium in order to avoid what we have seen Arendt (1971/2003) call "the great temptation of recognition" (p. 14). The point put another way is that we are not what we recognize. This is a statement which must be allowed to reverberate in order to trouble walls of presumption as thick as those of disused bomb shelters, relics of a war few knew they fought yet which claimed so many.
In this chapter, we think with Hannah Arendt (1958) about the question of thinking, in Augustine's disquietude, "quaestio mihi factus sum ("a question have I become for myself")" (p. 12). In so doing we will follow her project to create something which may at once inscribe in education and democratic citizen-hood a greater, that is a more thoughtful, ethical significance and then, as with all thinking, having existed for a moment like a breeze through a room of open windows, pass away.

3.2 Evil

In her essay Thinking and Moral Considerations in the soberly entitled collection Responsibility and Judgment (1971/2003), Hannah Arendt writes in some detail of thinking in human experience and its moral and political significance. As with her considerations of the public realm, she was impelled to do so by the moral crisis resulting from the de-legitimation of tradition in various anti-political social calamities and tendencies of the last century, whose progenitors she traced back through the centuries and millennia preceding. More particularly, Arendt was inspired in this respect by her encounter with one of those evils' infamously more productive agents, Adolph Eichmann, on whose trial Arendt reported in the early nineteen-sixties. She had then famously coined the phrase "the banality of evil" wondering "is evildoing possible in the absence of not merely "base motives" (as the law calls it) but of any motives at all, any particular prompting of interest or volition?" (p. 160). If so, she speculated about the existence of
evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was perhaps extraordinary shallowness. (p. 159)

Arendt argues that evil can arise from what is neither monstrous nor demonic, but rather from a “quite authentic inability to think” (p. 159). The banality of this potentially ubiquitous evil (for we are all thinkers) is something which could be promulgated unwittingly by virtue, as it were, of its very unwittingness. Such a conception of evil would not be one which the expression in selfhood in the liberal mentality would readily recognize (again we are what we do not recognize, this time in an ominous key). This would be due to the liberal self’s positive presence. To this way of thinking, an individual is, and this being is no absence but is instead the receptacle of modernity’s ubiquitous presence. Since Arendt, and anticipated as such by her, some of what is called poststructural thought has continued to provide ways to consider the self and its agency as matters of absence or negation. Arendt’s thought about thinking and evil inspires hermeneutic vigilance, not just as to the content and cast of interpretation, but in and of its very viability. This in order to not institute the un-thinking in which evil incubates, an absence whose bitter fruits sprout when un-thinking renders the recognizable natural and the unrecognizable inconsequential, when thoughtlessness permits the mechanisms of automaticity to rule in human affairs. Parallel and sympathetic with the arbitrariness of the new, the unrecognizability of the pre-conditions of evil in un-thinking offer yet

34 She elsewhere offers a revealing genealogy of the concept of hell, an “ingenious device to enforce obedience” (1968a, p. 111).
another reason to flee the frailty of human affairs altogether, which of course was Pilate’s flight as well. Here, as we have seen, the stranger is less apt to be surprised, more expectant of the unexpected, disinterested and thus more engaged. Along with the initiative to appear to actualize a public world, this is tantamount to the Arendtian subject’s responsibility to set right anew. It is one of thinking’s contributions to natality in the presumption, particularly of the conscious pariah’s critical stance, to “defamiliarize one’s concepts in order to think through...newness” (Boym, 2005, p. 602), which may arrive as all different kinds of weather, morally speaking. Dunne’s (1993) insight on Arendt’s delineation of fabrication and action is relevant to the question of the disavowal of thinking and its consequent imimical invisibility to itself. He writes that the political domain which Arendt analyses has been “distorted by the systematic importation of alien categories” (p. 95). By “alien” I take this to mean as if not of the world, and, as such, legitimating and de-legitimating in an unworldly fashion, in a manner which denies the world, and denigrates its newness and difference, that is, its hope. Thinking, along with action, can have the effect of prising open a gap between the categories and formulae by which the world is managed and contained in the modern, and now apparently post-modern, age, one whose humanistic, Christian and liberal ontologies invite, induce, obligate and even enforce a retreat from a climate of moral risk, as surely the requisite responses to the twentieth century’s horrors. Of course, the twenty-first has its own moral urgencies, against which new preoccupations of emergency are manufactured and for daily consumption.35 Such fabrications exist to the detriment of the spontaneity

35 To elaborate briefly, Glover (1999) describes what can always be exploited in this regard, the “Hobbesian trap of fear” in which where two groups or individuals are a potential threat to each other “the resulting mutual fear gives each a reason for striking first. And, since each can see that the other has this reason, the circle of fear is reinforced” (p. 131).
which is action's first instance and the animating energy of thinking, both of which instantiate human freedom and cultivate judgment. A solipsistic appropriation of freedom makes it disappear, turns it into a concept which may then regulate away its own promise. Like the doctrine of the soul, as we have seen in the last chapter with respect to the appearing world, such "conceptualization" may provide consolation for existential haphazardness and uncertainty, but it can only erect illusions in place of humanity's sole commonality. These come with names like "progress" and "development"—what Arendt (1968a) calls "the key words of modern historiography"—which presuppose their own justification. They are derivative of the interposition of the "concept of process" which implies that "we think and consider everything in terms of processes and are not concerned with single entities or individual occurrences" (p. 61). From the lack of concern imperceptibly develops the inability to see. Like Nietzsche's "Truths," these are mental forms of habituation to the misrecognition of their representations. In effect, the story of the world becomes the world, as "illusions which we have forgotten are illusions...metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force" (qtd. in Phelan et al., 2005, p. 105-106). As they are drained, so they drain those whom they subject. The resulting self-delusional emptiness permits totalitarian desensitization to the value and significance of human life. It is the forms of this emptiness which an Arendtian critique of education would be obliged to confront. Its intervention is relevant to education also because, due to education's wide scale as a public trust, it too readily becomes a functionalized institutional purview of "alien

---

36 In which meaning is understood processurally in patterns such as causality and progress which replace intrinsic with contingent worth. In understanding this becomes a self-subjection of meaninglessness, which institutionalized knows no limit to indifference and cruelty and is only consistently characterized by self-delusion.
categories" in the name of the certainty in utility they ostensibly produce, under the covers of so many “noble dreams” which “defend the bad against the worse” (Lewis qtd. in Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 310). For education, to consider thinking as Arendt does may invite broader understandings of the relations between being and politics, between action and conscience and memory and chance. One could imagine that she would insist on opposition to what Britzman (1998) calls the “moralistic romance” (p. 60) of teaching, and also to the range of lonely liberal presuppositions which inform and denigrate the image of the educator (who remains to a large extent in a gender ghetto in North American grammars of socio-economic recognition). This would amount to an instance of the conscious pariah’s fugitive critique, and an exemplification of the refusal “to be good rather than ‘to resist evil’” because otherwise, as Machiavelli warned, “wicked rulers do as much evil as they please” (qtd. in Arendt 1958, p. 78).

Arendt (1971/2003) describes thinking variously as “the quest for meaning” (p. 165); the “solitary soundless dialogue” (p. 187) which can “unfreeze” (p. 173) conceptual fixity; a purgative of opinions and prejudgments (p. 174); and the mental activity which can liberate judgment, the “most political of man’s mental abilities” (p. 188). Judging in turn realizes thinking in its greatest moral and political significance. Before turning these considerations more specifically to the question of judging, and in preparation for them, I will consider the implications of Arendt’s conceptions of thinking in turn, maintaining the conversation with the questions of what it means be and to educate in view of the ethics of Arendt’s conscious pariah’s hermeneutics and their existential phenomenology of estrangement.
3.3 The “Pointless” Quest for Meaning

_The need for reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning._ (Arendt, 1978a, p. 15)

I begin with the question of thinking as the quest for meaning. This idea of thinking stands against that of knowing, one which represents to an Arendtian view a sort of eddy in the flow of thought, a calcification of consciousness in the course of understanding. Knowing seen as sedimentation in the river of consciousness is characterized by a utility which threatens the conditions of contingency which stages it. By virtue of its settled aspect, this is to say that the most reliable factual truth (say that of 2+2=4) tends to install a monocracy of significance which underwrites resistance to thinking. In an Arendtian light, this aspect may permit the legitimating authority of established institution, or at least the assurance of deferred meaning in the conceptual tropes of historical progress or truth. These, Arendt argues (1968a), initially arose from frustration with the limitation they represent, they “sprang from the despair of ever experiencing and knowing adequately all that is given to man and not made by him” (p. 62). Both ignore the question of the significance of consciousness, of existential being, as a matter of meaning instead of the more accessible one of epistemological utility and its compulsive instrument of truth. They then deny the sort of phenomenological reconsideration Arendt provides in support of a revitalizing notion of the political, which for Arendt is a basic question of the dignity of plural beings. Arendt elaborates the modern schism—whereby
"nothing is meaningful in and by itself" (p. 63)—which legitimates processes of knowing at the expense of the capacity for wonder and thought:

The enormity of this change is likely to escape us if we allow ourselves to be misled by such generalities as the disenchantment of the world or the alienation of man, generalities that often involve a romanticized notion of the past. What the concept of process implies is that the concrete and the general, the single thing or event, and the universal meaning, have parted company. This process, which alone makes meaningful whatever it happens to carry along, has thus acquired a monopoly of universality and significance. (p. 63-64)

The suggestion is alarming that education may be enmeshed in and staged by a "monopoly of universality and significance" and descendant of a history inscribed more with its own self-concept (or what Derrida would call a specter) than the subscription of classical antiquity to "the insistence on individual events and occurrences" (p. 65). One of the engagements of this thesis is to evoke and sustain the question of what it would mean to instead to consider "the uniqueness of the event" (p. 66) as, in early Christian historiography, Augustine also did, according to Arendt. This invocation of significance is one which invites thinking as an ongoing quest for meaning, and one by which "Arendt projects the idea of freedom into our conception of the past" (Boym, 2005, p. 608). This is a way by which thinking opens settled forms of knowing whose enmity to the
arbitrariness of the public realm induced the now well considered retreat. It is another instance, a thinking one, by which to set right anew.

Arendt follows Kant in making the distinction between thinking and knowing and it is with it in view, as the foregoing intended to show with respect to a historiographical instance of knowing history as process, that education may be approached with the question of thinking as the human quest for meaning. The desire to know and the need to think are considered separate impulses by Arendt, ones whose conflation, I would suggest, amounts to a disavowal of responsibility on the part of an educator, both to the student as thinker and to the world which requires them, to resist the evil of thoughtlessness and the denigration of the public realm (which, if not for thinking, could never exist). The lure of knowing in education is obvious given how knowledge, or better yet now, information—with what Derrida (2004) calls its “principal of integral calculability” (p. 145)—can be subjected to abstracted forms in response to the dictates of morality, efficiency and the progressivist developmentalism. In a crucial sense, it will always be appealing to subject the particular quality of the “non-time-space” of being, a class, a day, a term, to a generalization about it—one authorized by the “twofold infinity of past and future” which induces sameness by eliminating “all notions of beginning and end” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 68). There is a double register in this thought, one by which the quotidian is debased while its apparent facticity is elevated, instrumentalized in and by fact, and by the idea of the eternal which operates before and behind it. In this instance, one requires imagination, and the courage of a thinker, to put aside knowledge’s desire, manifest in the demand for the unequivocal and certain, for understanding in the need to

---

37 This devolves from the boundlessness of knowing and is an expression of the urge to know, as distinct from the need to think (Arendt, 1978a, p. 61).
think, which steps into the dark to see what becomes visible. Britzman (1998) echoes concern for the degree to which habituated formality becomes accepted as inevitable through the institutions of knowing in citing Anna Freud's suggestion that "step by step education aims at the exact opposite of what the child wants, and at each step it regards as desirable the very opposite of the child's instinctual strivings" (p. 1). In Arendtian terms, such strivings are those of the spontaneity of natality whose need to think resides in a domain which, like that of action, is both boundless and arbitrary. Unlike the protean survey of the utopian project of knowing however, thinking's purview is ephemera in what is called wisdom,

The thinking activity on the contrary leaves nothing so tangible behind, and the need to think can therefore never be stilled by the insights of 'wise men.' As far as positive results are concerned, the most we can expect from it is what Kant finally achieved in carrying out his purpose "...to eliminate the obstacles by which reason hinders itself." (p. 62)

For Arendt (1971/2003), knowing is "no less a world-building activity than the building of houses" (p. 163) and is "unquenchable because of the immensity of the unknown" (p. 163). Although we may examine in more detail the relations between politics and epistemology in the following chapter, for present purposes it should be noted that, for Arendt, the need to think is comparatively fruitless, its urge to understand is not guided by practical purposes—it is "good for nothing" (p. 166)—it leaves nothing

---

38 This, of course for Arendt (1978a), is no more or less than freedom, conception of which consistently defies its instrument: "the opposite of necessity is not contingency or accident but freedom" (p. 60).
tangible behind, it resists distillation or technicization, it can only be satisfied through more thinking which is only thus by virtue of its thinking anew. To not distinguish between thinking and knowing in this sense is to subordinate the former against the latter's legitimating accumulations; it is to risk of the evils of thoughtlessness in return for the security of knowing. Knowing, as a sort of precipitate of thinking, provides ends for means-ends rationality which conflates the two, it “works too well” in the sense considered hitherto. It does this in many ways, through many grammars of recognition and citation. Britzman (1998) identifies two sympathetic myths: “information neutralizes ignorance and that learners and their teachers will rationally accept new thoughts without having to grapple with unlearning the old ones” and that “information is a mirror of the actual and hence works as an antidote for ignorance” (p. 88). Such myth’s affirmations are moralistic, each “positions the knower within the normative and as a constructor of compassion and tolerance” (p. 88). Moralism sustains and is a reaction to frustration before the impotence of knowledge whose elegant forms would never be able to bear all with which they are burdened in the modern age.

The degree to which even emotivist or intuitive knowing disavows its inheritance in sedimented forms of thought is indicative of the uneasy bargain between knowing and the modern liberal and sovereign self, a bargain more recently cemented in alliances of different “ways of knowing” and categories of identity. They are also symptomatic of the paucity of the common realm, a domain which would otherwise provoke thinking beyond itself to counter these and other inner authorities, whose decisive characteristic for Arendt is that they lie “within”:
Only under conditions where the common realm between men is destroyed and the only reliability left consists in the meaningless tautologies of the self-evident can this capacity become “productive,” develop its own lines of thought, whose chief political characteristic is that they always carry with them a compulsory power of persuasion. (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 318)

It is worth continuing a lengthy citation to follow the effect on thinking of the worldless compulsions of knowing:

To equate thought and understanding with these...operations means to level the capacity for thought, which for thousands of years has been deemed to be the highest capacity of man, to its lowest common denominator, where no differences in actual existence count any longer, not even the qualitative difference between the essence of God and men. (p. 318).

Such knowing is sustained by a concept of history which reduces to intelligibility every past sensibility or paradigm as though it were but a stepping stone en route to the enlightened pinnacle of the present. This is the “backward glance” of the deterministic will whose agent is knowing’s compulsiveness by which “everything that is appears to
be necessary” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 168, emphasis in original).  Again we see liberalism’s “divine legislator” bestowing its monarchy on the knowing subject’s knowledge (one which also should not be disassociated from European chauvinism and subsequent imperial pretensions). Additionally apparent is the iron fist of the will which sustains the ascendancy of the project of accumulation of knowledge via its epistemological instrument, the “Archimedean standpoint” (Arendt, 1958, p. 13) which Descartes removed from the appearing world (Arendt, 1978b, p. 151) to an abstraction amenable to boundless conceit.  The backward glance then, in opening to an image in command of the future, must destroy what it has made of the past: “in order to will the future...men must forget and finally destroy the past” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 178). Thus the twin infinities of past and future join the lost memory of the gap between in a singular oblivion, a meaninglessness not induced by the loss of traditional authority, but by the emptiness of those which have replaced it. Thus, despite the noblest aspirations to “play the mediator in view of a treaty of perpetual peace” (Derrida, 2004, p. 109) so much continues to go wrong, as the uneasy liberal accommodations of modernity resist any instance of an emerging common world, on account of their investment in its denial. For Arendt, this oblivion is a dark “hole” in which the forces of human creativity are turned to horrific purposes such as those of the Nazi “corpse factories” (qtd. In Birmingham, 2003, p. 1), purposes that are but symptoms an unthinking will denies (Arendt, 1978b, p. 168).

---

39 The obverse of this, the thinking that all could have been otherwise, is perhaps surprisingly given for Arendt (1968a) in the nature of fact, whose “stubborn thereness, whose incoherent contingency ultimately defies all attempts at conclusive explanation” (p. 253).

40 This Arendt (1978a) calls an “altogether different enterprise” from thinking: “Thinking can and must be employed in the attempt to know, but in the exercise of this function it is never itself” (p. 61).
Should not the boundless character of knowing instead be testament to the need to keep thinking? In a world eclipsed by the ubiquity of what Arendt considers private concerns—the foremost and most immutable among which is mortality—it should perhaps come as no surprise that structures devolved from knowing have come to predominate over the thinking processes to which they owe their existence. Like the stolid terminus of knowing, a liberal ontology is characterized by finitude, by “natural fatality” (Arendt, 1958, p. 246) in that it comes to an end (albeit at the supposed limits of all creation). Plural being however, has no bounds, the difference of the other is limitless, appearing being is utterly diverse. This invites the intimation, on one hand, of human limitation, of “border situations in which man experiences the limitations that directly determine the conditions of his freedom” (Arendt, 1946/2005, p. 186), and, on the other, of the mysterious fluidity by which natality arrives to the (fraternal) twin worlds of the public and thinking.

Thinking is the elimination of the obstacles thought creates in its native form of representational generalization, it overturns itself in endless pursuit, in what Bollas (1995) calls “the greatest of pleasures: the love of representation” (p. 46). This, for Arendt (1971/2003) is simply the “highest state of being alive” (p. 175). It is a telling tension in Arendt’s thought (which also manifests in that between the judging actor and spectator) between the sublimnity of thinking, as in the last quoted statement, and that of the power of the public realm to actualize reality as considered in the last chapter. What might seem contradictory I believe should be seen as entirely compatible, as Arendt’s metaphor of “visiting” the public realm illustrates. In this sense, the “highest” reality consists in a traverse between thinking and action, a passage whose vehicle could be said
to be judging but whose impetus consists an estranged wonder at being and hermeneutic suspicion of its conceptual ancillaries. Such impetus arises in Arendt’s (1978a) sublime conception of conscience’s first instance as “a primordial indebtedness” (p. 185) for the sheer fact of existence and determined resistance to its eclipse.

As for Derrida’s (1994) concept of spectral phenomenology (or hauntology), meaning within a thinking consciousness as Arendt posits it is a representational process perennially mutating in response to itself, becoming “specters” or re-representations of itself from one instant to the next. To the extent to which one is given to accrete thinking, given or found as it were, or lend it to an “unconscious” (in the Arendtian sense) accumulation of knowledge, of follow a prescribed path in cognition, one is not thinking at all. As physicist Niels Bohr remarked, “No, no, you’re not thinking, you’re just being logical.” Similar is thinking which asserts its own willful or habitual repetitive forms, as in the case of worry or obsession. The view that “pointless thinking is worse than no thinking at all” (Murakami, 2005, p. 318) evinces this concern that thinking can also obliterate meaning. Arendt (1968a) argues the same in a much more broad sense insomuch as thinking displaces action, and the realm of freedom. As we have seen, these are of the appearing world which Arendt (1968a) evokes as “a realm of splendor which is not the realm of conceptual thought” (p. 165). That the two are readily conflated is, as we have seen, symptomatic of “the age old theoretical supremacy of being and truth over mere appearances” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 25). This supremacy consists in many complex historical and psychoanalytic forces, which one might colloquially call the quest for the
proverbial (and anti-political) “easy ways out” of *vita contemplativa*\(^{41}\) or not thinking at all.

If thinking is vulnerable to eclipse in the command of knowing and can itself impede freedom what then, if not for knowing, is the “point” of thinking. As we shall see, it is, among other things, a curious combination of a negative force—from Socrates’ wisdom in the discovery of what to *not* do than what *to* do—an imaginative agility and a disinterested moral weightlessness. Most of all however, Arendt’s thinking must be seen, like being itself, as precisely lacking such a thing as a “point.” It has the unmanageable quality of being, extant in the question of meaning and beauty, beyond will where “desubjectivised… [it gives] utterance to the truth of being” (Heidegger qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, 174-175). Arendt takes Heidegger’s idea and relocates the locus of being in a common world where thinking is most meaningful in preparation for judging, or encountering that world anew.

Thinking leads to meaning because it arrests its own processes of arrest, and thus lifts the human intellect from its own stasis, from the automaticity in which the banality of evil consists. Like art, thinking may be said to “exist in order to combat…habitualization” (Boym, 2005, p. 590). Meaning then is processes “constantly interrupted by human initiative” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 170) in crystallizations of singularity, “the event that bursts open meanings by never allowing them to stabilize” (Gambetti, 2005, p. 432), and comparable to nothing else. Meaning is thus subject, as Derrida has shown, to the aporia of representation wherein “its particularity will always be betrayed

\(^{41}\) In creating their own conditions for thought, abstracted conceptual forms can also “work” rather too well to meet a reality of utter distinctiveness, they clearly did the like of Heidegger’s moral compass little good.
by any foray into the universal domain of language” (Edgoose, 2001, p. 127). Thinking is so boundless and necessarily evanescent that it eludes assessment, except insomuch as it acts among others as judgment, thinking’s political realization in the “situated impartiality” (Disch qtd. in Sharpe, 1999, p. 129) that the public realm inaugurates. For Arendt this is thinking’s greatest significance, as among others and beyond rule—rule in this sense a double entendre allusive of both senses of the word as standard and as sovereignty (Arendt, 1978a, p. 69). Understood thus, one can only ask how welcome are human activities which elude assessment in education? Perhaps all that may be considered truly educative, in the sense of not merely imparting formulae and evaluating compliance, begins where evaluation ends and where judgment begins, in that singular realm of human dignity where justice obtains “through the loss of understanding and fluency” (Edgoose, 2001, p. 132). If thinking needs to be free from an imagined outcome, purposiveness or a destination in order to be other than the mere unfolding of a plan (which subjects and disciplines both teacher and student), one can readily see how unwelcome thinking may become in systems which require tangible and accountable results. Einstein reportedly had a relevant reminder on a sign in his office: “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.” For someone who reportedly thought about and around a single matter (relativity) for ten years, to an Arendtian understanding of thinking, his sign would seem plaintive understatement. I would recall at this point the Arendtian dictum that to uncover a problem is to not discover a solution, to which I would add for topicality that to not uncover the problem would be infinitely worse.

42 The best example of this in Arendtian thought is as regards the ‘who’ one is: “the moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is...with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us” (Arendt, 1958, p. 181).
In recognition of the risk and necessity of thinking, an educator may be disposed to assume the risk of resisting overemphasis on content knowledge, of thematizing knowing’s disciplining of thinking and resisting the convenience of its measurement. This would perhaps be to create more thoughtful and politically significant provocations. This is less a pragmatic nod to the ever shifting curricular landscape than a philosophical accommodation both to the shifting epistemological one and to the ontology of an appearing world—for whose measurement no instrument will ever be devised. No amount of content knowledge will lead to ethical sensitivity and agility, despite the “dream of professional ethics...to standardize responses to difficult situations” (Edgoose, p. 124), because thinking and judging are by definition resistant to codification. The irony of such a dream is that it instrumentalizes what are, as ethics, arguably religious matters, questions as to the “good.” It is this sort of obfuscation which empties the publicity of action in place of the bewildering reliability of constancy, which normalizes the sublime.

Following Socrates, Arendt (1971/2003) advises that teaching can most nobly aspire, on the one hand, to resist prescriptions to ends and, on the other to “infect with perplexity” (p. 173). Thinking as quest for meaning is in the service of the unknown and unforeseeable, of the intrinsic significance of particularity (which thinking itself betrays), of a vital future of action and speech which can serve no end that could be imagined beyond the setting right anew, the renewal of a common world. That is, in the habitus of appearing, reflecting on its meaning and appearing again in the response which is judging. Thinking, if linked to action and appearance among others, is the vector to being as the first realization of itself, it gives “a hand to the essence of Being” (Heidegger
in Arendt, 1978b, p. 180) as the gift and freedom in consciousness, a gift crucially misconstrued in modernity as free-will. Thinking in support of political judgment and action “does not serve knowledge and is not guided by practical purposes” and is not “a mere instrument for ulterior purposes” (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 166). This is thinking as the call to “poetize on the riddle of being” (Heidegger qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 192) as the quest for meaning beyond familiar form, beyond which lies “fundamental incomprehensibility” (p. 196). One can only imagine beyond imagining what dreams this inspires instead. Their thinking is the only meaningful response of a being whose totality is forever partial before that of “Truth,” which Benjamin (1968) calls instead “the rumor about the true things” (p. 144), whose precincts remain plural and therefore necessarily unfamiliar: “Let us thank God that we don’t know the truth” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 229).

Thinking before the truth of being is always foreign. Like poetic language, thinking can never “fix this “distance stance’” (Mandel’shtam qtd. in Boym, 2005, p. 588). It is estranged but not alienated. Thinking is the response of a being alive in the twin mysteries of plurality and natality and is thus, and this is surely unsurprising to an evolutionary biological view, inextricably related with and parallel to the emergent phenomenal reality of the world of appearance’s public realm. Thinking’s liberation before “fundamental incomprehensibility” creates “the hiatus between liberation and the constitution of freedom” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 216). This hiatus bridges “the abyss of pure spontaneity” (p. 216) and makes both meaning and freedom possible, not as utopian terminus of ideated finality, but in specifically human activity. As Nietzsche (2004) wrote, “the creator wished to look away from himself,—thereupon he created the world” (pt. 1, s. 3, para. 3).
As we have seen from a number of viewpoints, for Arendt the presumption and preemptions of the human will coalesce in a kind of self-destructive mania. This neurotic dispossession of the world in nostalgic efforts at its repossession is sustained by the dictates of integrity of the phantasmal modern self, alienated by its own fragmentary dispossession, by its and action’s necessary opacities. The orientation of the human intellect according to causality, will, fabrication and functionalization then are expressions of and means to an atavistic dream of reprieve. That the dream inaugurates human self-denigration seems only to fuel the need of it, as though, in sinking, one can only cling more tightly to the mast. This is a viciously circular path which leads a short distance to violence, by which the will attempts to reassert its dominion. Violence for Arendt is the action which destroys its own freedom, in which it may command only the sovereign’s “craving to persist” (Heidegger qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 193). In the winds of thinking, together with its compliments in action and speech and their interlocutor judging, Arendt (1968a) argues that humanity is given perplexity, a wonder at the “chain of miracles” on which “our whole existence rests” (p. 168). This apperception may induce a change of mind in the making strange of the comfortable and the decision to effect a “conscious interruption by human initiative” (p. 170) in view of the world. Then choices about the world human life is “thrown into” (Heidegger qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 184), the world humanity must actualize and dignify despite the lack of rule, take on a broader import and a deeper significance. The perplexity of Socrates requires a poetic response, and allusive and metaphoric engagement of the imagination, an il-logic of the unthinkable which can be seen also as a guiding spirit of Art and the edification of the humanities.
The conception of thinking as a quest for meaning may manifest in action and speech in the intimation of and need for the density of plurality and the miracle of nratality, both forever provoking horizons of intelligibility and human understanding. How then is this quest for meaning realized? What are the implications of the structure of the invisible mental activity known as thinking? As a “solitary soundless dialogue” (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 187) made possible by consciousness, the manifold activity of thinking as Arendt imagines it draws us deeper into their fecund considerations.

3.4 Multiplicities Within and Without

In education, as in the modern liberal mentality which stages it and makes it intelligible, it is common to consider communities as collections of individuals, as diversities within unities. Arendt's conception of thinking invites us to reconsider the constitution of presumed communities, beginning with the locus of the individual self. From the understanding of Classical antiquity (1968a, p. 158) and Socrates in particular, Arendt posits the conscious self as inevitably multiple and thinking as reflective of that fact: “dualism is the existential condition of thought” (p. 158). Thinking is the process which actualizes the difference “given in consciousness” (1971/2003, p. 185), as “a difference…inserted into my Oneness” (p. 184). Arendt links the multiplicity of the self and that of the appearing world as such:

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. (p. 184)

Thinking considered in this way invites a different responsibility to plurality than that presupposed for integral and singular agents in a democratic polity. Before we consider the outline of this responsibility and implications for education, we need to visit the constitution of Arendt’s multiple thinker.

Consciousness, Arendt reminds us, is literally “to know with myself” (p. 183). As such, “I am inevitably two-in-one” (p. 184). In this view, within the very form of human consciousness there exists otherness, a self as both itself and other.⁴³ The dialogue among these immanent entities Arendt calls thinking. Thus, as a precondition of thought, it is a responsibility of such a plural being to maintain multiplicity even as it seeks the accord of non-contradiction with itself (1968a, p. 240), which is understanding. Against this view, liberal presuppositions of singular individual thinkers reject thinking in advance. This is the inherent cognitive anathema to plurality which Arendt (1968a) identifies in “the disastrous consequences for any community that began in all earnest to follow ethical precepts derived from man in the singular—be they Socratic, or Platonic or Christian” (p. 241). They may be considered normative insomuch as they foster cultural practices premised in homogeneous identities which presuppose unthinking singularity, or as Arendt (1971/2003) elegantly if starkly puts it: “the fashionable search for identity is futile and our modern identity crisis could be resolved only by losing consciousness”

---

⁴³ Psychoanalytic thought is a rich source for more on this notion, as Lacoue-Labarthe (1989) wrote “this splitting, or, as Lacan also said—an inevitable word here—“alienation” of the subject “with respect to itself,” makes it oscillate vis-à-vis its double” (p. 170) such that “it comes to itself only in losing itself” (p. 175).
(p. 184). The extent to which oneself is *one self* then, one is no one, or no one who could have actuality in a plural world. The danger for education is that it fosters an unconscious student, who of course becomes a population, a nation, a people, "unthinking...like sleepwalkers" (1978a, p. 191). Without a certain cautious reconsideration, even the question of *what do you think* imposes a structure of interpretation contra thinking. Ironically, by such inherited presuppositions, the question asks the thinker never to begin thinking at all, as if the question is a cue to know something, to know what you think instead of to think it anew. Such a demand can only, in the vast preponderance of instances, inspire a sort of panic at not knowing what one thinks (because one has not yet thought about it), or what one thought then no longer makes sense in the moment of the question (because an opinion is *formed*, and necessarily mutates). In either case, before knowing’s monarchic authority and the pervasive ascendancy of the knowing over the nettlesome thinking self, the question is unintelligible, and unfair. The implied structure of the question’s “you” denies in advance the possibility of it realizing its latent multiplicity as thinking. The resultant value structure will tend to favor the earthy concision of the ready answer over the soaring kites of thought. It will also, and very significantly, exile listening. For if half of a dialogue is listening and if one does not engage in the inner dialogue of thinking, one will have no basis or justification for doing the same with others to whom one appears. Absent thinking’s inner dialogue, listening becomes acquisitive and willful, an instrument of need or fear, which in turn supports self validating processes of unconsciousness which not-thinking fosters. If the need for harmony denies the world, it will never

---

44 Apropos of which, and illustrating well Arendt’s conception of thinking’s resistant aspect, is Churchill’s clarification that “kites rise highest against the wind - not with it.”
manifest for in so doing it must reject the bases, a multiple self and the appearing world beyond, from and in which it may meaningfully, if ephemerally, arise.

In searching for a more educative alternative to such presuppositions, and a more pedagogically and ethically responsible approach to the two-in-one of thinking, one may try to find ways to kindle Socrates' perplexity in asking instead “what might be thought about this?” or “how might we consider this?” or “what questions does this inspire?” “what can we wonder about this?” or even “how is this strange, novel, unique, curious?” As in many instances, one may find that Bob Dylan (1997) can help, in this case with the background of thinking’s dynamic formulations “Feel like I’m drifting/Drifting from scene the scene/I'm wondering what in the devil could it all possibly mean?”

The educative objects in Arendt’s (1968a) thinking are first to ignite its discursive character, “running, as it were, from place to place, from one part of the world to another, through all kinds of conflicting views” (p. 238) and second, to explicitly confront the characterization of thinking as monolithic singularity. For example, such confrontations could accost forms of accumulative knowing, calculative computation, algorithmic programmatics, against any mental program which knows where it is going, and which renders of where it has been familiar. These contrast thought’s disinterested estrangement to itself, its explorative heuristics in wondering, playing or a kind of dancing perhaps. Following Arendt, a singular mechanism of thought should not be considered thinking at all, but rather, as Bohr adverts, an exercise in logic in the mechanization of the human psyche.45 Parallel to the superimposition of fabrication, which is amenable to organizational efficiencies of regimentation and regulation, on

45 Lacan argues that “madness...is an exercise of the most rigorous logic” (qtd. in Leader & Groves, 1995, p. 112),
action, a singular conception of thinking voids and subverts the plurality of the thinking subject. It invites the unthinking destruction of the plurality of the common world—the ultimate “disastrous” consequence of unthinking. In effect then, because Eichmann was one, he permitted himself to become subordinate to the other, to the monstrous Nazi moral vacuum and it murderous excesses. The irony of the liberal autonomous self is that, in its singularity, is it heteronymous. One and other in tension within the thinking self (also an instance of what Arendt calls conscience) opens the possibility for judging by defamiliarizing the self to itself, in what Montesquieu called a secret return on myself—“retour secret sur moi-même” (qtd. in Arendt, 1978a, p. 75). Like the attitude of the conscious pariah, its significance obtains in that it makes itself strange in order to stand apart. Its departures are “construed on the principle of the outward space in which my non-mental acts take place” (p. 75) in order to return changed, discomfited and unsettled. The theme of estrangement is relevant in the case of the invisible world of thinking for “Man’s inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom” (Arendt, 1958, p. 244). Simply put, when is divided, when one can, as Nietzsche (1996) says, “lose oneself” (p. 306), one’s thought is ready for the crystallization of action in consciousness as judgment.

In education, strategies such as brainstorming or inviting time to think before responding are attempts to create space for thought. They may not however apprehend thinking’s significance in view of it as a multiple phenomenon of a single consciousness. Insomuch as that is the case, thinking is re-inscribed with the liberal imprimatur: One thinks, even if, in a Vygotskian or social constructivist view, one is to think with others.
In an Arendtian perspective, the reverse is the case, to think is a singular phenomenon (for in the appearing world he or she who thinks appears singly) of a multiple consciousness (the world is thus of a multiplicity of multiplicities, each single appearing being consisting also of a hidden representational multiplicity). This perspective foregoes the liberal dream of a singularity so universal as to absolve itself of responsibility. The multiplicity of a plural world is always imperiled by singularities, even as it most significantly is constituted by them (referring again here to the “who” of the appearing individual). To know that time is needed to think or that to think better is to think with others are not views which appreciate with Arendt the multiperspectival dialogics of which thinking consists. To conceive of thinking as an instance of the difference and otherness which inheres in a human consciousness, is to invite the self’s alterity as what Agamben calls “a structuring condition of possibility” (qtd. in Britzman, 1998, p. 92) and a libratory pre-condition of freedom. Resisting the institutions of withdrawal from the world is to make possible the self’s departure from the shadows of bewilderment which the banished otherness of frustrated liberal autonomy cast. It is not to produce otherness as a condition for recognition but to be among others, without and within, as participation in the appearing circumstances of the human condition, in all its miraculous strangeness.

With the suggestion of thinking’s implication in the poetics of meaning, and of the ethical significance of its non-unitary dialogic form, what then can it be said to do?

---

46 For this can be a way the autonomous liberal self identifies and justifies itself, by way of the spectral proxies of a legion of straw men.
3.5 Unfreezing Fixity: The Danger of Thinking

For Hannah Arendt (1971/2003), thinking has not only to assail structures of knowing in order to transcend it to meaning and understanding, it must also be “somehow self-destructive” (p. 166). Resonant with action, thinking has the qualities of evanescence and unverifiability. In order to remain as such, the most significant operation of thinking is to eliminate its own forms. As to the difficulty of apprehending the gap between past and future into which humanity is thrown, laden with forms sedimented in what was, thinking’s challenge for Arendt is like the veil of Penelope which “undoes every morning what it had finished the night before” (p. 166). For her thinking “has the peculiarity of doing away with its own previous manifestations” (p. 175). It has an anarchic aspect which, if it is to remain what may be worthy of its name, must consist against “applying general rules of conduct to particular cases as they arise in ordinary life” (p. 176). In other words, Arendt calls us to retain an intimation of thinking beyond any conception of thinking, to retain what it cannot be, in responsibility to what it must be, which is that which it is not, and thus may thereby become. This echoes Derrida’s (2004) “unconditional condition” (p. 105) of freedom of thought to which he argues the university must uniquely aspire. Arendt identifies in concepts “something considerably less tangible than the structure perceived” (p. 172) and charges thinking with the necessary “defrosting” (p. 173) of itself, the pursuing of the intangibility against the structure. In an important sense, because thinking is invisible it is less prone to be self-undermining than action whose effects may be seen and judged. Thinking’s invisibility

47 It is surely ironic that an intellectual activity which trades in representational abstractions should be expected to work against its own generalizations, that it may be given to do so would be in response to the provocation and persistent multiplicity of the appearing world, thinking’s “objective datum,” deprived of the authority of reality in modernity.
masks its structures whose effects are more clandestine, though no less effectual. It is therefore dependent upon the appearing world, and not the other way around.

Not dissimilar to Derrida's deconstruction, Arendt (1978) considers thinking always to be "recoiling on itself" (p. 197) and resistant to the doctrinaire imposition and self-imposed or inherited codification. As such, thinking retains a vertiginous aspect of, to again borrow Heidegger's metaphor, the wind. The wind of thought has no productive function; it creates absences where fixed presences were. It, like almost all of Socrates' thinking, is almost entirely negative, or negating (Arendt, 1978a, p. 180). One may recognize the liberation of this function of thought in considering the advancement of human knowledge, for who would deny that to know beyond the known requires thinking? New knowledge does not arrive in containers from outer space, nor is it infused by nameless technicians into the digital simulacrum of the internet. In Arendt's (1958) argument, since Plato the Western tradition's identification of knowledge with command (p. 225) has obscured the destructive necessity of thinking, a fertilization of the ground from which totalitarianism sprang. As with action and natality's impositions in the burden of freedom, thinking exacts its own price, it "inevitably has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics" (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 176). In this sense, the requirement for thinking as knowledge's foil and necessity would deepen the more knowledge becomes available, the more information is

48 It is interesting to consider this metaphor for thinking alongside Churchill's, which in Arendtian terms may more accurately indicate judging, in that it instantiates a particular appearance in the sky of thought against what prevails there.
at hand.\textsuperscript{49} Against this authority and its command—the denial of whose force since the World Wars is testament to the tenacity with which it is relied upon—it would be necessary as well to acknowledge the unequivocal risk of thinking: “There are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is dangerous” (p. 177). It is dangerous to knowing and dangerous to itself, relentless in its self destruction. Thinking, through its annihiliating nature, unsettles the given, the accepted, the optimal, the secure, the normative and the calculable. It presents the danger that it can “at every moment turn against itself... [and] produce a reversal of the old values” (p. 177). Thus one is right to expect to find in the view of history great expenditures of energy precisely to avoid thinking, these to retain stability perhaps in the name of order, safety, cohesion, accountability or consistency. Lest one get the impression of thinking for Arendt as the demon seed of chaos, as we shall see soon enough, its destructive quality is the very aspect with which human judgment can meet the contingency and unpredictability of the future and the public realm and remain vital. Its anarchy requires judgment to be ethical, that is, to be inscribed by sensus communis, or the “Ariadne thread of common sense” (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 311) spun in the actuality of the public realm. It is by thinking’s very restlessness that it remains relevant and ethical, in its refusals of finitum. One may recall that Arendt felt, and this may be taken for the animating impetus behind thinking’s impatience, that she had no right to not find answers (qtd. in Feldman 2000, p. 30) for “to be given to such passivity is called prejudice” (Arendt, 1978c, p. 258). Clearly one may infer that she felt the same way about the questions by which thinking may unsettle itself, and the extent to which thinking is not an open question, it is not thinking at all.

\textsuperscript{49} Thus the decisive difference between commons of a public realm and a “knowledge commons.”
For educators, thinking as unfreezing fixity may be useful initially in unfreezing thinking about the very activity itself. One can recognize that thinking can be an anxious and fraught activity, and thus resist the desire to "find results which would make further thinking unnecessary" (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 177-178). The anti-political danger thinking presents arises in this consideration: That in its ambiguity, its lack of tangible result, its "good for nothing" (p. 166) quality and its remove from the world of action, thinking inspires potential thinkers to "get used to never making up [their] minds" (p. 178), never decide to undertake the initiatives of action. It is the paradoxical nature of thought that its fluidity is its authority. One makes up one's mind because, although one knows such thought is provisional, the world requires the appearance of a thinking being's singularity. Of course, a most valuable sort of opinion may be one which evinces equivocation, in which the complexity of the moment or issue appears. Regardless, the opinion is not an end in itself but a means by which the plurality of the world is realized. The commitment to a sort of passionate provisionality is political in that it seeks to avoid the twin and related dangers of un-thinking and disappearance, or the worldless condition whose symptoms are denial and privation. In this unfortunate instance may be seen the alienation of thoughtlessness, which finds itself (for it is not lost) in the irrevocable mire of dogma and subject to the manipulation of the other which it had vanquished. In the discomfort, confusion and irresolution of thinking, the possibility of freedom is retained as sure as an open window admits fresh air, on which undoubtedly will float fragrant history, preference, genealogy and habit (to which it retains the possibility of address, to converse in the archaic sense of association). Although these may deceive and mislead, to a conscious pariah they are the stuff of inspiration (in the sense of drawing in or
inhaling). Contingent and ambiguous though they may be, what they are most certainly not is suffocating.

For educators, it is my view that much of the space for thinking must be created in the name of the responsibility to know well. Learning can be seen as an enforced governmentality of knowing for which only thinking is the antidote. Thinking approaches the apparent fixities of knowing with appreciation and suspicion, as it does itself. Every thinker knows as if for the first time. Knowledge is not to be acquired, but rather to be responded to, as problems call not for solutions (a “fix”) but a response. Thinking is the kernel of the knowing subject's responsibility. This is a responsibility poised in the balance of the contingent and the infinite, where the storm of thought ever opens what may alight there anew.

3.6 A Purgative of Opinions

Now that the word has crept onto these pages, opinion merits consideration with respect to thinking, particularly by virtue of its significance to Arendt's conception of judging. As sure as my argument forefronts the importance of Arendt's recoveries of the public realm and thinking, it aims to resurrect a conception of opinion as doxic truth, the only index of validity that appears. Opinion is a channel of sorts between what is given to the five senses which engage the appearing world and thinking, the faculty by which one removes oneself from it to reflect on it (and, as just discussed, on one's reflections about it). It matters as much that thinking, the encountering in reflection of what comes to pass and seize the attention in a play of representation, might come to form opinions as that it would destroy them. As for Socrates' wisdom's negative quality, thinking for opinion
must "get rid of what was bad in them...without however making them good, giving them truth" (Arendt, 1972/2003, p. 174). Again thinking must arrest its own processes, as a "gadfly as well as electric ray" (p. 175) as Socrates saw his aporetic provocations. In one sense, opinion is formed like sculpture, by chipping away at what is inconsistent, awkward, inelegant or false. It is, as Derrida argues, also an erasure, as in art and literature when whole worlds, whole structures of intelligibility, vie for recognition and insinuate their own conditions of intelligibility. In this sense, an opinion is also an idiom of desire, an "entire perceptico-inclinatory ensemble," (Smith, 2007, p. 72) that "in order to take actual form must erase itself and produce itself as the price of this self erasure" (Derrida, 2004, p. 116). For Arendt, opinion is an instance of the ‘who’ of somebody and thus a vital medium of judging (and vice versa). If, as Arendt insisted, judging cannot be taught but only be practiced, then experience with and among opinion becomes all the more significant as a pre-political necessity.

Arendt argues that the western intellectual tradition elevates types of thought which seek to possess and develop rules by which to subsume particulars, rules robust enough to, in effect, anticipate and conquer circumstance. The abstracted and universal habits of mind endemic in the tradition’s Cartesian legacy (Toulmin, 1990, p. 31), for Arendt are tantamount to a flight from the responsibility to think in preparation for judgment, whereby the generalizations of thinking are “illuminated” by particulars’ typifying specificity. An opinion thus has both a perspectival and a partial aspect (as opposed to a belief), it is “formed” and not “held” which implies greater mutability unexclusive of plurality. While necessary to actualize the reality of a plural world, opinions also vitiate thinking as “those unexamined prejudgments which prevent thinking
by suggesting that we know where we not only don’t know but cannot know” (p. 174). Opinions, particularly absent the validating contest of the public realm, may threaten to lead away from the partiality and contingency of meaning and into the enforcement of "truths." For Arendt, an ethical response to the lure of opinion’s solipsistic convergences is Socrates’, who “remains steadfast with his own perplexities” (p. 175). This can be considered as a double register in thought, a provisionality inscribed in all certainty. This is also for Arendt (1958) both a precondition for and the effect of participation in the natal power of action: “only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can we be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new” (p. 240). What could be more telling of the significance of this argument that the American response to the fundamentalist atrocity of 9/11 whose opposite, instead of the counter-fundamentalism of limitless “War on Terror,” surely would have more democratically been a commitment to the power of plurality—against, and not in relativistic tolerance of, chauvinistic violence. The injury of that act to the sense of sovereignty inspired the certain immediacy of a forceful and violent response, the response of a wounded sovereign, to whom everyone looks like a transgressor or conspirator. It is one which already exhausts itself having long ago squandered the goodwill and sympathy the traumatic injury prompted. Illuminated with the more general standpoint of opinion (and not of specific opinions), the power of plurality against such violence would have allowed the possibility of new and unanticipated forms of power, about whose significance one can now only sadly speculate.

---

50 This tension is a parallel necessity to pluralism’s tenuous and not unlimited tolerance of forces bent on its destruction, for which the acknowledged frailty of judgment is the only defense.

51 One may also recall American Justice Learned Hand’s reminder that the Spirit of Liberty is one “not too sure that it is right.”
The maieutic purging of opinions is of such importance for Arendt (1971/2003) because of its clear political significance: “The purging element in thinking, Socrates’ midwifery, that brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them—values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions” (p. 188). In this function, thinking has a “liberating effect” (p. 188) on judging by dispatching misconstrual and inviting the unexpected. Thinking as a purgative of opinion is the reconsideration, the confrontation and the provocation of “what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory” (p. 45) by way of engagement in the world of others. In this, habits of mind become more transparent so that they too may become subject to thinking’s restless erasures. To think clearly in this reading is to discover how one thinks wrongly, not solely in an analytical sense, in that of failing to follow prescribed algorithms of standard and criteria, but how one does not take into consideration other views, does not represent the views of others to oneself. These are, and Arendt is a brilliant example of this, “not necessarily limited to one’s contemporaries” (1968a, p. 231) for others live with us always in art, literature, philosophy and history. Parallel to action and speech’s trust for the world as a place fit for appearance, thinking in its purgative and destructive senses also requires trust, a sort of letting go of assumption, expectation and prediction in order, as with the more public instances of human activity, to be at all. As in all human realms, this is to begin.

52 The meaning of such otherness is foremost in the distinctiveness of aesthetic singularity, of the ‘who’ evinced. Who could say that the foremost significance of Joyce’s Ulysses obtains otherwise? The virtuosity of the new in its case can restructure the conditions of possibility (to again borrow Agamben’s phrase) of thinking by what Weir (1989) calls “catachresis” which “serves to clear an opening in language, to interrupt the relentlessness of inscription and enact the absence of name” (p. 228). In this case, an in many others like it, the representation of views of others carries a performative force which, like action and speech, restructures that which engages it in the inscription of what could have been neither anticipated nor subsequently intelligibly identified.
Arendt (1971/2003) names as thinking's chief characteristic that it "interrupts all doing" (p. 164). As such it is in perpetual tension, as many teachers will readily recognize, with whatever one is doing:

For it is true that the moment we start thinking on no matter what issue we stop everything else, and this everything else, again whatever it may happen to be, interrupts the thinking process; it is as though we moved into a different world. (p. 165)

Thinking is "out of order" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 197) and carries the risks of its inherent incompletion without the security ascribed to knowing. When thinking stops it is as if it had never been at all, and when it continues, due to the surfeit of meaning, in it one must endure what Derrida (1990) calls "the ordeal of the undecidable" in which freedom of thought obtains beyond "the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process" (p. 963) and thus in aporetic paralysis by which justice may devolve. Similarly Arendt (1971/2003) writes of the twofold "paralysis of thought" which consists in its interruptive and disorienting aspects. She elaborates:

If your action consisted in applying general rules of conduct to particular cases as they arise in ordinary life, then you will find yourself paralyzed because no such rules can withstand the wind of thought. (p. 176)
It follows that the greater the pressure to know, the less tolerable thinking would seem for thoughts in the guise of knowledge, "as assured certainties...become reified and unthinking dogmas" (Derrida, 1984, p. 120-121). Clearly a parallel, or perhaps an inverse relation, may be suggested between the greater authority of knowing and the evil borne of thoughtlessness. The boundlessness of knowing and the limitlessness of thinking are of very different species. To the extent to which knowing is emphasized in education at the expense of thinking, the risk is in choosing stupidity to avoid ignorance. Arendt reads humanity into a larger story than that of the life of a single individual, while dignifying that singularity with the infinity of its particularity. With respect to thinking, the knowing better it may inspire is related to the view to immortality, the "glory" of the Ancient Greeks, in *eudaimonia* (or living well) within the "organized remembrance" (Arendt, 1958, p. 198) of the *polis* whose referent is the common world. Arendt’s reminder is that existence exceeds imagining, her counsels are for caution about acquiescing to what is considered known and suspicion as to the conditions it prescribes, conditions to which humanity is subject, especially given the abjection these have visited upon the modern age. To persist in a sort of empiricist positivism is a fool’s errand, a denial of the reality of the invisible forces which define (but do not contain) the world, a liberal conceit which fails in its isolation even before the commonality of language.

As a purgative of opinions, thinking “always deals with objects that are absent, removed from direct sense perception” (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 165), it deals in representations of those stimuli given to perception, its country is a stranger’s. Therefore, not only does thinking interrupt doing in affording the opportunity for the formation of opinions, but it substitutes “ordinary sense-given objects” with “such invisibles as
concepts or ideas" (p. 165). Thinking creates the abstractions by which the world may be
eclipsed. Thus the need for thinking to recoil on itself, to destroy its forms, to interrupt
its processes, just as action interrupts automatic processes which govern the living world
in inexorable trajectories unto death. Thinking’s interruptive and abstracted aspects can
be felt to be unnatural. An educator concerned, as was Arendt, with questions of thinking
and evil needs to acknowledge both the discomfort of the experience of thinking and the
ways in which it diverts the imagination from the appearing world, from the
phenomenological first instance. While interrupting action and distancing from the
appearing world, thinking may either provide or divest one of a sense of wholeness
depending on the character of its response to its being: If complacent it consoles as for
the Lord of Dreams, if animated, it irritates and troubles the desire for unity, as for the
conscious pariah. Gitlin (2005) exemplifies the insinuating ambivalence and iconoclasm
of Arendt’s conceptualization of thinking with this suggestion: “Try telling someone
who feels the hunger for wholeness that this is a totalitarian principle” (p. 402). Try
telling someone who thinks they know what thinking is that they had better think again.
Try telling someone who finds themselves lost in a storm to trust the wind.

3.7 Conclusion

From this movement through Arendt’s conceptions of thinking, one may conclude in
general terms that thinking is a mental activity that activates ambiguity in order to subvert
its own forms, in readiness for the novel and unprecedented (which are thereafter
engaged by way of judging). That thinking should take such a form is a matter both of
ontological fidelity to the “non-time-space” between past and future and in respect for the
unexpected of which natality and plurality consist. For Arendt, the unexpected is all that should be reasonably expected of the future if it is to be preferred as more than the continuation of the automatic processes which populate and condemn a “belated” present. Resonance with this concern can be found in the thought of many and diverse writers. Adorno (1950/1993) considers intolerance for ambiguity and its implication in the authoritarian personality. Skovsmose and Valero (2001) direct attention to an “ideology of certainty” which situates thinking as a sort of secular heresy. Similarly, Gabbard (2003) makes a compelling argument about how the formation of secular conscience by liberal-capitalism’s market fundamentalism is presupposed by a human condition proscribed by the law of scarcity. Such a conceptual landscape, he argues, renders thinking anathema to the functionalized behaviorism of personal and institutional “development” and related accreditation according to market use-value.\(^53\) Friedrich Nietzsche (1989) describes the conformity of what he calls the “herd mentality,” endemic to unselfconscious routinization and latent resentment in “family alliances, communities, tribes, peoples, states, churches” (p. 199) and the self-defeating reign of airless moral heteronomies. Deborah Britzman (1998) employs psychoanalytic theory to theorize a human “passion for ignorance” (p. 75) which complicates (by sublimating) as it simplifies consciousness through neglect of the “unlearning” involved in learning (which recalls Arendt’s reference to the veil of Penelope), and to the detriment of thinking and trust in thought. Finally, Cornelius Castoriadis (1991a) pits a type of thinking as the instance of autonomy, a thinking which views at a distance, against the heteronymous singularity of the “imaginary institution” (p. 67) of a particular rationality’s “social imaginary” which undergirds every social order and vests it with intelligibility.

\(^53\) Of which this thesis is self-consciously if quixotically an instance.
From these considerations, it may be tempting to posit great conspiracy arrayed against thinking, a human allergy of sorts, one escalated by apprehension of the evil (and simultaneous blindness to its character) of not-thinking into a nightmarish vast self-reproducing wickedness. Such over-determination forgets the natal power of action in Arendt’s political philosophy. For Hannah Arendt, the resistance to thinking, as that to action, obtains from its ineffability and endlessness, its inherent anti-instrumentality and aversion to command. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that thinking would be under threat or that it would perennially require something approximating resuscitative intervention. This would understandably be a consequence of a thinking species’ desire to be “at home in the world” or to be free or to know wisdom or to be and do good. A tragic beauty of this world is that the moment of accomplishment is ever that of loss, and it is this riddle of existence which opens consciousness to thinking and may retain its openness or, more specifically, as Heidegger (2001) puts it, the “openness of [the] open” (p. 59). Arendt’s passionate thinking “balances thinking and thanking, reflection and gratefulness for being—in the world” (Boym, 2005, p. 605). As an inner corollary to action, thinking is a rather atmospheric movement, toward liberation and in the service of freedom, one made more beautiful by the drudgery and neglect it defies. That thinking in *amor mundi* (for the love of the world) would seem at times a mountain too high may recall romanticism’s underestimation of love’s quality as “the weight of the soul” (Augustine qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 95). The dimension of the challenge then Garcia Marquez (1989) recalls to us simply, “for nothing in this world is more difficult than love” (p. 270).
That thinking would warrant such thoroughgoing consideration in this thesis is testament to its significance to Arendt’s oeuvre. Its enormous capacity to institute and regulate the conditions for ill—in both absence (as evil) and presence (as un-freedom)—and good—as natality’s inner adjunct and plurality’s interior instance—is of clear significance. It describes a sort of parallel interior course in human experience which interacts with that of action in infinitely complex ways, in the creation of both unprecedented and derivative forms. These are then, to the thinking person, encountered as the emergent phenomenon called history, the Storyteller’s natal domain. Like Arendt’s phenomenology of action in the appearing world beyond concept, history may be reconsidered with conceptual modesty to invite the new, even from the past, as “new thing in an old world” for:

Just as the past is commonly perceived as a trace of the present, we could perceive the present at ‘the past’ of what-has-been, that is as the residue of the movement of withdrawal into absence. (Vázquez, 2006, p. 54)

Arendt’s (1971/2003) preoccupation with thinking and the life of the mind invariably leads to a still more pressing investigation of that ‘most political of Man’s mental abilities” (p. 189) for which thinking most meaningfully prepares, what she calls judging. The pathological absence of thinking in Eichmann exemplified the absence of which Arendt contended evil to consist because it rendered him unable to judge. A possibly more troubling question concerns how someone as indisputably thoughtful as Heidegger could choose to serve a totalitarian regime. Much of the animating energy
behind Arendt's thought is aimed to illuminate how it appears that thinking itself, although essential, is insufficient to resist evil. In the latter part of her life, Arendt's project became concerned with thinking in the service of judging. In this work's penultimate turn it is to this I now attend, as a culmination, if not a fusing, of these investigations of thinking and the public realm, and their implications for ways to imagine possibility as the perennial first instance of how to re-imagine education.
CHAPTER 4 - JUDGING

The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly.

(Arendt 1971/2003, p. 189)

The beautiful teaches us to love without self-interest.

(Arendt 1978c, p. 270)

4.1 Thinking, Knowing and the Limits of all Things

Arendt (1971/2003) recalls Socrates' depiction of the quest for meaning which thinking realizes Eros, "a love which is primarily a need—it desires what it has not" (p. 179). This love is in what wisdom consists, not in being wise. The importance of the desire of this love is that it establishes a relationship with its object, a relationship which thinking negotiates. On the other side of the matter, the confounding difficulty of this desire which manifests is that it can never achieve final certainty, can never possess and become what it loves. As if to ameliorate this indeterminacy's discomfort, this lack of final satisfaction of which wisdom consists, Voltaire observed that "doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd." Meaning, as we have seen in contradistinction to knowledge, is an ultimately ephemeral pursuit, one whose epiphanic irresolution tempts significance to the necessity of the desire instead of its irrevocable unsatisfiability. The desire for wisdom as such becomes willful and possessive, as one poet wrote, "I want this

54 I shall continue to favour Arendt's use of the verb judging for its connotations of fluidity in parallel with thinking, though without abandoning the activity’s noun form altogether, appropriate as it is to judging’s particular appearing solidity.
thing and this wanting will make me poor” (Lilburn 1999, p. 75). The result of the neglect of the necessary unsatisfiability of the love of wisdom can be recourse to reliance on knowledge, as a sort of epistemological faith and conceptual security. Like the temptation to the sureties of fabrication against the boundless uncertainty of action—where “unpredictability is not a lack of foresight” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 60)—the transcendent\(^{55}\) claims to veracity of knowledge oppose thinking’s only need, to think more. Put simply, knowledge offers understanding the consolations of settlement which thinking threatens.

As I have explored to some degree in the last chapter, from each of knowledge and thinking devolve different conceptual and political implications. The desire to know will “interpret meaning on the model of truth” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 15), it beckons with the promise of an immutable answer which of course it is not beyond its purview to find. The need to think makes no such assurances and promises only the equivocality of understanding in the making patent of its latent being.\(^{56}\) There is in this view a sense of the need to think as a journey and the desire for knowledge as an arrival. To connect these thoughts to previous considerations, for Arendt, counter to the desire to know, the need to think derives its significance in preparation for judgment, it is replete with what Kohn (2001) calls “the pathos of action and judgment, the pathos of relinquishing the

---

\(^{55}\) Arendt (1968a) writes of the “different kind of ‘transcendence’” from philosophical truth’s, by which yardsticks and other standards of measurement are separated from the multitude of objects they are to measure” (p. 233). Thus abstractions about factual knowledge may become habituated & rationalized, transformed into objects of rational truth unacknowledged. For Arendt, this “shifting” is “not merely from one kind of reasoning to another, but from one way of human existence to another” (p. 233).

\(^{56}\) Like meaning, understanding in this usage is particular and ultimately unfounded, for they open into that which defies human comprehension. Knowledge, on the other hand, is a product of that comprehension, it consists in provisional generalizations. For example, one would say they understand the meaning of a book and know the total of a sum. What is understood in the first case is arguably intrinsic to the object while in the second what is known is not.
known for the unknown” (p. 122). Thinking’s departure is evoked in the Zen paradox that “the more I know the more I do not know”. Knowing for Arendt (1971/2003) has a coercive authority about which she writes “the trouble starts with our usage of nouns” (p. 171) and the implication of concepts’ “holding the limits of all things” (Solon qtd. in Arendt, p. 171). The problem of all this for education obtains from modernity’s particularly authoritative realm of science—particularly as it has informed the structural legacies of the seminal Tyler curriculum (Pinar, 1995)—from which thinking and knowing are regarded unequally, to the benefit of the latter in the Enlightenment project of conquest of the unknown by the known. The scientist who intimates what he or she does not know must think in order to know more, a process often necessarily not directly prefigured by the knowledge which invites or precedes it—despite its inescapable staging of it: “data never came free of theoretical commitments” (Appiah, 2006, p. 40). As surely as knowledge may inaugurate the widening of its reach, it will prevent the same by assuming forms or invite commitments which delimit and obscure the unknown. As emphasized in the previous chapter with respect to the necessity for thinking to recoil on itself, thought is both a vehicle and an impediment to new knowledge; as it both avers and deters freedom. Leaping from plateaux of knowledge, thinking as a creative activity always presupposes itself and thus must as its first function effect a sort of self-annihilation. This “mad impossibility” (Edgoose, 2001, p. 129) is in resistance to what Castoriadis (1991a) calls the “delusion of foundation” (p. 87) that underwrites settled structures of knowledge—for this is not then meaning. As such it prevents or forecloses

57 For Arendt we have seen that freedom consists most rudimentarily in the beginnings of appearing beings, for which thinking may prepare by clearing away its own sedimentations. As by the sedimentation of knowledge—which prevents thinking to prepare a conscious being for the unprecedented quality of judging—thinking may also, in its case by virtue of its abstraction from the appearing world, “make freedom disappear” (Arendt 1968a, p. 145).
the unknown or unknowable, which for Arendt is the beginning of entrapment in automatic processes against the possibility of freedom (and for Derrida it is to make justice impossible). Castoriadis quotes Dilthey to illuminate the inertia of what he calls "instrumental rationality":

The field [of the sciences of the mind] is identical to that of the understanding and consequently the object of understanding is the objectivization of life. Thus the field of the sciences of the mind is determined by the objectivization of life in the outer world. *The mind can understand only what it has created.* (p. 57, emphasis in original)

I would here elaborate the Zen paradox to say that the more I know the more I do not know and the more I cannot know what I do not know. The fine, indeed aporetic, balance (or madness) of thinking may sustain itself in what we will come to see as judgment for Arendt (1978c), and in a move anticipatory of a later Foucauldian one, by "abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment" and "disregarding the private subjective conditions...by which so many are limited" (p. 258). As I have suggested, the degree to which this is or may be possible is a question subsequently taken up most fervently by what are now called poststructural thinkers. For the present purpose, it will be sufficient to note the parallels between a conception of thinking and knowing in regenerative mutual discord as a necessary requirement for something new to happen in the life of the mind, or, as I will outline later in this chapter,
and more important for Arendt, the “new thing in an old world” which is the political instance of judging.

Moving toward that issue, one must first consider questions of how knowing insinuates an authority such that one suffers its relinquishment in order to participate in judging and action. To continue with the example of science, what one might call scientism bestows upon scientific knowledge the authority of its factual validity at the expense of the perennial ambiguity at its horizons. Scientism lends moral authority to the known and grants fixity to its conceptual norms by ignoring the institution of knowledge in something other, something not itself, something encountered only in the play of the representations of whatever new phenomenon or perspective is given to the perception of sensory or cognitive experience. To a scientistic conception, knowledge is an investment and not a tentative, self-reflexive field of heuristics. It is important to consider the conception and portrayal of knowledge in education in order to resist the temptation to reiterate the grant of authority given knowing, in neglect of the contingency of its foundations and at the expense of the discomfiting multiplicities of thinking, selfhood and the appearing world. If thinking is to proceed for the love of wisdom, it may be expected to more readily reveal that which is not to be believed than that which is. Thus a discussion of the excesses attending the structuring of meaning in knowing can, as Arendt argues thinking must, clear the way for a consideration of judging, and for judging itself, which meets the future as if in novelty. To not oversimplify the point, I will elaborate more specifically the appeal of knowing and its mechanisms as truth. Bequeathed in Descartes’ (1999) legacy of a search for “just one thing” (p. 63) to know for certain, the inherited forms of abstraction from the appearing world of thinking and
the subsequent command of knowing come to bear for Arendt’s judging with respect to
the relationship between factual truth and opinion.

4.2 On Factual Truth

Arendt (1968a) writes that “all truths—not only the various kinds of rational truth but
also factual truth—are opposed to opinion in their mode of asserting validity” (p. 239).
She identifies in truth an element of compulsion, of domineering more robust than facts
and events (which were subject to unprecedented hostility in the twentieth century).
Truth as “a product of the human mind” (p. 227) asserts the “strain of habitually living
under a kind of compulsion” (p. 235) because it is a product of “the eyes of the mind and
not the eyes of the body” (p. 233). This compulsion is sympathetic with that of structures
of knowledge, whose first instance arises within the undeconstructed belatedness of the
institution of the self. From this, to believe with Arendt that “the chances that tomorrow
will be like yesterday are always overwhelming” (p. 170) is to require a stance of
hermeneutic suspicion to the axiomatics of truth lest they overwhelm or subject one to an
acquiescence exclusive of judging. Part of this hermeneutic disposition is necessarily
toward what is considered factual, not just because it is ever being overturned by new
understandings, but because of what it makes of the subject in relation to his or her
availability to the new and unprecedented. Such an agency of interruption is afforded by
virtue of the faculty of judgment, whose validity obtains, as a matter of opinion, in
communicability, community sense and the strange fruits of the imagination.

I consider Arendt’s conceptions of rational and factual truth alongside what
Nancy calls “verifiable” and “unverifiable” truth. He writes that
we must not confuse verifiable truth with unverifiable truth, that is, with a truth that imposes itself before or beyond all verification. Verifiable truth is a truth mastered by a subject who knows; this is the mathematical and Cartesian model of truth, the truth of science. But even in Descartes the truth of “God,” of the infinite that “comes to mind” (“that comes to”; that imposes itself, that manifests itself of itself) is of another order. This truth might be called verifying as opposed to verifiable; it makes the true and makes true the one to whom it is revealed. It makes him true and is not made true by him. (qtd. in Fabbri, 2007, p. 430)

Nancy’s argument to not confuse two types of truths is echoed in Arendt’s (1968a) abiding concern with the hazards of anti-political (unverifiable) tyrannies of rational truth which are familiar “chiefly from the various political utopias and which, politically speaking, are as tyrannical as other forms of despotism” (p. 241). An historical curiosity attendant rational or unverifiable truth is that it should ever have come to be held as more true than factual or verifiable truth,\(^\text{58}\) that humanity should have moved so far out of the appearing world of fact and opinion as to worship (for what else would it be?) the Archimedean point rational truth implies. This Nancy calls the subject-forming “verifying,” for Arendt (1968a) a process of “disastrous consequences” (p. 241). Put into a modern context, verifying operates as “the function of liberal society...not merely to teach the noble fiction of human universality, but to create individuals, sufficiently robust

\(^{58}\) This is ironically created in part by science, in empiricism’s mistrust of the appearing world (Arendt, 1978b, p. 153), and Descartes quixotic relegation of truth to invisibility (p. 151).
in their own identity, to live by that fiction” (Ignatieff, 1988, p. 71). On the other hand, verifiable or factual truth Arendt (1968a) calls “so-called objectivity” whose “curious passion, unknown outside western civilization, [calls] for intellectual integrity at any price” (p. 258). Aside from the epistemological chauvinism it may engender, verifiable truth is political “by being put into an interpretive context” (p. 245), it is subject to dispute before the appeal to an eventually available resolution. To illustrate the “thereness” of such “brutally elementary data” (p. 234), Arendt relates the anecdote of Clemenceau being asked for his opinion of the outbreak of the First World War and prediction of future historians’ judgment: “This I don’t know. But I know for certain that they will not say Belgium invaded Germany” (p. 234). Factual truth is “no more self evident than opinion” (p. 239) and therefore must inform it in the contest of points of view.

For Arendt the relationship of facts and opinions is what D’Entrèves (2001) calls one of “mutual entailment” (p. 257), opinions are informed by facts and facts are subject to contestation of alternate or newly emerging views, which may come in the guise of an opinion, speculation or discomfort with the factually given. Factual truth is always related to other people: it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon

59 The “tyranny of reason” (Arendt qtd. in Young-Bruehl & Kohn, 2001, p. 230) which rational truth installs is a self-validating institution for “truth as self-evidence does not need any criterion; it is the criterion, the final arbiter, of everything that then may follow” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 120, emphasis in original).

60 Of course, it turns out Clemenceau was rather too optimistic about the factual fidelity of the judgments of history, as Arendt (1968a) is at pains to demonstrate with regard to its dismissal in totalitarian structures of authority, where factual truth, as “very essence of political life” (p. 237), is the first casualty of anti-political necessity.
testimony...It is political by nature. (Arendt 1968a, p. 238)

This evokes for education the notion of fact as an instance of discovery, a moment of crystallization of trustworthy knowledge which requires a climate of vigorous opinion to avoid subjection by the invisible transcendences of rational truth. With respect to such trustworthy knowledge, I come now to the critical consideration for education. For educators the paramount question concerns the grant of authority of fact in and of itself, one to which Western scientism provides ready inclination, against the broader necessity of fact in the realm of political opinion, as a grounding mainstay of judging. The questions a fact asks us in education is whether it is where thinking begins or ends and, if it is to begin there, for what purpose and by what responsibility should it proceed?

4.3 A Matter of Opinion

Arendt often invites us beyond tired dichotomies and habitual categories into another view, an “otherwise” by which to imagine beyond the given, one surely of its own categories of discrimination. Again she does so in the matter of the value and purpose of opinion. In the appearing world, in which Arendt (1968a) argues reality is actualized in webs of relations, in a “world of universal interdependence” (p. 242), fact and opinion, like rational and factual truth, differ not in some essential way but in their mode of asserting validity. I have argued that the mode of asserting the validity of fact is superordinate in Western liberalism, a production of the “verifying” of the liberal subject.\textsuperscript{61} This is not to say that fact is more self evident than opinion (we have seen how

\textsuperscript{61} This Arendt attributes to a mixture of Platonism, Christianity and Cartesianism, the last of which provided the decisive impetus of withdrawal in a sort of epistemological retreat from the chaos of the Thirty Years War: “The more that the political situation in France and Europe collapsed, the more pressing
this can be quite the opposite), but that rational truth’s subject treats truth as if it were fact, to the detriment of the appearance of both. This I will call facticity. Facticity is the substance of what Castoriadis (1991a) calls the pervasive “ensidic” (p. 67) layer of meaning, the “first natural stratum on which every society lives” (p. 67) which accords with and constitutes liberal rationality. It is a re-instituting signification of value derived from the Western “imaginary” (p. 67) of instrumental rationality, which Derrida (2002b) derisively calls “empiricist light-headedness” (p. 79). For Arendt (1958) this consists in
the whole terminology of political theory and political thought, which
indeed makes it almost impossible to discuss these matters without using
the category of means and ends and thinking in terms of instrumentality.
(p. 229)

In Castoriadian terms, facticity, what I call the inscription of rational truth with factual truth’s mode of validity, has become what predominantly is “thinkable.” As such it asserts itself and the thinker as its subject, as something to be known. In Arendtian terms this is the basis for a tradition of political thought, a command of the will with knowledge as its sovereign instrument, both its ends and its means. Devolved from a Platonic idea of rulership, this command is part of the persistent effort to “eliminate the character of frailty in human affairs” (p. 226) whereby the good and not the beautiful is the highest idea—a dissimulation required in the philosopher’s return to the cave of human affairs (1968a, p. 109). Arendt’s “otherwise” in this case is to reassert opinion and its world-

was the need to find a way to escape the doctrinal contradictions that had been a prime occasion for the religious wars” (Toulmin, 1990, p. 62).
affirming mode of validity, to replace the a priori certainty of facticity with the intersubjective validity (Villa, 1997, p. 196) of opinion in order to vitalize the public realm. Arendt offers a more meaningful way to understand the relationship between fact and opinion, as one of mutual entailment. This replaces their antagonism which in modernity subordinates the more contingent beneath the phantasm of facticity. For Arendt, opinion is a sort of experimental moving toward unity among one’s views, those fleeting coalescences of thought and self-totality. Opinion actualizes plurality first in the difference given in consciousness—as conscience in thinking (Arendt, 1971/2003, p. 160, 186)—and second, in the plurality of the appearing world, in the publicity of one among others.

Within the context of Western rationality, and as an instituted instrument of the same, educators choose activities which by implication reiterate or defy the grants of authority (such as that of facticity) which tradition bestows on knowledge or different types of knowledge. Like identity politics, “knowledges” vie for relevance in a complex political landscape of identity and identification, rightly struggling for recognition where they have been suppressed or marginalized as other. Educators are drawn into discourses of identity politics in which knowledge is a marker for the fact of identity. To an Arendtian critique, while this may be an important legacy in pluralism in the redress of injustice—one born of the civil rights movement—it is also a potential new gravity of fixity in thought on account of the facticity of the its categories. Any reform must grapple with its own ideological tendency to assert new structures, new immutabilities which in turn have both anticipated (in new conceptual inertias) and unanticipated (in modes of subjectivication in the axiomatics of verifying rational truths) effects. With
respect to the concepts themselves, and however apparently more desirable than those they replaced, new forms themselves become instituted as given, subject always to the automaticity Arendt identifies as the persistent foil of natality and plurality. They become given because they consensually and rationally are. Against a Hobbsean view of clinging to cliffs of security in the ascent from the brutality of chaos, or the modern view of moral progress, the trade-off of contingency for security may seem acceptable. Before an Arendtian conception of freedom however, the benefit comes at the cost of the very thing it seeks to secure.

The intersubjective validity of opinion in a public is a substantial contribution of Hannah Arendt to an understanding of the meaning of public life (as what she calls politics). One reason for this is because it divests knowing of the certainty Voltaire decrives and inscribes it with the non-sovereign authority of a plural world, of a world of others, of an anti-ideological and thus non-universal world, a particular world "disfigured by its origins" (Glover, p. 41) in the struggle for self-reconciliation, understanding and meaning. Because of the persistence of disaffection, of which totalitarianism is "both cause and instance" (Sharpe, 1999, p. 108), this world is always one which is becoming otherwise. Factual veracity is a matter of trustworthiness, which is a matter of opinion. Facts must change as new knowledge becomes available. They are the subject of the contest of opinion, without which neither would be able to resist the ascendance of rational truths, as dogma, ideology or other unthinking adoption of the given. This is another way in which the loss of the world is effected, in the decline of opinion’s consequence (whose concomitant process is the replacement of the question of the factual

---

62 This recalls di Lampedusa’s (1958/1991) observance that “in order for things to stay the same, things must change.” This is to say in this case, that, as new understandings come into being, the judging of an enlarged, or pluralistic, mentality retains the inscription of the common world.
with the assertion of facticity). The denigration of opinion is one way in which “liberalism...measures a process of receding freedom” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 100) by positing the “almost universal functionalization of all concepts and ideas” (p. 101) before the sovereign, transcendent and contiguous authorities of the self and knowledge.

From Plato and through Hobbes, Arendt argues that opinion is seen as a sort of illusion, a confused or inadequate grasp of the truth, a defective form of knowledge which stands against the seductive practicality of facticity (which conforms events to “facts” instead of the other way around). Echoing Castoriadis, this recalls the apocryphal wisdom that the obvious is another word for what one believes in. Against the stolidity of this view, Arendt argues that it is through the play of opinion that mentality is enlarged, and that facticity is a form of story which has forgotten it is such, the persistent danger and tendency of rational truth. For Arendt, opinion forces into thinking’s whorl of representation the plurality of difference and helps thought to not perpetually reiterate specters of its own forms. Others and otherness are what make opinion a medium of judgment as it

needs the presence of others ‘in whose place’ it must think, whose perspectives it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all. (Arendt, 1968a, p. 220-221)

So long as opinion is seen as subordinate to fact, or what I have been calling the rational truth of facticity, science will be conflated with scientism and the world of others will be subject to the compulsion of standards of objectivity; demonstration will be the only
legitimate form of discourse and knowledge will be intelligible in place of understanding; meaning will be a private matter and education will remain anti-political. All of this will seem a reasonable trade off to the extent to which it is acceptable to permit the affront to human dignity of the idea of progress and the simplistic equation of knowledge with salvation. Arendt’s caution is that, in times of crisis, this wager leaves one in prejudicial inability to meet the unprecedented, without judgment.

For education, I wish to highlight a movement toward a conception of thinking which involves others as the provocations of plurality. Through the interplay of opinion, one is impelled to live with the explicit limits of thinking as an opportunity, an ethical obligation, and in the company of others. Opinion does not compel with standards of truth, it can only “woo, [and] court” (Arendt, 1978c, p. 270) assent. Opinion requires both others and contestable facts. It lives with the contingency of the facts, and the fact of contingency while mistaking neither as final. There will always be new facts to upset old orders. It used to be “true” after all, that the world is flat. The trouble starts when one begins to infer a monarchy of significance from the factual, for then soon both fact and opinion become unrecognizable (a matter of convenience for many interests). Knowledge should be thought more or less trustworthy to not be given to the view that one person’s view is as good as another’s. Because facts are more or less trustworthy, views must be seen as more or less valid and their contestation be a vital matter of ongoing political responsibility. In this domain, one sees in education a tension between an associational mode of being together and the ethical contest of a plural world, as how, as one writer puts it, “the Socratic way represents a threat to any context that favors consensus over contestation” (Duarte, 2001, p. 215). Fidelity to the fact of the world and
resistance to the dangers of unchecked "truths" such as facticity require no less. Arendt argues that plurality demands an agonal mode of being together in order for the interplay of opinion to ascend to the veracity of the factual and the tension of their mutual entailment be sustained. The authority of transcendent facticity needs be confronted with the particularity of the "who" of opinion and the poetic allusiveness of representational thinking which obtains by way of its stylization. As with respect to action, by way of its grounding in fact and opinion, this is a way judgment is able to "break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary" (Arendt, 1958, p. 203). For Arendt, Western tradition is of avoidance of the frailty of the common condition in favour of "the individual writ large" (Sharpe, 1999, p. 126). This is "Man," or "Humanity" (or perhaps just a void where plural multiplicity should be), a singularity of conceptual predisposition whose fear of metaphorical injury to invisible sovereign ubiquity permits his actual in human superfluity. Nothing could be easier or more compelling than to want to defer the uncertainty inherent in a world of plurality and natality, to prefer the familiar consolations of rational truth. Arendt (1968) clarifies the everyday form of this ubiquity:

Of course, I can refuse to do this and form an opinion that takes only my own interests into account; nothing, indeed, is more common, even among highly sophisticated people, than the blind obstinacy that becomes manifest in lack of imagination and failure to judge. (p. 241-242)

---

63 In unthinking fidelity to verifying self-institution according to rational truth.

64 They are, after all, the conceptual structures into which one arrives unaware.
For educators, or for anyone concerned with the instantiation of pluralism and the conditions of freedom, the perennial need set right anew must engage in the hermeneutics of rational truth. As important, it must consist in the creation of the conditions for the appearance of opinion and the question of the trustworthiness of fact. Like beauty, opinion and argument stand between individuals, in the world of appearances, and must take others into account, they attest to the reality of the common world:

In aesthetic no less than in political judgments, a decision is made, and although this decision is always determined by a certain subjectivity, by the simple fact that each person occupies a place of his own from which he looks upon and judges the world, it also derives from the fact that the world itself is an objective datum, something common to all its inhabitants. (Arendt, 1968a, p. 219)

Reconsidering opinion as Foucault (1985) argues one should of risk, as "truth itself" (p. 6), would thus be a way to advance the educative responsibility to plurality, not as a matter of tolerating "the other," and even less in simplistic deference to democratic majoritarianism, but in the contest of acknowledging and creating a world together. The contribution of judgment to such a world is measured in the vitality of a climate of opinion. To advance this elaboration of judging's contribution to that effort; I turn to the question of the constitution of opinion and the ways in which it arises as judgment.
4.4 A Matter of Taste

Arendt observes that before Kant, what he calls judgment was known as taste. Arendt's innovation as far as Kant's reflections on judgment are concerned was to focus on his elaboration of aesthetic rather than moral judgment as the basis for her conceptualization of the political faculty of judging. To better understand Arendt's conceptualizations of judging, I intend to elaborate its particular aesthetic emphasis and to discover and clarify how an activity so apparently subjective, so intractably private, could be something of pre-eminent commonality.

The sense of taste is in many ways the most immediate and personal of the senses. While it may seem the most prejudicial, it is also the most robust and individualistic in that it maintains a distance from the preconditioning of the conceptual, from the eclipse of the world in rational truth. Taste resides more in what is considered the visceral, it is immediate and phenomenologically proximate to what Lacoue-Labarthe (1989) calls "the enigma that oriented it" (p. 140). In the sense of taste one is pleased or displeased, and the readiness of reasons to the defense of our taste is not sure, and subsequent if at all. Typically, one simply likes or dislikes the taste of something without consideration (which arrives as an afterthought). Schiller observes the immediacy of this faculty: "With me the perception has at first no clear and definite object; this is formed later. A certain...mood comes first, and the poetical idea only follows later" (qtd. in Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989, p. 150). For Arendt, it is through the refinement of the sense of taste, in immediate reaction to phenomena or ideas, that one cultivates the discrimination of taste, which is to judge. She elaborates:

65 He elaborates a fascinating theory of the subject as an echo, a catacoustic and rhythmical effect of the immediacy of experience from whose conceptual edifices, in regard of whose "secrets" abstracted from immediacy, Freud says "self betrayal oozes from all our pores" (qtd. in 1989, p. 149).
Judgments are not arrived at by either deduction or induction; in short they have nothing in common with logical operations—as we say: All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, Socrates is mortal. We shall be in search of the "silent sense," which—when it was dealt with at all—has always, even in Kant, been thought of as "taste" and therefore belonging in the realm of aesthetics. (Arendt, 1978a, p. 215)

The way one responds to phenomena, the instance of taste in reaction to the world, is a manifestation of the 'who' of that person; it comprises particularity in a way that must be made public to both gain for judgment the distillation of an encounter with others and to appear as one must in distinctiveness. This is what I suggest Levinas (1996) describes as "access to the world in an original and an originary way" (p. 19) wherein "we are responsible in that we respond to the other before we can chose whether to respond" (Edgoose, 2001, p. 117).

In matters of taste, a felicitous reaction is not as to the certainty of the categorical good, but is to the apprehension of the beautiful, in the immanence of a particular instance of being. "Good" in matters of taste refers to the sublimnity of approbation. In the obverse, a disagreeable reaction is disgust or repugnance. Often taste may be conflated with mere preference. This may be one effect of the discourses of certainty which, as discussed above, denigrate opinion. Another significant effect of these is the view of preference or taste as fixed. As though applying the trope of fixity accorded factual knowledge to opinion, taste is seen as immutable, one either likes something or
one does not, period. Woven within a tradition which regards the self as singularity and conflates that singularity with the One, taste becomes both ubiquitous and insensate; it welcomes the relativism in which everything becomes everything else as though this were confirmation of democratic egalitarianism. The casualty of such thought is the sense of beauty and its adjunct singularity. Dolan (2001) calls this tension “the wonder of being versus the tyranny of truth” (p. 268), truth in this case obtaining in the apparent immutability of taste and its universal extrusion. As distinct from pleasing or gratifying, the beautiful is always imperiled because of its singular particularity, its intersubjective instance and its non-conformity to what is recognizable. It is also the medium of taste, approbation’s refinement or, in more public terms, the courage of judgment. The compelling irony in this is that the most immediate personal response of taste might become the typification of the political one, which for Arendt (1968a) arises in the “discriminating, discerning, [and] judging elements of an active love of beauty” (p. 219).

The sense of taste is vulnerable to devaluation before egalitarian strictures, from which the estimation of the one falls before that of the many, as both a democratic practicality or socio-political mechanism and a moral one in being merely one among many. Is one’s taste relevant before that of the majority? Is it not in-egalitarian to assert one’s taste at the potential expense of others? Should the concern be first with the balance (associational) or with the substance (agonal)? It is in matters of taste that the democratic and the egalitarian become confused, as though it is democratic somehow to become as docile and colourless as possible, as though democracy and majority were synonymous and not the more vital tensions of democracy and plurality. The absence of questions of taste—whether through modesty, desire for knowing certainty, willful
disaffection, fear of being judged oneself or some combination thereof—may too readily induce withdrawal from political life, and the subsequent presumption that politics is either a matter of compliance or defiance. Such self-exemption from responsibility in anti-political hostility is no more clearly expressed than in the question surely more frequently thought than articulated of “who am I to judge?” Arendt notably observed this of Eichmann at his trial in Jerusalem. With respect to the Final Solution, of which he became a chief administrator, Arendt (1963) notes that he asked “who was he ‘to have [his] own thoughts in this matter?’” (p. 114). It is crucial to further note that, the moment of discrimination having passed, Arendt wrote that Eichmann recalled that what followed “went more or less smoothly and soon became routine” (p. 114). Gibbon (1906) beautifully describes the gravity of non-judging, which a-political self-exemption risks (a vulnerability the conscious pariah is always at pains to resist):

From enthusiasm to imposture the step is perilous and slippery; the demon of Socrates affords a memorable instance of how a wise man may deceive himself, how a good man may deceive others, how conscience may slumber in a mixed and middle state between self illusion and voluntary good.66

---

66 Glover (1999) offers a very useful explication of the fragility of what he calls human moral resources in many examples from twentieth century history (particularly and most provocatively from the ostensible victors’ viewpoints), specifically in themes of institutional momentum and moral inertia, the fragmentation of responsibility and, echoing Gibbon, “the moral slide” (p. 115) of the increasing acceptability of the horrific.
The defeat of the question of taste, or its replacement with its unthinking indulgence, welcomes the consolatory sameness of a transcendent communal bond before humanistic idols of science, consumerism and communitarianism. Intellectually these are expressed as tolerance of ways of "knowing," whose subjectivication inaugurates and verifies a knowable, if byzantine, landscape of identity. As well, and because this is a matter of knowing (and its affinity with rational truth, as we have seen) such transcendence installs a limitless deference before an unknown other, a heteronomy no less dangerous than nationalistic excesses they displace. Their danger is that they institute the rational truth of a knowable diversity in place of the stubborn ephemera of meaning in the utter diversity of the public realm. For one writer, paraphrasing Žižek, "the postmodern 'ethics of otherness' is a polite displacement of an unconscious hatred for the other" (Boucher, 2002) which in Arendtian terms permits the disavowal of political responsibility in the name of the unknowable in identity. As we have seen, Arendt's concern is with the vitality of the public and the ways rational truths can displace and make it unintelligible. She refers to Machiavelli's concern with the reform of the Church, that in ridding the institution of corruption the greater danger of believing one can be "good" was instituted (Arendt, 1958, p. 77-78). The universal significance of the good or the other institute a dispossession of judgment's singularity as taste by way of their universalistic expression in epistemology (in this case of identity). Castoriadis (1991a) warns that "after the experience of Stalinism and Nazism...people have begun again to whistle in the dark the tune of universal rationality as a way of building up their

---

67 This is a neurotic conflation of knowing and identity, for, as Arendt (1978a) argues, unlike the need to think, the desire to know "can only be fulfilled when it reaches its prescribed goal" (p. 62) which has the effect not of positing an infinitely unknown self but one which somehow could be, an anathema to Arendt's conception of freedom.
courage” (p. 74, emphasis in the original). The absence of taste and related questions welcomes universals—of the exclusionary presumption of tolerance, of the conceit of modesty, of the reign of facticity, of contrapuntal displacement of the other in empathy. The explicit cultivation of the faculty of taste as a political imperative engenders only a messy and inconclusive process, a thoughtful, halting one which always invokes the limits of communicability and reason. Yet, according to Arendt, these are the symptoms of freedom, reflective of human distinctiveness and not of its ideological seizure. As Kant declaims, the beautiful teaches us to love without self-interest. In the provocation and enlargement of taste, in the sense of beauty, there arises the “a disinterested delight” (Arendt, 1978c, p. 270) which provokes beyond solipsism a glimpse of a common world. This is again a touchstone of the themes of both thinking’s pariah hermeneutics and phenomenological estrangement which I have been developing. This relation to being in the question of taste opens the enclosures of truth to awe and wonder, by evoking and making recognizable the ineffable singularity of the ‘who’ and in renewing the sense of mystery at existence’s bare fact, along with the unsettling contingency on which this understanding rests. As earlier considered, to consider in taste the enlargement of mentality is to be alive but not know exactly why or in what (Arendt, 1958, p. 193). It may have the unexpected effect of drawing away from the need for intimacy, from the assurances of identity, from the “infinite regress” (Sharpe, 1999, p. 101) of presumed commonality and toward a readiness for the onto-aesthetics of appearing with others. In the particularity of taste, the move toward Kant’s “silent sense” is effected by virtue of the experience of the singularity of engagement in the plural world. In education this can

---

68 A norm which forgets that “any norm is constituted through a citation of its exceptions” (Boucher, 2006, p. 116).
be understood as a liberal matter, in terms of the somehow discreet or calculable worth and invisible potential of the individual. For Arendt (1968a) this is reversed, the index of value is the common world: "for judgments of taste the world is the primary thing, not man, neither man’s life nor his self" (p. 222). It would be counterintuitive to a liberal predisposition—inscribed as it is with the worldless goodness Machiavelli wrote threatens from within reform—that this view would be the more personally and politically ethical and, in the long run, less dangerous. The judgment of taste is politically significant as instance of a ‘who’ one is as well as to the extent to which it evokes that of others, to the extent to which it inheres in the fluidity of that plurality, is the “plural touching of a singular origin” (Nancy, 2000, p. 14). Along with Socrates, one of Arendt’s (1968b) exemplars was Lessing, whose greatness she believed consisted in his not merely having reached

a theoretical insight that there cannot be one single truth within the human world, but in his gladness that it does not exist and that, therefore, the unending discourse among men will never cease so long as there are men at all. A single absolute truth, could there have been one...would have spelled the end of humanity. (p. 27)

Lessing’s gladness connotes a comfort with plurality. This helps release the judging self from monadism in order to judge in resistance to heteronymous institution. Moralistic discourse, borne of rational truths of tolerance, equality or empathy, invariably institute exclusiveness, they are normatively coercive at the level of epistemology. In matters of
taste or judgment, the question of what is beautiful resists generalization. It is concerned
with the particularity of the particular, the openness of the open and the wonder of the
wonderful. Clearly this is not to assert the absurdity that political debate is to be
measured solely by aesthetic standards, but to challenge the precept that it is a matter of
measurement at all and to relocate the meaning of being in thinking and appearing with,
for and among others. For it is in the specifics of the appreciation of the beautiful, the
singular, the novel, the unprecedented and the unique and through the cultivation of their
responsive human faculty, the response before representation (Heidegger in Levinas,
1996, p. 19), that judgment emerges and appears in its distinctive splendour. This is, for
Arendt, the only conceivable defense against totalitarian sameness, and against the
privation of life without a world. Arendt (1978c) writes: “the beautiful is...an end in
itself because all its possible meaning is contained within itself, without reference to
others, without linkage, as it were, to other beautiful things” (p. 272). As I have
attempted to describe the difficult terrain judging must confront in questions of truth and
opinion, and how opinion and fact subsist in a relation of mutual entailment, I have tried
to show how Arendt’s political reconsideration of judgment is a matter of what Kant
called taste, in order to posit an aspect of human capability sympathetic and resonant with
the doxic climate of the intersubjective domain she calls the public realm. If taste is the
vector of judgment and opinion one of its media, how is the mentality enlarged? By what
force does taste change and how does this come about? As we shall see, for Arendt,
these are best left to the imagination.
4.5 Significance Imposed or Imagine That!

A friend has a custom I had found curious until it met Arendt’s thought in my mind and began to make a kind of sense relevant to present considerations. Exclaiming about something remarkable having just passed notice, she would say “can you imagine?!” I thought this curious because I labored in the delusion that imagination was not concurrent with perception, that it had no necessary operation at the moment of the immediacy of experience. I was unaccustomed to thinking that I was imagining something I was perceiving. Arendt identifies imaginative representation as necessary to judging, by and through its staging of the enlargement of mentality, which, as we have seen, begins with the engagement and appearance of taste, one’s aesthetic stripe in the appearing world. She writes that “what pleases merely in perception is gratifying but not beautiful” (1978c, p. 265). Imagination is “representing in one’s mind what has already appeared to one’s senses” (D’Entrèves, 2001, p. 251). What pleases then in representation is beautiful because the imagination has “prepared” it as such, it “takes up” and mediates the reaction of taste into a representation which survives the passing of the immediate presence of the phenomenon. This then informs taste, effecting the scope, nuance and tenor of its responses, in the “enlargement” or cultivation of the judging mentality. Imagination serves a twofold purpose in this dynamic from my reading of Arendt. First, it draws phenomena into the representational world of the thinker’s thought, inaugurating thinking, and second, it distances the reaction given by taste into something which can be there considered among other views. Imagination in an important sense is a precondition for impartiality, a “being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not”

69 Although I was aware that it clearly had some in the instance of improvisational music, I did not, as Arendt (1968a) does with respect to freedom, consider it coincident with the performing act (p. 153).
(Arendt, 1968a, p. 241) whereby, in Kant’s words, “egoism is overcome” (in D’Entreves, 2001, p. 251). Among the representations of the imagination, taste may encounter unsettling difference, as of the perception of the view of others, of an intimation of the sensibility of a bygone era, or perhaps of the apprehension of the limits of its own apperception (as a structural consideration or as a matter of the coercive ubiquity of rational truth). Held thus represented in the imagination, a response or thought is also susceptible to be consumed for a moment in the sensus communis implied by the distancing of such representation, by “the idea of mankind” (Arendt, 1978c, p. 271), a view to which Arendt credits humanity’s self-overcoming. In imagination, the judging of taste and the sharing of the sole reality of the appearing world are combined.

To not represent thus what chances to alight in perception is to permit the world to appear to one singly “as it is,” as an answer and not a question, as coercive truth and not contestable fact. Certainly, one may come to be able to explain it, to “ruin everything with explanations” (Arendt, 1968c, p. 48) in “the drudgery of usefulness” (p. 44) as Arendt caustically puts it. As previously observed, explanation is not to be mistaken with or for understanding, for understanding imaginatively maintains the interplay of response and representation, knowing and its dissolution through the agencies of meaning. Empowered in the inheritance of the nineteenth century’s “conviction of not possessing the truth” (Arendt, 1978b, p. 151), and in the view of an eye poorly suited for randomness, explanations normalize understanding so that the present should, as Freire (1970) puts it, appear “well behaved” (p. 81). For Arendt (1954/2005), this is in denial of the “common sense,” (p. 314) whose meaning has been lost to the modern world, the

70 An idea which signifies the common plight of men (to continue with her customary pronoun) and not the idea of “Man.”
sense of the "miracle of accident and infinite improbability" (Arendt, 1968a, p. 170) which characterizes the whole domain of the public realm. In this reading, explanations promulgate—in perhaps another instance of a form which in Arendtian terms "works too well"—the corrosive dissolving of meaning for the surety of knowledge. This instigates what Valéry calls the "insolvency of imagination and bankruptcy of understanding" (qtd. in Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 314) to the detriment of the sense, depth and conversation of judging. Ironically then, the generality of explanation—whose facticity is its ostensible authority—both disparages the singularity of the particular and invites the "ruin of the factual" (Arendt, 1968a, p. 81) in the sense that it is subsumed in the facticity of explanation. To explain can be to "mistake of a pattern for a meaning" (p. 81) and to subvert the proliferation of meaning in structures devolved from knowing. Arendt (1978c) asks "how can I understand (and not just explain) why there is grass at all and then this particular blade of grass" (p. 256). Inscribed by the unending need to think, understanding requires every species of reason, along with those that are not-yet, alive in what Jefferson called "fields of imagination" (qtd. in Arendt, 1968a, p. 244). Understanding is a result of the imagination and may become subject to its love of beauty as a matter of taste, if not constrained by subjection to commands of truth or other normative ideological or epistemological moribundity. To object that the love of beauty can be a normative moribundity is to precisely get the point.

For the educator, the questions become not "what is this?" but "what could we understand this to be?" not "what do you see here?" but "what is appearing to us here?" and never to encircle a meaning in an explanation. Meaning is mysterious, particular, plural, poetic, sublime and not something one could ever completely explain and retain
humanity. This again is Lessing’s gladness for the dispossession of the truth, a dispossession which, as the condition for the possibility of meaning, in this case is an instance of common sense. By now it should be obvious that common sense for Arendt is not a matter of the apparent practicality of its more prevalent usage, although it retains some of that connotation when considered against the invisible programmatic of regimes of rational truth. The improbable “truth” of the appearing world will always be stranger than the fiction of a normal one. And this is a matter alive only in the human imagination.

Granting such exhortations, the more fine apperception and greater challenge in the education for imagination would for Arendt (1978c), be its necessary “‘interest’ in disinterestedness” (p. 270). To reiterate its close association with the phenomenological distance of estrangement from the second chapter and the hermeneutics of the conscious pariah stance from the first, disinterestedness as a quality of imagination affords it the freedom to alight the singularity it represents on different viewpoints, in the different worlds of plural being. By disinterestedness, imagination may extricate itself and thinking from normalizing forces, and the gravitational pressures of expectation and recognition. In a sense, the imagination frees the self from its own interest so that it may become taken up in the interest, the inter esse or being-between of the world (Arendt, 1958, p. 182). This world actualizes plurality within which and by which political power is actualized in the mutual appearance of the judging, action and speech of unique beings. The interest of such a world is not that of the one who appears in it, except to the extent to which they are borne by the taste for meaning, a result of the imaginative
representation of the common world and the diverse beauty and wonder in which it consists.

Disinterestedness is a troubling challenge to institutional education to the extent to which it is a process of significance imposed, to the extent to which “it is almost impossible to separate the arguments over social engineering, nation building and economics from the wishes and the institutions of education” (Britzman, 1998, p. 2). It is surely an educational objective to cultivate interest (in the personalized, liberal sense), usually in what its aspirations and anxieties require, or perhaps or perhaps too readily in “the necessitarian demands of the bureaucratic apparatus” (Hansen, 1993, p. 116). Cultivating interest otherwise, as being between, suggests a whole different world of possibility. It suggests in fact a whole different world. Reflecting one of the tensions with which we began, it is one whose orientation resides more in the aspiration to pluralism than in individual potential, but is no less individualistic. In fact it is more hopefully and necessarily so. In an ethos of individual potential, what does one do when one loses interest altogether, when one reaches that exhaustion with the self which so characterizes the age? All one may do in that instance is suffer the ignominy of having failed the liberal dream, of having no more apparent potential to realize. Then, in a premature surrender of the flower of human dignity, recourse to the responsibilities of the market economy and the future it projects is an accommodation to a lack of imagination and a betrayal of the promise of the world. It should be no wonder that graduation rates suffer a recalcitrant ceiling and evince suspicious socio-cultural affinities as the normalizations of liberal rational truths exact exclusion’s toll. As these are taken up as political matters, it is a further irony and difficulty that the mental activity (imagination)
which informs the faculty of deepest political significance (judging) would necessitate disinterestedness and not, for example, empathy—“as though a given subject of investigation, had a message in readiness which easily communicated itself” (Arendt, 1968c, p. 48). As thinking in preparation for judging requires boundless liberation, the imagination of judging requires disinterestedness. One may think of it as elbow room in the mind into which the infinitely variegated play of the appearing world is invited, but the metaphor betrays the complexity of the matter.

The conditioning of understanding by imagination is relevant to the elegance and refinement of a person’s critical instincts, which is inseparable from its more politically significant function of keeping alive a moment of contingency within taste. It is by virtue of the play of representation of the imagination that one may “think with the enlarged mentality— that means you train your imagination to go visiting” (Arendt, 1978c, p. 257). From this arises a sense of a general standpoint, one consisting of representations of the views of many others gained in sympathetic imaginative mutuality for “to think with the other and undergo the situation with him” (Gadamer qtd. in Sharpe, 1999, p. 126). For Arendt this is distinct from empathy, although it may threaten with its presumption. Among so much else, what are represented in the imagination are the possible judgments of others, in “the enlargement of... internal dialogue to include an anticipated communication with others” (Sharpe, 1999, p. 116). One then is imagining the situation of another (which is quite different from knowing how they feel), anticipating communication with them, and again and always abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to one’s own judgment (Arendt, 1978c, p. 268)—that is, imagining imagination’s limits. Thus the ethical function of the imagination is that, like appearing
in action and speech, it reflects the self to the self while inscribing it with difference. In this, it inaugurates in consciousness the partiality which provokes a broader standpoint. Imagination allows judgment without the pre-given or universal and thus “judges anew in full spontaneity” (D’Entreves, p.248) that which appears without precedent. This, as we have discovered is for Arendt no less than the preponderance of eventual reality in “infinite improbability” and in defiance of the processural abstractions of conceptualization, as of history. That the imagination serves a central political function is to my view a significant contribution of Arendt’s thought to political philosophy.¹¹ It is one which I hope would place it more in the centre of the curricular agenda, as a pre-political requirement of a pluralistic polity. This not to say—as may be assumed in relation to the liberal-inflected first purpose of British Columbia’s schools, the realization of “individual potential”—that imagination is to be valued because of its implication in creativity, though this is undoubtedly a wonderful idea. Instead, imagination’s significance is that it is the mental activity which creates the possibility of a plural world in common, through the discernment and judgment, the enlargement of mentality that is taste. Its vitality is contingent upon recognition that in order to foster or assess imagination, which in other words is to judge, one must be required to always resist the inertial gravitation of habitus, epistemologically expressed as the authorities of knowing, or even “ways of knowing,” as if human intelligence could or should be reduced, analogically, to the colours of the rainbow. One must, in Arendt’s (1978a) terms, become willing to suffer existence in the clash of the past and future called now (p. 205), to linger

¹¹ This joins in particular distinction the contributions of her conceptualizations of the evil of thoughtlessness and the political role of forgiveness.
“in the realm of errancy,” as a “willful rebellion against the “order” of creation” (1978b, p. 194) to come to visit the world as if it has never existed as such before. And yet, as a chimerical persistence, like darkness which cannot be elbowed away in a lightless room, this is a world has surely not been nowhere; its “orders” always already express themselves in understanding. In preparation for this unenviable challenge, Arendt evokes thinking’s multiplicity and, more important, the necessity to exist with and in a plural world prompted by its otherness and natality to the imperative to always judge anew. For this, the disinterested provocations of the imagination are the impetus of the cultivation of taste in the immediacy of the encounter with appearance. To help imagine this, and to invite judgments about it, I turn to another important medium of judgment which strains the division of the mind from the world.

4.6 The Particular

Those touched by great art may marvel at the artist’s mysterious facility in invoking something of broad relevance or deep impact through the representation of an everyday or commonplace instance, or perhaps in the exposure of meaning usually veiled. What one sees in great art is the particular’s claim to universality, how a thing itself can come to contain a universe of significance. It is deemed great if characterized by indubitable recognizability while at once not conforming to received forms of understanding. In this recognition one is grateful to art for what Arendt would call the enlargement of mentality, which consist in the twin intimations of a consciousness’ partiality and a broader realm of meaning to which it belongs. For Arendt, the idea of particularity should not be thought confined to the realm of art, though it is its exemplar par excellence. It is an indictment

72 For Arendt (1978b), “to act is to err, to go astray” (p. 194).
of civic culture and political tradition (or evidence of lack thereof) that the artifice of judgment be marginalized when it is surely, as thinking's public adjunct, within the ethical reach of all who think. One may recall from the previous chapter that one of thinking's chief missions is to recoil upon itself in order that the particular, the novel and the unprecedented not become subsumed within the general or the universal, what I have been generally referring to as the known and its rational truth of facticity. Understanding the difficulty of this task is a significant undertaking and a democratic responsibility, one which cannot exist without, like thinking itself, the ongoing necessity to begin it anew. It is a philosophically daunting enterprise, one whose complexity and apparent senselessness can as readily inspire flight as engagement, in what Arendt (1968a) calls "escape into the 'whole'...prompted by the meaninglessness of the particular" (p. 83). It may be sufficient as a provisional matter however to thematize this challenge as a necessary impossibility in order to proceed within view of the new, despite its eternal subsumption within pre-given structures of interpretation of understanding. Descombes (2001), in considering the infinite regressions of phenomenology, makes plain the implied futility in the contours of such thematics:

phenomenology embarks upon a task which it itself describes as 'infinite' (a discreet way of saying it is unrealizable, for a promised land which we will reach at the cost of an 'infinite journey' is indistinguishable from a land which is eternally prohibited). (p. 60)
Arendt’s (1958) view of natality is that it is so artesian as to defy institution within preexisting forms of being:

Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself. (p. 191)

It is in the tension between the particular and the universal, the new and the given, that the drama of the promise of humanity is played out insomuch as it is, through the recovery of significance, a struggle with unconscious world-negation. This tension manifests in the antagonism between the ways that the siren call of the logic of ideas reigns as ideological prejudice and the poetry of being as provocation in something unrecognizable and which follows the lead of its own uncertainty to “sing the myth of the future” (Nietzsche qtd. in Arendt 1978b, p. 164). As Arendt (1968a) herself says, “there is always at least a story to tell” (p. 82).

In education the question becomes one of recovering the particular, as singular and inexhaustible medium of judgment, from perennial reassertions of the rule of the yardsticks of our understanding, of the “classification and arrangement” (Arendt, 1968c, p. 3) of any society’s functioning and the ways these discipline thought. As for explanation against imaginative understanding, and as well the denigration of the need to think in favour of the desire to know, Arendt (1978b) identifies in taxonomic disciplining a “device, typical of the Occidental tradition...of understanding the new as an improved re-statement of the old” (p. 216). The generalization of human mental

---

73 For one cultivates understanding as one holds an opinion, while explanation is a matter of utility.
abstraction asserts many related regulative forms absent the mysterious and fragile significances of the appearing world. The ultimate human particular for Arendt (1958) of course is the ‘who’ one is, a concern with which she calls “an indispensable element of human pride” (p. 211). Against this particular pride stand the vanities of accomplishment, for “only the vulgar condescend to derive their pride from what they have done” (p. 211). It was the “gift and genius” (p. 197) of Athens to make this central to the idea of politics, and the “basic error” (p. 183) of materialism since to overlook it. Primo Levi (in Dietz, 2001) echoes Arendt’s argument in emphasizing the vulnerability of this distinctiveness, “we have learned that our personality is fragile, that it is much more in danger than our life” (p. 102). To live a large life, worthy of the story of itself, and as though it were a metaphor or exemplar of itself, is the bold charge of Arendt’s (1968b) aesthetic existentialism: “be loyal to life, don’t create fiction but accept what life is giving you” (p. 97). This sense of the reclamation of the particular is not in the nostalgia of dispossession, for the particular never was nor is possessed. It is performative and identitary, it neither resists acceptance nor rejects resistance, it assumes that being, as Arendt (1958) says of each human activity, “points to its proper location in the world” (p. 73) and sets out on that adventure of discovery, not as if in search of lost treasure but as if always already in its possession, possessed by it, and enthralled. In this view, the possessor is of course the treasure, which is to say the world.

The instance of the particular (of the ‘who,’ metaphor, story, fact) may not be such a complex one, but what it lacks in complexity is more than compensated for in habituation’s various aversions to the novel. Recalcitrant in the desire for the “consolation of fixing a proper place” (Britzman, 1998, p. 77) and the mislocation of that
place in the sureties of progressivism and pragmatism (and still more the imperial
guarantees of positivism), the particular is mislaid, forgotten in its apparent lack of
necessity. It, like the withering of the public realm in general, is discarded along with the
Arendtian wisdom, put otherwise by Hilary Putnam, that “meanings ain’t in the head”
(qtd. in Appiah, 2006, p. 27). This mislocation is expressed by a vast gulf of sensibility,
a dimensional shift of sorts between what the surrealists called the “ordinary marvelous”
(Boym, 2005, p. 583) of any particularity, and the “normal” of behaviorism—an
abstraction whose uniformity develops “an almost irresistible inclination toward
despotism” (Arendt, 1958, p. 43). On the side of the particular stands a necessarily
aesthetic orientation in estrangement and imaginative disinterestedness, and the critical
self-reflective thought of the conscious pariah stance. These, as has been discussed at
some length, are required of the diversity of the appearing world and the complexities of
various habituations against its frailties. Insomuch as it requires the nuance of this
double engagement, a concern for the particular is surely not the “narcissistic
preoccupation with the airless harmonies of aestheticism” (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 84). It is
rather the engagement with being as it may manifest itself in a narrative, ineffably unique
in itself, a sort of promise adrift in the ocean of uncertainty (Arendt, 1958, p. 244) and the
return of Narcissus to Echo. The promise of the story which the particular instigates is
always prone to redefinition and utterly resistant to a standardized or conventional
understanding. Standards of understanding require no judgment, they are exercises in
 correspondence, and to take seriously the need for what Arendt calls judging, one need
turn to what she consistently argues remains extant in order to effect an ethical
reorientation: Plurality and natality. She elaborates:
In light of these reflections, our endeavoring to understand something which has ruined our categories of thought and our standards of judgment appears less frightening. Even though we have lost the yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality. (Arendt, 1953/2005, p. 321)

In the realm of errancy, when the compass is spinning, one might say the moment is at hand. As with the call to actualize meaning among others in self-disclosure, the call of judgment is that of taste and appearance in uncertainty, to engage with the particular precisely because and as if it defies the universal. As with the "silent sense" of taste, there is mystery in judgment akin to that evoked by art:

The chief difficulty of judgment is that it is "the faculty of thinking the particular" but to think means to generalize hence it is the faculty of mysteriously combining the particular and the general. (Arendt, 1978c, p. 271)

The only hope for the accomplishment of such alchemy is through frequent exposure to and affirmation of the particular, in giving somewhere for the imagination to visit, in
modest evocation, if not actualization of a public realm. This human instance of the
appearing world is the diversity which manifests in the twin registers of plurality: first,
the multiplicity of other consciousnesses among which the struggle to make meaning is
realized from the particularity (and improbability) of existence and second, the
antagonism of belatedness wherein that struggle's presuppositions becomes a part of it.
Put another way, and more simply, this can only be a struggle among others. The
particular requires others for its affirmation. How otherwise could a belated self affirm
the reality of being, if not by way of meaningful stories among others? Arendt's story of
the history of Western thought depicts a grand attempt to avoid the difficulty of this
question. Its flight is from the particular, by which judging is made possible and which
requires the public realm's illumination:

Accepting the necessary frailty of the public realm means accepting the
frailty of judging, a frailty which, to use the words of Paul Ricoeur, is
more powerful and secure than any metaphysical guarantee. (Hansen,
1993, p. 216)

If judging's media consist in taste-informed opinion, the representative thinking of the
imagination and the phenomenological instance of the particular, by what may one
ascertain its validity? Accepting its particularity, its infinite irreducibility, are there ways
to approach the question of how judging is to be judged? As I move toward the
conclusion of these considerations, I turn to the question of what possible modes of
validity might attend "the address of Being" (Heidegger qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p.194) to which thinking and judging are subject for Hannah Arendt.

4.7 Communicative Validity & Cosmopolitanism

As may be gathered from Arendt's phenomenology of the appearing world, where meaning obtains in webs of relations among others, one evaluative of Arendtian judgment is intersubjective validity (Villa, 1997, p. 196). Arendt is here positing an alternative to the conventional subjective-objective duality which posits an objective to be evaluated by a subject, one who may or may not admit the contingency of their "judgment's" application of certain criteria and standards. Her alternative is born of the phenomenology of the plural We, in which obtains opinion's ascension to doxic truth, to the attainment of impartiality, immanent to and not transcendent from the political realm. This is to say that it is in the publicity of thought that it acquires validity. This is not to say that a judgment is valid simply if it secures the agreement of others, it is not about "the manufacture of consensus, the creation of rules of discourse that insure the triumph of "the force of better argument" (p. 197). Without its encounter with the opinions and judgments of others and the practice of representing these in the imagination, judging is unable to acquire a common sense, a sense of the world, unable to become edified and inscribed by the story of human togetherness, the shared plight and history of human being. Arendt asserts that "through communication the commonness of this world becomes apparent" (Arendt, 1990, p. 84). It is this common sense that Arendt argues ultimately guides judging, rising as it will from the individual's inevitably partial
parochialism toward the general standpoint of a “cosmopolitan existence” (Kant qtd. in Arendt, 1978c, p. 259).

The cosmopolitanism of a shared world is the political instance of judgment, preferable as such to, for example, the tolerance required by multicultural diversity, the analytical acuities of science, or the acumen and efficiencies of commerce. Among these, cosmopolitanism alone refuses to specify an end beyond the political or public realm, beyond an ontological question, and thus is resistant to the subjection of worldlessness, of reductive ideological alienation. This impulse only to make patent latent being subverts the tendency to enforce structures of the rational truths which impair the intersubjective climate of opinion. The cosmopolitan is a political conception, it consists in the marriage of notions of the actuality of the polis, in which we “belong to each other” in “beautiful vulnerability” (Curtis, 1997, p. 41, 47), and the cosmos, the infinitum of potentiality in which suspends the being of humanity (as opposed to its mechanisms of possibility) and by which “all the original capacities of the human race may be developed” (Kant qtd. in Arendt, 1978c, p. 259). These capacities for Arendt include being as beginning in the arrest or disturbance of the inevitable or given in webs of relations with others.74

Kant equates the freedom to communicate publicly with the freedom to think, for him reason is “firmed” in association with others. Arendt’s concern with the abstraction of the tradition of Western philosophy was that it permits, invites and in fact encourages a withdrawal from public life in a moralistic alternative of rational truths, which is then

74 Derrida (2002c) as well has elaborated the notion of a “cosmopolitan point of view” with respect to the notion of a “democracy to come” inspired by a “feeling...which has an interest in maintaining the whole” (p. 339, emphasis in original). This idea no doubt shares with Arendt’s a debt to Kant’s idea of the sensus communis, though, in her thought, such a feeling would be a result of secondary importance, behind the world and the courage appearance requires. For Arendt, there would be no need of a cosmopolitan feeling if it did not result from concomitant appearance. Appiah (2006) more recently has outlined a cosmopolitan ethos, as based in “distinctly cosmopolitan commitments” to pluralism and fallibilism (p. 145).
misconstrued as real. In her arguments, the messy, fragmentary world of others and oneself as other is reflective of the only world. It constitutes the human thinking subject in its image, as multiple, ambiguuated, contingent. To prefer, or know not otherwise is to be subject to the monarchy of liberal standards of understanding, and free from the political need to appear and persuade and imagine differently. It is also to inculcate world-alienation. Educational leadership recognizing the priority of political and necessity of judgment would lead, but not command (for “it does not tell you how to act” Arendt, 1978c, p. 258, emphasis in original), the visiting Arendt’s ethical phenomenology requires. Clearly time is needed for both thinking in dialogue with oneself and judgment with and among others. Predictably, there is no formula for such balances for it is a question of judgment.

Another challenge for educators of communicability and judgment obtains in its necessary aspect of risk. As we have seen, there is ample cultural authority supporting the idea of a measure of personal goodness without concomitant appearance. Often the well meaning may choose to affirm their sense of goodness by avoiding or dismissing the evil others do in a sympathetic projection of an inherent quality of goodness. One reading of this “romance of good intentions” is as a sort of pact of complicity of mutual absolution in the separation of the deed and the doer Nietzsche (1994, p. 28) warned about. The suggestion that these need be conflated is not to imply the assignment of an impossible, infinite responsibility but in acknowledgement of the limitations of perception, the opacity of the self and intention, and the multiplicity of the appearing realm of action. What can for an individualistic ethos seem an impossible burden of responsibility which can accommodate no satisfactory moral calculus is, from the view of
the world, to make obvious the need for forgiveness and to focus instead on the narrative reality of common existence. To an ethics of the appearing world, necessity is aesthetic foremost, "to judge is to be judged" (Carter qtd. in Sharpe, 1999, p. 123), it is to appeal to others in the name of a shared world, and so to say "here is my judgment: Judge my judgment, judge my reasons, judge me" (p. 123). In the aestheticism of judging, and the non-coercive, pre-rational aspect of taste's discriminations, which like action bear one along before the impositions of willfulness in the tide of events action instigates, judging is always "judging with" (p. 123). As such, it both it discloses (a singularity) and creates (a world).

Arendt makes communicability central to the cultivation of judgment and thereby places the risks of appearance prior to the enlargement of thought. Given what we have discovered of her existential phenomenology, it could hardly be otherwise. She argues for the cultivation of willingness to judge through acts of judging, forgiving others for their judgment's fallibility and asking forgiveness for one's own. The dispositions of judging are those of action and speech, whose first instance is appearing. To not appear, of cultivate the habit of appearing, is to risk doing nothing in the first instance of moral slippage, when the least is at stake in confronting evil. To avoid the necessity of judgment out of modesty, fear of appearing before others and being judged oneself, reluctance before the inequalities of a belated world—or countless other reasons one may devise to replace the uncertainty of judgment with more solid alternatives—is a choice historically associated with totalitarianism. It is the refusal of the suffering of partiality and incompletion in favor of the totality of a utopian dream, whose twin qualities of righteousness and reprieve both haunt and console without the reality of the public realm.
It is to place trust in a truth which does not exist, instead of faith in a freedom which
does, of which one’s birth is the most immediate and improbable instance. Arendt puts
modern liberal insularity and withdrawal on a grand stage of history, in the broad story of
modernity’s crescendos of self-defeat and reaffirmation. She offers a story for us to
judge for ourselves.

4.8 Exemplary Validity

\[\text{The secrets of life are not shown except to sympathy and likeness.}\]

(Emerson)

Arendt’s concern for the particularity of being gives rise not surprisingly to a particular
validity by which judgment may be considered and judged. This is the measure of a
thing as exemplar of itself, the only possible gauge of particularity. The question is not
how phenomenon, thing, action or idea, may be compared to or contrasted with another
but how it is or is not an exemplar of the particularity of itself. Deleuze elaborates the
ethics of this exemplarity, as described in the following passage:

What he calls “ethics” is...a set of “facilitative” rules that evaluates what
we do, say, and think according to the immanent mode of existence that it
implies. One says or does this, thinks or feels that: What mode of
existence does it imply? “We have the beliefs, feelings, and thoughts we
deserve,” writes Deleuze, “given our way of being or our style of life.”

(Smith, 2007, p. 67)

While absent from this description of Deleuze’s ethics may be the publicity Arendt insists is primary, she would probably agree with their “facilitative” aspect, their aesthetics and their judging concern with the particular’s exemplification of itself, of its implication in and of its own being. This is no easy thing to ascertain, especially to any mentality for whom the trials and rewards of the cultivation of judgment are not even a rumor. The difficulties of thinking are amplified in those of judging, where they become a public matter. There is no general rule which can guide judgment, no ready abstraction with which to engage the particular. There is instead only the anti-standard of the degree to which “a particular which in its very particularity reveals the generality which otherwise could not be defined” (Arendt, 1978c, p. 272). There is a question of revelation of being in judgment’s taste for meaning. The question of the generality evoked or implied by the particular requires the judgment of others to test, contest and refine. The degree to which a mentality conditioned to deductive reasoning and categorical thought could recognize the judgment of the particular is an intriguing question in education. It is one which may easily be seen as nonsensical to the pragmatics of recognition of practical necessity, of as they say, jumping through hoops without regard to why. For Arendt, judgment requires a return from the flight from the particular to engage difficult

75 Although Deleuze considered Arendt’s ethics, mistakenly I believe, “regulative.”

76 In another of what has now become an extended series of ironies, it is also so that, in certain creative communities as among artists or musicians, the question of aesthetic judgment is often couched in the language of labour, the operative form being “does it work?” The end in that case, and as for the public realm as well (in an affinity between art and politics), is the particularity of the thing itself, its success in being what it is, in making patent its latent self—a matter which resists full explication or control if it is to retain the ineffability of the human.
questions of how much something exemplifies itself or which of certain qualities are exemplary and why that might appear to be so. These are questions for which answers are not a "cure"—to paraphrase Britzman (1998, p. 76). They themselves are the condition, the symptom of freedom. These are also clearly matters of taste, which as "culture," Arendt (1968a) is at pains to align with politics:

culture and politics, then, belong together because it is not knowledge or truth which is at stake. But rather judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it, as well as how it is to look henceforth, what kind of things are to appear in it. (p. 222)

In the course of aesthetic discussions (which must be connected now to political instantiations), questions arise as to the limits and suitability of ideas or categories which activate within the conceptual demimonde the contingency which authorizes it. In school and elsewhere, the disciplines in which one is most likely to encounter such thought and judgment are the arts and humanities, for their concern is most commonly with the particular qua particular. The political significance of such inquiry is bolstered and revitalized by an Arendtian critique, a needed argument in a world of increasing standardization (now within the rubric of globalization's universal interchangeability). Nancy (2000) enhances the instance of exemplarity in the interdependent relation among the particular and the humanities in the following passage of strong Arendtian echoes:
The 'ordinary' is always exceptional, however little we understand its character as origin. What we receive most communally as 'strange' is that the ordinary itself is originary. With existence laid open in this way and the meaning of the world being what it is, the exception is the rule. (Is this not the testimony of the arts and literature? Is not the first and only purpose of their strange existence the presentation of this strangeness? After all, in the etymology of the word *bizarre*, whether the word comes from Basque or Arabic, there is a sense of valor, commanding presence, and elegance.) (p. 10)

The command of such presence is of the particular's exemplary validity, whose instance is both subject to the affirmation of opinion and beyond final assessment. For Arendt (1978a), the language of such questions Arendt is "analogies, metaphors, and emblems... the threads by which the mind holds on to the world" (p, 109). They retain in tension the ineffable "strangeness" of the particular and the relation to the other. They permit the "thinking without a banister" (Hill, 1979, p. 336) which for Arendt is metaphoric of judgment. These respect difference and that which generates it in consciousness and do not, for the love of unity or identity or resolution or even love itself, destroy "the singing in things" (Lilburn, 1999, p. 75), the delicate play of difference resonant in each instant. The metaphoric quality of judgment's exemplary validity, as for Emerson's analogics of "sympathy and likeness," is the manifestation of the mysterious means by which it combines the particular and the general. For Arendt, as thinking realizes inward
plurality, judging realizes it outwardly and palpably connects its inner and outer instantiations. Thus, in the quest for exemplary validity in the metaphoric engagement in meaning, judging achieves something of a unity with action:

The metaphor achieves the ‘carrying over’—metapherein—of a genuine and seemingly impossible metabasis eis allo genos, the transition from one existential state, that of thinking, to another, that of being an appearance among appearances, and this can only be done by analogies. (Arendt, 1978a, p. 103)

Bernstein (2001), who has written eloquently about this connection in Arendt’s thought, elaborates:

It is metaphor that bridges the gap between invisible thinking and the visible world of appearances; it is metaphor that bridges the abyss between invisible thinking and its manifestation in speech. The real paradox is not the need to express thinking in metaphorical language, but the illusion of philosophers that they can (and should) escape from metaphors. (p. 287)

In a sense, the question is of an escape from judgment, and the ethical necessity of metaphor is to retain in judging the particular. If the standard cannot be borrowed from experience—and this is where Arendt’s judgment diverges from Aristotle’s notion of

77 Cynthia Ozick’s (1986) “The Moral Necessity of Metaphor” is a wonderfully drawn exposition of the access of the metaphoric, “through metaphor, the past has the capacity to imagine us.”
phronesis—it must be evoked allusively, in metaphor and analogy, by the imagination and in communication with others. This is the challenge of a judgment's exemplary validity and, if an analogic aside might be appropriate here, why often the success of a practiced lawyer's argument is less in its penetrating concision than in its analogic aptness. In education this vein of practice and its considerations are most likely to be found in the subjects of art, literature or social studies, and in culture more broadly in the arts and related criticism. They may also be misconstrued or marginalized as a particular intensity of engagement with the world as "creativity," as though this were not something that being alive requires as its first instance. For "telling a story is already judging" (Sharpe, 1999, p. 128) and to judge is both to imagine and represent, it is to create worlds of every form. The question is not whether one chooses to take responsibility for them but whether one chooses to be with and in them at all, to give oneself to them. The arrogance of liberal presumption in this regard is also its own release from responsibility, its release from judgment. As such, to the extent to which language can be thought solely to have what Derrida (2004) calls "information value" it obliterates the possibility of judging. Judging requires of language its "poetic value" (p. 146), its means of engaging the particular qua particular. As Aristotle observed, "poetic language is always to some degree a foreign language" (qtd. in Boym, p. 586), its foreignness is of the exemplary foreigner, whose strangeness is one's own. It is the language of the conscious pariah's uneasy reconciliation with belated institution, of estrangement's disinterested delight and love for being of the world, and of judgment's fidelity to the particular. By way of metaphor and analogy, judging attains the ontological validity of action, whose instance

---

78 This is elaborated in Leora Bilsky ("Judging Evil in the Trial of Kastner," Law and History Review 19 (2001)), reference to which this mention is indebted in David Luban (2001) on "the way in which law is driven by metaphor" (para. 1).
is being for Arendt. This assurance is realized in judging through metaphor, "the means by which the oneness of the world is poetically brought about" (Arendt, 1968c, p. 14), in what Heidegger (1962) calls "the unity of analogy" (p. 22). Examples retain the ineffable and the untranslatable of which particularity necessarily consists. They ignite imagination and incite taste with pluralistic provocations. The search for the perfect exemplar is to miss the point of that for the best, a quest with parallels that for a general standpoint.  

Examples hold the place of the particular in thought, which deals with generalizing representations. They allow for the singularity of beauty, in which "all its possible meaning is contained within itself" (Arendt, 1978c, p. 272) which, in human terms, is synonymous with dignity.

Inasmuch as for Arendt to be human is to be "the dwelling place of the contingent" (Merleau-Ponty qtd. in Kohn, 2001, p. 114) and judgment is a broad requirement for the disclosure in and creation of human reality as political life, the contest of metaphorical representations of the world—of exemplification instead of assertion, narration instead of explication—requires sustained engagement and explicit support, allusive of the exemplification of itself. With imaginative thought and courageous appearance, the singular selves are disclosed, positions are transmuted into arguments which may be "redeemed persuasively" (Villa, 1997, p. 195) or abandoned altogether, as required by circumstance to the judging mind. What may not be abandoned however, is the world to whom appearing, thinking and judging is a promise.

---

79 The questions are of the same ilk, both appeal to judgment's modes of communicative and exemplary validity.
4.9 Conclusion

Arendt’s thought on judgment was scattered throughout her writing, finding no ultimate culmination or final reckoning, which though unfortunate, is poetically apropos. She died having just completed the penultimate section of her final work The Life of the Mind which was to precede one on judgment, which she expected to be its shortest “for lack of source material” (McCarthy in Arendt, 1978, p. 243). My purpose in giving it such broad consideration in this work is to touch upon the richness which her various portrayals of judging in order to inspire new ways to conceive of education. Judgment is clearly many things for Arendt, some of which seem irreconcilable, such as judgment for the actor versus that for the spectator, or impossibly separable, such as the particular and the general, the singular and the plural. Some commonalities in Arendt’s thematics of judgment may be emphasized in advance of a closing movement of its significance, and that of Arendt’s thought more generally, to the context of education.

Arendtian judging is a matter of taste, an aesthetic concern of curricular relevance more in the arts and humanities than elsewhere by virtue of necessary self-reflexivity and concern with the irreducible particular. In and by judgment one sees “the transformation of idiosyncrasy and self interest into ‘more broadly shared public or common interest’” (Smith, 2001, p. 72) as well as the interjection into the appearing world the difference of human plurality. In its exercise, judging creates the conditions for its exercise, as, by analogy, the individual is given to perceiving his or herself in and through action, that is, he or she appears in order to be. Judgment requires others not only for appearance in plurality but to become galvanized by the illumination of a general standpoint, by the informing of imagination with the possible judgments of others. This imagination
requires disinterestedness, an estrangement which grants poetic (that is un-analytic) distance to the closeness and particularity of that with which judgment is concerned. Judging concerns the quiddity of the moment and the veracity of the story it adopts of the past, it carries no fare into the future for it wishes not to abandon it as such. Above and beyond all, it may be said that Arendtian judgment is political, “one, if not the most, important activity in which this sharing the world with others comes to pass” (Arendt, 1968a, p. 221), it is concerned with and never not in view of the judgments of others and thus requires a climate of opinion. It is the practice of difference among others, and likeness without (in sharing a common condition). Judging transmutes thinking into political reality, its ability to tell right from wrong and beautiful from ugly are what interrupt the automatism of which evil consists, as Arendt (1971/2003) says in an uncharacteristic vernacular “when the chips are down” (p. 189). Judging is always seeking to locate those metaphorical chips, that they may become more visible. Judging most simple instantiation is profound, as when

"everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join is conspicuous and thereby becomes a form of action. (p. 188)"

“No less mysterious than the faculty of beginning” (Arendt, 1978a, p. 217), as Arendt calls action, the faculty of judging affords the ghost of a chance of redemption for humanity’s necessary trespasses, and for forgiveness for the rest. It is the promise of the persistence of human dignity as an appearing phenomenon in a “topsy-turvy world, a
world where we cannot find our way by abiding by the rules of what once was common sense" (1954/2005, p. 314).

In education, Arendt considered that judgment could not be taught, that it could only possibly be practiced, in what one writer called the “not-yet” world of schools (Smith, 2001, p. 87). Arendt was reluctant to require of schooling the demands of the public realm and offered no sense of how the transition from child—who is to be protected from the contest of the public world and from whose anarchic natality the world is to be protected—to adult is to be negotiated. We are left to imagine ways in which the conditions might be created for the practice of judgment, and they are myriad, from interdisciplinarity (which always requires the question of translatability and provokes assumed discursive communicability), to various critical and communicative engagements throughout the curriculum—wherever the initiative to appear may be inspired, sustained, debated and reflected upon. One could embark upon an entire separate study to inquire into the matter, but only with one profound caution. The degree to which one believes one knows what judgment is can be that to which one is prevented from practicing it. As judgment is allied in Arendt’s thought with beginning, it is necessarily non-professional and holds no debt to the wages of experience. The faculty of judgment’s publicity is again not a matter of secured agreement, for it is suspicious of abundant felicity and accord, wary as it would need be of the siren song of unity. Judgment grants the imagination and not the will the role of guardian of freedom, and in that tenuous boldness, as Goethe says of that quality, there is genius and magic. Such poetics are specific, intentional and appropriate for judgment as Arendt seems to have understood and imagined it, as Villa (1997) argues:
the autonomy of judgment is preserved by efforts such as Arendt's and Lyotard’s, which resist the temptation to ground this faculty in a theoretical discourse, and which struggle to provide a phenomenology of judgment "outside of the concept and outside of habit." (p. 201)

Judging thus brings forth a thinking being as a singularity, acting in and thus creating a world of "being singular plural." This wonder of natality takes place in the appearing tension of preserving and destroying which consciousness must suffer and exalt to remain in reach of the promise of freedom. The poetic instance, like that of thinking, is of catharsis, and its release is from the known and its truths in the freedom of beginning, one which reverberates through Arendt’s notion of judging and finds repeated echoes in art, as in such relevant and familiar words as these: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (Shakespeare, 1603/1993).
CHAPTER 5 - THE STORYTELLER

We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, of will live.

(Arendt, 1958, p. 10)

The mind has gone where the vision pointed.

(Jonas qtd. in Arendt, 1978a, p. 111)

5.1 Bergson’s Children

In drawing to a close, the problematic of summation arises. In addressing it, I must return to the form of the question, humble before even its prespecific insufficiency. In adequacy to the scope and richness of Arendt’s oeuvre, how can one summarize yet not reduce? Is there a way to not inflame the oozing betrayal of these words, which seek to invoke what I earlier referred to as a guardian faithful as it is sure, a “who,” when “our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what” (Arendt, 1958, p. 181)? How to distill this thesis’ evocations, its aspirant ethics of irreducible particularity in natality and plurality? How to sum up a thinking whose mien is not a theory but a perplexity? Valéry writes that we are “nothing but an echo” (qtd. in Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989, p. 139); a reverberation from what Arendt calls the realm of splendour beyond thought. How can one not then be like Bergson’s children, “trying to catch smoke by closing their hands” only to see “the object they would grasp fly before them” (qtd. in Arendt, 1978a, p. 122)?
Perhaps I may attend to this moment of culminatory disorientation with the help of Levinas' distinction between the "said" and the "saying" (qtd. in Edgoose, 2001, p. 122). If the "said" is the interlocutory certitude of the "information-exchange dream" (p. 122), the "saying" is its "perpetual undoing...which can only be comprehended in its incomprehensibility, in its disruption or interruption of the said" (Critchley qtd. in Edgoose, 2001, p. 122). As with the immediacy of taste, responsibility to the "saying" precedes recognition, stable meaning and understanding. The aspiration to convey what the vision portends thus is preceded by something other, something, to recall Derrida's words, "between the earth and the world." By way of summation then, let me join my patient reader in inquiring after the Laputan "saying" of this work, and wonder how its intimated responsibility may express itself.

Let us recall the initial Arendtian provocations, the awful specters of historical nightmare and human cruelty, the curious fated criticality of the response of the conscious pariah, and the sinewy problematics of modernity. Was there a "saying" in the exploration of the second chapter's struggles with the vast and fragile immediacy of the public realm, the tenuous quasi-romance of the new against the worldless transcendences of love and the good, action's incalculable authenticity and estrangement's peripheral clarity? Is there something which does not "swing back" on itself—as Heidegger (qtd. in Arendt, 1978a, p. 124) says thought and philosophy always will—in the third chapter's considerations of thinking? Is there an embarkation in thought even as it recoils on itself, and does this actuate the nexus between worlds of which judging is an instant? All of this is to ask then, if the energia does indeed depart the instrument, what song does the "saying" sing and how might it change the dance?

---

80 This surely is an example of what Arendt would call "rational truth."
The dream of the “said” exists to avoid the suffering of the “saying.” This is the suffering of being held by forces one knows not, in glimpses, echoes and moments of piercing and poignant reprieve from the known (even if as mirror of the unknown), the given, belated, the “always already,” from all of the instituted forms which extend continuity and intelligibility from horizon to horizon. It is the acuity of a suffering which tries to deliver itself into something greater than a life, lifting like the Owl of Minerva which “spreads it wings only with the falling of dusk” (Hegel qtd. in Arendt, 1975/2003, p. 9), something which bestows the kiss of meaning and the dignity of significance; it is the suffering of the “saying” which leads the storyteller to the story. The story bears the sufferer beyond herself, “all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story” (Dinesen qtd. in Arendt, 1958, p. 175), to the realm beyond death, that is, to the world. This is the domain of metaphor, a foreign language which indicates in the liminality of its foreignness the unity of the “saying” and the “said” for, as Arendt (1978a) observed, “there are not two worlds because metaphor unites them” (p. 110). Here then we have the basis for judgment in the integrity of the story, and also the fulfillment of the need for existential meaning, a need which creates its significance in the appearance of its own judgment, its own testimony to the fact of its singular existence, its participation in the world. Stories however, are always partial, they are of the diverse weave of the world, and they exist in multiple registers. This one has been about the one Hannah Arendt left for us, which is a story within the story of a dialogue among it, certain understandings of modernity and their expressions in educational thought. In conclusion what should or could be said of the story she left us, and what may be said of this one, in which hers now finds itself?
5.2 To Begin

This thesis is fashioned from pieces of thought given us by various writers, all of whom appear in support of a conversation between the artifice of Hannah Arendt and what is characterized herein as educational thought. Her story concerns the plight of human freedom in the modern age, the loss of the "underlying phenomenal reality of freedom and justice" (Young-Bruehl & Kohn, 2001, p. 232). As all good stories will, Arendt's weaves and taunts, frustrates and liberates, and ultimately leaves one considering the wonder of being and the mystery of its apprehension, in other words, considering its humanity, being held by and in it.

In the intersubjective world of Arendt's tale the central fact of human reality is neither within the grasp nor command of human conception. Its suggestion is like that of the absolute-Oneness with which a temporal creature frames the concept of eternity, it is rooted in something that may be beyond the reasoning of temporal men but still possesses a kind of rational of its own: it can...give a logical account of the existentially inexplicable. (Arendt, 1978b, p. 208)

What this account of the inexplicable refers to is the "unmetaphorical objectivity" (Benjamin, 1968, p. 70) of the common world. In the unity of metaphor this may be indicated, as a hope for redemption from the predicament of meaninglessness. This, expressed as human superfluity, has in modernity permitted unimaginable atrocity. We have seen how for Arendt (1958) the meaninglessness of world alienation can be
alleviated in judgment and "the interrelated faculties of action and speech" because these "produce meaningful stories" (p. 236). By "interrupting the law of mortality" (p. 247) they together are the impetus of beginning; in them is Arendt's answer to Rushdie's question from the start of the second chapter, which asks how newness comes into the world. This beginning can only be suffered and exalted, for it lies beyond calculating comforts of presumptive guarantees of a willful subjectivity's causality, systematization and explanation. Against their "murderous consequences" (Arendt is not one to mince words on this) stand "the poet's belief that the world's potential salvation lies in the very fact that the human species regenerates itself constantly and forever" (1978b, p. 212). In the public realm's power, mourning and hope is the affirmative reassurance that freedom is not a matter of security, of freedom from, but of a risk for something greater, in a freedom to. It sustains the hope that existence is not most significantly a matter of fear, but one of love. It trusts that this love of beauty, the feeling of "the peculiar pleasure of [the] particularity" (Arendt qtd. in Young-Bruehl & Kohn, 2001, p. 232) of worldly phenomena, while not a guarantee that being or humanity are recognizable as something good, may instead transmute the alienation of the modern self into estrangement's oblique ontological lucidity. With, for and among others to affirm its mysterious actuality, this is the indication of the gift of the inexpressible unity of being, whose truth obtains in the appearance of "the diversity of idioms on earth" (Mallarmé qtd. in Benjamin, 1968, p. 77).

The story of this unity then collapses upon itself, its ephemera overwhelms the demand of human need. It collapses because this story must enact its own problematic, must forgo the tidiness of abstraction to invoke its infinite improbability; of this physical
world of accidental regularity within entropic haphazardness (Gell-Mann, 2006), of the appearing intersubjective one of an incomprehensible diversity of multiplicitous singularities who, being We, only belong as do the shining of stars to a clear night sky. Arendt suggests that in that moment before the dawn dissolves the dark there is a suspension, a gap between the no more and the not yet, and thus a possible solidarity in the sameness of utter diversity, in a public and its promise of the new and unexpected. In the instant it pierces the line of the horizon, it induces blindness, and yet in this there is a new acuity, a sharper listening to the rhythm of being. As the story shatters into fragments, echoes, specters, so these play in the “disinterested delight” of the winds of thought, to emerge refashioned and attested to in thinking’s avatar, judging. This instance of being, of uncollected fragments expressed so explosively in the proliferation of appearing significance, is that of the storyteller. She is the one who gathers up in “memory, imagination and aesthetic form” (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 95-96) the broken patterns of experience to present them for the judgment of others. The story’s “said” is “this was and this may be,” but in the “saying” it says “this is” and “we are” in registers beyond explication, but never beyond fallible human judgment. The story inspires not passivity, but acceptance for being and becoming—in all their clamorous reverberations of losing and being lost—such that it might be imagined otherwise, that is, as it is.

To accept the story of the modern liberal self is to begin with a fiction wrought in fear, a fear which then became its command. It is a story of autonomy and will and universality, a story which Arendt judges fatally flawed, responsible for the oblivion of history, the alienation of being and the loss of the world, for the “fabrication of corpses.” A story like Arendt’s responds to its contingency, its genesis in what is not itself, with the
determined assertion of creative modesty. It is inscribed with the awareness that its edifice is necessary yet provisional, imperfect and alive; like humanity, its first impetus is to be, which is to appear. To do this it must most fully and completely appear as itself, in the act of becoming itself. It asks for itself only what the storyteller asks of life: "My life, I will not let you go except you bless me, but then I will let you go" (Arendt, 1968b, p. 97). This is judging's reconciliation with and instantiation of the immediate, particular and appearing world, even if, as in a work of this nature, it is one of representations, images of thought and the forms of the no-longer. It precludes none of the concern for the troubles and injustices of the world, but rather attempts to cast them in a context of meaning and significance which outstrips any one could fabricate. It is aware both of the decisive distinction and tenuous separation of the hubris of human fabrication and the arrogance of the story's judgment. Hence, judging both begins again and interrupts the circle of being, its critique is an instance of its own claim, of its "saying," and foremost a bulwark against the "loss of reality" (Arendt, 1968c, p. 33) of habituated forms, of unconsciousness' many slides into imposture. The story of a judgment, like Arendt's, begins something new, changes the terms of debate, calls into view a form as unique as the storyteller who is a beginning herself, for "history is a story which has many beginnings and no end" (Arendt, 1954/2005, p. 320). The story turns away from the path of those condemned by mortality's finitude, worn bare by the shuffling feet of those who knew not or could not know the promise of their courage. Instead, with the "attitude of the heir" (Benjamin qtd. in Arendt, 1968c, p. 43) and what Nietzsche calls an "unqualified Yes to Life" (qtd. in Arendt, 1978b, p. 163) the story leaps up as into the dying light of the public realm to evoke the novelty of beginnings and the taste for
meaning, to be remembered “in rare moments when the chips are down” (Arendt, 1971/2003): “I am glad that I have been told this story and I will remember it in the hour of need” (Dinesen qtd. in Wilkinson, 2004, p. 96). The story’s way is one lined with the pearls “of the rich and strange” (Shakespeare qtd. in Arendt, 1968c, p. 38) whose intrinsic worth, whose particularity marks the metaphoric boundlessness of the yet to come, of the beginning which is a conclusion, an end to what was, and a conclusion which evokes the immortality of a “new beauty in what is vanishing” (Benjamin qtd. in Arendt, 1968c, p. 41).

It has been an aspiration of this thesis to exemplify to some small degree this beauty for consideration in educational thought, a bequest of Hannah Arendt and the more just and meaningful world she imagined. Let it be a way to begin.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


