

1 Strategy and the Organization of Authenticity in the *Polis*

Naming

Strategy is the collective act of interpretation by which an organization attempts to see itself, and to see itself anew, in the company of others doing likewise. These acts of interpretation use a language of named qualities and attributes. Yet to see an organization for what it is, and to name its (often idealized) qualities, is not the same thing. As the poet Paul Valéry remarks, the act of seeing is more than the act of naming. Indeed, to see often means to forget the name of what is being seen, and instead to study the acts of naming by which seen things are being so readily categorized. Seeing is both to see things as they are being named in language, and to see that to be named is to conform to the already established grammatical expectations that come with carrying a name, it is to see that the ‘self’ being presented already conforms to the agreed criteria for what counts as ‘being an organization’.

Within strategic practice it is the first – the naming aspect – and not the second seeing aspect that dominates. The naming aspect is an administrative, martial or managerial concern with how an organization might justifiably present itself as acting in ways that make it ‘excellent’ or ‘forceful’ or ‘agile’ or ‘resilient’ or ‘caring’, and with how, over time, it gathers to itself a sense of self in which these qualities sediment in, and alternate between, memories and expectations. As a form of self-presentation, it is far from being static. Under its naming aspect, strategy confers an explicit, temporal framing upon an organizational form: its distinction is secured by placing its ‘being present’ between historical roots and future ambition. Strategy configures the organization in a present that reaches back in time to claim the foundational legitimacy of an origin, or the authority of generational struggles and sacrifices and successes. It also stretches forwards towards a future designed and imagined in such a way that it progresses from within the present as a probability, whilst, at the same time, always finding the present from which it is born somehow inadequate and in need of improvement. In this way the naming aspect is

animated by a progressive movement, one which borrows from the Christians an eschatology of redemption, from ancient Greece a motive power of inner purpose (*telos*) along with the geometry of the point in time dividing before and after, and from the various modes of modern scientific objectivity the methodological structure of controlled synthesis.

Then there is Valéry's seeing aspect: not the operation of naming attributes, but the struggle to investigate the demand or desire to name things in the first place; less the language of identifying and fixing than its grammar. To sense this seeing aspect is an experience of language itself, of the very real nature of how language signifies, how it operates, and how, through signification, it structures experience in the most basic of ways. It is to extending the strategic task from naming to seeing that we believe we reach the basic question concerning strategy.

To broach both naming and seeing is to be aware of how all interpretations of what an organization is involve both the specific, performative use of words to orient experience (semantic acts) and acts of grammatical correspondence constituted as a purely formal association (semiotics). The latter are typically untroubled operations in ordinary language use; to recognize the self-referential act of naming enacted in the word 'we', for example. Yet in strategic practice this use becomes a struggle because it entails the question of how and why it is in language that something comes to name itself as 'we'. It is a question that can only arise in those who have already been constituted in language as a subject, as a 'we', and who already have a history of what it is to be a collective self and associate this with carrying names. To bring this naming into questionability is to see, which is like beginning *again*.

Naming finds the language user learning the collective arrangements by which grammar works and becoming habituated in a semantic practice of expressive utterance that fosters the practical and normative entitlements and commitments by which occurrence comes to have significance and meaning (it is narrated as history). Seeing considers and questions these arrangements. This occurs in language still, but in addition to semantic operations the naturally appearing semiotic associations (such as names) also come into view. The semantic involves understanding: the perception of meaning in an utterance, whereas the semiotic involves recognition: the perception of a sign that has appeared previously. In bringing both understanding and recognition into view strategy can deliberately and carefully question what it is that has been accepted as already understood. Here the naturally occurring semiotic force of language (the literal, natural fact that we, like all animals, speak) becomes apparent, and the strategist is left in what Giorgio Agamben calls the 'moat' between the semantic and semiotic (because the questioning can only occur against the backdrop of semantically acquired meanings). The stretch between naming and seeing

does not dispense with or avoid names (humans cannot ‘will’ themselves to be outside history and into a purely naturalistic state of semiotic language), but brings names (and so naming itself) into questionability. In strategic terms, it is the provision of organizational space to consider, for example, why it is that an organization should gather under sobriquets and idealized characteristics such as ‘class leading’, ‘visionary’ or ‘future proofed’. The strategist exists not just to name the organization, but also to consider these names anew, which in turn is to question how, in the use of such characteristics, understanding so readily slips into recognition.¹

In considering what is named and why, and in considering how naming itself takes place, and why, the organizational condition being conferred by strategic practice is close to what, in relation to the human subject, is ‘named’ authenticity. To be authentic is not to conform with, and so confirm, a stable, grounding essence (which would be to define oneself by a name alone) but to see how a name has arisen, and in doing so leave oneself exposed to the possibility of other names, and other processes of naming. In human individuals it is a state of enlarged self-awareness that arises when a person is both aware of the names by which they are positioned within human practices and of experiencing itself outside of any specific practice, the latter being somewhat clumsily expressed in the grammar of the ‘I’. Authenticity emerges when these two conscious states, in their intimate distinctiveness, speak with the same voice.² It is what Hannah Arendt calls ‘the two in one of the soundless dialogue’ with oneself. The dialogue is an act of thought that admits and then refuses the semantic discourses by which the life into which human beings find themselves thrown has been arranged, and which so often gives way to forms of uncritical, semiotic recognition. In the language of strategy it is not only to semantically re-interpret what it means for an organization to progress, grow or succeed, but to also question why phenomena like growth or success collapse into semiotic signs. More often than not, they are just acknowledged as desirable names. The refusal comes not in opposing one name with

¹ Giorgio Agamben *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*. Translated by Liz Heron. London: Verso, 2007. Agamben riffs off Benveniste’s distinction between semantic and semiotic, as well as the metaphor of ‘moat’, which divides by also connecting them, and which conveys the sense of a floating effect on those considering what it is to belong to language in itself, as well as to its historically enabled categories of understanding. Saku Mantere offers a rare reflection on the ‘discomfort’ of semantics in strategy practice and the potential for inertia that comes with the definitions and labels that preoccupy (academic) strategy discourse. Saku Mantere What Is Organizational Strategy? A Language-Based View. *Journal of Management Studies*, 2013, 50(8): 1408–1437.

² Hannah Arendt Thinking and moral considerations: A lecture. *Social Research*, 1971, 38, 417–46. Also Hannah Arendt *The Life of the Mind*. Edited by Mary McCarthy. Indiana: Harcourt, 1971/1978, 157. It is an agreement to subject one’s deeds to self-examination without the comforts of compliance to publicly available standards by which one might check the veracity or rectitude of one’s assessment.

another, but in admitting and absorbing one's complicity with the burden of carrying names, one upon the other, whilst noticing that no matter how many names one carries, there is something about the self that lives beyond them, but often in shadow: even 'I' can become a form of naming.

To think with and write about the 'I' is itself a practice, one that Joan Didion remarked, wryly, in her essay 'Why I Write' (which she chose as a title because it sounded like the repetition of 'I', three times, and which she borrowed from another writer) is an imposition upon the world, a demand to be listened to, a subjugating assertion that writers, in particular, are alive to.³ If authenticity requires a two-in-one dialogue with oneself, it is hard to avoid using the 'I', but then the 'I' has its own confining limits. Where else can one go? There are options. Here, for example, is the dying narrator of Edward St Aubyn's novel *A Clue to the Exit*:

I felt the relief of writing a third-person narrative. It's so much more personal than first person narrative, which reveals too flagrantly the imposture of the personality it depends on.⁴

The distancing relieves the 'I' from its circularity, and forgives the peculiarly fragile nature of its essentializing, but ever so thin, form. The use of the third person upon oneself carries within it an intimacy of seeing from a distance, it is less assertive and aggressive. It is as though a small demon appears at one's shoulder, the enigmatic, invisible being that the ancient Greeks believed accompanied all living beings, and which appears as a fellow, fateful conspirator in one's life.

One's demon (*daimon*) is both an outward signature of one's genius and destiny, and a guide that can appear inwardly, as a source of advice and council by which to gain perspective on one's own thoughts, feelings and deeds. The self that is seen with, and sees through, its *daimon* is neither an 'I' substantiated by a singular set of sovereign qualities (such as reason, will or divine spirit), or by biological determinism (an instinctive will) or by historically determining forces (such as fate, dialectical spirit or community belonging). Nor is it a stack of categories found in human practices (a collection of roles and qualities) balanced on top of one another into an (often shaky and uneven) upright form. Through its *daimon* this self-spoken third person becomes an unsettled, 'moat-dweller' able to critically measure up to its own entitlements and commitments set amid many others, and yet to find there the possibility of things being otherwise. It is a self that Didion also acknowledges at the end of her essay, when she asks of herself just who this narrator is, this 'I' who knew things and who told stories but who was

³ Joan Didion Why I Write. New York Times. 5th December 1976.

⁴ Edward St Aubyn A Clue to the Exit. London: Picador. 15.

not at all identical to herself, who was not at all at home in her house, and yet whose voice was, when one thought about it, the reason she wrote.

In talking of strategy as authenticity we are enquiring into how to organize a state of affairs in which the third-person *daimon* of St Aubyn's narrator, and Didion's 'I' and Arendt's 'two-in-one' dialogue, can appear as, when thought about, the reason for organizational action. It is an appearance in which a community of selves who adhere in some way to a unified and named organization of entitlements and commitments do so critically. If strategy is limited to setting out a plan of action and following it, it is incomplete, indeed it is barely strategy. Strategy is asking oneself, as a collective, the occasional but necessary questions of what a name (like a quality, achievement, desire, title, vision or goal) amounts to, and how one came to carry the names one does, many of which are enlisted in the furtherance of organizational survival and flourishing.

In the case of St Aubyn's narrator, for example, under the enquiry undertaken in the company of his *daimon*, he acknowledges how utterly he is being driven by instinct, and by being bounced along by the prevailing places, practices and habits by which a ragbag of a life has been roughly assembled. Yet in the very act of considering the inevitability of being organized through these inner and outer forces, that often twist back on themselves, so the inner becomes outer and the outer inner, comes a persistent but strangely elusive sense of distinction and hence possibility. It is a 'thoughtful seeing' through which he gains a temporary perspective upon situations that then become objects, or a scene of objects, against whose hard edges he is able to repeatedly and imaginatively speculate. In Arendt's terms, he experiences the two-in-one dialogue of authenticity: his is a refusal to fall in passively with existing agreements and conventions, and, just as tellingly, a refusal to settle easily alongside the appeal of newly imagined ones. What is being forged is what Arendt calls self-presentation:

Self-presentation is distinguished from self-display by the active and conscious choice of the image shown; self-display has no choice but to show whatever properties a living being possesses. Self-presentation would not be possible without a degree of self-awareness – a capability inherent in the reflexive character of mental activities and clearly transcending mere consciousness.⁵

In self-presenting (which, given it is a critical concern with how one wishes to appear is always open to hypocrisy) St Aubyn's narrator is the object of his own questionability: he is a being who may never have sovereign control over events, or a stable, inner sense of being 'I', or the comfort of being happily known as 'this' or 'that', but who nevertheless

⁵ Hannah Arendt *The Life of the Mind*, 35.

struggles continually to see himself, and so embodies the possibility of starting events anew. He is, in our view, a strategist.⁶

Authenticity, Consciousness and Conscience

Authenticity is not freedom from the constraint of organization, but a freedom to modify the forms it takes, again and again: it is expressive and, potentially, transgressive. By locating authenticity in the interrogation of situations, from within those situations, Arendt envisages an intimacy between thought and existentially modifying acts of removal (*Ausgang*) from the ordinary concourse of events: authenticity is a forming of form-to-be, a picking over of unifying names to find fragments, working not to complete the image of oneself, but to disturb its complacency. Nothing fixed is being made or recommended, and the *daimon* is always acting as a process, not as anything that has been produced, an effect. Through the gaze of its own *daimon*, the authentic self gains perspective upon, curiosity for, and awareness of the organizational entitlements and commitments, some of whose normative force and apparent practicality are so engrained and habituated they have gone unnoticed. Their disturbance can be upsetting, Friedrich Nietzsche likens the carrying around of one's *daimon* to a pain, the pain cast by a riddler – and so occasional, elusive and fleeting in its nature. The *daimon* cannot be summoned at will, and as often as its company is provocative it is also paralyzing and dangerous. As Nietzsche reads it, it is both a state of conditioned happiness (the sense of *eu-daimonia* that comes from living alongside one's fate again and again) and occult disturbance (giving voice to the demonic or unruly forces that prevail beyond the world of known forms), and which then upsets the idea that happiness alone is the goal of living.⁷

Almost seamlessly, accompanying this consciousness of self realized in two-in-one dialogue, comes a sense of conscience: a thoughtful concern for why and how the social and im/material conditioning into which we are thrown organizes situations so that they carry an enduring and exemplary resonance. Arendt calls such conscience liberating: it questions the particular values, commitments, theories and doctrines by which people have lived, and continue to live, but without invoking general standards

⁶ The narrator realizes quickly that 'the unadorned 'I' – the pockmarked column standing alone among the ruins' is as 'flimsy a fabrication as the rest of them', provoking him to ask the question that then frames the rest of the novel: 'So what is the authentic ground of being if this footing pronoun is so inessential?'. Edward St Aubyn *A Clue to the Exit*. 4.

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887/2001, §341. The *daimon* appears as that which reminds the self of having to live life again, an eternal recurrence of the same, at which prospect one wails or one feels awe.

by which to warrant such questioning.⁸ As conscience it is acquired not just through experience, but learning. It requires a memory from which to recall and think anew. If the *daimon* itself produces nothing, a formless form, then once brought to bear on events in memory and learning, this self-conscious seeing becomes a conscience from which one not only senses but judges oneself. It is a condition of openness that demands a sense of direction, though, as the poet Robert Frost reminds us, the demand is vague, and replete with difficulty:

Tis of the essence of life here,
 Though we choose greatly, still to lack
 The lasting memory at all clear,
 That life has for us on the wrack
 Nothing but what we somehow chose;
 Thus are we wholly stripped of pride
 In the pain that has but one close,
 Bearing it crushed and mystified.⁹

Authenticity then, is more than a thoughtful reflection upon situational demands of existing and emerging commitments and entitlements, it is an active finding of one's way from within them, that results in a self-forming, which is of its own form, created by the realization that the question of what one is, and being what one is, are twinned, and is nothing outside what one somehow (opaquely) makes of it, in thought, feeling and deed, without ever being fully conscious or in control of such a life-affirming power. The form created in this 'choosing' occurs in an effortful language of plural stories and symbols that transform contingency into events that can be twisted into narratives from which hang carefully wrought opinions in whose argumentative embrace we find ourselves moved and purposefully committed. It is here a sense of self is both tempered and accented, for in the conscience arising from consciousness comes the struggle to distinguish the reasons that warrant existing entitlements and commitments from the good reasons: such a distinction rests with experience, not principle. It is a practically and normatively made distinction that entails imaginatively replaying events, considering alternatives and speculating on possible futures in relation to the struggle to make oneself understood to oneself, and to then work outwardly from within the self-constituting atmosphere of this inner dialogue.

⁸ Hannah Arendt likens conscience to the self being able to live alongside its *daimon*: 'Its criterion for action will not be the usual rules, recognized by multitudes and agreed upon by society, but whether I shall be able to live with myself in peace when the time has come to think about my deeds and words. Conscience is the anticipation of the fellow who awaits you if and when you come home.' *The Life of the Mind*, 159.

⁹ Robert Frost The trial by existence. In *Frost: Collected Poems, Prose and Plays*. New York: Library of America, 1995, 30.

Perhaps contrary to some understandings of authenticity, and certainly those associating it with an inner immunity to events, Arendt's authentic self is necessarily always incomplete, hesitant even: it is a standing towards the social and material conditions that bind each self concretely, rather than any assertive separation from them. In standing towards these conditions, it is also an openness towards them, allowing them to breach their own limits a little, even if it is just the way they are forced to declare themselves when being looked upon with concentrated curiosity. There is an 'in-out' rhythm to taking in prevailing organizational orders and then pushing back against them.

Authenticity becomes a kind of breathing – in and out – which is continual, and remains very much of this world, which is a world of metamorphosis of which one is affectively, thoughtfully and imaginatively partaking. In what emerges by way of self-understanding there is no metaphysical clarity, no firm destiny, no brilliant vision, no isolated will, only the capacity for, and organization of, a self-forming that, if properly thought through, avoids narcissism on one side, and fatalism on the other. In this, forming the 'ways' that bind a community together – the sense of place and common tradition, the pragmatically useful skills that have grown up over generations, the temperament of character, the seasonal and environmental conditions, the prevailing material and symbolic resources – are acknowledged as conditioning influences making life possible. Yet none of these can be relied on to yield a sense of an authentic self, which has to *own* these conditions (the move from consciousness to conscience), and in the process of owning up to them, encounter lines of flight, glimpses of escape, fantasies of emancipation, all of which give full voice to what Arendt felt made life not just possible, but distinct: namely the ability to inaugurate, to begin anew, beyond the names that name.

In Arendt's thinking authenticity becomes part of the tradition of writing that so delighted Ovid: imaginatively thinking oneself into the condition of others and finding distinction in refusing the boundaries that divide; like time, life is at its fullest at the very point of its dissolution. We belong to that which is not us: we run alongside otherness and in doing so we find and re-find our place in the world of things. As a condition of being it is in authenticity that the self finds its grounding and senses what it can and might be. As the organizational expression of authenticity strategy also upends rather than confirms any fixed understanding of the self.

Following Arendt, our view of strategy runs askance from most other views. If strategy is a concern with authentic self-presentation, it can never again concern itself with delineating fixed positions. It is not about attaining known aims, winning a competition, or generally organizing institutional and material forces so as to align human thought, feeling and deed with

desired outcomes. Strategy is not about settlement at all, but the deranging of settlements. Without recourse to an essence, and ambitious goal, or visionary end, a self might seem bereft of reasons to act, but in recompense it can shelve its prejudices and shake off its tethers: it can realize a generality not by controlling the things so they conform to its already existing self-image, but by continually coming alongside things and morphing in response. It is through this open morphology, we argue, that selves, and the organizational forms through which they coalesce, enlarge their awareness of what is possible, always flowing through the flaws they pick up when pulling away from what is considered typical, traditional, acceptable and normal. In its intimacy with authenticity strategy, as the art of the general, becomes an aesthetic that expands upon what was hitherto closed: strategy does not cover and so command the world, it transforms it.

Refugee

Writing in the aftermath of World War II, Arendt sets her enriching struggle for authenticity against the bleak backdrop of German National Socialism. Here was a political and social system in which individual lives were rendered superfluous when set against the idea of a master race. 'Rendered' is an appropriate verb: lives are cut into parts and processed as parts of parts, to the point where unities of living experience become interchangeable units of party machinery. A caustic mixture of violence, propaganda and fear were employed to warrant and enforce the downgrading of attempts at self-expression in favour of a general ideal. Coupled to this enforced ideal was a systemic requirement to concern oneself with everyday survival. To queue for permission, wrestle with bureaucracy, follow regulations, all of which required conformity with everyday opinions and practices, and a winnowing down of human life to a point of nullity in which the urge towards modifying acts of thought was snuffed out. It was as if the distinction between semantic understanding and semiotic recognition was being eradicated: language became the raw fact of speech, signs carried meaning on the basis of repetition, not interpretation.

Arendt herself fell short of the Nazi racial ideal. Being Jewish she was forced to hide, was captured and interred, and then escaped, fleeing Germany, first to France, and then to the USA:

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt *We refugees*. *The Menorah Journal*, 1943, 31(1): 69–77.

The trauma of this breakdown, however, brought the importance of authenticity into stark relief. As an enforced wanderer the refugee has been expelled from the trinity of state–nation–citizen: they do not lose specific rights, but law itself. In Arendt’s laconic phrasing ‘their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed, but that nobody wants even to oppress them’.¹¹ They are naked and adrift, without the protection of an entailed inheritance. They cannot just claim to have inalienable rights. No one is listening.¹² They are stateless, lawless, homeless, indeed so stripped bare of communal texture as to have no individuating distinction. Yet it is precisely at that moment that they become distinct:

The paradox involved in the loss of human rights is that such loss coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general – without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself – and different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance.¹³

It takes an avant-garde and so disturbing figure such as a refugee to reveal what otherwise is concealed: first that we are beings whose individuality is not in opposition to, but symbiotic with, belonging, and who, without community or government, become poor in world; and second, that we are beings who have forgotten the precarious character of this community and government upon which the appearance of any sense of self is named as such.¹⁴ The refugee is a reminder that the collectives to which a sense of self belongs are nothing natural, nothing we can take for granted, they have to be organized. They are a figure who sees how naming organizes by conferring limit conditions on life. Yet in being placed outside this figure is also a reminder of the irreducible difference by which all of us are individually and inwardly constituted, and of how so much that goes by the name of organization is predicated on, and generates, a hostility to this irreducible difference.¹⁵ The hostility is an

¹¹ Hannah Arendt *Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace. 1950/1979, 295–6.

¹² Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1958/1998, 200–1.

¹³ Hannah Arendt *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 302.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 293–4, 301.

¹⁵ ‘Since the Greeks, we have known that highly developed political life breeds a deep-rooted suspicion of this private sphere, a deep resentment against the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is – single, unique, unchangeable.’ Hannah Arendt *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 301. Arendt’s own history, ending up a refugee in the USA, is perhaps telling here. If, as F. Scott Fitzgerald suggested, the USA is neither a land nor a people, but an idea, then it was here, at least the ‘here’ Arendt experienced having escaped Nazi internment, that the irreducible difference of the private sphere received

acknowledgement of the limits of human artifice: no matter how much we attempt to pave over ‘unique individuality’ with the architectures of civilization, it has a habit of bursting back through.

In its distinct alienability, the figure of the refugee renews the possibility for authenticity. What the refugee knows, and what others might learn, is that the community and government that matter, that affirm life, are expressive conditions housed in the semantics of language that has to be worked at and seeded into histories again and again, it has to be achieved and then borne along: it cannot be designed and declaimed, it has to be acted out.¹⁶

The *Polis* of Ancient Greece

Perhaps the purest expression of this action, and certainly that about which Arendt thought long and hard, is the ancient Greek *polis*. The *polis* is a constantly renewing assembly of citizens engaged in listening, voicing opinions, arguing, thereby directly participating in the running of a city state by expressing themselves from within it. It is a form to which strategy has an intimate relation, not least because the origins of the word strategy lie with Greek city states such as Athens or Thebes and the officers – *strategoï* – responsible for their overall protection. To understand the ground upon which strategy rests, then, is to understand the figuration of the *strategoï* in relation to the *polis*, a relationship that is, we will argue, a struggle for authenticity, a struggle in which the distinctions to be realized by ‘the two in one of the soundless dialogue’ are made possible through a collective commitment to communally renewed criteria of consideration. There is an intimacy between authenticity and its public organization in a *polis*, and from the very beginning strategy was understood as the organizational practice of enacting this intimacy.

Ideally speaking, a *polis* should consist of as many citizens as one can make out individually from a single vantage point, and not more. The *polis* is being defined by the possibility of occupying a point of view in which a whole was somehow present, but only as a mutual gaze where

due consideration, almost, as it turned out, to an abnegation of the concomitant need of a public sphere through which private difference might find space enough to express itself.

¹⁶ That we so typically resent the struggle this entails, and that we have come to a condition in which we would rather outsource the task to service providers only too willing to manage our affairs for us, thereby transforming them into an economy of signs, is a state of affairs made perfectly blatant by the treatment typical to refugees. Arendt observes that when nations are called on to deal with refugees, they regard them as minorities, as separate to citizens, as in need of special treatment and permission, as strangers who, at best, and with appropriate regulations and laws in place, might then live alongside ‘native’ people. The idea that we belong to a community simply by being human is a comforting abstraction that insulates us from the uncomfortable truth that belonging is an organized condition (Hannah Arendt *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 295).

each citizen could hold the look of another and in this encounter of faces, even if vaguely, sense them looking back, not as citizens who have given over their subjectivity to the state in exchange for security, but as citizens who *ipso facto* have an equal standing in bearing the weight of belonging together, and who might be themselves looking upon others with the same thoughtful freedom. It is in this flicker of mutual awareness that the self as a citizen appears, looking outside and finding there a provocation to turn inward: consciousness transitions into conscience and to action; insides and outsides continuing to twist into one another. The *polis* is the space of this metamorphosis. It is a gathering or clearing of mutual disclosure that is marked out wherever people gather to deliberate openly on the possible distinction between reasons and right reasons, acts and good acts, or form and beautiful form, and do so freed from the self-interest and economic concerns associated with each of their private households.

It was an important and perhaps grounding responsibility of the *stratēgoi* to have both a spatial and temporal oversight of the *polis* as without a public marketplace of opinions and ideas the city was bereft of vitality and integrity for it was there, in open discourse, that citizens attempted to understand what the city was, what made it distinct, what mattered to it uniquely, what social and material conditions it found itself in, and how these might be envisaged differently. The job was a profound and yet very ordinary one: To lay the groundwork of what it is to have a sense of civic self with which each citizen can feel sufficiently complicit and responsible to become exposed to others. The citizens are to discuss and dispute whether the prevailing agreements concerning the concepts of law, equality, value, strength, happiness, love or virtue continue to make more of life. In this partaking the *polis* constitutes itself, but does not sustain itself; its generative robustness and viability require strategic form.

Historically, the *polis* included the:

ecclesia, the Assembly of the people, which is the acting sovereign body. All citizens have the right to speak (*isegoria*), their votes carry the same weight (*isophephia*), and they are under moral obligation to speak their minds (*parrhesia*). Participation also materializes in the courts. There are no professional judges, virtually all courts are juries with their jurors chosen by lot. The *ecclesia*, assisted by the *boule* (Council), legislates and governs.¹⁷

The council or senate set the agenda of the assembly, and it was those who advised this council, notably the council of the ten generals – the

¹⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. Edited by David Ames Curtis. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 90.

strategoï – who held sway. The generals were military, economic and political in nature, they were responsible for prosecuting war but their authority was secured through yearly election which in turn was based on acuity in establishing alliances and trading.¹⁸ They were leaders who acted as conduits for the *polis*, acutely aware of its being a space of both preservation and possibility whose limits were configured not just in city walls, but the legal constitution of a citizenry whose continual debate formed the wellspring from which an open future spills; the *strategoï* were to administer the edge of the *polis* to then better protect its enclosing and generative power.¹⁹ These structures were there to reconcile the agonistic qualities of dispute and continual self-revealing with organized structures that better enabled such an exchange of opinion. These exchanges occurred without princes or kings, without bureaucrats or administrators, and most tellingly without any territorially grounded notion of state sovereignty that individuals were to identify ethno-racially as people, constituents or *Volk* for whom, in turn, rules and decisions were binding: They were only to be bound as citizens, of Thebes, Sparta or Athens, each of which, as a city, was the ongoing expression of the aesthetic effort to create what otherwise would never exist.

In attempting to recover an interest in the *polis* and the distinction between politics and territory upon which it was organized, Arendt was trying to push back at the prevailing agreements in German legal thinking which, at the time, continued to maintain a feudal association between law, politics and land.²⁰ Politics followed a model of territorial building, and law was tied to the markings of territory: soil, fences, the marking of borders. The marking of territory to form the estate, *das Gut*, vassal and *feud*, is a once-and-for-all distinction that then requires violence to defend as boundary lines drawn around an estate (the product of the focus on building and making) need to be authorized.

This unquestioned association of law, politics and land had been woven into prevailing understandings of the Greek *polis*. The eminent Carl Schmitt, for example, locates the etymology of the *polis* in both fortress and border, and ties law, or *nomos*, to the marking out of territory

¹⁸ Maurizio d'Entrevres Hannah Arendt. In *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Spring 2019 Edition)*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/arendt/>

¹⁹ See Jerome Kohn Freedom: The priority of the political. In *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*. Edited by Dana Villa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 113–29.

²⁰ John Hart Ely The polis and 'the political': Civic and territorial views of association. *Thesis Eleven*, 1996, 46: 33–65.

into regional space, hence *nomos* can be located within walls. Etymologically, *nomos* also derives from the Greek *nemein* and the German *nehmen*, both indicating a taking or appropriating, which underlie Schmitt's use of the term *Landnahme* – the taking of land that was either free or won by conquest and so divided and appropriated under legal title.²¹ These geopolitics of space identify politics, and more specifically strategic leadership, with jurisdiction over a territorial space, which in turn is linked to the existence of households (*oikos*) and families as parts of settled (as opposed to *nomadic*, which offers yet another etymological root as wandering or grazing) land-communities. In this, the *nomos* of the earth is also opposed to that of the open sea for which Schmitt harbours particular dislike: with the sea there are no limits and boundaries, no sacred locations, no law or property that does not float away or get battered in storms.²² The sea resists cultivation and building, whereas land secures the agreements of collective belonging: ethnicity, religion, language and so on. It all begins with the first act of politics, which is fencing in. As Schmitt puts it:

Concretely speaking, *Nomos* is, for example, the chicken every peasant living under a good king has in his pot every Sunday; the piece of land he cultivates in front of his property; the car every worker in the US has parked in front of his house.²³

But whilst this territorial state is literally and figuratively built – through taxes, enclosing walls demarcating a space as a home, city or nation, replete with national armies, education for cultural homogenization as subjects in a unit – it is also subject to a self-referential blind spot.²⁴ The legalization of governance only works under the cover of law: as Schmitt admits, 'every norm requires a normal situation'. So when the context changes and 'the state' can no longer securely structure its enabling space, then the warrant for authority breaks down as the strategist must declare themselves to be acting in a state of exception from the law.²⁵ The unforeseen and new requires a political judgement by a decision-making entity that emerges in an act of suspending normal politics (and law) in order to save politics (and law), but which otherwise recedes and hides, lurking, amid the administration of everyday life.

²¹ Mitchell Dean A political mythology of world order. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2006, 23(5): 1–22.

²² Mitchell Dean A political mythology, 15.

²³ Mitchell Dean A political mythology, 5.

²⁴ John Hart Ely The polis and 'the political', 55.

²⁵ William Rasch Conflict as a vocation: Carl Schmitt and the possibility of politics. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 2000, 17; 1–32.

Arendt's location of the *polis*, in contrast, though it obviously does require and invoke a distinct city space, does not involve chickens, nor is the first act of politics the drawing of boundaries. These acts are the concerns of the household, the *oikos*. In the words of Arendt: '[t]he private realm of the household was the sphere where the necessities of life, of individual survival as well as of continuity of the species, were taken care of and guaranteed'.²⁶ Law sat between the *polis* and *oikos*, as that which circumscribed the edges of each, organizing the movement from one to the other. And it is here along this liminal edge that the *strategoï* act like a permeable membrane.²⁷

This wall-like law was sacred, but only the inclosure was political. Without it a political real could no more exist than a piece of property without a fence to hedge it in: the one harboured and inclosed political life as the other sheltered and protected the biological life process of the family.²⁸

Though the *polis* was often configured through material and symbolic spatial arrangements such as offices, city walls, insignia and legally apportioned land, its nature was not of these things; politics required boundaries, but it did not draw them.

It is a view of the *polis* that frees itself from the blood-tied virtues of the old aristocratically configured city state to which Schmitt attaches the term. It is also a view that is distinct from more archaic versions of the *polis*. Earlier iterations concentrated on virtues or excellence (*arete*) beyond those of open discussion: notably the strength and skill involved in wrestling or racing that carry competitors to victory in Olympia, along with those virtues that let warriors bear the sight of bloody slaughter and stand firm in engagement with the enemy. The latter, savage valour (*thouris alke*), was mythologized as the 'best and fairest prize to win for a youth among men',²⁹ providing as it did the

²⁶ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 46.

²⁷ The *oikos* is a space of the visible hand, there is nothing of the mysterious fluidity of invisible power that permeates the exchange of opinion in the *polis*. The *strategoï* rule the *oikos* as those who run a household. They are exponents of *oikonomia* working from within a managerial, non-epistemic paradigm, one often associated analogically with the health of the body and a concern for the correct arrangement and function of the organs. Giorgio Agamben elaborates in this condition of *oikos* beautifully when suggesting *oikonomia* is both a *logos* (an unbound form of reasoning without rival) and *praxis* (what for Karl Marx is the originary, historical act of making) without necessity; its force is both discursive and practical. See *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011, 53–68.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 64.

²⁹ Tyrtaeus' elegy, in Eric Voegelin *The World of the Polis*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957, 259. Here, Voegelin focuses particularly on the Spartan *polis*, where even the questioning of its justness was seen as an act of treason and betrayal.

basis for the unquestioning availability of citizens to fight for their community, regardless of whether the cause of this fight was just. Savage valour also provided the possibility of transfiguration: the sweetness and honour of sacrifice let men become immortal, with their tombs and children being honoured long after their deaths. Yet the promise of a sweet death and immortality becomes problematic. In part because, as Eric Voegelin remarks, it romanticizes what could be a traumatic experience: 'no warrior who returned from battle has ever committed suicide in despair because such sweetness escaped him'.³⁰ And in part because it is impossible to conceive a functioning political body that is entirely made up of savage warriors, especially as the brutal task of warfare can be outsourced to mercenaries in the same way in which the *polis* may instruct technicians to build temples or fortifications.

As Voegelin suggests, the development of a proper political order requires a wider set of *aretas*, most importantly wisdom, justice and temperance, which in the Athenian version of the *polis* all gained more importance than savageness. Solon seems to have been a watershed figure here. His poems begin to elaborate concern for justice and a sense for the influence of human action as a cause of order or disorder in the *polis*, and especially for justice (*dike*), which always catches up with perpetrators of unjust action, even if such feedback loops span over many generations. It is in this temperance of individual will and desire by the intervention of *dike* (watched over by Zeus) that opinions and illusions (*doxa*) are brought into an order befitting the senses of the gods. This goes especially for the desire for the accumulation and staking out of land for the *oikos*, and the striving for wealth and possession, which cannot, contra Schmitt, serve as a principle of good order, for there is no end to such striving. In this way, a civic *polis* begins to assert itself against the more heroic versions. Not everyone can be an Agamemnon or Achilles, and even they can only stave off for a while a war of all against all,³¹ and the bloody tyrannies that inherently follow impetuous and individualistic striving. Nor can individualistic accumulation of riches continue freely, as had been the case with Athenian aristocracy whose privileges provided economic advantages to secure positions and steer events into favourable directions. The citizen *polis* required a new temperance that recognized the individualism of *doxa* as 'the condition of disorder while the renunciation of *doxa* brings the right order (*eunomia*)',³² making possible a life in community. Solon does not provide a list of the right measure or

³⁰ Eric Voegelin *The World of the Polis*, 261.

³¹ Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*. London: Penguin, 1968.

³² Eric Voegelin *The World of the Polis*, 267.

criteria for good judgement, and for Voegelin, precisely this refusal to say anything positively about the source of order in the *polis* is the animating force that reveals the passion of life as the desire, illusion or opinion that must be curbed for the sake of order. The *polis* is the realization of this unspecified balance of the ‘unseen measure’, setting into rules of conduct, casting the role of its governors not as tyrants but lawgivers (*nomothetes*); statesmen in-between parties who share the passions of the people and so act with authority for the people.

Arendt takes Solon’s discursive view of the *polis*, and then pushes it further still, because, for her, *doxa*, so long as it emerges from freely exchanged enquiries, is a source of power, not, as Solon suggests, mass ignorance. Ely’s historical study supports Arendt’s view, suggesting that the *polis* emerged from a protest by sworn soldiers leading to a strike that denied the king his *corvée*. This act, the expulsion of a tyrannical government, makes way for a civic community of citizens whose communion was concentrated within the fortified walls of Athens’ Acropolis built around the upper reaches of a hill rising from the bustle of the tightly packed city. Yet the boundaries became porous, and even the physical space where the assembly of citizens came to meet – the Pnyx, used between the fifth and first centuries BCE – was found on the edge rather than centre of Athens, on a raised, open space south-west of the Acropolis, overlooking both the city and the port at Piraeus (see Figure 1.1).³³ The *polis* was defined by walls that both gathered the *ekklesia* into a tightly packed, bodily unity, but which set them against a wide landscape of mountains and sea: democracy was both prospect and refuge. Each meeting (where quorum was around 6,000, with a maximum capacity of around 13,000) began with an invitation to step forward and talk: τίς ἀγορεύειν βούλεται (‘Who wishes to address the assembly?’).³⁴

Membership of the *polis* initially retained an overtly aristocratic bias, requiring lineage back to a mythologized ancestry. It took a change in

³³ Ely rehearses Aristotle’s likening of forms of governance and physical features of the city. The form of a citadel is best geared towards oligarchies and monarchies, while larger aristocratic families, who suit a larger number of haphazard and random layouts. A level plain best befits a democracy where, as it was in Athens, the removal of private property markers was a precondition for citizenship, and with public spending geared towards temples and not private homes, were best suited served by a community of sworn warriors organized into a phalanx defending an unwalled city in and homes with unlocked doors. Ely suggests that when Athens built a wall in the fifth century BCE, it boded no good for the city’s constitutional health. John Hart Ely *The polis and ‘the political’*, 42.

³⁴ Aristotle. Ach. 45. ‘Who wishes to address the assembly?’ See also Kōnstantinos Kourouniotes and Homer A. Thompson *The Pnyx in Athens. Hesperia*. 1932, 1: 90–217 and Mogens Herman Hansen *Polis*. In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, vol. 5. Edited by M. Gagarin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 398–403.



Figure 1.1 The Pnyx. Showing the ‘stepping stone’ or *bema*. Photograph by Costas Tzagarakis, 2021.

military technology around the mid-seventh century BCE to expand this aristocratic privilege to other citizens. The hoplite (a term derived from ‘tool’) reforms saw the emergence of the heavily armoured foot soldier that allowed for the phalanx battle formation, in which units formed deep and tightly packed lines of attack. The demands for such foot soldiers exceeded the aristocratic pool of men in some cities, and so free farmers who could afford the cost of the panoply, the armour, were initiated, first into the military, and later into political life.³⁵ The phalanx represented a community-based, non-permanent defensive army and therefore the city was not primarily based on barriers and walls that protected old claims to property, rather the phalanx itself is that barrier, made up of equal parts.³⁶ Legal supports were necessary to keep that

³⁵ Kurt A. Raaflaub *Soldiers, citizens and the evolution of the early Greek polis*. In *The Development of the Polis in Archaic Greece*. Edited by Lynette G. Mitchell and P. J. Rhodes. London: Routledge, 1997, 26–31.

³⁶ And, again, in further military developments from around fifth century BCE, lighter cavalry and, siege tactics and weaponry increased the technical demands required for warfare, leading to a gradual split between those specializing in rhetoric in the assembly, and those *stratego*i responsible for military campaigns outside the *polis*. See Scott Peake *The role of the strategoi in Athens in the 4th century B.C.* PhD dissertation, St Andrews University, March 1990. <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/2961>. But equally more distant

barrier up. In 507 the tyrants of Athens were expelled, and the citizens took over decision-making powers in city affairs, insofar as a broadening of both the opportunity to speak (*isegoria*) and the distribution of political rights (*isonomia*) began to swell the numbers of a politically active citizenry. The Athenians (or at least the mature, male Athenians) were becoming free, so that with the rise of Solon's accession he was able to refer to himself as a 'boundary stone' set between the rich factions of the city, and the 'abstract people' (*demos*) without means or interests, but exposed to the freely expressed opinion of the *ekklesia*.³⁷ All citizens could attend meetings and speak, with official positions being allocated by drawing lots or through elections, their conduct was subject to review, and penalties were applied to all equally.³⁸ It was a contained and evolving freedom, one shaped by a coming together of community and a bodily coming together of architecture and rituals of speech and listening through which people discovered the reason for, and were formed by, their solidarity.³⁹

Hannah Arendt's Realms of Labour, Work and Action

In shuttling between *oikos* and *polis* the *strategoí* become the organizational equivalent of the two-in-one authentic self, alive to the administrative fault lines of territorial and legal facticity whilst also struggling to create and secure a political marketplace of ideas. Their role is to gain sufficient distance upon the situational presence of the city to apprehend better the possibilities for its self-transformation. They are alive to the quality of the *polis* as a space of open encounter and innovative

battles and the growing importance of military campaigns for Athens gave *strategoí* a weightier magistracy, with greater autonomy and influence. But with this also grew suspicion and distrust between them and the assembly. Dominant and charismatic figures were not immune to such distrust, an enmity that culminated in the trial of eight generals, and execution of six, following a botched attempt to rescue drowning sailors and damaged ships, after defeating a Spartan fleet at the Arginusae sea battle in 406 BCE. Luca A. Asmoti The Arginusae trial. *BICS.*, 2006, 49: 1–21.

³⁷ Lin Foxhall Who was the Athenian polis in the sixth century? In *The Development of the Polis in Archaic Greece*. Edited by Lynette Mitchell and Peter Rhodes, 2011, 61–74. Foxhall suggests it is neither clear who exactly constituted the *demos* – at least in its early seventh and sixth century BCE form – nor whether that lofty and benign attitude was more widely spread than Solon's poetry and propaganda. A more radically democratic version of the 'public' emerged in the fifth and fourth centuries.

³⁸ Hans-Joachim Gehrke The figure of Solon in the Athēnaïon Politeia. In *Solon of Athens: New Historical and Philological Approaches*. Edited by Josine Blok and Andre Lardinois. Leiden: Brill, 2006, 276–89.

³⁹ Marcel Detienne From practices of assembly to the forms of politics: A comparative approach. Translated by April Wuensch. *Arion*, 3rd series. 2000, 7(3): 1–19.

suggestion, as well as that of the *oikos* as a space of provision, domestic order, trade and military training; strategy becomes a practice of opening each to the other. It is not, though, a case of merging or even knitting them together, for they are of a fundamentally different nature.

It is in her distinction between labour and work, and with the further addition of what she calls action, that Arendt expands upon the distinction of the *polis*. It is only in action, she argues, that we make incisions into the world in an authentic and hence distinctly human way: action is what defines being human. Whilst both labour and work also involve incisions into the world, these are made in the shadow of an instrumental dependency that excludes the properly generative power unique to politics.⁴⁰ To labour is to meet the material needs of the body to survive. These needs are perpetual, and demand constant attention: the body needs feeding, shelter and sometimes medical care. Work extends beyond meeting these material needs, reaching into cultural productions by which life is not only sustained, but becomes something evaluated, and hence of value. Finally, action is a condition of freely exchanged opinion amongst equals without any regard for particular interests.

The *strategoí* clearly labour, and rely on labour, especially that of slaves, children, women, mercenaries and traders; indeed all those excluded from the status of citizen. Throughout the forming of Athens through the building of city walls, forays into battle, securing ports, and commercial exchange, structures have risen, or been raised and erased, in continuous cycles of production, acquisition and destruction. It is, quite naturally, the largely material and overtly labouring activities of producing, growing, defending, acquiring and consuming that dominate the everyday lives and considerations of those interested in the surviving and flourishing of cities like Athens. Because labour is characterized by non-durability – it is bound by the natural processes of an organic life form maintaining its viability – it is often the strategist's main concern: what is made in the service of preserving biological existence is quickly consumed, requiring yet more, but it is itself not of a particularly strategic nature as in the condition of labour life is pre-structured by necessities that often follow natural cycles and rhythms, and so there is little choice in which means and ends to pursue. It is a serving of life, not an individual's being, and in this service lives can come and go without leaving a trace. Their efforts are simply consumed as a means to secure more life, which is an insatiable force. Bound to this necessity, the labouring body

⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 176. And so politics becomes a genuinely human endeavour: 'A life without speech and without action ... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.'

is not free, but given over to bodily needs: '[t]he *animal laborans*, driven by the needs of the body, does not use this body freely ...'. There is no consideration of why these needs are being met and no questioning of being; products are made, consumed, and replaced (where possible), it is pure metabolism being experienced by members of a species (*animal laborans*). To present oneself to oneself does not occur under the impress of these life processes, there is no place for modifying thought.

The *strategoï* would also concern themselves with the realm of *work*. Where labour describes the processes by which naturally occurring life secures its continuation, work describes the struggle by which a specific form of naturally occurring life – namely human life – attempts to distinguish itself. Labour secures food and shelter but to work is to create objects that last, not products that are used-up and so the things made through work endure beyond their creation (i.e., they are not meant to be acquired, consumed and replaced). Work is not bound by necessities of species biology and its raw concern for survival, protection, possession and abundance. Being unfettered from biological organs, the objects created by work are both useful and valuable: they become cultural. Cultural objects are valued to the extent they potentially outlast the mortal span of their creating workers (*homo faber*); indeed in being taken up and used the objects can actually grow rather than diminish in stature, being always available and intensifying in symbolic resonance because of it. The objects of work are not always material, indeed even if they are material it is as often their symbolic force as much as their physical presence that counts. To work is to lobby and advise in the creation of laws, to create art works, stories, myths, norms and rituals. These are objects that organizationally enliven and enrich, but also suppress, human lives, animating material things and activities with 'civilizing' values. Materially, work objects can range from a well-used and therefore useful hand tool to an altar piece or epic poem, and institutionally from an official procedure to a constitutional ceremony. What they share is the quality of enhanced longevity: provided they are made well, objects can be used or admired without diminishment, indiscriminately giving of value themselves. The makers of objects are remembered for the handiness of the tool or the sturdiness of the building, for the beguiling features of the story or image, for the justness of the law or gravity of the sacrificial ritual.

Workers – lawyers, priests, artists – avoid the suffering attendant to labouring whose toiling activities yield nothing beyond what is needed right here and now. Workers can witness themselves in what is being made, and the more skilled and mannered they are the more they come to belong to the culture of the city, their works outliving their own lifespans

and becoming part of the stories that give a culture a sense of progressive development. Culture is not the making of objects as such, but the habituated moving in and amid such objects; it is a style learnt by those schooled in appreciation not just of what is useful (handy tools) but also of what is beautiful (affecting art) and what brings wisdom (just laws). To belong to culture is to have taste; a discerning sensitivity; the ability to 'take aim' as Arendt calls it, whether it is a question of aesthetics, ritualistic belief or legal judgement. The cultured embody the requisite gestures and language that allows them to display a considered restraint: they can, for example, withhold emotion so that a natural ebullience in the face of a beautiful artefact becomes something calm, schooled and active, or they can act in a timely (*kairos*) way, by bearing in mind how rituals or laws are always loaded with both recollection (*anamnesis*, historical significance) and expectation (prophecy, future). Through work comes culture, and with culture comes naming and a sense of artifice and sovereign force that severs *homo faber* from nature, implicating humans in their own created world.

It is here Arendt introduces notes of caution and concern. First, by separating themselves from the wider world, the human worker (and the subjects of work's affects) ceases to be concerned with the very world that conditions its own being: the conscience through which the two-in-one dialogue initiates itself. The worker presumes the mark of work to be its self-sufficiency. As Arendt accepts this presumption has generated an impressive array of cultural forms, whether artistic, legal or religious, being built under the aegis of reason, or metaphysical belief, either of which speak of an end, *telos*, or a correct way of being, towards which the human alone can direct itself. Yet she reminds us that this artificial world of work should not be conflated with the world itself, and the fact that the human species seems intent on forgetting this is to its detriment. The forgetfulness means humans no longer critically consider the presence of work in the basic facticity of experience. It is as though work is all that matters, as if the work-world was all-absorbing, and what is outside the work being done by the self is of a lesser, objective status – and so the self only questions its effectiveness and efficiency in controlling a world of objects, it never questions its own status as a named subject. *Homo faber* is made in the reflection of the objects made through work, but with this also comes a sense of impoverishment in the relation to the world, which is always more than work. As a fabricator, the self performs amid a scenery of conforming subjectification: as it fabricates it accords with established patterns from the past, and frames a future through the order of intelligible expectations, some galvanized by hope. Through fabrication the future becomes a scene of possibility and entailments, and the past

a scene of memory and commitments and entitlements, between which the present sits as the space of willed decision and controlled occurrence. The world is there to be understood, it is there as a scene of evaluation and value; in short, it exists to confirm the separating elevation of the only form of life that understands it: humans. This separation is marked by culture: the space afforded by a civilization for its continual consideration of, and adherence to, what is named as beautiful, good and true.⁴¹ Mediated by culture, the non-human world becomes both symbolic and mute. In idealizing symbols, it can foster a heightened sense of inner certainty, and in material form it provides the raw material to sustain work, in either case it is subaltern.

The other source of concern Arendt raises with the association of work and human distinctiveness is its necessary and ultimately diminishing alliance with labour. *Homo faber*, no matter how creative and enduringly brilliant, nearly always acts in the shadow of labour: work serves labour, labour serves material need, and material need is endless. Within the world of work, the possibilities for non-instrumental, open expression remain diminished insofar as any cultural form built by *homo faber* that resonates risks being confined to a purpose, an end outside itself; it is enlisted to meet specific material needs. Even works of art – which are purportedly entirely removed from any use and therefore are as close as anything that is fabricated can be to being tangibly enduring and immortal – become things of use, for example to enhance the rhetorical power of a trader anxious to impress clients, or a priest anxious to protect his living. This is almost inevitable, irrespective of whether the work of art was commissioned for such purposes. The same with laws, which no matter how justly intended can quickly become the playthings of vested interests. Indeed, the objects of work often need to be profaned in this way for people to understand and make use of them in their daily lives: art works are used for decoration, and law to seek restitution in petty matters of personal possession; the ideals of beauty and equity are subdued.⁴²

Though they are caught in a continual *melée* for the advancement of specific interests, Arendt is not dismissive of labour and work; and it is through an intimate understanding of labour and work that the *strategoï* play a grounding role in forming and sustaining a viable city, a place where things are produced and fabricated, a solidly administered space,

⁴¹ Hannah Arendt The crisis in culture: Its social and political significance. In *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Viking Press, 1961, 197–226, 210–14.

⁴² Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 153–5.

an *oikos*. The *strategoï* become adept at understanding what needs to be built to create, protect and enrich the city. Theirs is a pragmatic intelligence that accepts the inherently self-interested nature of trade, acquisition and war, and remains ever alive to the broader framing by which these instrumental activities can be gilded and emboldened by values. In the service of the *oikos* the *strategoï* might, for example, oversee the employment of artistic genius to write of and symbolize the mythical figures to which a city is wedded and from which it takes emotional and purposeful succour. For the city of Athens these figures were the horse and the owl of the goddess Athena, the one symbolizing swift and powerful engagement, the other mysterious foresight, and in combination a powerfully charged embodiment of a people who had been hard set with confidence and ambition. Being in thrall to such affective appeals, the Athenians might be more inclined to labour as a manageable and efficient unit. The *strategoï* might also enshrine laws that require regular attendance at sacrificial rituals to ensure those growing rich through commerce and military success begin to channel some of their wealth into the artistically embellished public institutions, and so encourage a kind of virtuous cycle of influence between trade, art and belief.

Yet with labour and work alone any city, and body of people, any strategy, will find itself confronting and even encouraging a uniformity of commitments and entitlements, it is a body lacking the necessary self-awareness to renew its own practices. Arendt casts the problem as one of accommodation:

the world is created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time as home. Because the world is made by mortals it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they. To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew.⁴³

This setting right anew comes not from the *oikos*, which concerns the material and cultural realization of organizational order, but the *polis*. The *polis* is an-archic; its law is its own self-constituting force. It is secured by first making a space, both legally and architecturally, which then gives itself over to the boundlessness and uncertainty of action. The *polis* is the space of Arendt's third realm: action, a term she derives from the Greek word *archein*, – to begin, to lead and to rule.⁴⁴ But always

⁴³ Hannah Arendt The crisis in education. In *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Viking Press, 1961, 173–96, 190–2.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 132; Hannah Arendt What is freedom? In *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Viking Press, 1961, 143–72, 163–6.

with the emphasis on beginning, on appearing, on opening up, with little sense of an ending. Being devoid of explicit purpose and tangible object, actions have their own atmosphere: they have neither cause to absolve them nor effect to aggrandize them. Loosened from the moorings of wider determination, action is without need of stated, calculating warrants, indeed it is the space in which such warrants find their authority and legitimacy.

[A]ction and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me.⁴⁵

Each citizen accords others the status of beings whose distinctiveness as selves comes from their continually expressing and adjusting opinions about the commitments and entitlements by which a civic organization is being produced again and again.

For Arendt a citizenry can only properly flourish if the administrative activity of city management is itself directed towards the creation of an organizational space such as a *polis* in which citizens act for the sake of action alone.⁴⁶ It is here, amid all the jockeying and manoeuvring of open discussion and argument, that citizens find themselves; not, however, as sentient, practical creatures with specific biological needs, nor as beholders and holders of named norms and values, but as public beings freed from the weight of specific attachments. The *polis* itself produces nothing, that is the point: what is done is inseparable from the performative execution of its being done, and no sooner is it done than it dissipates: the action can only be understood in its being performed and in being performed it is complete, there is nothing further to be assayed or assessed.

Building Authenticity: Lessons from Athens

The *stratego*i are critical figures in the *polis*. Not only because they commit to the labour and work necessary for its material and symbolic form, but

⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 198.

⁴⁶ An intriguing aspect of this responsibility is preserving the deeds of those who act in the *polis*, deeds that cannot, by definition, have an end or settle around a set of defined interests. To preserve the deeds of the citizens is to enlist stories and myths surrounding argument and oratory, narratives that latch onto the expressive performance that would otherwise evaporate, given life in the *polis* has no beginning or end. The importance of doing so is that to preserve the expressive deeds of the citizens is to lend them the quality of being exemplary, it is a way of learning how to be citizens, how to enter the distinction-making *polis*. Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 194–7.

because in learning the nuances of grammar and the arts of persuasion, they partake in its purpose: the creation and promulgation of thoughtful opinion through speaking up. Indeed, the most celebrated of the *stratēgoi*, Pericles who was elected fifteen times to the council of ten generals, is remembered because of his speeches, narrated in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars*. From an aristocratic family bonded by a generational familiarity with political power, Pericles came to the fore along with Athens itself. The Athenian defeat of the Persians in the naval battle of Salamis in 480 BCE sprung the city into an ascendent arc upon which Pericles was able to latch his own fortunes. Even those writers like Plutarch who found his leadership wanting admitted that Pericles, though militarily average, had a mellifluous voice: he could and did persuade the *Ecclesia* with silver-tongued ease. Throughout his leadership he focused on the *demos*, the people. He felt that in the body of the assembly, the city found its life, no more so than when the city, as head of the Delian league, was fighting the Peloponnesians (led by the cities of Sparta and Corinth). In his most infamous and compelling speech – a funeral oratory given to all people of Athens, including the women – he reminds the audience of Athens' riches, not just architecturally and economically, but of its collective capacity for justice and deliberation. Pre-eminent amongst peoples, the Athenians cannot but fail to survive and flourish, despite the onslaughts from the enemy who had been laying waste to the city's hinterlands. It was, he reminds them, Athens who repelled the Persians and rightfully led the Delian league, by virtue of their vigorous patriotism and daring, and Athens who would again prevail. It was a necessity to fight those who sought to overthrow the *demos*, but set within the necessity of having to fight Pericles alludes to options, the most favourable one being to temporarily cede control of inland territories, and to concentrate instead on naval strength. Command of the seas secures trade routes, it allows for rapid deployment of forces, and given it relies on teams of lowly ranked oarsmen, emphasizing the navy contributed to a vibrant sense of equality. In response to the twice-yearly Peloponnesian attacks (from 431 BCE onwards) Pericles advises the citizens to take refuge within the robust city walls, to hold firm and stay the course.

In this funeral oratory Pericles embodies the performative skill and zeal by which a *polis*, ideally, comes to life. There is an audience to action, but unlike the leader of the hostile city states lining up against Athens, as Pericles opines he remains a member of that audience, he participates in his own witnessing, and it is as a collective that the assembled citizens validate the power to which the speech makes such eloquent appeal. The war, then, was not a decision emerging from the interior, freely constituted will of Pericles: it was the very form of the *polis* that required the

war to be fought (a democracy cannot concede to a traditional tyranny and survive) and which brought forth the willing nature of those who fight (using civic minded and motivated seafarers). Material possessions, Pericles continues, are as nothing to the world of a city when set against its peerless force of character. Athenians, he argues:

cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show, and place the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact but in declining the struggle against it. [2] Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. [3] Again, in our enterprises we present the singular spectacle of daring and deliberation, each carried to its highest point, and both united in the same persons; although usually decision is the fruit of ignorance, hesitation of reflection. But the palm of courage will surely be adjudged most justly to those, who best know the difference between hardship and pleasure and yet are never tempted to shrink from danger. [4] In generosity we are equally singular, acquiring our friends by conferring not by receiving favors. Yet, of course, the doer of the favor is the firmer friend of the two, in order by continued kindness to keep the recipient in his debt; while the debtor feels less keenly from the very consciousness that the return he makes will be a payment, not a free gift. [5] And it is only the Athenians who, fearless of consequences, confer their benefits not from calculations of expediency, but in the confidence of liberality.⁴⁷

Athens' strength lies with its commitment to the voluntary, open and disciplined action, and those who have and will die for Athens will be remembered not by the stone memorials of work but the continuance of a city steeped in freedom; it needs no myth-making Homer for its panegyric, its acts alone are sufficient. The suggestion here is of a people whose freedom is not something that exists prior to action, but is grounded in it: their uniqueness emerges from within the performance.

As both Bell and Garst observe, the power of the *polis* is social, not material in nature; it comes in the organizational formation of a common or general will in whose expression word and deed refuse to part company; they

⁴⁷ Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War*. London: J. M. Dent. 1910, §40. See also Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 197, 199. Arendt notes how for Pericles the continuation of *polis* is assurance enough that the deeds and stories which are the outcome of action and speech remain imperishable, and in this the walls and laws of the *polis* act as a form of organized remembrance of the perpetual sharing of words and deeds. The walls and laws stabilize what is an organization of people arising from people living together so as to act and speak together.

too, like the citizens, are steadfast.⁴⁸ Arendt's sense of the *polis*, as encapsulated in Pericles' oratory, is of a politically generated freedom being made within a politically guaranteed public realm: uniquely, the fact of freedom and the institution of the *polis* coincide. The association of freedom with an exercise of free will is an individualistic idea of each being sovereign of their own self in distinction from, and uneasy competition with, other wills. It is an interest-bearing idea of freedom. For the Greeks of Pericles freedom was not of this order, indeed far from being an individually motivated choice between options, it is 'the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known'.⁴⁹ It is a performative experience of being in the company of others without the debate being corralled by already scripted motives or goals. When the performance is riddled with one will setting and settling upon the other it becomes corrupted by the pursuit of specific interests, each advanced as a matter of force, or violence, but never power. It is not as if, in advancing their interests successfully, some subjects remain free, whilst others are subjugated. Freedom simply disappears.

Such a fate befell Athens in the wake of a plague that gripped the tightly packed city in 429 BCE, killing Pericles. With Pericles dead, the city fell into the hands of cabals intent on advancing private interests. Primary amongst the schemers was Cleon, who argued an empire is nothing but despotism, and its people disaffected conspirators who obey from fear not loyalty. He spoke in the aftermath of a failed rebellion by the city of Mytilenia, on Lesbos, for which crime, Cleon argued all the Mytilenians should be executed. Though initially the *polis* acted on this advice, even dispatching soldiers to execute an entire citizenry, they are persuaded by Diodotus to change their minds. It was the Mytilene *oligarchs* who rebelled, not the *demos*, and surely, suggests Diodotus, showing clemency to the people will reveal the seriousness of Athens' commitment to this primacy of a people over a leadership. Athens will punish those who offend democracy, not the people themselves. This norm of rule is absolute, exhaustless, undaunted: people are not free when they choose to act, freedom is action, and action only occurs in the performance of the *polis* from which the place the 'confidence of liberality' springs as naturally as the source of a great river.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Daniel Garst Thucydides and neorealism. *International Studies Quarterly*, 1989, 33: 1, 3–27. Vicki Bell The promise of liberalism and the performance of freedom. In *Foucault and Political Reason*. Edited by Andrew Barry, Thomas Osbourne and Nikolas Rose. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1996, 81–98.

⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt What is freedom? 143–72, 151.

⁵⁰ Arendt talks of the space of appearance as that place in which everything that finds itself being placed is, ipso facto political: see Hannah Arendt What is freedom? 155–6.

Diodotus' performative commitment to the idea of commonly held freedom, however, only holds sway a short while. Indeed, in the very next debate Thucydides chose to narrate how the Athenians turn back towards Cleon's instrumentalism by meting out the very same punishment they were considering for Mytilenia to the citizens of Melos, a small island that had been attempting to maintain a neutral stance between Sparta and Athens. Melos' crime was to be Melos, an independent city state whose independence was considered a threat by an increasingly aggressive, dominant, but also paranoid empire. It seems, even Athens cannot uphold the normative regularities by which a *polis* is sustained: assert yourself too materially, and without good argument, and the power of action morphs into what Arendt calls the force of labour and violence of work, both of which require ever more resources, and have no other warrant than their own apparent necessity. Athens ceased to act, and instead it laboured and worked, stretching itself outwards without care for the specious nature of its talk of justice.

In acting, a sense of self is always being formed not just inwardly, but publicly: it is a space to disclose not 'what' but 'who' I am. These declarations of 'who' are inherently agonistic insofar as they are calls upon the attention of others and once expressed these calls can clatter into other claims, find companions, or be ignored, as other citizens also vie courageously to disclose themselves and seek acknowledgement. The mutual acknowledgement of action is the spring for authenticity, which ceases, then, to be just an inward attainment, but becomes a declared one, as it is not the citizen who affirms the act, but those witnessing the performance, other citizens, who then invest themselves in the disclosure by hearing and then recalling it in memory. Here work comes in. Memory works by being held collectively in stories, myths, laws and rituals that are invoked, offering up a space of signs through which disclosures can be interpreted, this way, then that way, growing or diminishing as they are taken up, or left aside. Being citizens, the audience has sufficient understanding of the process to understand that all opinions, no matter how appropriate they sound and how authoritatively they are named, carry a contrary within them, and so can be seen anew, again and again. The audience is aware that what holds them in common as citizens, irrespective of the pressures and demands that prevail in particular situations, is an expressive ability to act as beings in the world for whom self-disclosure is wrapped up in the ongoing public expression of opinion.⁵¹

⁵¹ To act is to occupy a condition in which human response is still being made available even in situations where manners and mores have collapsed, where indeed a dictatorial cruelty is in reign. During the trials of those accused of genocide in the wake of the Holocaust, for example, Arendt judges the complicity of the accused – those such as

Action is a scene of expressive power that needs protecting from the force and violence found in the operations of the *oikos*. To breach the space of action is to permit the spread and elevation of one-dimensional characters interested either in the natural metabolism of survival or the cultural elevation and imposition of fixing values. And given work is always subservient to labour, this mixing of the *polis* and *oikos* allows what Arendt calls ‘the unnatural growth of the natural’, by which she means a singular concern with ‘the constantly accelerated increase in the productivity of labor’.⁵² The city becomes obsessed with making and acquiring and ordering lives in the service of material need, to the detriment of considering the affect the things being accrued are having on the prevailing character of the citizens. Where the correctly managed *oikos* ensures lives can be lived, a properly protected *polis* makes those lives worth living.

Authenticity as a Condition of Plurality and Natality

Action is realized through a spatially enclosed, collective use of spoken and embodied language. Of course, speech is also present in both labour and work, but in these realms it plays a subordinate role, ostensibly as a means of communicating or providing information, and is often unnecessary; the talk could be replaced by sign language or by programmed instruction. In action, however, performative speech and gesture become integral to revealing who one is, in the company of others also revealing of themselves; a language in which the beginning and end of all things occur.⁵³ It is only in acting that we experience ourselves as somehow free from subordination to ends outside ourselves:

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. The insertion is not forced upon us by necessity,

Eichmann whose defence rested on their simply following orders – as a case of ‘banality’. They were not consciously, wilfully evil. That ascribes too much motive to power. Rather they were completely without action or the possibility for action. Their language slumbered, there was a falling away of self-awareness, mere naming without seeing, and labour and work were enjoined and enjoyed without questionability. The executors of genocide were being pragmatic in a base sense, unquestioningly absconding from responsibility, simply complying, obeying. Hannah Arendt Eichmann in Jerusalem. New York: Viking Press. 1963.

⁵² Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 47.

⁵³ At many Japanese Shinto shrines the gates are guarded by a pair of *Komaimu*, dog- or lion-like spirit creatures, one to the right with its mouth open, wording the opening letter ‘a’ of the Sanskrit alphabet, the other to the left its mouth closed, wording the last letter ‘un’, one breathing in, the other out, in the breath (‘a-un’) comes the start and closure of all things, and during comes the harmony of things held in balance.

like labor, and is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we would like to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the condition of beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, ‘to begin’, ‘to lead, and, eventually, ‘to rule’ indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action.⁵⁴

Following the first birth of a unique but naked, speechless and actionless coming into the world, the word and deed of action bring forth a second natality, now born again to take on the ‘naked fact of our physical appearance’, do things and say things on our own initiative; the possibility of the creation of something new. In her emphasis on beginning Arendt expands on the nature of action: as an insertion into the world of set agreements it is both free and plural in nature. As a beginning, a commencing, action is twinned irrevocably with possibility, newness, unpredictability and difference. The nature of such a beginning cannot be planned, or ordered, or arranged for; it is what she calls a condition of infinite improbability, a birth of the new whose uniqueness takes it beyond the organic patterns by which the realm of labour is settled into its biological motion, and beyond the blandishments and aspirations of cultural evaluation and social engineers.⁵⁵ It is its own small horizon in which nothing is yet settled. It emerges from the basic primal question asked by all new things, the question prompted by the *daimon*: ‘Who am I? It is a question in thoughtful speech that declares a sense of belonging to being itself, as opposed to reporting on qualities and characteristics. It is from such a ‘who’ question – one that is answered the very moment it is expressed because its expression announces a beginning, an opening-up under the gaze of an ‘other’, the *daimon* that is now also a *polis* – that all forms of freedom emerge.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 177.

⁵⁵ Arendt flirts with Deism here: ‘This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and all origins. Thus, the origin of life from inorganic matter is an infinite improbability of inorganic processes, as is the coming into being of the earth viewed from the standpoint of processes in the universe, or the evolution of human out of animal life. The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable’ (Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 178). What is new and emergent always occurs in spite of probabilities.

⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 178–9. Without speech action would lose both its revelatory character and its subjects, in speech the actor announces the intentionality by which the action is something to which they belong: ‘If action as beginning corresponds

Action is, by definition, immune to management. Once expressed, action comes fully formed, and its resonance spills outwards in ways that can confound, as easily as confirm, expectation. And once expressed there is no going back, for it colours and settles into the character of its exponents like dye into cloth, it colours them with self-sufficiency. It is through action that we realize a condition of happiness if, following Aristotle, by happiness and the nature of happiness we mean a critical awareness of what it is that affords us the continual company of what Arendt likens to the disturbing prospect of our conscience, our *daimon* (recalling Nietzsche's connecting it to *eu-daimonia*), without needing the guiding artifice of work. Action stands alone and what it finds is found to be good, without embellishment, without artificial improvement, without augmentation, without the often temporary experience typically attributed to happiness as a mood or state of affairs.⁵⁷ To act is to live well over time, and to have lived in such a way that the well-being of one's *daimon* is attended to as a form of revealing or unconcealing of being in the natality of action.⁵⁸

Accompanying natality comes plurality. To begin anew in a second birth is to announce oneself as a self in the performance of action to

to the fact of birth, if it is the actualization of the human condition of natality, then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals.⁷

⁵⁷ Aristotle too is asking after the nature of human beings. What is it that makes us distinctly human? It cannot be that we are alive as we share that with plants, or sentient, which we share with animals, so it is more akin to the active exercise of the soul's functions in accord with rational principle, which is, then, to not just do things but to do them well, after consideration. What then of what it is to do things well? This is virtue: action that brings rewards that is pleasant, but above all Aristotle poses the question thus in *Nicomachean Ethics*:

To say however that the Supreme Good is happiness will probably appear a truism; we still require a more explicit account of what constitutes happiness. Perhaps then we may arrive at this by ascertaining what is man's function. For the goodness or efficiency of a flute-player or sculptor or craftsman of any sort, and in general of anybody who has some function or business to perform, is thought to reside in that function; and similarly it may be held that the good of man resides in the function of man, if he has a function.

Are we then to suppose that, while the carpenter and the shoemaker have definite functions or businesses belonging to them, man as such has none, and is not designed by nature to fulfil any function? Must we not rather assume that, just as the eye, the hand, the foot and each of the various members of the body manifestly has a certain function of its own, so a human being also has a certain function over and above all the functions of his particular members? What then precisely can this function be? (1097b)

⁵⁸ This reading from Arendt finds relates the human self to its *daimon* accompanying each of us as we live, but which being somehow aside from us, is often only visible to others (as our fate) and not ourselves. She thinks only those in whose deeds a life is ended definitively, that is, it is sacrificed prematurely in a remarkable (and hence mythologized) form, such as that of Achilles, can fully experience *eudaimonia*, as only these supreme acts make a full (and hence complete, ended) life. Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 194.

which others, necessarily, are an audience. Not mute spectators, but equally active beings with whom one seeks agreements. To act is not only invoking a *daimon* through thought (the two-in-one condition of looking upon and potentially agreeing with one's own self, but also a placing of oneself in others' conditions). This ability to think within others' thoughts is more than a dialogue with one's own self. It also requires awareness of conversations with those with whom one is in (potentially) some kind of (dis)agreement. To be aware of others and others' expectations and memories, commitments and entitlements means 'the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present', a capacity that enables people to orient themselves towards a plurality.⁵⁹ It is in this way that the freedom of action is not an outward expression of inner certitude, but an already public performance whose certainty is being carried through attempts at persuasive argument. The need to persuade through performance is an acknowledgement that any insertion into the world through speech and action is an encounter with others with whom speakers are in relations of profound equality (all humans speak and act) and distinction (they do so uniquely): there are no formulae or ready-made routines available to action, each expression demands the effort of an imaginative placing into the lives of others.

Neither labour nor work afford us such natality and plurality. To labour is to make things to be sold, consumed and replaced, or otherwise to store until they decay or spoil. To work is to make objects to be used as tools or guidelines, or as symbols to be contemplated, worshipped or possessed. The production of labour is ceaseless, and confines all life to a headless fixation with its own continuation, without room for the two-in-one dialogue of authenticity. The fabrication of work would seem to offer more scope for authenticity, given it pointedly and explicitly attempts to elevate human forms of life to the level of a subject relating to 'objects' that exist 'out there': through work comes a sense of sovereign command and agency whose artifice keeps it separated from the outer environment into which it violently projects itself, securing its own sense of continuation that will outlive its meagre, biological span. Yet it is precisely because of its anthropocentric artifice that work also fails to render the human being into an authentic condition.

It is in action that authenticity arises. What appears as intimate to a condition of authenticity is a sense of a human self that feels implicated in occurrence: what marks the authentic self is the experience of altering, transforming or beginning again, and somehow at one's own behest.

⁵⁹ Hannah Arendt *The crisis in culture*, 218.

But this is not the equivalent to having rational control over events, or to thinking oneself on a trajectory that reaches beyond them, but an expressive awareness of an aesthetic power to act within them. Hence, for Arendt, far from being an inner state of subject sovereignty, the condition of authenticity is an organized giving over to the gaze of others in the public creation of opinions (being aesthetic, action is making something that otherwise doesn't exist, it is not natural, but nor is it committing to a separating truth: because of natality and plurality, what is made is always subject to metamorphosis).

To experience authenticity requires, first, a solitude from practice sufficient to transform a consciousness of saying and doing things into a conscience about having said or done them (from naming to saying), or in imagining oneself saying or doing them. In this it tended towards being a contemplative condition, one which Arendt was to distinguish as a condition of thinking and then willing. Yet this two-in-one dialogue is only possible in the company of others from whose distinct presence comes an open, and fragmented appreciation of how things can be said and done differently. Under the collective force of this public expression what appears as something 'given' (a determining fact) becomes 'what gives' (an expressive handing over), and what gives is what makes and then hands over, and what is handed over is not determined and cannot be controlled. It is, then, a distinctively immediate condition in which the idea of cause and effect (the basic ordering of a narrative that, in the hands of fabricating work, becomes a comforting story that begins and ends) collapse into one another, for no sooner is an action performed than it acts upon others capable of their own actions, outside these being just a reaction or adaptation. The aesthetic act of creating opinion sets in train an affective spilling over that is without edges and which, in practical effect, can as easily break open long-established agreements as it does re-enforce them. In the space of appearances this cycle of unbounded resonance occurs intensively, it cannot be unfolded into sequential chains of thought/act/effect; the action and its resonance are ravelling and unravelling in a kind of expanding, expressive, affective present in which speech and action arrive and disappear as one.⁶⁰ To speak is itself a thought and action and in actions what is said is being borne along, and in acting comes the speech by which any insertion into the already existing world is being affirmed or challenged in new distinctions.

It is in the nature of these plural, new beginnings that one cannot extrapolate from them towards a known end, or invoke a settled origin,

⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition*, 191.

and as a space of such appearances the *polis* is not somewhere to consider either the determining biological ends met by labour or the presumption of sovereign agency fabricated by work from which things emerge; there is neither resolution nor control. The fact that materially and institutionally the *polis* is itself an end towards which the *strategoí* and others labour and work, at least insofar as it is an organized condition towards which we ought to orient ourselves, is an apparent irony to which Arendt is alive, and to which she responds by thinking of the *polis* purely in terms of language. As a grammatical condition, the architectural and legal means by which the *polis* is constituted are reconciled to the realization of its being more akin to a pure means, namely a means whose expression is nothing more than its own mediacy embodied in the being-in-common that is action.

It is to language that we now turn.