Rethinking Birth and Maternity as Philosophical Categories:

Hannah Arendt's Notion of Natality and Contemporary Feminist Thought

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Abstract

This thesis demonstrates the limits of the revival of the question of death in twentieth-century European philosophy by rethinking "birth" and "maternity" as philosophical categories. It does this by building upon Hannah Arendt's notion of "natality" with further resources from contemporary feminist theory to argue that Arendt's perspective should be complemented by reflection on maternal subjectivities and the relations that mark the beginning of each human being's life. This further highlights the intrinsic plurality of the human condition, as well as the limits of mortality in reframing human finitude.

This thesis asks why, despite the success of feminist positions, there is still a tendency to reject birth and maternity as specifically philosophical categories. How is this rejection connected to the twentieth century's revival of the question of death and with an uncritical sexual differentiation of humankind? What challenge may the categories of birth and maternity pose to the Western philosophical tradition? The thesis addresses these questions by interpreting birth and maternity not as mere natural events, restricted in time and linked to an uncritical vision of femininity, but as authentic existential possibilities, to be elevated to philosophical and political categories.

The thesis begins with a discussion of the return of death as a central philosophical category in twentieth century European philosophy via a critical engagement with Heidegger, Derrida and Lévinas. It then reconstructs the genesis of Arendt's notion of "natality" as it appears in her doctoral dissertation on *Love and St. Augustine,* her biography of Rahel Varnhagen and her major works *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind,* in relation to this context. Arendt's published works are read in the light of her reflections included in the *Denktagebuch*. Via a critical discussion of Arendt's distinction between private and public and the relation between natality, will and freedom the thesis argues for a more dynamic understanding of the public/private distinction in order to rethink intimate relationships - particularly those between friends and lovers - as already a site of plurality that informs and is critical to the generation of the public sphere, rather than sharply distinct. The thesis introduces feminist readings of Arendt's idea of natality, focussing specifically on continental interpreters who provide

reflection on the maternal, discussing Irigaray, Kristeva, Muraro and Cavarero in the context of twentieth century critiques of the subject and of the "question of the other." It also addresses Butler's critique of the relation between maternity and femininity. The final chapter develops an account of temporality and vulnerability in relation to natality and maternity via a critical comparison of Cavarero, Butler and Lévinas. In this way, this chapter shows how setting birth and maternity at the centre of philosophical inquiry can challenge traditional philosophical and political categories such as the notions of autonomy, freedom, and sovereignty by focusing on the relationality of the human condition.

Plurality is the law of the earth

(Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*,1978)

Solo, poichè è nata, vive

(Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone*, 1990)

I work to earth my heart

(Denise Riley, *Time lived, without its flow*, 2012)

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Abbreviations

Full bibliographic details can be found in the bibliography appended to this thesis.

Note: Citations of Aristotle, Heidegger, Derrida, Lévinas, Cavarero, Irigaray and Kristeva are taken from the English translations as indicated in the bibliography. Where, for the sake of clarity or argument, it has been necessary to include the Italian, German, French, ancient Greek term or phrasing into the English citation, this is indicated by square brackets [].

Works by Hannah Arendt

LA *Love and Saint Augustine*

RV *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*

WEP "What Is Existenz Philosophy?"

OT *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

HC *The Human Condition*

OR *On Revolution*

BPF *Between Past and Future*

JW *The Jewish Writings*

LM *The Life of the Mind*

LKPP *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*

EU *Essays in Understanding: 1930–1954*

DKT *Denktagebuch 1950–1973*

UP "Understanding and Politics"

Works by Aristotle

NE *Nicomachean Ethics*

Works by Judith Butler

GT *Gender Trouble*

FW *Frames of War*

Works by Adriana Cavarero

DN *Dire la nascita*

IP *In Spite of Plato*

RN *Relating Narratives*

FOV *For More than One Voice*

HO *Horrorism*

IN *Inclinations*

Works by Jacques Derrida

GD *The Gift of Death*

AP *Aporias*

Works by Martin Heidegger

BT *Being and Time*

Works by Luce Irigaray

SP *Speculum*

Works by Julia Kristeva

RPL *Revolution in Poetic Language*

SM "Stabat Mater"

WT "Women's Time"

Works by Emmanuel Lévinas

EE *Existence and Existents*

OTB *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*

TI *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*

TO *Time and the Other*

GDT *God, Death, and Time*

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Introduction

Birth and Maternity as Philosophical Problems

In her *Natality and Finitude,* Anne O' Byrne speaks of a traditional division in Western philosophy that sets birth and maternity in the realm of nature, while death belongs to the realm of existence and theoretical reflection.[1]

One of the reasons why birth seems to have received so little attention is that it has tended to be regarded as simply a bodily matter, something that is merely natural and therefore not an appropriate object of philosophical reflection.[2] Furthermore, with regard to the history of Western philosophy, it seems that the disregard of the topics of birth and maternity has something to do with the dominant conception of the individual as someone who has no relationships, with the separation between body and mind and a static concept of human existence.

In this context the psychoanalyst Silvia Vegetti Finzi suggests that while sexuality has managed, overtime, to acquire tools of cultural expression, maternity has remained "the un-thought of our era."[3] The causes of this are multiple. First, it is difficult to question the presumed naturalness of becoming a mother. A process that largely involves the female body, maternity has mostly been conceived as a mere reproductive function, which does not entail any effort of thought. Only recently, feminist, queer and gender theories have questioned maternity as a mere biological function and offered perspectives to complicate its relation to femininity. In this respect, the link between maternity and femininity still needs not only to be philosophically deepened, but also reconfigured in order to make the former a more open and inclusive category. To this attempt, the main risk is, on the one hand, to reduce maternity to a

[1]Anne O'Byrne, *Natality and Finitude*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2010, p.8.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Silvia Vegetti Finzi, *Il bambino della notte: Divenire donna divenire madre*, Mondadori, Milano, 1990, p.7, my translation.

mere biological process; on the other hand, to rethink it as only an abstract theoretical notion that does not take into account the plurality of actual experiences of maternity.

For the reasons above – and this is the second problem – the reflection that women have made on themselves, the claim of their own specificity, has often looked with suspicion at that "maternal attitude," historically and philosophically employed to reiterate their inferiority. Indeed, maternity has essentially shaped the Western idea(l) of femininity and womanhood. As the historian Nadia Maria Filippini puts it, "for centuries being a woman coincided with being a mother; motherhood was an expression of sexual identity." [4]

However, the idea that the topics of birth and maternity have been absent from the history of Western philosophy is not entirely true. Since the gendered construction of reproductive roles as elaborated in ancient Greece (fifth century BCE), where male and female contributions to reproduction were framed as having a dichotomous and hierarchical distinction, with the former constituting the positive and active pole and the latter the negative and passive one,[5] through the Platonic/Christian separation between physical and spiritual (meaning freed from any bodily traits) pregnancy, to the modern reconfiguration of political power that shifted from the sphere of death—or the power to give death—to that of life and its control, to the feminist debates that started in the 70s around maternity, abortion, sex roles, family, public and private and social reproduction to today's current bioethical issues around the development of cryopreservation techniques and the spreading of assisted reproductive practices, questions related to

[4] Nadia Maria Filippini, *Generare, partorire, nascere: Una storia dall'antichità alla provetta*, Viella, Rome, 2017, p.9, my translation. The book has been translated into English as Nadia Maria Filippini, *Pregnancy, Delivery, Childbirth : A Gender and Cultural History from Antiquity to the Test Tube in Europe,* translated by Clelia Boscolo, 1st edition, Routledge, London, 2021.

[5] For example, Artistotle conceived the female body as the inert matter in which the male seed acted, true protagonist and initiator/principle of the generative process (*arché tes genéseos*). Taking a different approach was Plato, who in Diotima's famous speech on Love in *Symposium* described a dichotomous interpretation based on a mirror relationship of two kinds of pregnancy and procreation: physical, proper of the women, and spiritual, proper of the men. The former ensured immortality to the individual through the generation of children; the latter gave life to a spiritual and per se immortal offspring—laws, verses, thoughts—by way of beauty.

pregnancy, birth and maternity did have space in the Western philosophical and political debate.[6]

Particularly in the twentieth-first century, the ideas that the subject is bodily situated in the world and that human beings are relational and temporal beings, have become commonplace in post-structuralist philosophies, phenomenology and ethical theory. But those who believe that human existence is bodily, relational, temporal and worldly, have to confront the idea of natal existence as well.

Furthermore, as Stella Sandford points out, "the idea of 'the maternal' poses itself as a [philosophical, ethical and political] problem [today], rather than being taken for granted as ...a natural phenomenon."[7]A meeting point between biological and social, public and private, physical and psychic, this theme offers itself as a focal point in which particularly feminist philosophies of our time converge and confront each other.

In this sense, the term 'the maternal' can have multiple meanings that include motherhood as an embodied and embedded relational and material practice (the very literal labour of birthing and raising children), as well as a figural, symbolic meaning. As the meaning of the maternal widens, it comes to signify a structural and generative dimension in human relations, politics and ethics.[8]

Despite the success of feminist, phenomenological, ethical and psychosocial positions, there is still a tendency to reject birth and maternity as specifically *philosophical categories*, which means not *object* of philosophical debate, but as theoretical, symbolic and critical tools to rethink human existence, temporality, finitude,

[6] For a thorough historical reconstruction of maternity in the Western world, particularly in Europe, see the above mentioned text by Nadia Maria Filippini.
[7]Stella Sandford, What is maternal labour? In *Studies in the Maternal*, 3(2), ISSN (online) 1759-0434, 2011, p.2.
[8] See Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, Bloombury, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2017.

the current status of the 'private' and the 'public', relational ontology, the ethics of care and vulnerability, the idea of "beginning".

How is this rejection connected to the twentieth century's revival of the question of death and with an uncritical sexual differentiation of humankind? What challenge may the categories of birth and maternity pose to the Western philosophical tradition? Why is it difficult to reflect on and to narrate human beings' "origin" starting from birth and the primary relation with another human being? What about the maternal capacity for beginning? As Stella Villarmea points out

> Philosophical reflections on the question of origin have a long history of identifying 'origin' with key concepts such as 'beginning', 'logos', or 'foundation', as developed by the great exponents of the history of philosophy. But what happens when we take the expression 'rethink the origin' literally? In philosophy we are not used to associating 'origin' —*logos, arché, Ur*-— with 'birth', *our* birth.[9]

As a consequence, Villarmea argues that it is necessary to explore new genealogies – understood in the literal, Greek sense of new *logoi* or studies of *genos*, generation –that acknowledge the importance of birth and who is giving birth.

We may also notice that if many feminist thinkers have underlined the rejection of the material aspects of maternity in Western philosophy, which at best has recovered this topic in an abstract/ Platonic fashion, on the other hand, they seem to have accepted the assumption that maternity has first do with the biological aspects of the (female) body. Following Fanny Söderbäck, it seems to me that while some feminist thinkers

[9]Stella Villarmea, 'A Philosophy of Birth: If you Want to Change the World, Change the Conversation', Open Research Europe, 1, 2021, 1.65, not paginated. See also Stella Villarmea, 'Rethinking the origin: Birth and Human Value', in Creating a Global on Value Inquiry, ed. by Jinfen Yan and David Schrader, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, NY, 2009, pp. 311-329.

have attempted to recuperate and valorise materiality, immanence and cyclical time, and others have sought access to "linear time" and to a public/political sphere already given, a fruitful theoretical strategy is to investigate how the notions of birth and maternity can disrupt these (metaphysical) binaries and help construct new concepts of the public, of the relations to others, and of time.[10]

In other words, I argue that simply assuming the importance of embodiment for a discussion of natality and maternity would reinforce the distinction that permits such disregard as the appropriate philosophical response to the condition of being-born, the sort of disregard for any natural phenomenon that may deserve scientific but not philosophical study.

With the above issues in mind, this thesis demonstrates the limits of the revival of the question of death in twentieth-century European philosophy by rethinking "birth" and "maternity" not as mere natural events, restricted in time and linked to an uncritical vision of femininity, but as authentic existential possibilities to be elevated to philosophical categories.

In the context of this thesis, "to rethink birth and maternity philosophically" means thinking them through, and to possibly trace, a specific philosophical path which goes from the above-mentioned revival of the question of death in twentieth century European philosophy – Heidegger in particular – to Arendt's shift of focus from the existential, philosophical and political centrality of mortality to that natality, to feminist interpretations of this notion. The aim of this thesis is not to suggest "mortality" and "natality" as alternative paradigms, but to underline the limits and some problematic points of an exclusive focus on death to reframe human finitude, or, as Arendt would say, the human condition.

[10]Fanny Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time. On Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2019, p.8.

In this thesis Arendt's notion of "natality" is critically addressed through resources from contemporary feminist theory to argue that her perspective should be complemented by reflection on maternal subjectivities and the relations that mark the beginning of each human being's life. This further highlights the intrinsic plurality of the human condition, as well as the limits of mortality in reframing human finitude.

The Category of Death in Twentieth Century European Philosophy

The thesis begins with a discussion of the return of death as a central philosophical category in twentieth-century European philosophy via a critical engagement with Heidegger, Derrida and Lévinas.

In the Western tradition, mortality has been conceived as a constitutive part of human existence since at least the thought of the Ancient Greeks. During the twentieth century continental philosophers such as Heidegger, Derrida and Lévinas foregrounded it again.[11] This philosophical turn needs to be inserted into the wider context of a critique of the "metaphysical tradition," in particular of a metaphysical notion of subjectivity, characterized by isolation, a-temporality, and detachment from the relations to others and to the world.

Heidegger's position in *Being and Time* is that death is *Dasein*'s authentic existential possibility because it is the only one which can never become actual, and which cannot be shared with others. For him, death is essentially "non-relational" (*Unbezügliche*). As a result, death configures itself as the limit which (dis) closes the finite temporality in which the question of the meaning of Being can properly be articulated. Derrida and Lévinas overcome Heidegger's focus on ontology and articulate their critique of Western philosophy around the question of "alterity." In their

[11] See for instance BT, AP, GD and GDT.

perspectives, death is essentially relational to the extent that it always involves a relation to someone or something absolutely Other (*Autre*). The relation to death does not cut me from the relations to others. On the contrary, the only death I can encounter in my life, and can thus have an existential, theoretical and ethical meaning for me is the death of the other. In this sense, the relation to death configures itself as mourning, as responsibility for the other, which, far from closing my existence within the boundaries of a finite temporality, opens up a radically future and external dimension.

In spite of this rupture, I argue that Heidegger's "thanatological frame" still persists in both Derrida and Lévinas' perspectives.[12] In my view, this frame shapes their concept of the other in particular, who, losing its empirical and human traits, seems to only have the philosophical function of relating the subject to a radical alterity and, thus, to break the immanence of a temporality and of a philosophical inquiring articulated on the basis of an egoistic conception of dying.

This problematic account of alterity, or of the idea of the other in relation to death is specifically discussed by contemporary feminist philosophers such as Adriana Cavarero and Luce Irigaray.[13] In different ways, these philosophers criticize the persistence of the centrality of the category of death in Western philosophy at least from Plato's thought, detecting in this persistence a (patriarchal) rejection of the natal, relational, bodily and worldly condition of human existence. In their views, this rejection has essentially to do with the covering over of the "beginning", understood as the beginning of life, from a philosophical landscape that, on the contrary, has overtime oriented its focus towards the end of life.

[12] The word "thanatology" is perhaps more commonly used in Italian philosophy to designate studies around the question of death. See for example Silvano Zucal, *Filosofia della nascita*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 2017 or Chiara Bottici, "Rethinking the Biopolitical Turn. From the Thanatopolitical to the Geneapolitical Paradigm", Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal_ 36 (1), 2015, pp. 175-197.

[13] See for instance IP and SP.

What are the theoretical implications of this persistent philosophical focus on the end? What does this perspective cover of human beings' existence? How does it orient our way of thinking and acting? Why do twentieth century philosophers still rely on the notion of thanatology? Does this entail a continuity between their perspectives and those of the predecessors they want to challenge? Is it possible to articulate an alternative paradigm?

Hannah Arendt's Turn to Natality

Hannah Arendt's introduction of the concept of "natality" in this context questions the centrality of death in reframing human existence. As Cavarero points out, the Arendtian category of natality cannot simply be added to Western philosophical thought as a new concept that enriches and completes it, but it is a category that radically changes this thought, by transforming it at its roots.[14]

Indeed, the concept of natality emerges in Arendt's thought in dialogue with philosophers from the Western tradition such as Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Kant, Benjamin, Jaspers and Heidegger, but Arendt draws very different conclusions. Rather than aligning with her contemporaries and enriching a long tradition of reflection on mortality, Arendt brings to light a category that had hitherto remained hidden. Because of that, I maintain that the perspective opened by Arendt provides a new way to look at, to rethink and to question the Western philosophical tradition itself.

Like a red thread, the topic of 'natality' in its various configurations crosses most of Arendt's work, but as many interpreters have pointed out, Arendt does not develop a systematic account of this notion.[15] In the second chapter of this thesis I thus

[14] DN, p. 110.

[15] Among others see Patricia Bowen-Moore, *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, Macmillan, London 1989; Margaret Durst, *Birth and Natality in Hannah Arendt*. In *Analecta Husseriliana*79 (777-797), 2003; Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2006 and Miguel Vatter,"Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt,"Revista de cienciapolítica (Santiago). 26. 10.4067/S0718-090X2006000200008, 2005.

reconstruct the genesis of the concept of natality in Arendt's work drawing the fragmentary references to it together and trying to puzzle out their connection. I show how natality may be considered to be a key for understanding and re-interpreting further some other Arendtian concepts and categories.

The secondary literature on Arendt's concept of natality is now quite extensive. A systematic reconstruction of this topic can be found in Silvano Zucal and, most notably, in Particia Bowen-Moore.[16] In her book *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, Bowen-Moore detects a tripartite concept of natality in Arendt: 'primary natality', referring to factual birth into the world; 'secondary' or 'political natality'– birth into the realm of action; and 'tertiary/theoretical natality'–birth into the timelessness of thought.[17] It is worth noting that Bowen- Moore wrote this book before the publication of Arendt's *Denktagebuch* in 2002, and before the essays included in the collections *Jewish Writings* and *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*.[18] Anne O'Byrne offers an existential account of natality in her *Natality and Finitude,* while Dana Villa investigates the Heideggerian roots of Arendt's political thought.[19]

Arendt's notion of natality has also been explored in connection with biopolitics, most notably by Agamben, Diprose and Ziarek, Bottici and Vatter, who also offers a valuable account of the genesis of this concept, but limited to retracing when Arendt began to employ this term in her published works and in her *Denktagebuch*.[20] Feminist interpretations and critiques of this concept can be found in texts from authors such as Durst, Söderbäck, Fulfer, Cavarero, Rigotti, Dietz, Kristeva. In her 2006 book *Hannah*

[16]Zucal, *Filosofia della nascita.*

[17] Bowen - Moore, *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality,* p.1

[18] DKT, JW, EU.

[19]O'Byrne, *Natality and Finitude*; Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996.

[20] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1942), Stanford University Press, California, 1998; Rosalyn Diprose and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *Arendt, Natality and Biopolitics: Toward Democratic Plurality and Reproductive Justice*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018; Chiara Bottici, "Rethinking the Biopolitical Turn".

Arendt and Human Rights, Peg Birmingham investigates the concept of natality in relation to the question of human rights.[21]

Drawing on but also going beyond this literature, in Chapter Two I first reconstruct how the concept of natality spans throughout Arendt's work, from her doctoral thesis on *Love and Saint Augustine*, which Arendt revised for publication in the late 50s / early 60s, to her last and unfinished work *The Life of the Mind*. My reconstruction benefits from additional publications, such as Arendt's *Denktagebuch*, that were not available to authors like Bowen-Moore. Furthermore, in distinction from Bowen-Moore and other interpreters, I try to show the interconnectedness of the various meanings of "natality" that can be detected throughout Arendt's oeuvre, rather than following a tripartite schema (biological, political and theoretical natality).

Second, I make explicit how this concept is informed by the dialogue between Arendt and twentieth century German *existenzphilosophie*, Heidegger and Jaspers in particular, and via them St. Augustine. I argue that this background persists in Arendt's mature reflections on the political significance of the concept of natality and can help rethink the distinctions she makes in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*. This also allows for the outline of a concept of time oriented by remembrance and beginning that remains to some extent implicit in her work.

Why Arendt?

The Arendtian category of natality means that human beings are born from someone in the world and it points to the idea that the fact of being born stands for our relationality in the world and leads to the "capacity of beginning."[22] Indeed, what Arendt calls the "human condition of natality" means, at the same time, having-been-generated and

[21] Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights.*
22 HC, p.9.

being capable of bringing something new into the world.[23] Precisely because we have been generated we are capable of generating something new.

Although Arendt points to the fact that each human being is not self-generated, one of the main critiques that has been addressed to her–particularly by feminist thinkers–is that of having proposed an image of "natality" that recalls the concrete experience of birth, but is also significantly detached from it and from the whole generative process. Symptomatic in this sense is the model Arendt draws on to speak of her idea of natality and, more generally, of the condition of "being-born", namely that of the Creation (from nothing).[24]

By conceiving human being's birth as a coming from nothing that corresponds to and is interchangeable with the nothing that, in her view, will occur after death, Arendt obscures a fundamental question: From *whom* did we come? *Who* gave us life? In other words, Arendt obliterates the obvious but still philosophically underexplored fact that human beings have been generated (and not created) by another human being.

For this reason, many feminist philosophers have looked with suspicion at the framework she provides. Indeed, they emphasize that Arendt seems to uncritically accept the ancient relegation of 'reproductive labour' (in her words, the "labor of women in giving birth") to the private sphere of bodily necessities.[25] In *The Human Condition,* Arendt highlights affinities between labour and reproduction, stressing the "deformation of the human body" which is entailed by both activities and the need to conceal them from the public sphere.[26] As a consequence, Arendt's theory of action and the related concept of 'natality' appear to be detached from actual births and rather modelled on the masculine context of the Greek polis.

[23] Ibid., p.178
[24] See for instance LA.
[25] Ibid., p.30.
[26] Ibid., p.48.

Because of this, Arendt seems to distinguish human beings' first appearance in the world through the event of birth from their capacity to appear again, through action and speech, in the shared scene of political life. It is precisely this "second birth"– our capacity to begin anew through action – that ultimately takes a central position in the Arendtian perspective. As Fanny Söderbäck points out: "the capacity for beginning is announced by the birth of a child, but it is only actualized as freedom once we put it to work in a shared space of equals." [27]

So why use Arendt to rethink birth and maternity as philosophical categories? First, as mentioned before, I argue that Arendt's account of natality is of special interest in this attempt because it emerges in dialogue with thinkers from the Western tradition, but Arendt subverts their premises and brings into light a category that had hitherto remained hidden. Second, I contend that Arendt's idea that natality points, at the same time, to the human condition of being-born (from someone else) and to the human capacity of beginning helps in thematising the intrinsic relationality of human life as well as in critically discussing "maternity" as a specific female capacity. Rather, it would help to understand maternity as an existential possibility and a philosophical/political category able to speak for and represent all human beings. As I will elaborate in relation with Butler and Cavarero, rather than being projected onto a neutral horizon, the capacity of beginning will be embedded in human uniqueness. Finally, I claim that a comparison, on the one hand with German *Existenzphilosophie*, and on the other hand with continental feminist interpretations of Arendt, will shed new light on the tripartitions and distinctions (for example between private and public) she outlines in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*, making them more dynamic and interrelated. This way, this thesis offers an original re-reading of Arendt's categories.

[27] Fanny Söderbäck, "Natality or Birth? Arendt and Cavarero on the Human Condition of Being Born," *Hypatia* 33 (2):273-288, 2018 , p. 275.

In the third chapter, I thus suggest a dynamic understanding of Arendt's distinction between private and public, as well as between the life of the mind and the *vita activa.* I argue that the public (and specifically its intangible part) as conceived by Arendt can be rethought not, or not only, as a pre-existing realm that human beings have access to by acting and speaking. Rather, emphasizing the existential dimension of Arendt's concept of politics, it can be reframed as a dimension (in Arendt's words an *in-between*) that is from time to time generated and reshaped through actions and speeches.[28] Indeed, the public, as conceived by Arendt, precedes the various forms in which the public realm can be organized.In *On Revolution* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt does discuss the institutional and legal conditions under which action takes place and can be extended. In *The Human Condition,* she discusses the possible institutionalization of the space of appearance. However, I argue that, for Arendt, politics does not have primarily to do with institutions or organizations (as for example the nation-state) *already given*, but with the "in-between": the interactions among human beings. In Arendt's thought, this "in-between" corresponds to the " 'web' of human relationships," which constitutes the intangible part of the world that human beings have in common.[29]

This dynamic reinterpretation of Arendt's distinction between private and public that emerges specifically when reconstructing the roots of her thought in twentieth century German *Existenzphilosophie* (Heidegger in particular), helps recast the private sphere in terms of the plurality and relationality that are continuous and critical to the shaping of the public sphere.

Furthermore, building on the connection that Arendt draws in her *Denktagebuch* between the public and the private dimension of plurality, I suggest that it is possible to

[28] HC, p. 182.
[29] Ibid., p. 183.

detect two notions of the 'private' in Arendt's work that are to some extent connected to each other.[30] The first one is probably more immediately traceable in Arendt's works such as *The Human Condition* and *On Revolution,* and it is more-or-less explicitly connected to the space and management of the household. This concept of the private lends itself to an antagonistic reading of Arendt's distinction between private and public as mutually exclusive spheres.

The second concept of the private needs to be retraced specifically in *The Life of the Mind* and in Arendt's *Denktagebuch.* In some passages in these works, the private is described as the space opened from time to time by the activity of 'thinking', understood as 'understanding'. In Arendt's view, understanding does not produce meaning but *depth*, what gives profoundness and rootedness to human existence and human actions that can emerge from this darker ground. Understanding is what helps human beings make themselves at home in the world.[31]

I argue that this second notion of the private can be conceived as a dimension of intimacy that has its own kind of relationality and plurality. However, this sphere is not sharply separated from the public, but it is rather continuous with it. It is a space for intimacy we can share with friends and lovers, as Arendt also claims and can give birth to a new "microworld." [32] Finally, I discuss the relevance of natality for the relation between will and political freedom.

Arendt and Contemporary Feminist Thinkers

The rethinking of the private/public distinction I develop in the third chapter is critical in order to see what Arendt calls "first" and "second birth" not as mutually exclusive

30 See DKT, XIX, 10, p. 454.

31 In her *Denktagebuch* Arendt speaks of 'recollection' and 'reconciliation'. See for example DKT XII, 28 & 31, pp.290-292; XIII, 6 &11, pp. 299-301. See also UP.

32 Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Letters, 1925-1975*, translated by Andrew Shields, edited by Ursula Ludz Harcourt, Orlando, 2004, p.173.

or, at best, connected in a logical/consequential way as feminist thinkers such as Fanny Söderbäck have interpreted it.[33] Rather, what Arendt calls human beings' first birth can be rethought as already a political and existentially significant event that is staged in a complex network of relations.

As Julian Honkasalo points out, it is possible to detect two ways in which feminist thinkers have criticized and appropriated Arendt's thought. On the one hand, US second-wave feminist theorists have criticized Arendt for her hostility toward the women's movement and the feminist politics of the time. By interpreting her conceptual distinctions, such as the public/private, the political/social, action/labour as rigid and exclusive, early second-wave interpreters charged Arendt with embracing a male and metaphysical bias in her thinking.

On the other hand, continental feminist thinkers such as Cavarero and Kristeva perceived Arendt's contribution to feminist theorizing as evident in her work because of her feminine position and feminine textual style. In contrast to American feminist critics of Arendt such as Adrienne Rich, Mary O'Brien and Wendy Brown, Cavarero and Kristeva used Arendt's categories to open up a space for theorizing embodiment, intimacy, maternity, relationality and plurality from a radically feminine and feminist perspective.[34]

By following this second interpretative line, in the fourth chapter I argue that the maternal relation too should be included amongst those relationships that have the world-creating power that Arendt attributes to friendship and love. Indeed, from the standpoint of the common world, maternity suggests the capacity to bring something or someone *absolutely new* into the world. On the contrary, according to Arendt's account,

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[33] Söderbäck, " Natality or Birth?".

[34]Julian Honkasalo, "Cavarero as an Arendtian Feminist," In P. Landerecche Cardillo, & R. Silverbloom (Eds.), *Political Bodies: Writings on Adriana Cavarero's Political Thought* , SUNY Series in Contemporary Italian Philosophy, SUNY Press, 2024, pp. 37-55, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781438497105-004, p.38.
See for example IP and Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, translated by Ross Guberman, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001.

labour performs precisely the opposite movement as it "incorporates" and immediately consumes what it produces.[35]

In Chapter Four I first give an account of the concepts of maternity that have been provided by some thinkers of sexual difference – Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Luisa Muraro in particular. I set their reflections in the context of second wave feminist thought in Europe and twentieth century continental philosophy. I focus specifically on the attention that philosophers of that time gave to the "question of the other." Indeed, particularly through reflection on sexuality, embodiment, femininity and the maternal, the thinkers of sexual difference have provided original critiques of the subject and alternative ways to rethink otherness.

From this starting point, I discuss Adriana Cavarero's original re-reading of Arendt's idea of natality, exposing similarities and differences with the feminist thinkers presented before. To some extent, Cavarero aligns with those who charge Arendt for re-proposing a masculine concept of the public space and a metaphorical understanding of birth based on the model of the Creation.[36] However, Cavarero does not endorse a dismissive approach to Arendt's categories. On the contrary, she uses Arendt's original rethinking of politics to develop her own account of uniqueness, embodiment, plurality and birth.

Building on Cavarero's position, I suggest that the maternal power to generate someone absolutely new can be connected with the Arendtian capacity of beginning, which is typical of the agent. Drawing specifically on Cavarero's *Relating Narratives*, I argue that the intimate relational dimension between mother and child, friends and lovers can be related to the political space that, for Arendt, unfolds through the interactions among human beings. In this respect, I draw a connection between Arendt's

[35] HC, p. 96-101.
[36] See for example IP.

understanding of plurality and relationality and the practices of Italian feminist "consciousness-raising groups," from the 1970s and '80s. I also suggest that the mother-child relation provides an ontological foundation for a philosophy that begins with the inter-subjective relation between two human beings.

Finally, I argue that Cavarero does not address the importance of the relational model provided by reflection on these intimate relations for what Arendt would call the "life of the mind." In *The Human Condition,* Arendt states that "traditionally the term *vita activa* receives its meaning from the *vita contemplativa*".[37] On the contrary, I argue that Arendt can help rethink the "life of the mind" from the standpoint of the *vita activa*. In this sense, she does not simply recover the traditional distinction between *theoria* and *praxis,* as it is often believed. Rather, she helps understand how these two spheres are interrelated and can impact each other. In particular, Arendt's last writings – dedicated to the analysis of the Socratic faculty of thought and the Kantian faculty of judgment – help elaborate a different concept of thinking that does not destroy what Arendt calls "the in-between," but rather prepares, or opens up the necessary space, to welcome others' perspectives. I argue that not only in the public sphere of action and in the reciprocal storytelling that is performed in intimate relations, but also in thought, will and judgment the connective tissue of politics starts to be woven. In the last section of this chapter, I critically discuss the relation between maternity and femininity and the limits of the framework of "sexual difference" via Butler's *Gender Trouble*.

In the final chapter, I reframe Cavarero's interpretation of relationality and vulnerability as represented in the "maternal scene" as a possible alternative to Levinas's ethical account of the 'Other' in relation to death, wound, and transcendence. Via discussion of Cavarero and Lévinas, I recursively re-address the questions of time and the other in relation to the category of mortality discussed in the first chapter and

[37] HC, p.16.

outline a possible concept of maternal temporalities that are world-oriented and which unfold through and inform human relations. This will help recast the dimension of the present that was dismissed by the thinkers discussed in the first chapter as the dynamic and vivid space where human beings' can interact, hear each other's voice, exchange words and deeds.

Chapter One. The Thanatological Turn in Twentieth Century's European Philosophy: A Break with or a Continuation of the Western Metaphysical Tradition?

Introduction

During the twentieth century, the field of European philosophy witnessed an impressive return of "thanatology" as a philosophical category. Take, for example, Martin Heidegger's "Being-towards-death" (*Sein-zum-Tode*), Vladimir Jankélévitch's monumental work *La Mort*, Jacques Derrida's reflections on the limit and the aporia, or the dimension of mourning (the death of the other) in Emmanuel Lévinas' philosophy.[38] This philosophical turn needs to be inserted in the wider context of a critique of the "metaphysical tradition," in particular of a metaphysical notion of subjectivity, characterized by isolation, atemporality, and detachment from the relations to others and to the world.

Martin Heidegger constitutes the threshold for both the twentieth century critique of metaphysics, as well as its return to the notion of thanatology. In particular, as it is known, Heidegger's critique of metaphysics is structured around the question of ontology (the question of the meaning of Being), and its relation with temporality. In *Being and Time*, he attempts to articulate the question of the meaning of Being (*die Seinsfrage*) within the frame of Dasein's authentic temporality. In this way, human existence and philosophical thought become inextricably related. Dasein's temporality is shaped by the relationship that, from time to time, Dasein establishes with its own death, conceived as authentic existential possibility. In Heidegger's view, death is Dasein's authentic existential possibility because it is the only one which can never become actual, and which cannot be shared with others. For him, death is essentially

[38]Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La Mort*, Flammarion, Paris, 1977.

"non-relational" (*Unbezügliche*). As a result, death configures itself as the limit which (dis)closes the finite temporality in which the question of the meaning of Being can properly be articulated.

Overcoming Heidegger's focus on ontology, Derrida and Lévinas articulate their critique of Western philosophy around the question of "alterity." If, in a certain sense, Heidegger's conception of death as non-relational possibility entails a continuity with the metaphysical notion of subjectivity as mastery and artificial immunity from the relations to others, the two philosophers challenge this vision by developing a philosophical and ethical account of the figure of the "Other" (*Autrui*). In their perspectives, death is essentially relational to the extent that it always involves a relation to someone or something absolutely Other (*Autre*). The relation to death does not cut me from the relations to others. On the contrary, the only death I can encounter in my life, and can thus have an existential and theoretical meaning for me is the death of the other. In this sense, the relation to death configures itself as mourning, as responsibility for the other, which, far from closing my existence within the boundaries of a finite temporality, opens up a radically future and external dimension.

In spite of this rupture, Heidegger's "thanatological frame" still persists in both Derrida and Lévinas' perspectives. In my view, this frame shapes in particular their concept of the other, who, losing his empirical and human traits, seems to only have the philosophical function of relating the subject to a radical alterity and, thus, to break the immanence of a temporality and of a philosophical inquiring articulated on the basis of an egoistic conception of dying.

What are the theoretical implications of this persistent philosophical focus on the end? What does this perspective cover of human beings' existence? How does it orient our way of thinking and acting? Why do twentieth century philosophers still rely on the notion of thanatology? Does this entail a continuity between their perspectives and

those of the predecessors they want to challenge? Is it possible to articulate an alternative paradigm?

In the first section of this chapter I will expose Martin Heidegger's account of mortality and I will discuss his vision of death as "ownmost non-relational possibility." In the second section, I will compare Heidegger's position with Derrida and Levinas' perspectives on death. I will argue that, in spite of the rupture that Derrida and Lévinas produce with respect to Heidegger's position by including the figure of the Other in their account of death and mortality, nevertheless the persistence of the centrality of the category of death entails a continuity between their perspectives.

1.1 Martin Heidegger's *Being-Towards-Death* and the Critique of Metaphysics: The Issue of the Death of the Other

With Martin Heidegger, human existence and philosophical thought become inextricably related. The question that drives *Being and Time* is eminently philosophical, being related to the question of the meaning of Being (*die Seinsfrage*). The necessity to raise this question anew is strictly connected to Heidegger's project of dismantling the so-called metaphysical tradition, which, in his view, is responsible for the obscuration and the trivialization of this fundamental question. For Heidegger, our epoch is characterized by an oblivion of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*). Whenever one asserts or asks "what *is*" something, a pre-understanding of Being comes into play. The question of Being is implicated, precedes and grounds all the other possible philosophical questions. Nevertheless, according to Heidegger, today no one seems interested in properly understanding the meaning of Being, that is to say, the meaning of the "is" involved in all philosophical inquiring.

Heidegger maintains that, even if, since Plato, philosophers provided different definitions of Being, all of them conceived of it as an *entity*– perhaps the supreme

entity- among other entities.[39] The metaphysical tradition produced an *entification* of Being which was grasped as a constant, evident *presence*. The *identification* of Being coincided with its entification.[40] Its verbal and dynamic nature was fixed on a specific side which corresponded to a precise temporal structure: the present of the pure 'making- present' of something.[41] This last point suggests that the question of the meaning of Being deals with the question of its *temporality*. As Heidegger puts it

> […] our treatment of the question of the meaning of Being must enable us to show that *the central problematic of all ontology is rooted in the phenomenon of time, if rightly seen and rightly explained* […] the fundamental ontological task of Interpreting Being as such includes working out the *Temporality of Being.*[42]

Time is what remains unthought and forgotten in the metaphysical conception of Being, which is reduced to a mere object of knowledge.[43] Indeed, this *evasion of time* grounds the cognitive/epistemological relationship between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, systematically elaborated by modern philosophy, Descartes in particular.[44] The artificial separation between an isolated and atemporal subject and its static object raised overtime the question on how "this knowing subject comes out of its inner sphere into one which is 'other and external'." [45] The supposed necessity to bridge the gap between these two spheres unveils the inadequacy with which the question of

39 In Heidegger's view, Artistotle constitutes an exception in this tradition because he conceived the unity between Being (Sein) and beings (Seiendes) as analogical, horizontal and transversal instead of vertical, such as that between genus and species. However, he remarks that "[...] even Aristotle failed to clear away the darkness of these categorial interconnections." BT, p. 22.

40I propose to use the term "entification" to describe the metaphysical reduction of Being to a specific entity in order to identify it. The word *entificazione* is perhaps more commonly used in Italian literature on Heidegger to represent this process of reduction. See for example Donatella Di Cesare, *Ermeneutica della finitezza*, Guerini, Milano, 2004, p. 100.

41 BT, p.48.

42 Ibid., p.40.

43 See Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, translated by D. Magurshak & S. Barber, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1987, pp. 29-31.

44 Emmanuel Lévinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," Diacritics 26.1 (1996),11-32, pp.12-13.

45 BT, p.87.

the meaning of Being was previously formulated and, consequently, the setting of all philosophical inquiring.

But if the starting point is not that of the metaphysical subject, who raises the question of Being? How to set this question properly? How to work out the question about Being and Time? As Heidegger poses the issue:

> From which entities is the disclosure of Being to take its departure? Is the starting-point optional, or does some particular entity have priority when we come to work out the question of Being?… To work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own Being.[46]

Heidegger refers to *Dasein*– namely human existence- and links *fundamental ontology* and *existential analytic.* The question of the meaning of Being belongs to the essential constitution of Dasein, whose essence (*Wesen*) and existence do coincide. The essence of Dasein lies in its existence intended as *Ex-sistere,* or 'coming-out-of", as the Latin etymology suggests.[47] This "coming-out-of" does not indicate a passage from one place to another or from one moment to another already given. On the contrary, Dasein 'makes space,' it temporally displaces itself, it constantly goes beyond itself. The unfolding of the meaning of Being follows this movement of the human existence, of the *Da-Sein.* Reciprocally, " Dasein… is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. […] Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence- in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself."[48] The understanding of Being is a peculiar mode of Being of Dasein. An hermeneutic and circular relationship binds Being and Dasein.[49] As Lévinas puts it: "Man exists in such a

46 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
47 Ibid., p.67.
[48] Ibid., pp. 32-33.
[49] Paul Ricoeur, 'Heidegger and the Question of the Subject', In Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, edited by D. Ihde. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974, p.226.

manner that he understands being."[50] This is the reason why to work out the question of Being properly means first to unveil the basic existential structures of Dasein, that is to say to work out an existential analytic of Dasein. Heidegger proposes a phenomenological analysis of Dasein, starting from the manner in which it shows itself in its *everydayness*. Step by step, the analysis will go back from the ontic (factual) level to the ontological one, where the existential structures of Dasein (the so-called *Existentialia*) will show themselves authentically. This recapitulation/regression is indeed at the same time a purification. [51]

Dasein is out of itself. Its existence is essentially dynamic, always in constant transformation. The dynamicity of human existence lies in its temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*).Time is the horizon of both the understanding of Being and of Dasein, who understands Being. Constitutive of the movement of transcendence of Dasein is the formation of the world (*Welt*), not conceived as a static container. Dasein meets the world as a web of availableness, of *readiness-to-hand* (*Zuhandenheit*): a web of tools that refer to each other. Dasein is not simply inside the world. Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) means to dwell, to be familiar with the world, and to be absorbed in it. This implies to take care of, to be concerned with or about (*Besorgen*) the things of the world. This is not a pure practical behavior, but it discloses a specific point of view towards the world. The disclosure of the world is at the same time a practical and theoretical attitude which is far from the detached approach of the contemplative subject. Indeed, Dasein is always in a particular mood or "state-of-mind" (*Befindlichkeit*). It affectively discloses the world of its concern.

Care (*Sorge*) marks not only the way in which we relate to objects, but also the relationships with other human beings, for whom we care (*Fürsorge*). Dasein's world is

[50] Lévinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," p.17.
[51] BT, p.67.

in fact a *with-world* (*Mitwelt*). Being-in means *Being-with* others.[52] Dasein is essentially *Mit-sein*. Proximally and for the most part, human beings are not individuals, isolated, autonomous, and then later able to get in touch with others. On the contrary, they are so intimately related and close to each other that they do not even distinguish themselves from the others. As Heidegger remarks, "when Dasein is absorbed in the world of its concern – that is, at the same time, in its Being-with towards Others- it is not itself ."[53] In *Being and Time*, the Other first appears as an obstacle, an intruder who hinders Dasein from being-itself. It does so with its chatters, with its requests, with its trivial presence. In the everyday Being-with-one-another Dasein is literally *subjected* to Others[54]. It can be replaced and represented by others. This indifferent being-with-one-another means to belong and to be mastered by the others. This reciprocal subjection empowers what Heidegger calls the *dictatorship of the "they"* (*Man*).[55] The "they" is a neuter authority which levels down all the possibilities of Being in a mediocre *averageness*:

> We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as the they [*man*] take pleasure; we see, read, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find ' shocking' what they find shocking. [...] Everyone is the other, and no one is himself .[56]

The blinding light of the "publicness" (*die Offentlichkeit*) where Dasein first finds, or, better, loses itself in the indifferent being with one another, obscures the particularity of each Dasein. Here, the *"who"* of the Dasein is the *"nobody"* of the impersonal *Man*. At

[52] Ibid., p.155.
[53] Ibid., p.163.
[54]A contemporary reader might find jarring that, differently for example from the Italian translators, the English translators of *Sein und Zeit* capitalize the "O" of "Other" . Indeed, at least since Lévinas, the capitalization of the "O" of "other" stresses the radical alterity of the other, especially when it refers not only to the alterity of the other human being, but also to that of God. In this sense, it acquires a specific ethical and religious meaning which seems quite absent in Heidegger's perspective. However, we should remember that Macquerrie and Robinson translation is from 1962, which predates any published English translation of Levinas' work. At this time, Levinas' thought itself was very little known.
[55] Ibid., p.164.
[56] Ibid., pp.166-167.

this level, Dasein interprets and transcends itself in the mode of the "they." The "they" has taken its Being away from it. It anticipates and affects every possible understanding and disclosure of the world. Proximally and for the most part, Dasein is "fallen away from itself ."[57] This movement of falling reveals that Dasein is never statically by itself, but it is always thrown and absorbed into the world. *Falling* is the way of Being of Dasein in its everydayness. This kind of Being is that of inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*) and failure to stand by itself.[58]The who of the Dasein is thus not a given, but it must be extrapolated from this intricate and oppressive situation from time to time.[59]

How can Dasein resume itself? How can it remove the concealments under which its 'who' is hidden? How can it disclose to itself its own authentic (*Eigentlich*) Being? It is important to notice that these are not only existential questions, but at the same time theoretical. As we have seen, the relationship between Dasein and its Being, the way in which Dasein interprets Being, affects the way in which it understands and discloses the world. As Heidegger remarks, "every disclosure of Being as the *trascendens* is *transcendental* knowledge. *Phenomenological truth* (*the disclosedness of Being*) is *veritas trascendentalis*."[60] The movement of transcendence of Dasein discloses the world under a peculiar sight/side. This disclosure of the world coincides with its truth intended as *un-concealment,* as coming-into-light, as the Greek term *ἀλήθεια* to which Heidegger refers to suggests. Dasein discloses the world in the horizon of the interpretation of Being. The more Dasein understands its authentic Being, the more its sight is liberated from obscurity, and vice versa. This liberation/emancipation is not given once and for all, neither does it lead Dasein to an higher level of existence. It is rather a 'modification' of this very existence. The

57 Ibid., p.220.
[58] Ibid., p.166.
[59] See Ricoeur, "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject," p.227.
60 BT, p.62.

movement of freedom from inauthenticity is inseparable from the ecstatic nature of Dasein which, in its Being, is always ahead of itself. Dasein is constantly projected towards its possibilities, which can be disclosed authentically/properly or inauthentically/improperly. As Lévinas suggests, the dynamicity of human existence is in fact to be intended as "a question of *dynamis*, of possibility."[61] Dasein transcends itself by choosing among the possibilities that come towards it. This is the sense in which for Heidegger

> The formally existential totality of Dasein's ontological structural whole must...be grasped in the following structure: the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world).[62]

Projection (Being-ahead-of-itself), *throwness* (Being-already-in-the-world) and *falling* (Being-alongside-entities encountered within-the-world) are linked together by Care (*Sorge*).

If, up till now, the analysis of the existential structures of Dasein has been carried out in a partial and fragmented manner, we now have a frame of its structural whole. As Heidegger underlines, the primary item of this structural whole is the "ahead-of-itelf".[63] This is because Dasein, as long as it exists, constantly transcends itself, it is always projected towards its possibilities. We might say that the "being-ahead-of-itself" is what keeps Dasein's existence into motion. At the same time,

> The 'ahead of itself'...tells us unambiguously that in Dasein there is always something *still outstanding*, which, as a potentiality-for-Being for Dasein itself, has not yet become 'actual'. It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is *constantly something still to be settled* [*eine ständige Unabgeschlossenheit*]. Such a lack of

[61] Lévinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," p.22.
[62] BT, p.237.
63 Ibid., p.279.

> totality signifies that there is something still outstanding in one's potentiality- for-Being...as soon as Dasein 'exists' in a such a way that absolutely nothing more is still outstanding in it, then it has already for this very reason become "no-longer-Being-there" [Nicht-mehr-da-sein]. Its Being is annihilated when what is still outstanding in its Being has being liquidated.[64]

But what does Dasein lack in order to "be-a-whole"? How can it be comprehended in its totality? Always thrown in the world of which it takes care and, at the same time, constantly ahead of itself projected towards its possibilities, Dasein lacks the time of the end, the end of time: *death*. At an ontological level, Heidegger's existential analytic focuses on the relationship that Dasein establishes with its own death, conceived as authentic existential possibility. At the same time, death gives meaning to both philosophical thought and the existence of human beings. In this way, as Hannah Arendt points out, in Heidegger an ancient notion persists: "the affinity between philosophy and death."[65] As Heidegger puts it:

> As long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which Dasein can be and will be. But to that which is thus outstanding, the 'end' itself belongs. *The 'end' of Being-in-the-world is death*. This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-Being – that is to say, to existence- *limits and determines* in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein. [66]

The anticipation of death gives time and totality to Dasein. It constitutes the primary item of Dasein's peculiar temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*). Indeed, Heidegger distinguishes between the ordinary conception of time as a linear succession of instants (which, in his

[64] Ibid., pp.279-280.
[65] LM, part I, p.79.
[66] BT, pp.276-277, *emphasis mine.*

view, is predominant also in the Western philosophical tradition) and the particular way in which Dasein 'temporalizes' time on the basis of the structure of care. In the anticipation of death, Dasein is liberated from the mere present in which it is alongside-entities encountered within-the-world and projected (being-ahead-of-itself) towards a future of possibilities defined by a specific past (being-always-already-in-the-world). In this way, Dasein can disclose the present in an authentic manner (Heidegger talks about a "moment of vision*"*), and put the circle of existence back into motion.[67]

Death opens up a future of definite possibilities. Dasein "does not have an end at which it just stops, but it *exists finitely*."[68] It transcends itself finitely. Its future is not infinitely open, as the ordinary conception of time suggests. On the contrary, it is primordially closed.[69] Indeed, as Peter Osborne points out, "[Dasein's] futurity 'exists' only as the projected horizon of a present defined by the mode of its taking up of a specific past ."[70] Heidegger conceives Dasein's authentic temporality as "fate." Dasein's being-ahead-of-itself is not projected towards an indefinitely open future which could be affected by contingent events or circumstances, but it arises out of a past primordially closed and determined by Dasein's finitude. By bumping against the supreme limit of its own death, Dasein understands *its* finitude. Death pushes Dasein back to itself and its possibilities. From time to time, it sets into motion Dasein's transcendent movement. This is because it is the only *pure* possibility that can never be actualized.[71] The actualization of death coincides indeed with the end of Dasein.

[67] See ibid., pp. 373-387.
[68] Ibid., p.378.
[69] See Di Cesare, *Ermeneutica della finitezza*, p.36.
[70] Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time : Modernity and Avant-garde*.Verso, London/New York, 1995, p.59.
[71] See Piotr Hoffman, 'Death, Time, History: Division II of *Being and Time*', in C. Guignon, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1993, p.201 and Edoardo Ferrario, "«POSSIBILITÀ DELL'IMPOSSIBILITÀ». UN FACCIA A FACCIA TRA HEIDEGGER E LEVINAS." *Archivio Di Filosofia*, vol. 78, no. 1, 2010, pp. 239–249. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24488364.

The impossibility of actualizing death induces Dasein to understanding, cultivating and anticipating (*Vorlaufen*) it as a possibility. Dasein literally *is* for its death, not in the sense of Being-at-an-end, but of Being-towards-the-end.[72] Dasein is essentially *Being-towards-death* (*Sein-zum-Tode*). Being-towards-death means to push ourselves to the end of every possibility, to go to the limit of the possible and, from this extreme position, freely choosing the possibilities that come up towards us. Death negatively marks every possible experience. It is the sign of the *nullity* on which Dasein itself is founded as thrown potentiality-for-Being. As Heidegger remarks, "Death is the possibility of the pure impossibility of Dasein."[73] The impending of such a threat inevitably raises a feeling of anxiety (*Angst*). It is precisely in the state-of-mind of anxiety that Dasein understands its being thrown towards its end. In anxiety for death Dasein feels disoriented, destabilized. This feeling of lostness, or 'uncanniness' (*Unheimilichkeit*) individualizes/isolates (*Vereinzelt*) Dasein, who can no longer flee from itself. [74] Death brings Dasein face to face with itself. It re-calls Dasein in the depth of its existence.

Death is thus that possibility which, at the same time, confers totality and authenticity to Dasein. By anticipating its death, Dasein attests its potentiality-for-being-a-whole and it is liberated from the oppression of the they and brought before itself. But how does this process take place? How could Dasein hear the *call/appeal (Ruf) of conscience* which brings Dasein before the possibility of its "pure impossibility" if, first and foremost, it is absorbed into the tranquillizing chatters of the

[72] BT, p.289.
[73] Ibid., p.294.
[74] Ibid., p.308. It might be interesting to notice that, in the Italian translation of *Sein und Zeit* , the verb *vereinzeln* is translated as *isolare* ("to isolate") instead of "to individualize". In light of Heidegger's rejection of the metaphysical notions of individuality/subjectivity, perhaps the Italian translation is more accurate. See Martin Heidegger, *Essere e Tempo*, Nuova edizione italiana a cura di Franco Volpi sulla versione di Pietro Chiodi, Longanesi, Milan, 2011.

they?[75] Even in this case, the starting point of Heidegger's analysis of death is indeed Dasein's everydayness. Here,

> death is 'known' as a mishap which is constantly occurring – as a 'case of death'. Someone or other 'dies'... 'One dies' [...] Dying, which is essentially mine in a such a way that no one can be my representative, is perverted into an event of public occurrence which the "they" encounters [...] Death gets passed off as always something 'actual'; its character as a possibility gets concealed, and so are the two items that belong to it – the fact that it is non-relational and that it is not to be outstripped.[76]

Dasein ordinarily interprets death as a familiar event. "One dies" (*Man stirbt*) constantly. Death still does not touch us authentically/properly. The Heideggerian authenticity, the authentic "being-one's-self", must be appropriated from time to time. The link between authenticity and "ownness" is inherent in the German word *Eigentlichkeit* (*Eigen* means "own").The disavowal of death as one's ownmost possibility is precisely what hinders us from recognizing the condition of subjection where first and foremost we find ourselves. The power of the dictatorship of the "they" is intimately related to the interpretation of death. If, first and foremost, Dasein is immersed in the chatter of the 'they', death stimulates another kind of hearing. As Heidegger points out, " the call discourses in the uncanny mode of *keeping silent."*[77] Death silently calls Dasein, speaking with the voice of its conscience (*Gewissen*) intended in a purely ontological-existential manner. It asserts nothing, but simply summons Dasein to itself. When Dasein chooses to hear the appeal of its conscience and, thus, to anticipate its death, all the relations to any other Dasein are undone:

[75]BT, pp. 312-319.
[76] Ibid., pp.296-297.
[77] Ibid., p.322.

> Anticipation allows Dasein to understand that that potentiality -for-being in which its ownmost Being is an issue, must be taken over by Dasein alone. Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as an *individual* Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself. This individualizing is a way in which the 'there' is disclosed for existence. It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue. Dasein can be *authentically itself* only if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord. [78]

The authenticity of every single Dasein shows up only in solitude and isolation, in the withdrawal from the light of the publicness. The authentic "being-one's-self" can appear exclusively in an intimate sphere. In the anticipation of death, which is "in every case mine", Dasein is cut off from the relation with others.[79] Death reveals itself as the ownmost, non-relational (*Unbezügliche*) possibility.[80] Indeed, the way of access to my death could never be the other who, first and foremost, prevents me from recognizing my ownmost possibility by offering me others already given and available:

> [...]the suggestion that the dying of Others [can be] a substitute theme for the ontological analysis of Dasein's totality and the settling of its account rests on a presupposition which demonstrably fails altogether to recognize Dasein's kind of Being. This is what one presupposes when one is of the opinion that any Dasein may be substituted for another at random, so that what cannot be experienced in one's own Dasein is accessible in that of a stranger . [Indeed] this possibility of representing breaks

78 Ibid., p.308.
79 Ibid., p.284.
80The English translation of the term *unbezügliche* as "non-relational" gives very well the idea that, in death, Dasein is cut off from relations with others.

> down completely if the issue is one of representing that possibility-of-Being which makes up Dasein's coming to an end, and which, as such, gives to it its wholeness. *No one can take the Other's dying away from him*. Of course someone can 'go to his death for another'. But that always means to sacrifice oneself for the other '*in some definite affair*'. Such "dying for" can never signify that the other has thus had his death taken away even in the slightest degree. Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine [...] In dying it is shown that mineness and existence are ontologically constitutive for death.[81]

In Heidegger's view, death is the only possibility which cannot be shared with others. According to the setting of Heidegger's argumentation, this non-relationality of death has, at the same time, an existential (i) and theoretical (ii) meaning. The limit of my death reveals itself as that boundary which keeps me settled into my "Da" (i). From time to time, death draws a line, a boundary between me and others. Such a limitation seems to be necessary in order to authentically disclose the transcendental horizon within which Being can come into light (ii). Indeed, this gesture prevents any possible inauthentic understanding of Being and of the world which occurs in the dispersion of the publicness. As Sara Heinämaa points out, the undoing of the relations with others in the face of death essentially modifies our relation towards the world, that is to say our understanding of the world.[82]The cut of the relations with others circumscribes/defines the space where Being can show itself, and preserves it in this openness. At the same time, it opens up the hidden sphere where Dasein can come face to face with itself and authentically disclose its potentiality-for-Being.[83]

But does this detachment from the relations to others mean that, when it comes to authentically disclosing Being and one's own potentiality-for-Being, Dasein turns

[81] Ibid., pp. 283-284.
[82]Sara Heinämäa "Phenomenologies of Mortality and Generativity," in *Feminist Philosophies of Birth, Death and Embodiment*, ed. Schott, pp. 73-153, Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN, 2010, p.102.
[83] BT, p.304.

into that absolute subject that Heidegger aimed at putting into question? Does the exclusion of the other in the face of death reiterate the metaphysical gesture of abstraction from the relations within the world in order to access to a more authentic and undisturbed sphere? Indeed, in line with the Greek thought, death seems to take over the function of dissolving the inauthentic relations built within the world in order to relate to something purer and more authentic . In this respect, as Heinämaa points out, some commentators have argued that ," despite his efforts to the contrary, Heidegger offers an abstraction that artificially separates the subject from its vital connection with the others."[84] Radicalizing this position, others have detected a continuity between the "*cogito sum* of Descartes and the existential *moribundus sum* of Heidegger ,"[85] to the extent that Heidegger seems to give to death the same function that Descartes assigned to God.[86] As Hoffman (1993) puts it

> Insofar as I view myself in the light of the possibility of being mislead by the evil demon, I suspend my reliance on the truths of everyday life; but at the same time, I discover the unshakable truth of my subjectivity.[...] In a similar vein, my coming face to face with the (indefinite) possibility of death not only forces me to abandon the ordinary, everyday framework of intelligibility and truth, but at the same time leads me to discover the unshakable certainty and truth of my *sum*.[87]

Nevertheless, as Hoffman himself points out, "insofar as the evidence of Descartes's *cogito* is interpreted as a case of "apodictic evidence" accompanying our mental grasp of a present-at-hand item – of our own ego- then indeed there can be no analogy between Descartes's *cogito sum* and Heidegger's *moribundus sum*," to whom

[84]Heinämäa, "Phenomenologies of Mortality and Generativity," p.100. Heinämaa refers for example to Seyla Benhabib, Richard Cohen, and Simon Critchley.
[85] Hoffman, 'Death, Time, History: Division II of *Being and Time*', p.201.
[86] See for example Hannah Arendt, "Søren Kierkegaard"(1932), in EU, pp. 44-49, p. 46 and Françoise Dastur, *La mort: essay sur la finitude*, Hatier, Paris, 1994, p.47.
[87] Hoffman, 'Death, Time, History: Division II of *Being and Time*', p.203.

certainty/truth is given in the peculiar temporality of the Dasein.[88] Furthermore, with respect to the first claim, Heidegger makes clear that the decision for one's own death does not "signify a kind of seclusion in which one flees the world; rather it brings one without Illusions into the resoluteness of 'taking action'."[89]

Yet the main point still remains: "while being-with-others... forms part of [Heidegger's] account of Dasein's existential structure, relations to others are not integrated into the concept of Dasein at the most fundamental, ontological level."[90] I suggest that the relations to others seem to be not only neglected/overlooked, but necessarily excluded from Heidegger's account of Dasein at an ontological level. At first glance, this exclusion might look like a contradiction of Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein as essentially "being-with," but looking more closely it is consistent with his conception of Dasein's authentic temporality/ historicality (*Geschicklichkeit*) as fate (*Geschick*). As Heidegger puts it

> Only by the anticipation of death is every accidental and 'provisional' possibility driven out. Only Being-free *for* death, gives Dasein its goal outright and pushes existence into its finitude. Once one has grasped the finitude of one's existence, it snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one... and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate* [*Schicksals*]. This is how we designate Dasein's primordial historizing, which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself *down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen.[91]

[88] Ibid., pp.204-205.
[89] BT, p. 358.
[90] Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 66.
[91] BT, p. 435. Several commentators have detected a link between Heidegger's conception of authentic historicality as fate and heritage and his commitment with the Nazi Party. See Emmanuel Lévinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism." Critical Inquiry. 17.1,1990, pp. 62-71 and Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 161. The recent publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (*Schwarze Hefte*) strongly corroborates the thesis of a continuity between Heidegger's philosophy and his political engagement. See Donatella Di Cesare, *Heidegger e gli ebrei. I «Quaderni neri»*,Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 2014.

If, on the one hand, the decision for its own death frees Dasein from the dispersion of the They, on the other hand, it imposes a limited horizon of possibilities to be chosen in an authentic manner. Death draws a boundary between me and the other. This boundary is reconfigurable, but uncrossable, impenetrable. There is no opening that allows me to go further, to take a step towards something else. Indeed, if Dasein's authentic temporality would be open to others' actions/intervention, how could there be any fate at all? How could Dasein recognize it? How could death –Dasein's finitude- be "in every case mine"?[92]As Heidegger remarks, neither the death of the other can affect Dasein's relation to its own death/destiny. It is possible to suffer and to still take care of the other in mourning and commemoration. However, " in suffering this loss...we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man 'suffers'. The dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense."[93]

I suggest that the difficulty of Heidegger's argumentation lies here. It is internal to his conception of Dasein's authentic temporality as anticipation of death conceived as the ownmost, non-relational possibility. Indeed, how does Dasein recognize its portion of death? How does the division of dying occur? How is my death different from yours? What is the difference between your death and mine? Is it legitimate to speak of one's own, personalized death? One could object that, in fact, only I can experience the instant of my death, the moment in which I die. This is indisputable, but Heidegger is not talking about that. When Heidegger claims that ,"by its very essence, death is in every case mine,"[94] he is not referring to the circumscribed instant in which one passes from life to death, from this world to the other world. The existential analysis of death, or, better, of dying "remains purely 'this-worldly'", it is a "*way of Being* in which

[92]Likewise, as Osborne points out, "There is ...no place in *Being and Time* for the temporality of an independent nature," which could affect one's own authentic fate. Osborne, *The Politics of Time,* p.78.
[93] BT, pp. 281-282.
94 Ibid., p.284.

Dasein *is towards* its death."[95] But how is it possible to exclude the other from my dying? How can death be only mine? How can I separate "my" time from the time of the other? Is it possible to draw boundaries in time?

In my view, in some passages of *Being and Time,* Heidegger himself seems to acknowledge this issue, in particular when he points to the possibility of an authentic Being-with-one-other. In § 26, Heidegger outlines two extreme possibilities of taking care of the other in everyday being-with

> With regard to its positive modes, solicitude [Fürsorge] has two extreme possibilities. It can, as it were, take away 'care' from the Other and put itself in his position in concern: it can *leap in* for him...The Other is thus thrown out of his own position...In such solicitude the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him...In contrast to this, there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as *leap ahead* of him [ihm *vorausspringt*] in his existentiell potentiality-for-Being, not in order to take away his 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care – that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a "*what*" with which he is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it.[96]

An "authentic care" of the other consists not in replacing/representing him, but in making him free for his own potentiality-for-Being. But in order to do that, Dasein must previously appropriate its own death, and realize that no one can take it over in his place. Only here can an authentic care/solicitude occur. In this perspective, we might argue that, to the extent that Dasein, first and foremost, "maintains itself between the two extremes of positive solicitude- that which leaps in and dominates, and that which

[95] Ibid.,291-292.
[96] Ibid., pp.158-159.

leaps forth and liberates," the taking over of my death is inseparable from the experience of the impossibility to take over the death of the other, and therefore to replace him in his ownmost possibility.[97] In other words, if it is true that, by taking over my death I also inevitably understand that I cannot leap in for the other and I can make him transparent to himself in an authentic care, then the opposite is also true: by recognizing the impossibility of appropriating the death of the other, and therefore to leap him for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, I can in turn take over my death and authentically be-towards-it. In this perspective, the ownmost non-relational possibility of Being-towards- death would inevitably imply a passage through the death of the other.[98]

Indeed, as Heidegger underlines, "Dasein resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to *let the Others* who are with it *'be'* in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and to *co-disclose* this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates."[99] Stressing this mutuality, we might conceive the two movements of making myself free for my own death and of leaving the other free for his own as happening simultaneously. More, we might argue that these two movements implicate each other. At the same time, Dasein performs a double movement of appropriation and expropriation of death: on the one hand it understands it and takes it over as its ownmost possibility, on the other it recognizes it as radically other/stranger. This inevitably happens since, as Heidegger points out, "Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factically no Other is present-at-hand and perceived."[100]The other is thus authentically presupposed in his own potentiality- for-Being. In this perspective, "the moment of vision/decision"[101] where Dasein

[97] Ibid.,159.
[98] See Edoardo Ferrario, "Abramo e la filosofia," in R. Ago, *Il sacrificio,* Biblink Editori, Rome, 2004, pp. 202-207.
[99] BT, p. 344, my emphasis.
[100] Ibid.,156.
[101] Ibid., 387-388.

authentically discloses itself and the world in the face of death, would reveal itself as intrinsically divided and shared.

However, according to Heidegger's perspective, sharing can eventually occur only at this time. Dasein is destined to come back to itself, to retreat in the face of the radical strangeness/otherness of the death of the other. I thus maintain that if, on the one hand, Heidegger's merit was that of challenging the static and timeless setting of the metaphysical inquiring by intertwining the question of the meaning of Being with human life's temporality/finitude, on the other hand, he attempted to work out and confine this question into the horizon of a "closed temporality." This was the result of his interpretation of human life (and its finitude) as primordially limited by death, conceived as one's ownmost, non-relational possibility. By showing how, on the contrary, one's death unavoidably shades into the death of the other, what kind of temporality do we face? How can this rethinking affect the critique of metaphysics? What horizon of meaning could be disclosed?

1.2 Jacques Derrida and Emmauel Lévinas: Relational Death

Where the figure of the step is refused to intuition, where the identity or indivisibility of a line (finis or peras) is compromised, the identity to oneself and therefore the possible identification of an intangible edge-the crossing of the line-becomes a problem. There is a problem as soon as the edge-line is threatened. And it is threatened from its first tracing. This tracing can only institute the line by dividing it intrinsically into two sides. There is a problem as soon as this intrinsic division divides the relation to itself of the border and therefore divides the being-one-self of anything (Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, 1993)

Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen (Paul Celan, *Grosse glühende Wolbung*, 1967)
(The world is gone, I must carry you)

If, on the one hand, according to Heidegger's perspective, the anticipation of one's death provokes that suspension that pushes Dasein towards its ownmost possibilities,

putting the circle of existence back into motion, on the other hand, the fact that the death of the other cannot be anticipated or appropriated radically interrupts that same circle. What would it happen, then, if Dasein were to relate to an "inappropriate death," to a death that it cannot take on as its own?

As we have shown in the previous section, each time Dasein decides to be-for/towards-its-death it draws a line that distinguishes between what is mine and what is yours, between my possibilities and yours. In this way, it can authentically choose among the possibilities that come towards it. However, this same line indicates that there is something beyond, that there is a beyond. Indeed, a closer analysis showed how the "moment of decision/vision" is not necessarily characterized by individuality/exclusivity, but it might be configured as intrinsically divided and shared. Similarly, we might notice that the boundary that Dasein traces when it relates to its own death is characterized by two edges: one internal and one external. The "this side" (*das Diesseits*) and the "other side" (*das Jenseits*) that take shape from this tracing are further distinguishable: the "this side" of life in relation to the "other side" of death and the "this side" of my dying in relation to the "other side" of yours. As Derrida puts it:

> Each time the decision concerns the choice between the relation to an other who is *its* other (that is to say, another that can be opposed in a couple) and the relation to a wholly, non-opposable, other, that is, an other that is no longer *its* other. What is at stake in the first place is therefore not the crossing of a given border. Rather, at stake is the double concept of the border, from which this aporia comes to be determined.[102]

In this perspective, we might suggest that that proper dying that is on this side and that I must assume in order to-be-a-whole is determined in relation, at the same time, to a proper beyond, to an other proper, namely that of my death, and in relation to an other improper, to an inappropriate beyond, namely the other's death. The decision for one's

[102] AP, p.18, my emphasis.

own potentiality-for-Being implies at the same time a choice between two alterities to which to relate: the other *of* my life, that death that I am as a mortal being, and an absolute alterity, something absolutely other *than* my life, absolutely other than me: the death of the other. The *aporia* fits here. Indeed, as Jankélévitch reminds us, the distinction between the two edges of a line can exist at a spatial level, and then be applied by analogy to death, but death as a limit constitutes itself within time, where there are no border lines or delimitations.[103] The aporia thus first lodges in that limbo that lies between the two edges of a line, and becomes even more intricate when the line effaces itself, questioning the opposite possibilities of the proper and of the stranger.[104] In other words, differently from what Heidegger maintained, it is not possible to circumscribe a proper dying to which to relate. On the contrary, the relation to death always involves a relation to something which is absolutely other, represented by the radical otherness of the other's death. In this sense, Derrida talks about an "originary mourning"[105] which, since the very beginning, structures our existence, even the singularity of our existence, as if we always had to relate to a death which is not our own, which is always recognized as inappropriate, as absolutely other and yet to be assumed - as if we were to always carry someone else's death. In this perspective, the relation to death configures itself as a process of mourning, which unveils a relational dimension intrinsic in human beings.[106] Pushing this insight further, Derrida claims that,

[103] Jankélévitch, *La Mort*.

[104] As Derrida remarks "the non passage, the impasse or aporia, stems from the fact that there is no limit. There is not yet or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable, and indeterminate. There is no longer a home [*chez soi*] and a not-home [*chez l'autre*]". AP, p.20.

[105] AP, p.63; 76.

[106]It is debatable whether this relational dimension which the reference to an "originary mourning" seems to unveil actually implies the relation to an empirical other. However, I believe that Derrida's insistence on the connection between mourning, ethics and responsibility introduces at least an ambiguity around this point.
It might be interesting to notice that, in GD, Derrida proposes a reading of history (in particular of the history of Europe) as a "process of mourning". GD, pp. 3-35. Building upon Jan Patočka's *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History* (1996), Derrida describes the turns/revolutions from what he calls the "orgiastic mystery" to Platonism to Christianity as a series of incorporations, internalizations, repressions, conversions, and subordinations of a *secret* which is related to the question of responsibility. The secret of responsibility is intertwined with and structured by a mystery, by a "nucleus of irresponsibility (Ibid., p.22)" which is preserved and kept alive in these subterraneous historical turns. In this sense, Derrida talks about a " psychoanalytic economy of secrecy as mourning (Ibid., p. 24)".

paradoxically, the relation to death isolates/individualizes me in the absolute responsibility for the (death of the) other, in the responsibility for the other "in that he is mortal", as Lévinas maintains.[107] Indeed, nobody but me can carry the burden of the other's death. The relation to death seems thus to necessarily involve a relation to others, an absolute relation and a responsibility for the other as a mortal being. Reciprocally, the condition of possibility of an authentic responsibility for the other, of an ethical relation to the other, seems to have something to do with death. As Derrida puts it

> [...] *Jemeinigkeit*, that of Dasein or that of the ego (in common sense, the psychoanalytic sense, or Levinas's sense) is constituted in its ipseity in terms of an originary mourning... this self-relation welcomes or supposes the other within its being itself as different from itself. And reciprocally: the relation to the other (in itself outside myself, outside myself in myself) [is] never distinguishable from a bereaved apprehension.[108]

In this way, "the relevance of the question of knowing whether it is from one's own proper death or from the other's death that the relation to death or the certitude of death is instituted is thus limited from the start,"[109] up to the point that we might ask "Is *my* death possible"?[110]

According to Derrida's argument, the aporia of death compromises all property, it interrupts any circular and self-referential return to oneself. It suspends any calculus, any perspective of earning, any possibility of exchange. From time to time, it produces a delay, a rest which prevents any correspondence, any reciprocity, any simultaneity. The aporetic dimension of death, which points to an originary mourning, seems to disclose a relation to the other that is marked by a radical asymmetry. Under the light of death, the

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This economy of secrecy follows the logic of a "conservative rupture (Ibid., p.10)" which keeps, retains, and displaces what is denied/surpassed.

107 GDT,p.3.

108 AP, p.68.

[109] Ibid., p.61.

[110] Ibid.,21, my emphasis.

other cannot be reduced to the sphere of the proper. He withdraws any appropriation, any mutuality, he escapes even from my sight. Death interrupts the reciprocity of glances. It is as if one had to relate to someone who is otherworldly, who transcends the order of this world up to the point of becoming invisible. In this sense, death marks a "relationship without relation," an encounter without encounter.[111] "Awaiting one another" at the limits of death means to always arrive too late, to be late, to arrive when the other is no longer here. As Derrida puts it

> [...] when the waiting for *each other* is related to death, to the borders of death, where we wait for each other knowing *a priori* and absolutely undeniably, that, life always being too short, the one is waiting for the other there, for the one and the other never arrive there together, at this rendezvous (death is ultimately the name of impossible simultaneity and of an impossibility that we know simultaneously, at which we await each other at the same time, *ama* as one says in Greek: at the same time simultaneously, we are expecting this anachronism and this contretemps). Both the one and the other never arrive together at this rendezvous, and the one who waits for the other there, at this border, is not he who arrives there first or she who gets there first. In order to wait for the other at this meeting place, one must, on the contrary, arrive there late, not early.[112]

We might say that, under the light of the other's death, we are already no longer in the same world. The world itself disappears. There is no longer a common ground between me and the other. We cannot find a meeting place. As Lévinas remarks, it is the experience of the "slippage of the earth beneath my feet."[113] We are even no longer under the same sky.[114] The other escapes my embrace, like a shadow, a ghost. The contours of his body lose their definition. The other can no longer answer to me. I

[111] See GD, p.73.
[112] AP, pp.65-66.
113 GDT, p.111.
[114]Ibid., p.139. Here Lévinas refers to Blanchot's concept of "dis-aster", interpreting it as "not being in the world under the stars." Ibid., p, 143.

cannot hear his voice. I can only make it resound within myself. [115] The aporia (literally *a-poros,* "non-passage", impasse) of death interrupts any reciprocity, it becomes the sign of a constitutive delay, of a radical asymmetry which prevents any possible correspondence, any possible calculus or perspective of earning. In this way, it preserves the otherness of the other, and can be configured as the condition of possibility of any authentic decision or responsibility *for* the other. Indeed, if, for Heidegger, death as one's ownmost possibility grounds Dasein's capacity to authentically decide among the possibilities that come towards it, and to decide for its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, on the contrary, for Derrida, it is the aporetic dimension of death that guarantees the authenticity of any decision and responsibility for the other, precisely because it prevents any perspective of earning and return to oneself. This interruption discloses the dimension of the gift, of the love *without reserve*.[116]

The relation to death is thus a relation to something (and someone) absolutely unappropriable. From time to time, it imposes a decision not for one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being, but for something radically other, for the other as wholly other (*tout autre*). Far from being one's most proper possibility, death reveals itself as the most ex-propriating one.[117] It means to be exposed to a radical alterity. In this perspective, *being-towards-death* means *being-towards/for- the other*, being for the

[115]Both in the collection of essays written after the deaths of figures such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-François Lyotard and published with the title *The Work of Mourning* and in the famous *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida offers a touching account of friendship in relation to death. Since the very beginning, friendship is structured by the possibility that one of the two will see the other die, and will be left with the responsibility to bury, commemorate, and mourn the friend, to keep them alive within himself. This is particularly true when the other who passes away is "a great thinker (who) becomes silent," and the friend has the duty to pursue the dialogue, to let them speak even beyond the interruption of death.
Jacques Derrida *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* [1997], Stanford UP, Stanford, California,1999, p. 9; Jacques Derrida, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas, *The Work of Mourning*, University of Chicago Press, London/Chicago, 2003.
[116] GD, p.106.
117 AP, p.77.

other as completely other[118].This quasi mathematical process significantly disrupts Heidegger's position. Indeed, it shows how the alterity of "my" death always shades on the alterity of the death of the other. Our deaths are not sharply distinguishable. The death of the other overlaps with my death, to a certain extent it *is* my death, it intimately concerns/regards (*Regarde*) me.

But what does this mean? What does it mean that the death of the other regards me? What does it mean to be concerned for an other's dying? Does this concern provoke that same kind of anxiety that, from time to time, accompanies Dasein's anticipation of the possibility of its nullification? Indeed, as we have seen in the previous section, in Heidegger's view the relation to death is the relation to the nothing that threatens our existence. While we are alive, by anticipating our death, we can convert this nullity into being, thus keeping into motion both the movement of Being and that of our existence. But can the death of the other be comprehended within this movement? Can it be confined to the boundaries of the ontological dilemma of being-nothingness?[119] What meaning can that particular experience of nothingness which is the end of a human being other than ourselves have? What is the meaning of that dying? To what nothingness do we relate in this case? What does this death add to the compound being - nothingness that constitutes our existence? Does not it disclose *another source of meaning* that precedes, or, better, exceeds the dilemma being - nothingness and all its possible combinations?[120]

118 Building upon the semantic ambiguity of the French "*tout autre*", in GD Derrida proposes the phrasing "tout autre est tout autre", meaning " every other (one) is every (bit) other", or "everyone else is completely or wholly other" (GD, p. 69). In this way, Derrida aims at challenging the distinction between the idea of an infinite/absolute alterity such as the alterity of God and the alterity of every single, empirical other. GD, pp. 82-116.
119 GDT, p.8
120 Ibid., p.13.

This is the crucial point of Lévinas' critique of Heidegger's account of mortality, a critique that plays an important role in Lévinas' philosophical system itself.[121] As Stella Sandford points out,

> Heidegger's conception of *Dasein*'s being-towards-death as a form of 'finite' transcendence (transcendence of the present towards an open future within the horizon of mortality) is opposed in Levinas's work by an insistence on *infinite* transcendence. This is elaborated in relation to an idea of the Other quite absent from Heidegger's work. Transcendence as infinity, also called 'exteriority' and 'height', is avowed or in some sense 'manifested' in the epiphany of the face of the Other (*autrui*), the relation with whom is 'metaphysical desire' or 'religion'. This relation is also, famously, called ethics -once again, a category conspicuously absent in Heidegger.[122]

As we have seen, Heidegger's main aim was that of grasping Dasein's totality within the limits of a finite temporality (dis)closed by the solitary anticipation of death. At the same time, this circumscription defined the space where Being could show itself, and preserved it in this openness. On the contrary, Lévinas' purpose is that of elaborating another concept of time conceived not as circularly enclosed in itself, but stretched towards an infinity opened by the ethical relationship to the Other. In this way, he aims at transcending the question of Being that delimited the boundaries of Heidegger's inquiring. To this end, Lévinas challenges the fulcrum of Heidegger's concept of (authentic) temporality by questioning his interpretation of death as the ownmost non-relational possibility that one needs to anticipate in order to-be-a-whole and to decide for its proper potentiality-for-Being.

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[121]The most systematic elaboration of this critique is perhaps developed in the two lecture courses taught by Levinas during the academic year 1975-1976 at the Sorbonne and published under the title *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (1993). However, as I will partially show, the topic of death crosses most of Lévinas' work, and it is related to both the question of the ethical relationship with the Other and the metaphysical questions of transcendence, time and infinity.
122 Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love. Gender and Transcendence in Levinas,*The Athlone Press, London, 2000, pp.20-21.

In the early work *Time and the Other*, the relation to death is conceived as a relation with something absolutely other, with a mystery that is refractory to any appropriation/anticipation. Death constitutes the event that interrupts the circular return to oneself. It marks the passivity of the subject in the face of something radically unassumable.[123] In this way, it breaks the subject's solitude by exposing it to an alterity that it cannot master, that deeply affects it and cannot be reduced to the sphere of the proper and of the known.[124] As Lévinas points out,

> in the phenomenon of death, solitude finds itself bordering on the edge of a mystery. This mystery is not properly understood negatively, as what is unknown. I shall have to establish its positive significance. This notion will allow me to catch a sight of a relationship in the subject that will not be reduced to a pure and simple return to solitude. Before the death, that will be mystery and not necessarily nothingness, the absorption of one term by another does not come about...the duality evinced in death [is] the relationship with the other and time.[125]

The relation to death as something unassumable allows to cast a glance to a relationship that, similarly, precludes any possible appropriation. This is the "face-to-face" relation with the Other, who is conceived as radical foreign, heterogeneous and asynchronous.[126] Indeed, the relation with the Other is not a simultaneous, reciprocal and synchronic relation, rather it is radically diachronic and asymmetric. As a relation with someone or something absolutely other, it is never fully realized, it never becomes "actual."[127] It

[123] TO, pp.69-79.
[124] Ibid.,p.82.
[125] Ibid., p.41.
[126] Heinämäa, "Phenomenologies of Mortality and Generativity," p.122.
[127] As I will discuss later, it is controversial whether Lévinas' concept of the "Other" refers to an empirical other who can be encountered within the world, or to a more general (and abstract) idea of absolute "otherness/alterity" which can open to transcendence. Indeed, as Andrew McGettingan points out, even if Lévinas talks about a face-to-face relation with the Other, which seems to involve a "physical" and contingent encounter with an other human being, for him " the 'face' is not an individual countenance...[it] is not a physiological characteristic ." Rather, as Lévinas remarks, "the face is abstract...the abstractness of the face is a visitation and a coming which disturbs immanence *without settling into the horizons of the World*." Andrew McGettigan, "The philosopher's fear of alterity: Levinas, Europe and humanities 'without Sacred History'," Radical Philosophy, 2006, 15-25, p.19 ; Emmanuel Lévinas, "Meaning and Sense' (1964), trans. Alphonso Lingis in Basic Philosophical Writings, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak,

configures itself as a "relation without relation."[128] In this unfulfilment, in this unmatching, lies the positivity of this modality of relation, "for the separation or distance maintained between the self and the Other *is* [interpreted as] respect for the Other."[129] In Lévinas' view, this relation with the Other is "the very accomplishment of time" to the extent that it is the condition of possibility of " the encroachment of the present on the future." [130] Indeed, since the very beginning, Lévinas remarks that "time is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but ...it is the very relationship of the subject to the Other."[131] To the extent that the Other, in his radical alterity, cannot be comprehended in the sphere of the proper and of the same, he interrupts, diverts time towards an unanticipable future. This deviation is not an extension of the "proper" time, a stretching of the personal life. On the contrary, the encounter with the Other "gives time" because it provokes a rupture, a break in "the egological order of the present," obstructing the return to the proper and interrupting the automatic flow of instants.[132] As Heinamäa points out,

> The future received from a diachronic, asynchronic, and heterogeneous other is not any type of *extension* of or *addition* to my personal existence, as if my identity would be secured and sealed independently of this opening. The break in my time and the arching into a foreign future constitute an inner fissure at the very heart of the subject.[133]

We might say that what is common to death and the relationship to the Other is the encounter with an alterity that is refractory to any knowledge. Nevertheless, Lévinas seems to suggest that it is only the asymmetric relation to the Other that opens up a

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Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996, pp. 33–64, p.59, my emphasis. Around this point see also Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 24-29.

[128] TI, p. 80.

[129] Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love,* p.26.

[130] TO, p.79.

[131] Ibid., p.39.

[132] Ibid., p.100.

[133] Heinämäa, "Phenomenologies of Mortality and Generativity,"p.123.

dimension of futurity which breaks the immanence of the present. In *Time and the Other*, this relation with a radical and transcendent alterity is elaborated as the erotic relation where, according to Lévinas, " the alterity of the other appears in its purity."[134]Assuming a male point of view, the Other par excellence is represented by the *feminine*, conceived as " a mode of being that consists in slipping away from the light,"[135] in withdrawing from the subject's embrace[136]. In this way, Lévinas can show how, in the erotic, there is no fusion, there is no reduction of the other (feminine) to the same (male), but the alterity of the other is preserved in this slipping away which points to a dimension which is still to come, to a pure future [*avenir*] without content.[137] The contingency and reciprocity of the touch, of the contact is surpassed towards the *transcendence* of a pure future. As Lévinas remarks, "the relationship with the Other is the absence of the other; not absence pure and simple, not the absence of pure nothingness, but absence in the horizon of the future; an absence that is time."[138] The perspective of the future opened by eros is then accomplished by the relation of the father to the son, and conceived as "fecundity".[139]

In *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas further develops the ideas of fecundity and paternity, which in some way replace eros by taking on the function of opening to transcendence. As Sandford points out:

> [...]the structure of transcendence [is] now...found in 'fecundity'... [the] unparalleled relation between two substances, where a *beyond substances* is exhibited, is resolved [*se résout*] in paternity...eros 'terminates' in paternity or fecundity...The relation with the son in fecundity effects the very *transubstantiation* of the subject...The relation with the son opens for the father an absolute future or infinite time which overflows the destiny

[134] TO, p.85.
[135] Ibid., p. 87.
[136] For a thorough discussion of the notions of feminine/female in Lévinas' work see Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp. 33-63.
[137] TO, p.89.
[138] Ibid., p.90.
[139] Ibid., pp.90-94.

> of any self-same ego...in fecundity one becomes two, and not two ones (one, one) but two-in-one without being a new One.[140]

The unmediated relation between father and son (the two-in-one) introduces in the subject a multiplicity which prevents any totalizing closure, and opens to an absolute future. The break provoked by the encounter with the Other is so radical that it fissures the subject internally. The Other *is* in the same without being there, without being incorporated by it. It points to an infinity which cannot be fully contained by the subject[141]. This infinity introduces a distance in the intimacy of the father-son relation, which is resolved as fecundity.[142]

In *Totality and Infinity*, the topic of death is addressed specifically in the paragraph of the third section entitled "The Will and Death". Death is seen again as a mystery which now takes on the contours of a threat coming from the Other. It configures itself as a modality of relation with the Other which, at the same time, implicates and interdicts the possibility of annihilation. This possibility "looks at me from the very depths of the eyes I want to extinguish."[143] As Lévinas puts it

> In death I am exposed to absolute violence, to murder in the night...I contend with the invisible... The Other, inseparable from the very event of transcendence, is situated in the region from which death, possibly murder, comes...Death threatens me from beyond. This unknown that frightens...comes from the other...In the being for death of fear I am not faced with nothingness, but faced with what is *against me*, as though murder, rather than being one of the occasions of dying, where inseparable from the

[140] Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, pp.64-70.
[141] Lévinas borrows this idea of the "infinity in me" from Descartes' Third *Meditations.*
[142] In *Otherwise than Being*, this idea of the "Other-in-the-same" will be paradigmatically represented by prenatal maternity, and articulated in terms of anarchic responsibility, passivity and suffering. However, as Sandford points out, "that idea of maternity, far from replacing the masculine parental term, is conceived and elaborated within the terms of the priority of paternity and is ultimately subordinated to the latter (Ibid., p. 4; see also pp. 82-92)".
[143] TI, p.233.

> essence of death, as though the approach of death remained one of the modalities of the relation with the Other.[144]

The idea that death is "one of the modalities of the relation with the Other" is extensively developed in the series of lectures held by Lévinas during the academic year 1975-1976 at the Sorbonne and published in 1993 under the title *Dieu, la mort et le temps* [*God, Death, and Time,* 2000].[145] Here, Lévinas directly challenges Heidegger's position by arguing: "The death of the other: therein lies the first death."[146] The death of the Other affects, regards me so intimately that it constitutes my first death, the death I approach when I say "my death". By maintaining the priority of the death of the other over the proper, Lévinas shows how the relation with this death, the relation with the Other in the light of death, can disrupt the alternative being-nothingness which drove Heidegger's reflections, disclosing another source of meaning. As Lévinas points out,

> The relation with the death of the other is not a knowledge [*savoir*] about the death of the other, nor the experience of that death in its particular way of annihilating being...It is an emotion, a movement, a disquietude within the unknown...[It is] an emotion as a *question* that does not contain, in the posing of the question, the elements of its own response. A question that attaches to that deeper relation *[rapport]* to the infinite, which is time (time understood as a relation to the infinite)...a disquietude wherein the response is reduced to the responsibility of the questioning itself *[du questionnant]*or of the one who questions *[du questionneur]*.The other concerns me as a neighbour *[prochain]*. In every death is shown the nearness of the neighbor, and the responsibility of the survivor, in the form of a responsibility that the approach of proximity*[proximite]* moves or agitates *[meutouemeut]*.[147]

[144] Ibid., p.233-234.
[145]In the preface to this book, Jacques Rolland maintains that "these lectures should be studied in their strict connections with the texts of *this* period," namely *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. GDT, p.2.
[146] Ibid., p. 43.
[147] Ibid., pp.16-17.

The proximity of this death that has nothing to do with the imminence of one's own end, opens up to a disquieting unknown dimension that is not perceived as pure nothing, but that causes what I suggest to call a "traumatic mood." This mood– which is also a way of understanding - is distinguished from the state-of-mind of anxiety which, according to Heidegger, constituted the privileged opening to the world due to its capacity to isolate Dasein, to take it back from the dispersion into the They by bringing it before its ownmost possibility: the possibility of its annihilation. Here, it comes to suffer for the Other, to "die a thousand deaths" for him and, nevertheless, to survive him guilty.[148]We are guilty because we survived to his end, to the end of his world. We are survivors at the end of the world and, therefore, witnesses. In this suffering, the dimension that opens up is that of responsibility, a responsibility that cannot be delegated, that is untransferable since no one else can bear this witness, no one can replace me in carrying that world that the Other has left. I am responsible to the point of including myself into the death of the Other, " I am responsible for the other in that he is mortal," Lévinas maintains.[149]

The death of a loved one causes a laceration both in the private and in the emotional sphere, in the semantic horizon, in the everyday life, in the world of each of us. We find ourselves being custodians of another origin of the world that opens up another time, a temporality different from that of being-towards-(my)-death. The death of the Other opens a breach in the finite time of each of us. This time does not simply add up to that of life, it is not a continuum of one's own existence. It is not an addition of being that delays the time of the end. On the contrary, we might say that the death of the Other gives me time due to the wound it inflicts on my being. Depriving me of any defence, depriving me of the possibility of elaborating this mourning, of comprehending it in a horizon of meaning, of internalizing it, this death hinders the healing of the cut, it

[148] Ibid., p.39.
[149] Ibid.,p.43.

prevents the closure of this opening. The impossible synthesis of the same and the other that starts from this fracture, produces an interruption in the monotonous flow of time. The absolute transcendence of the Other interrupts the automatic succession of the instants. The same is awakened by the impact, by the beating of the Other and, in the decision to go towards him, he comes out of himself.[150] This movement puts time in motion in an incessant exposure to the Other. As Lévinas remarks, the relationship with the other is a relationship that has never ended with the other. It is not exhausted, it is not consumed since the proximity of the neighbour does not efface his otherness.[151] The responsibility for the other as a mortal is an-archic, pre-originary. The Other intimately disquiets me. It is in me even before I can say "I". I am an *hostage* of the Other, I am preoriginally tied to another.[152] As if we were before God, vulnerable and restless, the only answer we can give to the request of the Other is "Here I am".[153] I am here with you, I am here for you, you are not alone at the end of the world.

As we have seen, both Derrida and Lévinas configure the relation to death as a modality of encounter/relation with the other. The relation to death implies a relation to the other. Reciprocally, the relation to the other as absolutely Other seems to involve, at the same time, a relation to death. What is thus the relationship between death and the Other? What account of otherness does death give? What kind of alterity does death disclose? We might suggest that the alterity of death shades into, and, to some extent, structures the alterity of the Other (*Autrui*), and vice versa. But what does this mean? Building upon Derrida and Lévinas' positions, I argue that death discloses and preserves the alterity of the Other because of the constitutive delay and the radical asymmetry that produces between me and the other, thus preventing any possible reduction of the other to the same. In this way, it configures itself at the same time as the condition of

[150] Ibid., p.139.
[151] Ibid., pp.106-112.
[152] Ibid., pp.172-175.
[153] Ibid., p. 23 and p.196.

possibility of an ethical relationship to the Other, and of an opening to transcendence. Indeed, when the relation to the other is focused and structured by death, by the possibility of death, or by the possibility that one of the two will see the other die, there seems to never be a matching, a synchrony, a correspondence or a reciprocity between me and the other. As Derrida suggests, one of the two is always late. One of the two always withdraws the relation itself, which, in this way, can be (and necessarily is) articulated as a "relation without relation," as a relation which never becomes actual, as Lévinas remarks. Paradoxically, we might argue that death authentically relates me to the Other thanks to the interruption, to the distance that poses between me and the other, which precludes any possible synthesis or assimilation of the Other into the same. Even when the other finds his place within me, or is internalized in the process of mourning, this does not mean that he becomes a part of me which I can master, which is at my disposal. He never becomes fully "mine". Rather, as we have seen, the other fissures me, he digs into me, he diverts my time by disclosing a *beyond*, an *outside*, an exterior and ulterior dimension which cannot be comprehended within the boundaries of the world. As Andrew McGettingan suggests, in Lévinas' perspective this beyond does not correspond to a "pre-existing realm of transcendence to which the subject is granted access in the encounter."[154] Rather, from time to time, it is produced thanks to the imperfect encounter with the other disclosed by death, by the impending of the other's death. Indeed, if the encounter was "perfect", if there was a synchrony or a reciprocity between me and the other, no transcendence could arise, no beyond could be disclosed, since the relation would exhaust, consummate and, in the end, annihilate the alterity of the Other. Definitely, we might say that it is not the closeness, the proximity of the other that opens to transcendence, but the distance, the gap that is kept in spite of this

[154] McGettingan, "The philosopher's fear of alterity: Levinas, Europe and humanities 'without Sacred History'," p.19.

proximity. This is the reason why not all encounter discloses/produces transcendence, but only the encounter marked by the *gift of death*, as Derrida would say.

I contend that, in spite of the rupture that Derrida and Lévinas produce with respect to Heidegger's position by including the figure of the Other in their account of death and mortality, nevertheless the persistence of the centrality of the category of death entails a continuity between their perspectives. In my view, this questions the radicality of Derrida and Lévinas' break, and poses their reflections on ethics and the "Other" (*Autrui*) in a controversial position. First, I argue that some elements of Heidegger's account of death as a "non-relational possibility" persist even in Derrida and Lévinas' positions. Indeed, we might ask, what kind of "relation" does death disclose? Is it a relation which implies a "real" and contingent encounter with the other? Does this relation disclose a shared dimension between me and the other? Can I interact with the other who "slips away", who withdraws my embrace, my touch? Wouldn't it be like relating to an absence, as Lévinas maintains? Under the light of death, are the two truly *present* to each other? Indeed, as I have tried to show, It is precisely the "non", the interval, the interruption, the negation of the relation which produces transcendence. The focus remains oriented toward the separation, the distance between me and the other which cannot be overcame. The overcoming of this distance would mean the annihilation of the other as Other, the annihilation of his radical alterity, and thus of any possible access to transcendence. Death establishes and effaces the relation itself. Death authentically binds me to the Other to the extent that it divides me from the Other. Thanks to the delay produced by death, the more the Other approaches me, the more the distance between us grows.

In this sense, even in Derrida and Lévinas' account, death seems to preserve its character of *pure possibility* which structures human beings existence. Indeed, if, as we have seen, in Heidegger the actualization of death would mean the end of Da-sein, in

Derrida and Lévinas, it would mean the end of transcendence, the foreclosure of the *beyond*. Once again, death is what keeps existence into motion, its existential and theoretical priority is not affected by the introduction of the figure of the Other. On the contrary, it is only death that discloses an authentic (non-) encounter with the Other. Pushing this insight further, we might say that the Other seems to disappear, to be surpassed in the tension to transcendence, up to the point that, actually, the (non-) relation seems to primarily be not between me and the Other (*Autrui*), but between me and the radical/absolute alterity (*Autre*) of the Other disclosed and preserved by the focus on (his) death.[155] Indeed, it is only this alterity disclosed by death which can open to transcendence. The Other in himself, without this pointing to transcendence, would be a mere, empirical other encountered within the limits of the world, incapable to break the immanence of the present. If thus, in Heidegger, the other was excluded from the relation between Dasein and its own death (or, as I have suggested, perhaps included only to confirm the ownness of Dasein's death), in Derrida and Lévinas the other is yes included in the relation to death, but only insofar as he can relate me to a radical alterity, or, in Lévinas' terms, he is a means, a *way*, an opening to transcendence. We might ask, can an ethical account of the other be articulated in these terms?

Second, I argue that the persistence of the focus on death supports the devaluation of the temporal dimension of the *present* which was inaugurated by Heidegger in *Being and Time.* As we have seen, Heidegger's critique of the metaphysical tradition is strictly intertwined with the question of temporality. The main fault of metaphysics is precisely that of grasping Being as a constant, evident *presence*,

[155] As Sandford points out, in Lévinas' *Totality and Infinity* "*Autrui* is said to be the absolutely other (*Autre*) as if to distinguish the two terms, or as if to inscribe the former as the limit case of the latter, the other *par excellence*. But Levinas also uses *Autre* or *autre* in this same capacity, even in the same paragraph, as if to avoid the foregoing suggestion [...] the continued use of *Autre* will seem to stress that what is crucially at issue is precisely the *alterity* of the other, in a formal sense, rather than anything which could be said to be the specifically, empirically human of *autrui*." Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love*, p.25.
This ambiguity becomes far more explicit in Derrida's interpretation of the formula *tout autre est tout autre* I mentioned in a previous note.

as something that is present-at-hand, and thus reducible to a mere entity. In this perspective, the present seems to be an atemporal and static dimension which binds the knowing subject to the object of knowledge by making the latter present to the former, and by cutting/isolating both from the totality of Dasein's primordial temporality.[156] Proximally and for the most part, Dasein lives and is absorbed in this "continuously enduring sequence of pure 'nows'," which is disclosed by the concern for what is closest to it, and is made proximally available.[157] For Heidegger, this modality of making-present corresponds to the "falling understanding of Being "[158] -the understanding of Being as presence-at-hand- which the ordinary conception of time entails. As Heidegger puts it

> Everyday Dasein, the Dasein which takes time, comes across time proximally in what it encounters within-the-world as ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. The time which it has thus 'experienced' is understood within the horizon of that way of understanding Being which is the closest for Dasein ; that is, it is understood as something which is itself somehow present-at-hand. How and why Dasein comes to develop the ordinary conception of time, must be clarified in terms of its state-of-Being concerning itself with time--a state-of-Being with a temporal foundation. *The ordinary conception of time owes its origin to a way in which primordial time has been levelled off*.[159]

In its everydayness, Dasein is thrown and falls into the publicness of the They. The They anticipates and orients the understanding of Being and of the world by covering up Dasein's ownmost possibility: the possibility of its death. In this way, the They levels off, obscures Dasein's authentic temporality by reducing it to a literally *endless* present/now. The (ordinary) time which is offered by the They has no end because, as Heidegger remarks, "The "they" never dies... it cannot die ; for death is in each case

[156] BT, p.479.
[157] Ibid., p.462.
[158] Ibid., p. 352.
[159] Ibid., p.457, my emphasis.

mine."[160] The time in which Dasein is proximally and for the most part thrown/fallen is thus the inauthentic, *"public* time which has been levelled off and which belongs to everyone--and that means, to nobody."[161] This public time configures itself as a "flat" present (which, however, gives the illusion that something continuously and frenetically happens) to the extent that it loses its tension with the *end*, and, thus, at the same time, with the specific past which Dasein needs to assume in relation to its death. Dasein's irresoluteness, its incapacity to authentically anticipate its death in the dispersion of the They,

> [...] temporalizes time in the mode of a making-present which does not await but forgets. He who is irresolute understands himself in terms of those very closest events and be-failings which he encounters in such a making-present and which thrust themselves upon him in varying ways. Busily losing himself in the object of his concern, he loses his time in it too. Hence his characteristic way of talking-'I have no time'.[162]

If, on the one hand, Dasein's inauthentic temporalizing discloses the present as a mere making-present of what is closest to it and, in a certain sense, masters and absorbs Dasein, on the contrary,

> the temporality of resoluteness has, with relation to its Present, the character of a *moment of vision.* When such a moment makes the Situation authentically present, this making present does not itself take the lead, but is *held* in that future which is in the process of having-been. One's existence in the moment of vision temporalizes itself as something that has been stretched along in a way which is fatefully whole in the sense of the authentic historical constancy of the Self. [163]

[160] Ibid., p. 477.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.,p.463.
[163] Ibid.

In Dasein's authentic temporality, the present configures itself as the "moment of vision" in which Dasein takes over *its* specific past in the horizon of a primordially closed future. In this way, Dasein can, from time to time, accomplish its fate, it can be "fatefully whole". Indeed, the present thus disclosed does not lead/master Dasein. On the contrary, arising from its authentic futurity, it becomes the space in which Dasein can resolutely act and orient its existence (and perhaps the course of the world) according to its fate.

In this sense, we might notice that, for Heidegger, the present of the moment of vision is not open to contingency, to unexpected events or to others' intervention. On the contrary, it is primordially closed, contained and controlled by the fatefully future which is to be assumed. In other words, the present disclosed by the moment of vision is immediately shaped and kept under control by Dasein's authentic futurity. If, thus, on the one hand, the temporal dimension of the present corresponds for Heidegger to the mere making-present of Dasein's inauthentic temporalizing, on the other hand, it finds itself stuck, repressed, and primordially closed in the limits of Dasein's authentic fate.

Even if Derrida and, more systematically, Lévinas, give an account of temporality no longer focused on totality, but stretched towards transcendence and infinity, we might notice that, in their perspectives, the devaluation of the temporal dimension of the present still persists. Indeed, as we have seen, Lévinas articulates its conception of time in relation to the figure of the Other. Contra Heidegger, he maintains that the temporalization of time does not occur in the solitary and egological anticipation of death as one's ownmost possibility. On the contrary, it is the asymmetric and diachronic relation to the Other disclosed by the focus on his death that can accomplish time thanks to the rupture, to the wound it inflicts on the finitude of my

being. The radical alterity of the Other breaks the immanence and the self-referentiality of the "proper" time by opening to an unanticipable future.

In this frame, the temporal dimension of the present corresponds to the immanent space where the Other cannot escape the embrace of the same, of the ego by disappearing in the projection of an unanticipable future, but is absorbed and consummated by it. In the synchrony of the present, where the one is truly *present* and matched to the other, the alterity that can open to transcendence is annihilated. Indeed, in Lévinas view, the present is the space of the synthesis, of the mediation, it is the common ground where one can truly appear to the other, and, thus, be incorporated in him. As Lévinas points out:

> [...] the presence of the present, as temporality, is the promise of a graspable, a solid... The other is made the property of the ego in the knowledge that assures the marvel of immanence... Does not the "seeing one another" between humans ...revert, in its turn, to a seeing and thus to an egological significance of intentionality, the egology of synthesis, the gathering of all alterity into presence, and the synchrony of representation?[164]

The present corresponds to the temporal dimension in which the other gives itself to the same and can be mastered and re-presented by it[165]. Here, the other is not "truly" Other (*Autrui*), he does not break the immanence of the same. Rather, it configures itself as a generic and logical alterity which can confirm, be synthesized and known by an ego. It is only the ethical and diachronic relation to the Other disclosed by the focus on his

[164] Emmanuel Lévinas, "Diachrony and Representation" (1982) in TO, pp.98-100.

[165] In the essay "Diachrony and Representation," Lévinas detects a continuity in the (theoretical) priority of the "egology of the present" from Descartes to Husserl. In his view, this modality of knowledge as reduction of the other (*Autre*) to the same in a process of "egological gathering" persists in the Heideggerian "toward-being [à-être] [as] the source of *Jemeinigkeit* ." Ibid., p.99.

death that can open up a "future contrasting strongly with the synchronizable time of re-presentation."[166] Indeed, as Lévinas points out,

> Responsibility cannot be stated in terms of presence... Responsibility for the other in me is an exigency that increases as one responds to it; it is an impossibility of acquitting the debt and thus an impossibility of adequation: an excess [*excedence*] over the present. This excess is glory. It is with glory that the Infinite is produced as an event. The excess over the present is the life of the Infinite. This inherence of the Other in the Same, without the presence of the Other to the Same, is temporality by way of the irreducible non-coincidence of the terms of the relation.[167]

Once again, the *evasion of present* is thus functional to the preservation of the alterity (*Autre*) of the Other which can produce transcendence. In this sense, we might say that, even if the immanence and self-referentiality of the proper time is breached by the beat of the Other, or by the suffering for his death, nevertheless the one and the Other are not bounded by a *shared temporality* which could entail a simultaneous relation. Rather, it is only the diachronic and asymmetric non-encounter with the Other that can put time back into motion in the opening of an unanticipable futurity. In other words, the one and the Other can reciprocally break and divert the flow of the proper time, but their respective temporalities remain unmatched, unpaired. They do not converge in a shared dimension[168]. This inevitably happens, since, as Derrida reminds us, when the encounter or the relation with the Other is marked by the gift of death, or by the impending of the

[166] Ibid., p.114.

[167] GDT, p.195. Similarly, in GD, Derrida remarks that the moment in which we take on our responsibility for the Other as a mortal being, "is irreducible to present or presentation, it demands a temporality of the instant without ever constituting a present." The gift of death cannot be re-presented, it is not a *present* which can be grasped, apprehended or comprehended, for " a gift destined for recognition would immediately annul itself ." GD, p.66 and p.31.

[168] In GDT, Lévinas explicitly affirms that "the dissymmetry of the relationship keeps me solitary and unmatched [*depareille*] in regard to the other." GDT, p.181.

Other's death, one of the two is always late, a radical delay is produced which keeps and increases the distance between the two[169].

If, thus, on the one hand, Derrida and Levinas' reflections on the other's death to a certain extent disrupt Heidegger's vision of death as "ownmost non-relational possibility", as well as the account of temporality he elaborates according to this vision, on the other hand, as I have tried to show, the persistence of the centrality of the category of death entails a continuity between their perspectives. The main similarities I have detected concern the question of the "non-relationality" of death and the related issue of the devaluation of the temporal dimension of the present. These two points are intertwined with and implicate a controversial account of the "other", who, in order to preserve his radical alterity and capacity to open to transcendence, seems to lose his empirical and human traits. Is this account of alterity entailed by a specific conception of death, or by the persistence of the category of death itself? Is it possible to articulate a different account of the other in relation to death and mortality? If not, what does an exclusive focus on death cover about the relation to the other? What are the theoretical implications of this covering over? Is it possible to articulate an alternative paradigm?

[169] Building upon Denise Riley's *Time Lived, Without Its Flow*, in the last chapter of this thesis, I will show how, on the contrary, there can be a shared temporality, or a simultaneity in the impending of the other's death, as if the dead could bring you with him, in his timeless time. However, I will argue that it is the maternal perspective assumed by the author that can disclose this point of view on the other's death.

Chapter Two. Between Tradition and New Beginnings: The Genesis of Hannah Arendt's Category of Natality

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have shown how death and mortality return to be central categories in twentieth century European philosophy. I have highlighted some problematic aspects of this turn by addressing the positions of Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, especially in relation to the construction of the figure of the 'other', and how to understand/configure relationality, vulnerability, and temporality.

In this chapter, I will suggest that it is possible to trace two ways to deal with and to critique Heidegger's account of mortality: on the one hand, Derrida and Lévinas' strategy of shifting the focus from 'my death', to the death of the other (still relying on the category of death), on the other hand, Arendt's shift of focus from the philosophical centrality of mortality to that of birth and natality.

I believe that Arendt's concept of natality is of special interest in this attempt because it emerges in dialogue with philosophers from the Western tradition such as Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Kant, Benjamin, Jaspers and Heidegger. However, Arendt seems to draw different conclusions. Rather than aligning with her contemporaries and enriching a long tradition of reflection on mortality, Arendt brings into light a category that had hitherto remained hidden. In this sense, as Adriana Cavarero points out, the Arendtian category of natality cannot simply be added to Western philosophical thought as a new concept that enriches and completes it, but it is a category that radically changes this thought, by transforming it at its roots.[170] In other words, I maintain that

[170]DN, p. 110.

the perspective opened by Arendt provides a new way to look at, to rethink and to question the Western philosophical tradition itself.

In this chapter, I will set the notion of 'natality' in the context of Arendt's whole original political philosophy. First, I will reconstruct how this notion emerged and informed Arendt's thought by focusing on early texts such as the biography of Rahel Varnhagen and her doctoral thesis on the concept of Love in St. Augustine. I will show how the concept of natality crosses most of Arendt's work and emerges in dialogue with philosophers of the Western tradition.

I will rely not only on Arendt's published work, but also on posthumous texts, marginal notes, letters and material not intended for publication, most notably her *Denktagebuch*, which, from behind the scenes, accompanies published texts from the 50s onwards. Arendt's notes, her correspondence and the fragments included in her *Denktagebuch* can be seen in the framework of what Gérard Genette calls "paratexts", namely those collateral productions that "ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in... the form of a book," and constitute an "intermediary zone between the off-text and the text."[171] As Genette puts it

> the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is rather a *threshold* , or ... a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back.[172]

As the author remarks, paratexts have a spatial and temporal dimension on their own and with respect to the published text. They can be posthumous, contemporary or

[171] Gerard Genette, [1987] *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p.1.
[172] Ibid., p.2, my emphasis.

'prenatal' productions, a distinction which seems to be particularly relevant for the task of reconstructing a topic Arendt never addressed systematically in her published works.

Arendt's *Denktagebuch* has been published in 2002 by Ursula Ludz and Ingrid Nordmann. As Ian Storey points out in the introduction to the commentary *Artifacts of Thinking: Reading Hannah Arendt's Denktagebuch*, the collection includes twenty-eight handwritten notebooks—primarily in German but partly in English, Greek, and French—commencing in 1950 and ending in the early 1970s, two decades in which Arendt published *The Human Condition*, *Between Past and Future*, *Men in Dark Times*, *On Revolution*, and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. As such, the publication of this "thought diary" (as it is often translated into English) constitutes a turning point in Arendt studies and enlightens published works after the 50s.[173]

The reconstruction of the topic of natality in Arendt I suggest will be partial in the space and purpose of this thesis. What I hope to show is how this topic spans throughout Arendt's work, and can be considered a key to re-interpret some Arendtian concepts and categories. As many interpreters have pointed out, Arendt does not develop a systematic account of this notion. [174] The first task is thus to reconstruct the genesis of the concept in Arendt's work, drawing the fragmentary references to it together and trying to puzzle out their connection.

As pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, the secondary literature on Arendt's concept of natality is now quite extensive. A systematic reconstruction can be

[173] Roger Berkowitz and Ian Storey, editors. *Artifacts of Thinking: Reading Hannah Arendt's Denktagebuch*. Fordham University Press, 2017. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hfr0q2 .
During my PhD, I had the opportunity to undertake a research trip to the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College (NY). There, I had access to Arendt's personal library which contains approximately 4,000 volumes, ephemera and pamphlets that made up Arendt's library in her last apartment in New York City. In Arendt's huge archive, I focused on works by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Kant and Heidegger, addressing German and English editions of some of these author's texts, as well as Latin and ancient Greek editions. Doing research in Arendt's library allowed me to appreciate how closely Arendt read the works of her interlocutors as well as grasping the dynamic of her process of thinking.
[174]See, among others, Durst, 'Birth and Natality in Hannah Arendt'; Vatter, 'Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt'; Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights.*

found in Silvano Zucal[175] and, most notably, in Particia Bowen-Moore. In *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, Bowen-Moore detects a tripartite concept of natality in Arendt: 'primary natality', referring to factual birth into the world; 'secondary' or 'political natality'–birth into the realm of action; and 'tertiary/theoretical natality'–birth into the timelessness of thought.[176] (It is worth noting that Bowen Moore wrote this book before the publication of Arendt's *Denktagebuch* in 2002, and before the essays included in the collections *Jewish Writings* and *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*).

Anne O'Byrne offers an existential account of natality in her book *Natality and Finitude*, while Dana Villa investigates the Heideggerian roots of Arendt's political thought.[177]Arendt's notion of natality has been explored in connection with biopolitics by Agamben, Diprose and Ziarek, Bottici.[178] Vatter, offers a valuable account of the genesis of the concept, but limits this to retracing when Arendt first began to employ this term in her published works and in her *Denktagebuch*.[179] Feminist interpretations and critiques of this concept can be found in texts by Durst, Söderbäck, Fulfer, Cavarero, Rigotti, Dietz, Kristeva.[180] In her 2006 book *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights*, Peg Birmingham investigates the concept of natality in relation to the question of human rights.[181]

In distinction to Bowen-Moore and other interpreters, in this chapter I will show the interconnectedness of the various meanings of 'natality' that can be detected throughout Arendt's oeuvre, rather than following a tripartite schema of separate

[175]Zucal, *Filosofia della nascita*.
[176]Bowen-Moore, *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, p. 1.
[177]O'Byrne, *Natality and Finitude* ; Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*.
[178] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; Diprose and Ziarek, *Arendt, Natality and Biopolitics*; Bottici, "Rethinking the Biopolitical Turn. From the Thanatopolitical to the Geneapolitical Paradigm'.
[179]Vatter, 'Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt',p.26.
[180]Margaret Durst, 'Birth and Natality in Hannah Arendt', in *Analecta Husseriliana* 79 (2003), pp. 777-97; Söderbäck, 'Natality or Birth?; Katy Fulfer, 'Hannah Arendt and Pregnancy in the Public Sphere.' In H. Fielding, & D. Olkowski (Eds.). *Feminist phenomenology futures*, Indiana University Press, 2017, pp. 257-274; IN; Francesca Rigotti, *Partorire con il corpo e con la mente*. *Creatività, filosofia, maternità*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 2010; Mary Dietz, *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics*, Routledge, New York and London, 2002; Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*.
[181]Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights.*

biological, political and theoretical meanings. I will also make explicit how the concept of natality is informed by the dialogue between Arendt and twentieth-century German *existenzphilosophie*, Heidegger and Jaspers in particular and, via them, St. Augustine. I argue that this background persists in Arendt's mature reflections on the political significance of the concept of natality and can help rethink the distinctions (for example between private and public) she makes in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*. This will also allow for the outline of a concept of time that remains largely implicit in her work.

2.1 A Red Thread

One of Arendt's earliest works is a biography.[182] This is the text *Rahel Varnhagen. The Life of a Jewish Woman*, dedicated to the figure of Rahel Levin-Varnhagen, a German-Jewish writer who, between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, hosted one of the most famous salons in Europe gathering artists and intellectuals such as Schlegel, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Heinrich Heine, Bettina Brentano-von Arnim and Clemens Brentano. As Arendt reports, Rahel Varnhagen exchanged correspondence with eminent figures of her time, for example with Goethe.

Begun when she was barely nineteen, interrupted eight years later, in 1933, when she was forced to leave Germany due to the Nazi regime's persecution,[183] Arendt carried out this project over many years, finally publishing it in English in 1957. Through Rahel's biography, Arendt reflects on the existential significance of being a Jew in the hostile climate of Nazi Germany, a reflection that anticipates her mature

[182] RV. In reconstructing Rahel Varnhagen's life path Arendt relies on published and unpublished material , diaries and correspondence.
[183] In 1933, after spending eight days in a Gestapo prison, Arendt fled from Berlin to Paris. At the age of twenty-seven, she became a stateless person.

considerations on the questions of assimilation, on the figures of the pariah and the parvenu, and on statelessness[184]. In a letter to Jaspers from 1930, Arendt writes

> It seems as if certain people are so exposed in their own lives (and only in their lives, not as persons!) that they become, as it were, junction points and concrete objectifications of " life." Underlying my objectification of Rahel is a self-objectification that is not a reflective or retrospective one but, rather, from the very outset a mode of "experiencing," of learning, appropriate to her. What this all really adds up to—fate, being exposed, what life means—I can't really say in the abstract (and I realize that in trying to write about it here). Perhaps all I can try to do is illustrate it with examples. And that is precisely why I want to write a biography. In this case, interpretation has to take the path of repetition.[185]

As Young-Bruehl suggests in her thorough biography of Arendt, the book on Rahel Varnhagen can be considered as an example of" biography as autobiography."[186] For Arendt, it was not only a way to re-elaborate her own personal story, placing it at distance, but also a laboratory, as it were, where her mature reflections on love, alienation from the world and the solitude of the activity of thinking were coming to life.

[184] See for example Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', *Menorah Journal* Vol. 31, no.1, January 1943, pp. 69–77. Arendt started working on the book on Rahel after leaving Marburg in 1925 and moving to Heidelberg, where she wrote her doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Karl Jaspers. In her biography, Arendt often refers to Rahel Varnhagen as "Rahel". This is because Rahel Varnhagen often changed her name during her life, but kept Rahel as her preferred signature. See Maria Tamboukou, *Epistolary Narratives of Love, Gender and Agonistic Politics: An Arendtian Approach*, Routledge, London, 2023, p.34.

[185] *Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, Correspondence, 1926–1969*, edited by Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner, translated by Robert and Rita Kimber, Harcourt, New York, 1993, pp. 11–12.

[186] Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*(1982), Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004. Young-Bruehl was a former student of Arendt at the New School for Social Research in New York.

In Rahel's biography, the topic of birth takes on a central importance. Arendt begins the reconstruction of Rahel's life stages and of her interior path with her last words. On her deathbed, Rahel exclaims:

> WHAT a history!- A fugitive from Egypt and Palestine, here I am and find help, love, fostering in you people. With real rapture I think of these origins of mine and this whole nexus of destiny, through which the oldest memories of the human race stand by side with the latest developments. The greatest distances in time and space are bridged. The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life-having been born a Jewess this I should on no account now wish to have missed.[187]

Throughout Arendt's text, Rahel Varnhagen often refers to her 'infamous birth.'[188] Rahel's is a story of guilt, of shame, of self-denial and of continuous attempts to cover up this birth, through love, marriage or assimilation. Only in extremis does she recognize herself in her origin, intended as the starting point of everyone's life. As Cavarero suggests in 'Dire la nascita', Arendt combines two *atopies* in this biography: birth and Jewishness. In Cavarero's account, birth and Jewishness are '*a-topos*', literally, 'out-of-place' or 'extra-ordinary' to the extent that they exceed the established – symbolic, philosophical and political–order that overlooks the beginning of human life (especially if connected to a Jewish origin), by focusing rather on its end. In this sense, for Cavarero, birth and Jewishness are not simply placed outside of the established order or the mainstream Western philosophical tradition, but they retain a

[187] RV, p.3. This passage echoes Arendt's own words reported in her correspondence with Scholem: 'I have always regarded my Jewishness as one of the indisputable factual data of my life, and I have never had the wish to change or disclaim facts of this kind. There is such a thing as basic gratitude for everything that is as it is.' However , as Arendt herself remarks in her interview with Günter Gaus, the recognition of her origin was not an easy task: 'the word "Jew" never came up when I was a small child. I first met up with it through anti-Semitic remarks...from children on the street. After that, I was so to speak 'enlightened'." Hannah Arendt, 'An Exchange of Letters Between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt', in *The Jew As Pariah*, ed. Ron H. Feldman, Grove Press, New York, 1978, p.246; Hannah Arendt, '"What Remains? The Language Remains": A Conversation with Günter Gaus', EU, p. 6.
[188] RV, pp.8 and 71.

peculiar relationship with respect to them, by virtue of which they are capable of de-centring and questioning their assumptions.

The category of natality will become central in Arendt's mature thought and it is not irrelevant that it was initially connected to a Jewish origin. Indeed, Cavarero remarks that in her later works, Arendt employs the category of natality purified from biographical and autobiographical references. In spite of this abstraction, I argue that the importance of the (auto)biographical and existential perspectives on political and philosophical reflection remain central in Arendt's thought. For Arendt, general concepts can be exemplified through and take on (different) meaning(s) when they are tied to a concrete life.

As the correspondence with Jaspers shows, the work on Rahel Varnhagen goes hand in hand with Arendt's elaboration in her doctoral thesis of the concept of love in St. Augustine.[189] As Judith Chelius Stark points out in her preface to the 1996 English edition of Arendt's dissertation, it should not be surprising that Arendt decided to focus her doctoral thesis on a Christian thinker like St. Augustine. Stark reports that Hans Jonas, when asked why this was so, replied that 'such a topic would not have been all

[189] See the early letters published in Arendt-Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969*.
In addressing St Augustine's works in Arendt's personal library at Bard College I noticed that Arendt underlined several passages from Augustine's *De Trinitate* where the philosopher from Hippo claims that "there is nothing whatever that generates its own existence [neither God, nor the spiritual or the bodily creature]," and where he describes the knowledge process as well as the knowledge communication by using the vocabulary of conception/generation and by pointing to the concept of Love. In Augustine's words: " we behold, by the sight of the mind, in that eternal truth from which all things temporal are made...and we have true knowledge of things ...as it were as a word within us, and by speaking we beget it from within... and this word is conceived by love". These passages recall the pages on Love from Plato's *Symposium* that Arendt underlines as well. While the importance of Augustine and especially of his concept of Love for Arendt's idea of natality is well known, what is interesting to me is the attention Arendt pays to the metaphors of pregnancy and generation in the activity of the mind, and especially in the connection between the interiority of the mind and the exteriority of the performed act/speech that I will discuss in chapter three of this thesis.
See Augustine, *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Whitney J. Oates. Two Volumes. New York: Random House,1948, 668-798.
Plato. The Symposium / translated by W. Hamilton.[Harmondsworth] : Penguin Books, 1956, c1951. Hannah Arendt's Personal Library, Stevenson Library, Bard College, NY. https://library.bard.edu/record=b1024463 ;
Saint Augustine. Basic writings of Saint Augustine, ed. with an intro and notes by Whitney J. Oates. New York, Random House [1948]. Hannah Arendt's Personal Library, Stevenson Library, Bard College, NY. https://library.bard.edu/record=b1281019

that unusual in the German universities of the time.' In the German universities particular attention was devoted to Augustine's *Confessions* which, as Jonas recalls, prompted students to 'self-exploration and the descent into the abyss of conscience.'[190]

In her doctoral thesis, Arendt investigates three concepts of love in Augustine: love in the sense of *cupiditas*, the love between Creator and creature (*caritas*), and neighbourly love. All three types of love are characterized by craving (*appetitus*), desire for some good that can guarantee the actualization of a happy life (*vita beata*) or happiness (*beatitudo*). The idea of neighbourly love drives Arendt's reflections, as she seeks to render clear the meaning of the evangelical command: 'love they neighbour as thyself'.

As Arendt remarks, in Augustine's view, Love intended as *cupiditas* is constantly threatened by the possibility of losing the object of desire, as it is addressed towards worldly and temporal goods ("love of the world").This type of love prompts human beings to seek an object/ good which is outside of the world (transmundane) and its mutability. This is the "highest good" (God), which stands above us and is loved for its own sake. Here, the relation to God is found in the anticipation of an absolute future (oriented by human beings' mortality) which anticipates the 'timeless present' of eternity.[191] In this perspective, "our own selves, our neighbors, our bodies –[are] loved for the sake of the highest... the original self-love and with it the love of his neighbor [are] bypassed."[192]

By contrast, in the love of the creature for the Creator, happiness, the perfect possession of the object of love, is found not in the anticipation of an absolute future, but in the remembrance of a past which has never been "present" in our worldly

[190] LA, p. XV.
[191] "In longing for and desiring the future, we are liable to forget the present, to leap over it. If the present is altogether filled with desire for the future, man can anticipate a timeless present 'where the day neither begins with the end of yesterday, nor is ended by the beginning of tomorrow; it is always today.' This is properly called divine 'time,' that is, the time of him whose 'today is eternity'." LA, p. 27.
[192] Ibid., pp.39-45.

existence. This is the perfect reunion to God intended as the matrix or origin of human beings' life. Indeed, as Arendt explains, this is a condition we experienced (without experiencing it) before birth, and in which we will be absorbed again after death. In her reading, it is possible to recall it also in some forms of worldly love.[193]In this perspective, human beings' life is not oriented by the anticipation of an absolute future, but by the remembrance and repetition in a quasi Freudian sense (in the literal sense of "re-petere", re-seek) of an absolute past.

Both in the anticipation of an absolute future and in the remembrance of an absolute past, the present of the worldly human existence is annihilated, and, with it, the relation to everything mundane. Human beings are profoundly isolated in the love of God, to whom they can find a way by loving themselves as creatures of Him. At this stage, as Arendt remarks, love of oneself, love of God and love of the neighbour are mutually exclusive.

How to reconcile neighbourly love, the divine command of loving our neighbours in the world, with the isolation prescribed by the exclusive relation to oneself and to God? As Bowen-Moore suggests, it is here, in Arendt's interpretation of Augustine's *Vita Socialis* - love of the neighbour - that the question of the plural dimension of natality starts to emerge. Arendt attempts to reconcile these two dimensions of love (individual and plural) by pointing to a twofold origin of human life: Christ's redemptive death and Adam's original sin. As descendents of Adam, human beings share a historic identity by generation. Descending from Adam, human beings are thrown into a common situation of sinfulness in which they are mutually dependent upon one another and in which they relate to one another as world-oriented beings:

[193] "[...]every particular act of love receives its meaning, its raison d'etre, in this act of referring back to the original beginning (Ibid., p. 50)"; "The knowledge of the possible existence of the happy life is given in pure consciousness prior to all experience, and it guarantees our recognizing the happy life whenever we should [B:033183] encounter it in the future. For Augustine this knowledge of the happy life is not simply an innate idea, but is specifically stored up in memory as the seat of consciousness. Hence, this knowledge points back to the past. When happiness is projected into the absolute future, it is guaranteed by a kind of absolute past, since the knowledge of it, which is present in us, cannot possibly be explained by any experiences in this world." Ibid., p.47.

"The community of men among themselves [the *civitas terrena*], which goes back to Adam and constitutes the world, always precedes any 'city of God' (*Civitas Dei*). It is a pre-existing community into which the individual comes by birth," Arendt maintains.[194] Adam's progeny stands in a radical condition of equality: all human beings are equal in that they all are sinners before God.

It is worth noting that, in her doctoral thesis, Arendt follows Augustine's overlooking of the figure of Eve in the narration of the Creation story, rather focusing on that of Adam. As Augustine remarks in the *De Civitate Dei*, differently from other species that were ordered "to come into being several at once", Adam was created *unum ac singulum*.

This will change in the first pages of *The Human Condition*, where, in a note, Arendt points to "two biblical versions of the creation story":

> In the analysis of postclassical political thought, it is often quite illuminating to find out which of the two biblical versions of the creation story is cited. Thus it is highly characteristic of the difference between the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and of Paul that Jesus, discussing the relationship between man and wife, refers to Genesis 1:27: "Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female" (Matt. 19:4), whereas Paul on a similar occasion insists that the woman was created "of the man" and hence "for the man," even though he then somewhat attenuates the dependence: "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man" (I Cor. 11:8-12). The difference indicates much more than a different attitude to the role of woman. For Jesus, faith was closely related to action (cf. § 33 below); for Paul, faith was primarily related to salvation. Especially interesting in this respect is Augustine (*De civitate Dei* xii. 21), who not only ignores Genesis 1:27 altogether but sees the difference between man and animal in that man was created

[194] Ibid., p.103.

> unum ac singulum, whereas all animals were ordered "to come into being several at once" (*plura simul iussit exsistere*). To Augustine, the creation story offers a welcome opportunity to stress the species character of animal life as distinguished from the singularity of human existence[195]

Although Arendt underlines that Paul mitigates his statement by pointing to a mutual interdependence between man and woman, symptomatically, she does not quote the biblical passage in full:

> [8] For man did not come from woman, but woman from man;[9] neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.[10] It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.[11] Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.[12] For as woman came from man, so also man *is born of woman*. But everything comes from God.[196]

Arendt draws on Genesis 1:27 to point to an original duality (or, in her terms, plurality) of human existence that does not exclude uniqueness, but is rather critical to it.[197]

Going back to Arendt's discussion of Augustine's *Vita Socialis*, as descendents from Christ, human beings relate to each other with a view to their common 'whence' from which they came and from which they derive their true being: "What actually enables the person to relate to his source, as the creature to the Creator, is a historical fact: God's revelation in Christ. As a historical fact, this is revealed to human beings living together in a historical world."[198] The shared kinship rooted in Christ's redeeming

[195] HC, note 1 p.8.
[196] I Cor. 11:8-12, my emphasis.
[197] As Cavarero underlines in *Inclinations*, despite the emphasis on the double biblical version, Arendt demonstrates remarkable blindness when she takes Adam and Eve (who actually have not being generated) as models of natality intended as having-been-generated and of an original human plurality. This is even more evident in her doctoral dissertation where, as I pointed out, she does not even mention the figure of Eve. See IN, 117-120.
[198] LA, p.105.

death depends on the salvation provided to all human beings by God's grace. In Augustine's view, through faith in Christ's redeeming grace, human beings are able to love their neighbours as they love themselves[199].What each one loves in the other is the recognition of a common createdness and desire to return to their origin[200].

It is in the context of the discussion of the love of the creature for the Creator and of the possibility of reconciling this love with neighbourly love that Arendt's critique of the primacy of death for human life appears, as well as early references to the concepts of birth and plurality. In a passage from part II we read:

> [...] man's dependence rests not on anticipation and does not aim at something, but relies exclusively on remembrance and refers back to the past. To put it differently, the decisive fact determining man as a conscious, remembering being is birth or "natality" that is, the fact that we have entered the world through birth. The decisive fact determining man as a desiring being was death or mortality, the fact that we shall leave the world in death. Fear of death and inadequacy of life are the springs of desire. In contrast, gratitude for life having been given at all is the spring of remembrance, for a life is cherished even in misery: "Now you are miserable and still you do not want to die for no other reason but that you want to be." What ultimately stills the fear of death is not hope or desire, but remembrance and gratitude... This will to be under all circumstances is the hallmark of man's attachment to the transmundane source of his existence. Unlike the desire for the "highest good," this attachment does not depend

[199] "One should love one's neighbor not on account of his sin, which indeed was the source of equality, but on account of the grace that has revealed itself in him as well as in oneself (*tamquamte ipsum*). By being made explicit, equality obtains a new meaning; it becomes an equality of grace. However, it is no longer the same equality. While the kinship of all people prior to Christ was acquired from Adam by generation, all are now made equal by [Ao33359] the revealed grace of God that manifests everyone's equally sinful past [...] divine grace gives a new meaning to human togetherness-defense against the world. This defense is the foundation of the new city, the city of God. Estrangement itself gives rise to a new togetherness, that is, to a new being with and for each other that exists beside and against the old society. This new social life, which is grounded in Christ, is defined by mutual love (*diligereinvicem*), which replaces mutual dependence" Ibid., pp.106-108.

[200] Again, as Arendt points out, "this indirectness turns my relation to my neighbor into a mere passage for the direct relation to God himself. The other as such cannot save me. He can only save me because the grace of God is at work in him" Ibid., p.111.

> upon volition, strictly speaking. Rather, it is characteristic of the human condition as such.[201]

As Vatter emphasises, Arendt adds the passages explicitly mentioning the concepts of birth and natality in the period from 1958 through 1964, when she revises her dissertation with the aim to publish it in English; as well as, later in the text, the famous citation *Initium ut esset homo creatus est ante quem nullus fuit* from Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and explicit references to Heidegger's *Being and Time*.[202]

In these pages, Arendt begins to question herself about an origin which stands outside the human condition and yet is the source of human beings' capacity of beginning something new in the common world. She supports a concept of human life and of temporality primarily oriented not by expectation or anticipation, but by remembrance of a past that is never wiped out. For Arendt, human beings retain a special relation to this absolute past by virtue of being-born intended here as 'having-been-created'. This origin, though not properly experienced, remains stored up in the human mind and prompts a response to and recollection of it by originating/initiating something new. In Arendt's view, human beings' capacity to act is indeed an actualization of 'the human condition of natality' to the extent that it depends on and responds to 'the beginning that came into the world when we were born'. For Arendt, this capacity is not metaphorically or symbolically connected to birth, but it is *ontologically* rooted in the fact of being born.[203]

An explicit critique of Heidegger's analytic of Dasein oriented by death can be found in Arendt's 1946 essay 'What is Existenz Philosophy?'. In the section 'The Self

[201] Ibid., pp. 51-52
[202] 'That there be a beginning, man was created, before whom there was nobody.' Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XII, 20. See Vatter, 'Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt', p.140 and LA, pp. 55–56 and p.132.
[203] HC, pp.177–8 and p.247.

as Being and Nothingness: Heidegger', Arendt insists on the solipsism of Dasein, who relates to its own death to reach its authentic 'Self'.[204]As Arendt puts it

> Heidegger calls the Being of Man *Dasein*. This lets him avoid using the term "Man" and is by no means an example of arbitrary terminology. Its purpose is to resolve Man into a series of modes of Being that are phenomenologically demonstrable. That dispenses with all those human characteristics that Kant provisionally defined as freedom, human dignity, and reason, that arise from human spontaneity, and that therefore are not phenomenologically demonstrable, because as spontaneous characteristics they are more than mere functions of being and because in them Man reaches more than himself [...]The Being for which *Dasein* cares is "Existenz," which is constantly threatened by death and is condemned to destruction. *Dasein* is in a constant relationship with this threatened existence [...] Only at death, which will take him out of the world, does man have the certainty of being himself [...] The essential character of the Self is its absolute Selfness, its radical separation from all its fellows.[205]

In notes from the 1950s included in her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt then begins to explore the question of the plurality of human beings in a more explicitly philosophical and political way. In fragment 21, dated August 1950,which was later published as the opening to the posthumous essay *Was ist Politik?*, Arendt rethinks politics starting from the fundamental distinction between 'men', who are always in the plural, and 'Man', according to Arendt the object of both philosophical and theological inquiry. In the subsequent fragments, Arendt also reflects on the question of the semantic ambiguity of the Greek term Ἀρχή, which, at the same time, means 'beginning' and 'rulership', in Plato's *Statesman*.[206]

[204] WEP, pp. 34–56.
[205] WEP, pp.178-181. I will discuss this text more in detail in the next section dedicated to Heidegger and Arendt.
[206] DKT, I, 34, pp.26-28.

It is in a 1953 note included in her *Denktagebuch* that the word 'natalität' first appears in relation to the terms 'action,' 'equality' and 'pluralität', and in contrast to the terms 'singularität,' 'loneliness,' 'mortalität'.[207] As the *Denktagebuch* editors suggest, this fragment might be considered a preparatory sketch for a series of lectures Arendt delivered at Notre Dame in 1954.

One year later, Arendt refers to birth as an event of salvation. After attending the premiere of Händel's *Messiah*, she writes in her diary: 'The Alleluia is understandable only starting from the text: "a child has been born unto us"…every beginning is a salvation, for love of the beginning, for love of salvation, God created man in the world. Every new birth guarantees salvation in the world, it is a promise of redemption for those who are no longer a beginning.'[208] In a letter to Heinrich Blücher (her second husband), from May 1952, Arendt further comments: 'For the first time I appreciated the force of "a child has been born unto us".'[209]

The idea of the capacity for introducing a new beginning in the world by virtue of human birth and the citation from Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* officially appear in the essay 'Ideology and Terror', which will become the last chapter of the 1958 expanded version of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In this essay, birth is understood as

[207]Ibid., XIX, 21, p.461. As Jeffrey Champlin notes, this is the only passage in Arendt's *Denktagebuch* in which the word 'natality' is explicitly used. Champlin offers an analysis of this fragment, but he does not provide an overview of the concept in Arendt's thought diary. See Jeffrey Champlin, '"Poetry or Body Politic": Natality and the Space of Birth in Hannah Arendt's Thought Diary"' in Roger Berkowitz and Ian Storey, eds, *Artifacts of Thinking*, pp. 143–61. It is also worth noting that, when Arendt first begins to employ the term 'natality', she does so in English and she seems to translate it back from English into German as *Natalität*, instead of employing the word *Gebürtlichkeit*, which is the standard German translation for 'natality'. See Vatter, "Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt , p.139. Arendt seems to refer to the Latin etymology of the world 'natality' which comes from the term 'natalis': 'pertaining to birth or origin', from the past participle of the verb *nasci* (*natu*), which means 'to be born'. As Alessandra Papa points out, '"natality" is a demographic and statistical term that seems to have several meanings at the same time, beyond the immediate evangelical suggestions. Semantically, the English word natality refers both to the idea of fertility, and to the idea of ecumene, that is, of the inhabited world.' Alessandra Papa, *Nati per incominciare. Vita e politica in Hannah Arendt,* Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 2011, p.6, my translation.

[208]DKT, IX, 12, p.208, my translation.

[209]Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher, *Within Four Walls: The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher 1936-1968* 1St U.S. ed. Harcourt, New York, 2000, p. 270.

new beginning and the possibility of acting becomes a weapon of salvation against the blind automatism imposed by totalitarian regimes

> Total terror, the essence of totalitarian government, exists neither for nor against men. It is supposed to provide the forces of nature or history with an incomparable instrument to accelerate their movement. This movement, proceeding according to its own law, cannot in the long run be hindered; eventually its force will always prove more powerful than the most powerful forces engendered by the actions and the will of men. But it can be slowed down and is slowed down almost inevitably by the freedom of man, which even totalitarian rulers cannot deny, for this freedom—irrelevant and arbitrary as they may deem it—is identical with the fact that men are being born and that therefore each of them is a new beginning, begins, in a sense, the world anew. From the totalitarian point of view, the fact that men are born and die can be only regarded as an annoying interference with higher forces [...]Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus est*— 'that a beginning be made man was created' said Augustine. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man[210]

In the years from1929 to 1958 (the year of the publication of *The Human Condition* and of the revised edition of the *Origins*) Arendt explores the centrality of the 'capacity of beginning' from a more political perspective. In the first section of *The Human Condition*, after pointing out the three fundamental human activities of the *vita activa* (labor, work, and action), Arendt claims

> Labor and work, as well action, are… rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of

[210] OT, pp. 612-629.

> newcomers, who are born into the world as strangers. However, of the three, *action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality*; *the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something new, that is, of acting*. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical thought.[211]

As for Arendt's latter claim, on the one hand, we might say that she draws a traditional distinction between two different fields, dealing with distinct matters (political thought/action vs metaphysical thought/thinking); on the other hand, though, Arendt's work can help us rethink the so-called 'metaphysical' tradition, or even detect a more or less implicit critique of metaphysics in a quasi-Heideggerian fashion. In this sense, in the preface to *Between Past and Future* we read

> there is an element of experiment in the critical interpretation of the past, an interpretation whose chief aim is to discover the real origins of traditional concepts in order to distill from them anew their original spirit which has so sadly evaporated from the very key words of political language such as freedom and justice, authority and reason, responsibility and virtue, power and glory leaving behind empty shells with which to settle almost all accounts, regardless of their underlying phenomenal reality.[212]

In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt rethinks the question of the 'beginning' and its peculiar relation to the past in connection to the concepts of inheritance and tradition. In this context, the human capacity to begin is seen as the possibility of recovering those

[211] HC, pp.8-9, my emphasis.
[212] BPF, p.15.

'lost treasures' in history that seemed to be drowned by the flow of time. For Arendt, thinkers, artists, intellectuals, and historians are responsible for preserving these treasures:

> [...] not only the future "the wave of the future" but also the past is seen as a force, and not, as in nearly all our metaphors, as a burden man has to shoulder and of whose dead weight the living can or even must get rid in their march into the future. In the words of Faulkner, "the past is never dead, it is not even past."This past, moreover, reaching all the way back into the origin, does not pull back but presses forward, and it is, contrary to what one would expect, the future which drives us back into the past. Seen from the viewpoint of man, who always lives in the interval between past and future, time is not a continuum, a flow of uninterrupted succession; it is broken in the middle, at the point where "he" stands; and "his" standpoint is not the present as we usually understand it but rather a gap in time which "his" constant fighting, "his" making a stand against past and future, keeps in existence. Only because man is inserted into time and only to the extent that he stands his ground does the flow of indifferent time break up into tenses; it is this insertion the beginning of a beginning, to put it into Augustinian terms which splits up the time continuum into forces which then, because they are focused on the particle or body that gives them their direction, begin fighting with each other and acting upon man in the way Kafka describes.[213]

In Arendt's view, in the activities of thinking and judging, human beings insert themselves in the continuum of daily or ordinary time, interrupting its flow and allowing the "opposite forces" of past and future to find a meeting point in the gap created by the withdrawal from activities that are performed in public. With this withdrawal, human beings' are capable of isolating a sphere, a place "sufficiently

[213]Ibid., pp.10-11.Arendt refers here to Kafka's parable "HE" conserved in "Notes from the year 1920," translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, New York, 1946. Arendt will further discuss this parable in the paragraph titled "The gap between past and future: the nunc stans" in LM, pp. 202-213.

removed from past and future" that offers a position from which to judge the events of the world with an impartial glance.

For Arendt, this space or gap is also removed from historical or biographical time to the extent that it does not depend on a singular life spanning from birth to death. In this sense, the gap is for Arendt literally "ageless". Though it constitutes a specific sphere from which to observe and judge the events occurring in the world, it remains, so to speak, untouched by them. By virtue of this distance, it is able to preserve the 'treasures' that, otherwise, would be drowned by the continuous flow of historical or biographical time. As Arendt puts it

> The gap, I suspect, is not a modern phenomenon, it is perhaps not even a historical datum but is coeval with the existence of man on earth. It may well be the region of the spirit or, rather, the path paved by thinking, this small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal men and into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time. This small non-time-space in the very heart of time...cannot be inherited and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew.[214]

In these reflections on the importance of the past for the capacity of introducing a new beginning, as well as in her considerations on the figure of the historian/judge, Arendt seems to be influenced by Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, a manuscript that Arendt brought with her from Paris to New York in 1941. In Thesis II we read

[214] BPF,p.13.

> […]the past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.[215]

When Arendt frames the 'gap between past and future' where the activities of thinking and judging are performed as 'non-time' or 'out of time', she does not have in mind a space of eternal quietness. Rather, recovering Kakfa's parable "HE", Arendt conceives of this gap as a battleground where the no-longer and the not-yet meet in the Now, the "fighting present" where the thinking ego stands.[216] This region is not above or beyond the world and human time. As Arendt puts it

> This timelessness, to be sure, is not eternity; it springs, as it were, from the clash of past and future, whereas eternity is the boundary concept that is unthinkable because it indicates the collapse of all temporal dimensions. The temporal dimension of the *nunc stans* experienced in the activity of thinking gathers the absent tenses, the not-yet and the not- more, together into presence.[217]

In this sense, the activities of thinking and judging are not really 'out of' time, but they produce a suspension, a rupture of time understood as a linear or a cyclic movement.[218]

The idea that the 'new beginning' retains a relationship with the past will become central also in the work *On Revolution*. For Arendt, the concept of revolution

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[215] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, p.254.
Benjamin was Arendt's first husband cousin (Günther Stern/Anders), with whom she became friend in the years in Paris. She dedicates him an essay in the collection *Men in Dark Times* which was first published as an article in *The New Yorker* and as introduction to Benjamin's *Illuminations* Arendt edited. As it is known, Benjamin took his life at the Franco-Spanish border in 1940 when he was about to emigrate to America.
[216] LM, p.207.
[217] Ibid., p. 211.
[218] See Ibid., pp. 202-213.

must be able to mediate between the "concern for stability" and the "spirit of novelty", rejecting changes imposed by violence. The real revolution is always linked to birth, since it is able to introduce an element of "absolute novelty" while preserving a relation to the past. Only in this way is it possible to avoid the absolutist tendencies that Arendt denounces in the French and Russian revolutions, "...as though once again fratricide was to be the origin of fraternity and bestiality the fountainhead of humanity, only that now, in conspicuous opposition to man's age-old dreams as well as to his later concepts, violence by no means gave birth something new and stable but, on the contrary, drowned in a 'revolutionary torrent' the beginning as well as the beginners."[219]

For Arendt, the foundation of a new order (*Novus ordo*) does not simply get rid of what precedes, as well as every birth renews the world, giving new life to what seemed destined to perish and imprinting a new course on human events.[220] By interrupting what Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, calls "the natural course of events" that, if not hindered by human action, take on the cyclicality and repetition of natural time, the foundation of a new order paradoxically instantiates/performs the infinite improbability of an absolute beginning occurring in the historical time. In this sense, although it appears in a sequence of events, this new beginning does not retain a casual or consequential relation with what precedes.[221]

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[219] OR, p.209.

[220] "It was perhaps because of the inner affinity between the arbitrariness inherent in all beginnings, and human potentialities for crime that the Romans decided to derive their descendance not from Romulus, who had slain Remus, but from Aeneas [...] What matters in our context is less the profoundly Roman notion that all foundations are re-establishments and reconstructions than the somehow connected but different idea that men are equipped for the logically paradoxical task of making a new beginning because they themselves are new beginnings and hence beginners, that the very capacity for beginning is rooted in natality, in the fact that human beings appear in the world by virtue of birth." OR, pp. 209-211.

[221] In this respect, in § 33 of *The Human Condition*, we read "If left to themselves, human affairs can only follow the law of mortality, which is the most certain and the only reliable law of a life spent between birth and death. It is the faculty of action that interferes with this law because it interrupts the inexorable automatic course of daily life, which in its turn, as we saw, interrupted and interfered with the cycle of the biological life process. The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin. Yet just as, from the standpoint of nature, the rectilinear movement of man's life-span between birth and death looks like a peculiar deviation from the

Reflections on the question of the beginning as the peculiar human capacity will accompany Arendt until the elaboration of her last and unfinished work *The Life of the Mind*, published posthumous in 1978. In this text, it is possible to detect the relevance of natality for the *vita contemplativa,* and specifically for the activities of willing and judging. Building on Augustine, Arendt makes a distinction between will understood as *liberum arbitrium*, a freedom of choice that arbitrates and decides between two given things, and will understood as the freedom and capacity to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given:

> In my discussion of the Will I have repeatedly mentioned two altogether different ways of understanding the faculty: as a faculty of *choice* between objects or goals, the *liberum arbitrium*, which acts as arbiter between given ends and deliberates freely about means to reach them; and, on the other hand, as our "faculty for beginning spontaneously a series in time (Kant)"or Augustine's "lnitium ut esset homo creatus est: man's capacity for beginning because he himself is a beginning. [...] The very capacity for beginning is rooted in natality, and by no means in creativity, not in a gift but in the fact that human beings, new men, again and again appear in the world by virtue of birth.[222]

As I will show in Chapter Three, the topic of the will is closely connected to that of freedom. Both refer to the typically human capacity of beginning something new. Because of its attention to the particular, its capacity, so to speak, to generate general meanings from time to time, and its dependence on the plurality of human beings as earth-bounded creatures, the mental activity of judgment too seems to have a peculiar

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common natural rule of cyclical movement, thus action, seen from the viewpoint of the automatic processes which seem to determine the course of the world, looks like a miracle." HC, p. 246.See also LM, pp. 195-217.

[222] LM, pp. 158-217.

relationship with natality. It is perhaps not by chance that, as Simona Forti suggests, along with natality, Arendt's "theory of judgment" is the other keystone of her political thought of which there remains only fragmentary textual allusions.[223] "While still a solitary business" Arendt remarks, judgment "does not cut itself off from 'all others.' To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides."[224] This capacity to 'enlarge' one's thought in order to include other's perspectives, may be seen as a preparation for acting, to the extent that it creates the space where actions can be performed and welcomed. From this perspective, the figures of the actor and of the spectator and their respective activities blur, and are seen as interrelated.[225] On the other hand, the activity of the spectator/judge who retrospectively judges the course of the events (as Arendt did in occasion of the Eichmann's trial), may be seen as a sort of action in itself, to the extent that, in the rare moments in which "the stakes are on the table," it is able to "tell right from wrong" and to preserve the seeds of a promise for the future[226]. As Benjamin puts it

[223] See Simona Forti, *Hannah Arendt tra filosofia e politica*, Mondadori, Milano 2006. "Judging" was to have been the third and last part of Arendt's unfinished work *The Life of the Mind.* This suggests that she had the intention of providing a more systematic account of this notion. Arendt addresses the topic of judgement in her '64-'65-'66 and '70 courses at the University of Chicago and The New School for Social Researches, then published as *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*.

[224] LKPP, p.43.

[225] In this sense, in the essay "Understanding and Politics," Arendt claims "Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality. If the essence of all, and in particular of political, action is to make a new beginning, then understanding becomes the other side of action, namely that form of cognition, in distinction from many others, by which acting men (and not men who are engaged in contemplating some progressive or doomed course of history) eventually can come to terms with what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidably exists". UP, p.43.

[226] LM, p.193. In his interpretative essay to the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Ronald Beiner speaks in this sense of 'two theories of judgment' in Arendt's work: "In her writings up until the 1971 essay, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," judgment is considered from the point of view of the *vita activa*; in her writings from that essay onward, judgment is considered from the point of view of the life of the mind. The emphasis shifts from the representative thought and enlarged mentality of political agents to the spectatorship and retrospective judgment of historians and storytellers". LKPP, p.90. I think this interpretation works only if we read Arendt's major investigations on the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa,* namely *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind* as separate from each other, instead of conceiving the latter as a continuum and, to some extent, a rethinking, of the former.

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration *pregnant with tensions*, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad... a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.[227]

2.2 Hannah Arendt and German *Existenzphilosophie*

In the previous section, I have showed how the concept of "natality" crosses most of Arendt's work and becomes a central category of her political thought. In this section, I emphasize how the elaboration of this concept was conditioned by Arendt's philosophical studies in Germany in the mid and late nineteen-twenties.

After studying with Heidegger in Marburg in 1924, Arendt completed her doctoral thesis in Heidelberg under the supervision of Karl Jaspers. As we have seen, it is in her thesis on *Love and Saint Augustine* that she starts to re-elaborate and challenge some aspects of her mentors' philosophy, Heidegger in particular. However, as the editors of Arendt's dissertation point out, the link between Arendt's political thought and its roots in twentieth century German *Existenzphilosophie* are to some extent, still overlooked, if not intentionally obscured.[228]

Arendt's dissertation was published in English only posthumously in 1996, when a certain idea or image of Arendt as a political thinker far from 'metaphysical' or philosophical-existential concerns had been established. Even the scholars who worked with the Arendt Papers in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., where the revisions of the 1929 manuscript are collected (for example Elizabeth Young-Bruehl and Margaret Canovan) marginalized the dissertation or framed it as a pre-political or even apolitical work.[229] Furthermore, not many political theorists approaching Arendt's

[227] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, pp.262–263, my emphasis.
[228] See LA, pp. 125–34. See also Forti, *Hannah Arendt tra filosofia e politica*, pp. XI-XII.
[229] Ibid.

thought were (or are) familiar with the work of a Christian thinker like St. Augustine, or even with the philosophy of her mentors, Heidegger and Jaspers.

Crucially, there was a perceived need to emphasize the break between Arendt's pre- and post-Holocaust works, or her German and American works. In particular, it was considered that Arendt's thought needed to be freed from Heidegger's influence.[230] This was of course due to Heidegger's political position – the fact that he became rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933 and joined the Nazi party the same year. Arendt, on the contrary, was the Jew who had left Nazi Germany to escape first to Paris and then to find refuge in the United States. She was the political theorist of democracy and one of the first twentieth-century thinkers to reflect on totalitarianism. It is interesting in this regard that, as the editors of Arendt's dissertation underline, her early biography of Rahel Varnhagen was accepted and received into the 'Arendt canon', as it could be included amongst the works anticipating Arendt's subsequent considerations of the questions of exile and assimilation, of the figures of the pariah and the parvenu, and of the problem of statelessness.[231]

Heidegger and other German philosophers contemporary with Arendt were taken to represent the latest version of the 'professional thinkers' of the Western philosophical tradition that overlooked the plurality of human beings and obscured the specificity of political action. Arendt herself contributed to this reading when she explicitly framed (Western) philosophy and politics in sharply distinct, if not antagonistic terms.[232] On the one hand, in a letter to Scholem from 1963, Arendt recognizes this philosophical tradition as her origin: 'If I can be said to "have come from anywhere", it is from the

[230]The editors mention, for example, the American political scientists Thomas Pangle, Luc Ferry and John Gunnell. They charge Arendt for undermining the rationalistic foundations of Western philosophy, as well as American pragmatism and empiricism with German nihilism. Ibid., pp.174–78.

[231] Ibid., p.127.

232. See for example HC, p. 9 and Hannah Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', *Social Research* Vol. 57, no. 1 (1990), pp. 73–103. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970579 . Some feminist interpreters of Arendt such as Cavarero emphasize this separation and endorse this antagonistic reading to stress the originality of Arendt's thought and her detachment from a masculine/metaphysical way of philosophizing.

tradition of German philosophy.'[233] On the other hand, in her interview with Günter Gaus, Arendt famously claims

> I do not belong to the circle of the philosophers. My profession, if one can speak of it at all, is political theory. I neither feel like a philosopher, nor I do believe that I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers…As you know, I studied philosophy, but this does not mean that I stayed with it…I want to look at politics, so to speak, with eyes unclouded by philosophy.[234]

This passage is recalled in the introduction to *The Life of the Mind* where Arendt states:

> I have neither claim nor ambition to be a 'philosopher' or be numbered among what Kant, not without irony, called *Denker von Gewerbe* (professional thinkers).The question then is, should I not have left these problems in the hands of the experts, and the answer will have to show what prompted me to venture from the relatively safe fields of political science and theory into these rather awesome matters, instead of leaving well enough alone.[235]

As these passages suggest, Arendt does not reject her philosophical roots in western and, more specifically, German philosophy. However, she takes on an external position to look at it and challenge some of its premises.[236]

More recently, the connection between Arendt and German *Existenz philosophie*, with particular attention to the philosophical exchange with Heidegger, has been explored by scholars such as Dana Villa, Jacques Taminiaux, Seyla Benhabib and

[233]Arendt, 'An Exchange of Letters Between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt', p. 246.
[234]Arendt, '"What Remains? The Language Remains": A Conversation with Günter Gaus,', pp. 1–2.
[235] LM, p.3.
236 In the last pages of the *Thinking* section of *The Life of the Mind* Arendt states that she has " [...] clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today." LM,part I, p.212.For Arendt, the starting point of such a dismantling is the acknowledgement that "the thread of tradition is broken" with twentieth century events. See EU, pp.309-310. "[What we have been] left with is still the past, but a *fragmented* past" whose "pearls" need to be recovered and processed. LM, part I, p.212.

Simona Forti.[237] If all these authors agree on Arendt's rootedness in twentieth-century German philosophy and uncover specifically her critique and re-elaboration of Heidegger's thought combined with a reinterpretation of Aristotelian categories, they nonetheless suggest different analyses of these connections.

Both Taminiaux and Villa insist on what we may call Arendt's 'polemical appropriation' of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and of some of the key concepts he outlines in *Being and Time*. However, by framing almost all of Arendt's categories as a polemical response to Heidegger, they end up presenting them as a mere reversal or, even an expansion of Heidegger's philosophy, which risks obscuring the originality of Arendt's thought. Rather, as I will briefly discuss, Villa's reconstruction of Arendt's 'debt to Heidegger', as he frames it, often seems to be more a re-reading of Heidegger's concepts in the light of Arendt's categories.

Seyla Benhabib specifically addresses the philosophical exchange between Arendt and Heidegger in the section titled "The Dialogue with Martin Heidegger. Arendt's Ontology of *The Human Condition*" included in her book *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. By framing the intellectual exchange between the two philosophers as a 'dialogue', Benhabib underlines the equal position Arendt and Heidegger now have in the philosophical debate. Indeed, she opens the section with a passage from a letter Arendt sent to Jaspers in 1961 where Arendt comments on Heidegger' s silence after she sent him a copy of the German version of *Vita Activa* .[238]

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[237] Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*; Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*, SUNY Press, New York, 1997; Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt.* New Edition with a New Preface and an Appendix, Rowman and Littlefield, New York, 2003; Forti, *Hannah Arendt tra filosofia e politica*.

[238] Arendt attached to the copy an epistolary note dated October 28, 1960:

> [...] You will see that the book does not contain a dedication. If things had ever worked out properly *between us—and I mean between, that is, neither you nor me*—I would have asked you if I might dedicate it to you; it came directly out of the first Freiburg days and hence owes practically everything to you in every respect. As things are, I did not think it was possible, but I wanted to at least mention the bare fact to you in one way or another (Arendt-Heidegger, *Letters 1925-1975*,pp. 123–4, emphasis mine)

What emerges from the letter Benhabib quotes is Arendt's initial struggle for Heidegger's recognition of the importance of her work, an attitude that she then abandons. What I found surprising about Benhabib's text, is the need to first mention a personal exchange and to also briefly dig into the philosophical and even psychological motivations of Heidegger's silence to prove Arendt's independence of thought from her former teacher.

In her *Hannah Arendt tra filosofia e politica,* Simona Forti emphasizes the importance of Heidegger's 'discover' of temporality and of his critique to metaphysics for Arendt's rethinking of politics, pointing to Arendt's intention to join the old mentor in the project of challenging some assumptions of the western philosophical tradition, but to also go contra and beyond him by setting at the centre of her reflection the realm of togetherness and plurality that is the realm of politics.

What is, for our context, the theoretical gain in retracing the roots of Arendt's thought in the German tradition of *Existenzphilosophie*? First, the originality of Arendt's categories, and specifically the shift in perspective entailed by her focus on birth and natality rather than death and mortality, can be better grasped if we understand that these categories emerged in dialogue with twentieth-century German philosophy. Indeed, as we have seen, Arendt does not refer to a different tradition of thought, but rather engages with classic thinkers of Western philosophy.

Arendt actually wrote a poetic dedication which is collected in the German Literature Archive in Marbach, but she never sent it to Heidegger:

> The dedication of this book is left blank.
> How could I dedicate it to you,
> trusted one,
> whom I was faithful and not faithful to,
> And both with love

(See Tamboukou, *Epistolary Narratives of Love*, p. 18, translation modified).

Second, retracing Arendt's philosophical lineage in German *Existenzphilosophie* allows one to grasp the dynamicity of her categories or to put them into motion. Indeed, in approaching Arendt's framework, what is often missed is the dialectical and intimate relationship between the spheres and the activities that she outlines, which do not stand in binary and rigid oppositions. Arendt's interpreters usually focus on the content of each sphere, the criteria used to place certain kind of activities in one or the other, or suggest ways to challenge these very distinctions. For example, Benhabib warns against what she calls Arendt's "phenomenological essentialism," that, in her view, runs the risk of becoming paralyzing and exclusive, imprisoning agents and activities in fixed roles and locations.[239] What is often overlooked is *how* these spheres take shape, are modified and temporarily displaced/articulated. As Villa points out

> Unlike many of her critics, Arendt refused to reify the capacities and conditions of human existence into a transhistorical human 'nature'...It is not...simply a question of the relative status an activity has in the hierarchy of the vita activa; it is also a matter of the peculiar historical reality the activity inhabits. Hence the possibility not only of a change in rank (the "reversal" within the vita activa that helps define the entry into modernity), but of a dis-essencing or transformation of the capacities themselves.[240]

Although Arendt stresses that 'each human activity points to its location in the world', her categories cannot be conceived as static and given once and for all, we might say in a sort of metaphysical presence, so that certain kinds of activity and the corresponding human type find their proper and definitive place in one or the other sphere.[241] In this respect, it is interesting to consider Lewis and Sandra Hinchman's claim that 'almost all of Arendt's crucial terms are in fact "existentials" that seek to illuminate what it means

[239]Seyla Benhabib, 'Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's Concept of Public Space', *History of the Human Sciences* Vol. 6 no. 2, 1993, pp. 97–114, p. 104.
[240]Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, p.174.
[241] HC, p.73.

to be-in-the-world and not "categories"', while Heidegger's *existentialia* are actually 'articulations of being'.[242] As applied to Heidegger, I agree with the Hinchmans' thesis, to the extent that Heidegger's main concern even in *Being and Time*, where we find the existential analytic of Dasein, is actually the *Seinsfrage*, the question of Being.[243] But with regard to Arendt, it is hard to completely embrace the Hinchmans' suggestion. Indeed, the distinctions Arendt proposes in, for example, *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind* are actually *new* categories that can be used for a philosophical-political analysis.

What is interesting in the Hinchmans' reading is the connection they draw between politics as understood by Arendt –that is, not primarily as a given institution or organization (such as the nation-state), but as an *in-between*–and German *Existenzphilosophie*. In this sense, Lewis and Sandra Hinchman speak of 'Phenomenological Humanism' or 'Existentialism Politicized'. This connection becomes particularly evident when focusing on categories like 'natality' and 'mortality' that are closely attached to human existence.

In her essay 'What is Existenz Philosophy?', Arendt discusses how, starting from Kierkegaard, death, and/or the fear of death, becomes one of the central (if not *the* central) theme of existential philosophy and is seen as human beings' *principium individuationis*, to the extent that 'even though it is the most universal of all universals, nonetheless inevitably [death] strikes me alone'.[244] Even in Jaspers, death persists as one of the main 'boundary situations' that conditions human life (while birth is not

[242]Lewis P. and Sandra K. Hinchman. 'In Heidegger's Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Phenomenological Humanism', *The Review of Politics* Vol. 46, no. 2 (1984), pp. 183–211. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1407108, p. 197.
[243] The question of the meaning of Being is not a question for Arendt, who also criticizes Heidegger for using the term *Dasein* to speak of human beings. This way, he 'resolve[s] man into several modes of being that are phenomenologically demonstrable.' WEP, p.178. Arendt not only avoids the word *Dasein*, but, in various contexts, she also emphasizes that the subject and the starting point of politics is not 'man,' but 'men in the plural'. See for example DKT, I, 21, pp.15-18.
[244] WEP, p.178.

mentioned). As Arendt shows in *The Life of the Mind*, this is not a new trope. Indeed, she highlights an essential 'affinity between death and philosophy' that, since Plato, crosses most of the Western philosophical tradition.[245]

What is important for us is that Arendt recovers some elements of the tradition of German *Existenzphilosophie*, and specifically of Heidegger's perspective, but simultaneously distances herself from it by putting the concept of birth at the centre of her reflection. Indeed, she embraces Heidegger's *dynamic* concept of human existence as *Ex-sistere.* In Arendt's view, human existence, and, with it, the realm of politics, unfold in a dialectic of darkness and unconcealment that recalls Heidegger's conception of disclosure (*Erschlossenheit*). However, by shifting the focus from the solitary relationship of *Dasein* with its own death to the relationship that every human being entertains with their birth, this movement can occur only in a plural sphere. In the section dedicated to Jaspers in 'What is Existenz Philosophy?' Arendt writes:

> *Existenz itself is, by its very nature, never isolated*. It exists only in communication and in awareness of others' existence. Our fellow men are not (as in Heidegger) an element of existence that is structurally necessary but at the same time an impediment to the Being of Self. Just the contrary: *existence can develop only in the shared life* [togetherness] *of human beings inhabiting a common world given to them all*[246]

If the Heideggerian anticipation (*Vorlaufen*) of death reveals and preserves one's authentic self in solitude and silence, the Arendtian conception of birth is the place of visibility, of listening and of mutual recognition. For Arendt, to appear means to be seen

[245] Arendt, LM, part I, pp. 79–80.
[246]WEP, p.186, emphasis mine. In a 1953 *Denktagebuch* entry Arendt claims that "to establish a science of politics one needs first to reconsider all philosophical statements on Man under the assumption that men, and not Man, inhabit the earth. The establishment of political science demands a philosophy for which *men exist only in the plural*. Its field is human plurality. Its religious source is the second creation myth—not Adam and rib, but: male and female created He them. In this realm of plurality, which is the political realm, one has to ask the old questions—what is love, what is friendship, what is solitude, what is acting, thinking, etc." DKT, XIII, 2, p.295, my emphasis.

by others. If Heidegger's appearance is inward, 'self-distorting' and informed by the anticipation of death intended as concealment and protection, for Arendt phenomena appear to others and are distorted by the plurality of glances witnessing them. For Heidegger the public realm (*die Öffentlichkeit*) remains that of the impersonal *Man* where *Dasein* is first and foremost absorbed. But for Arendt, the public realm or the realm of plurality is the only space where human beings can appear authentically, by means of actions and words.[247]

As Arendt's dissertation suggests, human beings' reciprocal disclosure and, with it, the public realm of politics unfold in a temporal dimension oriented by past and remembrance rather than future and anticipation. As Arendt puts it:

> [...] human existence consists in acting and behaving in some way or other, always in motion, and thus opposed in any way to eternal 'enduring within itself' (*permanere in se*)...this precarious mode of existence is not nothing, it exists in relating back to its origin... Through remembrance man discovers this twofold 'before' of human existence...In this process of re-presenting, the past not only takes its place among other things present but is transformed into future possibility... The fact that the past is not forever lost and that remembrance can bring it back into the present is what gives memory its great power (*vis*)... it is memory and not expectation (for instance, the expectation of death as in Heidegger approach) that gives unity and wholeness to human existence.[248]

[247]Although it is possible to reconstruct Arendt's categories as mirroring and overturning Heidegger's concepts, Arendt does not merely spatialize or externalize them as Villa often suggests. Indeed, for example, Arendt makes a crucial distinction between the social (that we might connect to Heidegger's 'Man' as described in § 27 of *Being and Time*) and the political sphere which is absent in Heidegger. See Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, p. 130; p. 136.

[248]LA, pp. 53-56. It is worth noting that in *Being and Time* Heidegger does not speak of *expectation* of death, but of *anticipation* (*Volrlaufen*). As pointed out before, Arendt adds the line explicitly mentioning Heidegger when she revises her thesis for publication in English in the early 60s, but the manuscript was published only posthumously in 1996. She may have revised her terminology choice in the final version. See BT, p. 306.

According to Heidegger, *Dasein*'s temporality is oriented by the anticipation and repetition of a specific past which dis-closes a limited range of possibilities to be 'freely' chosen. In this respect, I disagree with Villa's claim that Arendt recovers Heidegger's concept of freedom. As Villa himself points out, Heidegger's *Dasein* can 'freely' make a decision among a range of possibilities already given. In this sense, Heidegger conceives of human freedom as non-sovereign because it is limited and oriented by the Da- and one's own specific Being. Thus, differently from Arendt, he conceives of 'freedom' only in this sense of *liberum arbitrium* (i.e. the capacity to choose among a range of possibilities already given) and not as a capacity to 'call into being' something absolutely new, a concept that Arendt traces back to St. Augustine. [249] In Arendt's perspective, this capacity is non-sovereign because it depends and is limited by the presence and actions of other human beings.

In Arendt, the 'return to the past' is not primordially closed, but it is the only way human beings can introduce a new beginning in the world by recalling their own having-been-originated. The event of this new beginning is radically contingent and depends on the plurality of human beings that confirm and take part to it. In this way, it unfolds in a potentially infinite network of actions and reactions that keep it open to unpredictable consequences.

[249]Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger,* pp.114, 126 and 132. See Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in BPF p.167. Here Arendt claims: "[...] we find in Augustine not only the discussion of freedom as *liberum arbitrium*, though this discussion became decisive for the tradition, but also an entirely differently conceived notion which characteristically appears in his only political treatise, in *De Civitate Dei*. In the *City of God* Augustine, as is only natural, speaks more from the background of specifically Roman experiences than in any of his other writings, and freedom is conceived there not as an inner human disposition but as a character of human existence in the world. Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free because he is a beginning and was so created after the universe had already come into existence: *[Initium] ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nemo fuit*. In the birth of each man this initial beginning is reaffirmed, because in each instance something new comes into an already existing world which will continue to exist after each individual's death. Because he is a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom."

Chapter Three. Natality between Private and Public

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the tripartitions and distinctions for example between private and public Arendt makes in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*.

Firstly I will make explicit the connection between Arendt's theory of action and her concept of natality. By reconstructing the roots of Arendt's thought in German *Existenzphilosophie* as well as focusing on some passages from Arendt's *Denktagebuch* and private correspondences, I will suggest a more dynamic and interrelated understanding of Arendt's distinction between public and private and the *vita activa* and the life of the mind. I will argue that the private intended as a sphere of intimacy that gives profoundness and preserves the finitude of human existence is not sharply separated from the public, but it is rather continuous with it in that it is made by relations -with friends and lovers – that own their own kind of plurality and hold a world-creating power. I will then highlight the intrinsic duality and plurality of the mental activities of thinking, willing and judging, an interpretation that I will further developed in the fourth chapter. If it is usually the activity of judgment that is considered to be central in Arendt's political thought, I will try to show how willing can constitute a conjunction between the "mind's inwardness and the outward world" as Arendt puts it.[250] I will thus discuss the relation between will and political freedom.

3.1 Natality and action

The Arendtian shift of focus from death to birth implies a rethinking of the very concept of existence. This is one of the great themes that is at the heart of Arendt's political thought. What does it mean to exist in a world where we are born, that is where we first

[250] LM, part II, p. 101.

appeared to someone, and from which we will definitively disappear when we will no longer be able to show ourselves to others?

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt investigates human beings' activities in the world. Arendt points out three kinds of activity that correspond to three kinds of human beings: *Labor*, which is the activity performed by the *animal laborans*; *Work* intended as *Homo Faber;* and *Action,* the activity of the *ζῷον πολιτικόν.*This distinction is strictly connected with the distinctions among the social, private and political spheres that Arendt makes in the same text. Each activity retains a specific connection to these spheres. The standpoint from which Arendt makes these distinctions is that of the common world, or of the place that human beings have in common and welcomes their words, actions and products. As I will discuss later, it is important to keep in mind that these identifications and differentiations are not static, but are joined together and they mostly present different configurations throughout history.

The first I want to discuss is *Labor*, which is the activity performed by the *Animal Laborans*. In Arendt's view, labour corresponds to the biological processes of the human body and biological life is for her a metabolism feeding on things by devouring them. Labour, for Arendt, corresponds and is informed by the logic and the cyclic movement/time of consumption, according to which as soon as something is 'produced', it is immediately consumed.[251]

On the contrary *Work*, performed by the *Homo Faber*, provides an "artificial" world of things, different from natural surroundings. As Arendt remarks, *Homo Faber*, the builder of world and the producer of things, can find a relationship with other people by exchanging the products of their work. These products' durability is almost untouched by the corroding effect of natural processes. The activity of the *Homo Faber*

[251] HC, pp. 79-126.

is for Arendt teleologically oriented by the idea or model of the final product and it is informed by the category of means – ends. When the product is finished, the activity reaches its fulfilment/achievement in a separated object.[252]

Finally, Arendt frames *Action* as the typical activity of the *ζῷον πολιτικόν*. As remarked in the previous chapter, the capacity to act corresponds for Arendt to the "capacity of beginning."[253]In Arendt's view, each individual holds this capacity by virtue of their birth, which, in turn, introduces an element of innovation in the cyclic process of natural time. As Arendt points out, " …individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the *rectilinear* course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movement of biological life."[254] This interruption is recalled and occurs again every time human beings decide to act and, thus, to start a new series of events. In this sense, it outlines and unfolds in a non-progressive and non-teleological temporality set out by the re-petition of the beginning that came into the world when we were born.

Arendt underlines that, compared to the automatic processes of the cycle of nature and the flow of human life in society, the capacity to act looks like a true miracle. The mere fact of deciding to expose ourselves to others, bravely escaping from our refuge, is an exceptional deed. The more exceptional the action, the more critical the conditions of the outside world. The more powerful a single action, the more it engages the people who attend and take part in it. "Where power is not actualized, it passes away" Arendt claims, and this "actualization" depends on the authentic *togetherness* of human beings.[255] Actions need to be actualized in a plural context.

[252] Ibid., pp. 136-167.
[253] Ibid., p.9.
[254] Ibid., p.19, emphasis mine. See also p.97.
[255] Ibid., p.200 and p.182.

For Arendt, action does not correspond to a single act, but it is a "process" that requires the interaction of at least two people. The sequence/chain of events resulting from action is not informed by the rigid consequentiality of cause-effect. The course of action is also essentially different from the cyclicality of natural processes that, in her account, also marks the rhythm of the social sphere. What Arendt calls the "process character of action" implies that the effects of each action transcend their root cause. This is the reason why to act means to start something new. This way, each action can appear like an event that breaks into human affairs. Such an interruption, *per se*, has an essential meaning: the possibility of introducing a new beginning into the world.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, this new beginning appears not only as an event, but also as an authentic existential possibility. Before being an historical event, it is a supreme human capacity depending on the universal human condition of natality. The human capacity to act shows itself as a possibility absolutely open. However, to the extent that this capacity takes place exclusively in a plural sphere, it boosts the effects of each action, and it does not imply a state of sovereignty for those who decide to take initiative. Every action is a reaction. Each act is part of a web of pre-existing and potentially infinite acts. For Arendt, the paradoxical circumstance that human beings hold an almost divine power to start something new, but are unable to control or to even foretell its consequences, constitutes the essence of freedom. The peculiarity of Arendt's position consists in the fact that the typically human capacity to start a new series in time does not lead to link freedom and sovereignty. This link has been traditionally accepted based on the semantic ambiguity of the Greek term *archè*, which at the same time means "to begin" and "to rule". On the contrary, the person who acts must be ready to accept that the actions of other people and the circumstances of the outside world can change the course of their actions. This is the reason why

irreversibility and *unpredictability* are for Arendt the main features of action. As Arendt puts it

> […] Greek and Latin, unlike the modern languages, contain two altogether different and yet interrelated words with which to designate the verb "to act." To the two Greek verbs archein ("to begin," "to lead," finally "to rule") and prattein ("to pass through," "to achieve," "to finish") correspond the two Latin verbs agere ("to set into motion," "to lead") and gerere (whose original meaning is "to bear"). Here it seems as though each action were divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by "bearing" and "finishing" the enterprise, by seeing it through. Not only are the words interrelated in a similar manner, the history of their usage is very similar too. In both cases the word that originally designated only the second part of action, its achievement—prattein and gerere—became the accepted word for action in general, whereas the words designating the beginning of action became specialized in meaning, at least in political language. Archein came to mean chiefly "to rule" and "to lead" when it was specifically used, and agere came to mean "to lead" rather than "to set into motion." Thus the role of the beginner and leader, who was a primus inter pares (in the case of Homer, a king among kings), changed into that of a ruler; the original interdependence of action, the dependence of the beginner and leader upon others for help and the dependence of his followers upon him for an occasion to act themselves, split into two altogether different functions: the function of giving commands, which became the prerogative of the ruler, and the function of executing them, which became the duty of his subjects[256]

Words and deeds—the specific products of action—become immediately objects of sharing. In this way, they assume multiple meanings and configurations according to the points of view of those who witness and take part in the action. Through words and

[256]HC, p.189.

actions, the person who acts can show themselves publicly and show parts of themselves according to the viewpoints of those present.

For Arendt, the capacity to act depends on the plurality of human beings. Actions need to be actualized, to be performed in a plural context. This plurality is specifically the condition of all political life and of the public. Arendt defines human plurality as the "paradoxical plurality of unique beings".[257] For Arendt, plurality and uniqueness stand in a paradoxical relationship since, in order not to be perceived as contradictory, they cannot be understood separately. In order for a multitude of humans to manifest itself as a plurality - and not as something monolithic or a mere multiplication of copies -, each human being must be seen as unique. Reciprocally, this uniqueness depends on the possibility of distinguishing oneself from and appearing to others, who are therefore critical to attest the very uniqueness of each individual.

The singularity of each human being is formed and held together by the multiple glances that bear witness to it, as otherwise the risk can be that of suppressing reality (the reality of the world and that of the self) onto a sole facade. For this reason, appearance needs a plural context that is never given once and for all, but which is dynamic and continually renewed. In this respect, from the standpoint of mere physical presence, birth and death can be statically conceived in terms of absence and presence. By contrast, "to appear", "to show", "to manifest", as well as "to disappear", "to hide", "to take refuge" etc. are dynamic concepts. They are performe in that interactive and plural context which is the common world. In this sense, to the extent that being born –intended as appearing in a public space- and dying – intended as retreating into a solitary sphere- are activities that unfold in a common world, I argue that from mere biological conditions they can be considered existential possibilities.

[257] HC, p. 176.

This world is not identical with the earth or with nature, but comes into being wherever people are together. This relational context may be with or without mediation of objects. It is something which is "in-between". Even when this in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify, it is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. Under many aspects, the "public" for Arendt coincides with the world itself, understood as a space that welcomes products and human affairs.This suggests us that the public, as conceived by Arendt, precedes the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. In *On Revolution* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt does discuss the institutional and legal conditions under which action takes place and can be extended. In *The Human Condition*, she discusses the possible institutionalization of the space of appearance. However, I argue that for Arendt politics does not have primarily to do with institutions or organizations (as for example the nation-state) *already given*, but with the "in-between": the interactions among human beings. In Arendt's thought, this "in-between" corresponds to the "web of human relationships," which constitutes the intangible part of the world that human beings have in common. As Arendt puts it

> the common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die…such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public…The term "public" signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena. It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity…Second, the term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world

> means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. [258]

For Arendt, the common world is not simply a background to changeable organic life in general, and to human life in particular, but this world itself also changes and is shaped by them. From the standpoint of human life, the world has the double function of relating and separating people at the same time, so that it constitutes the condition of possibility (though not necessarily the guarantee) for people to freely speak and interact without hindering each other. Human beings can access and modify this sphere by revealing themselves with words, deeds, or by producing objects.[259]

For Arendt, the exposure to others that occurs in a plural sphere has an essential disclosing power. From time to time, it renews our coming –into- the- world. Arendt calls this phenomenon the *disclosure of the 'who'*, as opposed to showing "what" every human being is. The "what" mostly corresponds to social identities; it has to do with those labels that are socially imposed in order to classify individuals. By contrast, the "who" is something intangible and therefore uncontrollable. As conceived by Arendt, this dimension of identity is neither a property already given, nor something that can be

[258]Ibid., pp. 50-55.

[259] Ibid., p.52 and 183. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt suggests that words and deeds are closely related, and distinct from the disclosure through production which only, if at all, reveal very little of its maker. However, in her discussion of the work of the genius , as well as in the essay "The Crisis in Culture" she introduces an ambiguity in this respect. Indeed, Arendt speaks of the work of the Genius in the part of *The Human Condition* dedicated to action. Producing artworks, the genius appears as absorbing those elements of distinction and uniqueness immediately expressed in action and speech. In their production the genius transcends their own skill and workmanship as well as each person's uniqueness transcends the sum of their qualities. In this sense, "the superiority of man to his own work seems indeed inverted, so that he, the living creator, finds himself in competition with his creations." As Arendt remarks, this phenomenon makes the genius feel as "the son of his work", and he is condemned to see himself "as in a mirror, limited, such and such" See ibid., pp. 207-212.
Similarly, in "The Crisis in Culture", we read: « […]The conflict, dividing the statesman and the artist in their respective activities, no longer applies when we turn our attention from the making of art to its products, to the things themselves which must find their place in the world. These things obviously share with political "products", words and deeds, the quality that they are in need of some public space where they can appear and be seen; they can fulfil their own being, which is appearance, only in a world which is common to all; in the concealment of private life and private possession, art objects cannot attain their own inherent validity, they must, on the contrary, be protected against the possessiveness of individuals» Hannah Arendt "The Crisis in Culture" in BPF, p.218.

appropriated. The Arendtian "who" needs to be welcomed. The "who" that we are constitutively entails exposure to others. This is why, for Arendt, the retrospective examination of our first radical appearance in the world becomes central as it is recalled in the moment in which we decide to act. Plurality is intrinsic to the event of birth in that the birth scene always implies the presence of someone else who is immediately able to confirm the uniqueness of the newcomer. This beginning is renewed every time we act or speak in public. In such moments, individuals can experience the naked exhibition that inaugurates the appearance of every human being.

The Arendtian "who" is therefore something intangible. Although exhibited through the concreteness and uniqueness of the body, the "who" is always shown by something more than mere physical presence. When individuals decide to act or to speak in public in front of others, a natal scene opens up. For Arendt, this phenomenon is like a *second birth* "in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance."[260] "To be born" means to come into the world and this can only take place in a relational context, such as that between mother and child. As Arendt puts it in *The Life of the Mind*:

> Nothing and nobody exist in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody. Not Man but men inhabit this planet. Plurality is the law of the earth.[261]

It is possible to decide to actively expose ourselves to others, but it is impossible to fully control the way in which we show ourselves to others—or rather, how others perceive our actions and our words. This is why "it is more than likely that the 'who,' which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person

[260] HC, pp. 176-177.
[261] LM, part I, p.19.

himself."[262] In the pure actuality of actions and words addressed to others, we are invisible to ourselves.

The freedom to show oneself to others has for Arendt ontological relevance. If one could not show oneself in the world in any way, then this would be tantamount to the damnation of not existing in the world. In this sense, as Arendt remarks, in ancient Greece, the notion of "privacy" literally meant a condition of being deprived of something. From this perspective, privacy, intended as the private household where the urgencies of life were satisfied, was opposed to the public realm in which men freely faced each other through words and actions.

As Arendt remarks, today privacy is not understood as deprivation. This is due to the spread of mass society in the modern world. When the multitude becomes a mass, human plurality is destroyed. The many merge into a unity so compact as to eliminate any distinction. In this way, the spaces for action are demolished. The perspective multiplicity that guarantees mutual recognition and the reality of the world, is erased. The phenomena occurring in the world are seen from a single point of view. They are flattened into a single interpretation. Reality loses its complexity. It is the end of the common world. In this case, the multitude does not give life to a political community, but becomes a mass society. In this sense, Arendt speaks of "no-man rule", "bureaucracy", "mathematical treatment of reality", "normalization", "equalization", "laws of statistic", "conformism".[263]

This forces human beings to find refuge within the private, if not the intimate sphere. As a consequence, modern privacy is for Arendt to be understood as the opposite not of the political sphere, but of the social one.

[262] HC,p.179.
[263]Ibid., pp. 38-49.

3.2 Private and public

In her *Natality and Finitude,* Anne O' Byrne compellingly suggests that we could reinterpret 'natality' as a *threshold concept* through which to rethink Arendt's distinction between private and public. [264] Emphasizing how this distinction is informed by Heidegger's notion of ontological difference (the distinction Heidegger makes in *Being and Time* between the Being of Being and the *Seiendheit* of entities), O' Byrne reframes natality as a "struggle with absence and presence, and with the "gap at the origin of our being." In other words, as already pointed out, Arendt's dynamic concept of politics and of human existence seems to recall the dialectic of darkness and unconcealment that characterizes Heidegger's disclosure (*Erschlossenheit*). However, by shifting the focus from the solitary relationship of *Dasein* with its own death to the relationship that every human being entertains with their birth Arendt emphasizes that this movement does not entail the exclusion of others. Rather, it can occur only in a plural and relational sphere.

O' Byrne does not develop her intuition further, and eventually aligns her interpretation with those embracing a rigid reading of this distinction. [265] On the contrary, I argue that a more dynamic reinterpretation of Arendt's distinction between private and public that emerges specifically when reconstructing the roots of her thought in twentieth century German *Existenzphilosophie*, would help recast the private sphere in terms of the plurality and relationality that are continuous and critical to the shaping of the public sphere.[266]

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[264] Anne O'Byrne, *Natality and Finitude*, pp.8-12.

[265] Ibid., 12-13.

[266] In the next chapter, I will show how a more dynamic interpretation of the public and private distinctions can help rethink the interplay between what Arendt, in the *Human Condition*, calls "first and second birth" (176-177). Seyla Benhabib and Peg Birmingham too suggest compelling interpretations of Arendt's distinction and the interplay between 'first' and 'second birth', connecting it to Heidegger's thought and to the learning of language. Benhabib "Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space.", Peg Birmingham, *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights.*

Different interpretations of Arendt's private/public distinction have been offered by authors such as Dana Villa, Seyla Benhabib, Peg Birmingham, Patchen Markell and Katy Fulfer. If, on the one hand, Villa stresses Arendt's need to keep the private and the public as separate, although not fixed spheres, Benhabib, on the other, suggests a more fluid reading of Arendt's distinctions, focusing not primarily on the space that circumscribes and identifies each human activity, but on the activities' complexity and on how agents can take on and make sense of them.[267] As Benhabib puts it, "When human activities are considered as complex social relations, and contextualized properly, what appears to be one type of activity may turn out to be another; or the same activity may instantiate more than one action type ."[268]

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt develops a long and complex discussion of Heidegger's *Will-not-to-will* in relation to the so-called reversal (*Kehre*) in his philosophy which occurred between 1936-1940.[269] In this section, Arendt highlights rather a continuity in Heidegger's thought proved by the persistence, with different configurations, of the centrality of the concepts of Care, Death and Self. She underlines that, after the *Kehre*, Heidegger radicalizes some of the positions sketched in *Being and Time.* In particular, in Arendt's view, Heidegger desubjectivizes the activity of thinking - which was already seen as *Dasein'*s main activity - by reinterpreting it as a mere response to the call of Being (and no longer the call of conscience).[270]*Dasein*'s main task is now that of responding to and actualizing Being by letting-it-be (*Gelassenheit*). In Heidegger's later works, the unfolding of Being commences with an original withdrawal from the inauthenticity of *das Man* and from anything that happens on the

[267] See Fulfer, 'Hannah Arendt and Pregnancy in the Public Sphere.' , p.264.
[268] Benhabib, *Reluctant Modernism,* p.128.
[269] LM, part II, PP.172-194.
[270] Arendt sees this turn not as a change in perspective in Heidegger's philosophy, a turn from the supposed "subjectivism" of *Being and Time* to the "letting-be" (*Gelassenheit*) mentioned in the subsequent works. Rather, for her, this attitude of 'abandonment' is a necessary and natural consequence of the premises sketched in Heidegger's early works. See LM, part II, p.181.

"surface." If in *Being and Time*, the oblivion of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) was a characteristic of the metaphysical tradition that *Dasein* could prevent by anticipating its own death, now Being's movement of self-veiling becomes essential to its inward disclosure and preservation from the loud and visible actions of public life. As Arendt puts it, "it belongs to the very nature of the relation between *Dasein* and Being." As Villa remarks, "Being's initial withdrawal sets in motion a double movement that radicalizes the "categorical separation of Being and beings" by placing the two in an alternating, mutually exclusive temporal sequence".[271] This way, according to Arendt, Heidegger re-proposes and gets trapped in the same metaphysical dichotomy (true Being – mere appearance) that his philosophy was supposed to challenge.

I argue that the same critique could be addressed to Arendt's separation between the public and the private, if embracing a rigid reading of her distinction. Indeed, another risk of hypostatizing Arendt's categories is to interpret her emphasis on the public sphere as a mere reversal of the metaphysical privileging for the private / hidden substratum that underlies mere appearances - a reversal of what, in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt calls the "two - world theory," namely the metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) appearance that, in different configurations, crosses most of Western philosophy.[272] In other words, the risk would be to interpret Arendt's distinction between private and public as simply an overturning of the surface-darkness hierarchy that has informed the Western metaphysical tradition. As Cavarero points out,

> Arendt helps us ...to overturn that crucial movement, from the outside to the inside, which characterizes the modern conception of the self. Prejudiciously disposed, like Descartes, to the loss of the world, modernity turns its focus from the world itself to the individual, from the public to the private, from the appearing object to the interiority of

[271] Villa, *Arend and Heidegger*, p.238.
[272] LM, part I, pp.23-30.

> the subject. Arendt does the reverse. The result of Arendt's move, nonetheless, does not consist in a sort of return to the pre-modern or to a nostalgic recovery of ancient Greece. It consists rather in the anomalous notion of a self that is expressive and relational, and whose reality is symptomatically external in so far as it is entrusted to the gaze, or the tale, of another. [273]

In the first pages of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt insists on the *ontological* importance of appearing intended as being seen, heard and touched by others, to the point of arguing that only what appears in public really *is* from the perspective of the common world.[274] What does not reach this visibility is doomed to obscurity and oblivion. As Arendt remarks, it is literally dead to the world.[275] However, I argue that this visibility is not given once and for all, so that certain activities are *essentially* visible/real and object of political discourse, while others are necessarily relegated out of our sight and, consequently, outside the realm of politics. Any activity can potentially become public and be born in the space of appearance. What is of crucial importance is that, when appearing as public, private or social words and deeds take on different configurations. They are not merely transferred/transposed from one sphere to the other, but they are transfigured and, at the same time, they transform the context where they appear.[276]

What is particularly interesting is the dynamic and temporality in which the private, the public and the social as informing human activities take shape, or how a specific activity appears to others and can be recognized as such. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt states that "A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of *rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose*

[273]RN, p.41
[274] LM, part I, pp.19-40.
[275] Ibid., p.79.
[276]Furthermore, Arendt mentions the antagonism between being and thinking as one of the metaphysical fallacies that can be traced back to Plato's idea of philosophizing as dissolution of the union between body and soul. Ibid.

its depth in a very real non-subjective sense."[277] As this passage suggests, the specificity of each human activity is not given once and for all. Rather, it emerges and takes shape from time to time in relation to the other. Activities are not naturally and immediately given. When appearing as private or public, they take on different configurations according to the context that welcomes and, at the same time, is reshaped by them.

This 'context' too is difficult to configure. What does Arendt mean when she speaks of 'space', 'location', 'sphere', 'realm' in connection to the articulation of the private, the public and the social? Does she refer to a physical or to a metaphorical space represented for example by the house and the square? This question becomes particularly pertinent when Arendt, in *The Life of the Mind*, reflects on the location of the activities performed by the mind and specifically on the place of the 'thinking ego'. In part IV she literally asks "where are we when we think?". Where to locate the activities that do not appear in public? How to configure them? To address this question, Arendt refers to the reflective nature of the activities performed by the mind. This reflexivity seems to point to a "place of inwardness... construed on the principle of the outward space in which non-mental acts take place."[278] But, she continues,

> [...] that this inwardness...could only be understood as *a site* of activities is a fallacy, whose historical origin is the discovery, in the early centuries of the Christian era, of the Will and of the experiences of the willing ego. For *I am aware of the faculties of the mind and their reflexivity only as long as the activity lasts*. It is as though the very organs of thought or will or judgment *came into being* only when I think, or will, or judge.[279]

[277] HC,p.71, my emphasis..
[278] LM, part I, p.75.
[279] ibid. Emphasis mine.

In other words, Arendt seems to suggest that human beings' mental activities are not performed in a space already given that pre-exists the activity itself. This does not mean that mental activities are performed in a sort of *tabula rasa*. Indeed, when she speaks of the interplay between remembrance, thinking and imagination, Arendt, quoting St. Augustine, often refers to something that is "stored-up" and preserved in the space of memory. What Arendt suggests is that "these thought-objects *come into being* only when the mind actively and deliberately remembers, recollects and selects from the storehouse of memory whatever arouses its interest sufficiently to induce concentration."[280] Memories/Thought-objects are not simply recalled, but are from time to time generated, transformed and processed anew.

Although there are obvious differences between what we may configure as an inward and concealed sphere and the public (*Öffentlich*) space where human activities are performed and addressed to a plurality of human beings in an environment shaped by the products of the Homo Faber that give solidity, stableness and durability to the common world, Arendt's remarks about mental activities may tell us something about how to conceive of the process of generation and constant modification of this very public sphere.

In a letter to Heidegger from 1971 Arendt asks her old teacher if she can dedicate him a book she is working on and that she describes as "a kind of second volume of the *Vita Activa* [which] concerns human activities that go beyond a pure activity: thinking, willing, judging."[281] I would like to take Arendt's remark that what will then be published posthumously as *The Life of the Mind* is a sort of second volume of *The Human Condition* as an invitation to read the two works together, and to uncover possible connections between them.[282] Further, as Forti argues, *The Life of the Mind*

[280] Ibid., p.77, emphasis mine.
[281] Arendt-Heidegger, *Lettere 1925-1975 e altre testimonianze*, edizione italiana a cura di Massimo Bonola, Einaudi, Turin 2001, p. 161, my translation.
[282] See also DKT, XXV, 36, p.675 and XXVI, 1, p.701.

sheds a retrospective light on Arendt's political philosophy tout court, helping rethink some of her categories.[283]

As for Arendt's use of the terms 'space', 'sphere', 'dimension', 'realm' in relation to the private and the public, it may be interesting mentioning a 1953 fragment from her *Denktagebuch* where she states:

> Die drei Dimensionen der Pluralität:
> der Raum des Öffentlichen
> der Raum des Privaten
> der Raum der Einsamkeit [284]

As the editors of the *Denktagebuch* point out, Arendt had originally used only the term "Raum", "space", to speak of her idea of human plurality. However, in the first line, she replaces 'Raum' with 'Dimensionen', which suggests a more flexible interpretation of the configuration of this very plurality as not necessarily bounded to an univocal and physical space. Indeed, it is significant that "der Raum der Einsamkeit (Solitude)" is included here amongst the "three dimensions of plurality."[285]

Furthermore, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt describes the Greek *polis*, which seems to recall her idea of *in-between*, as a political space not primarily attached to a physical location. Rather, as she remarks "it arises out of acting and speaking together...it is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word."[286]

Following this thread of thoughts, I argue that the public (and specifically its intangible part) as conceived by Arendt can be rethought not, or not only, as a pre-

[283] Forti, *Hannah Arendt tra Filosofia e* Politica, p.33.
[284] DKT, XIX, 10, p.454.
[285] See also DKT, XI, 13, p.263.

[286] HC, pp.198-199.

existing realm that human beings have access to by acting and speaking. Rather, emphasizing the existential dimension of Arendt's concept of politics, it can be reframed as a dimension (in Arendt's words an *in-between*) that is from time to time generated and reshaped through actions and speeches. As Arendt puts it

> Action and speech go on between men, as they are directed toward them, and they retain their agent-revealing capacity even if their content is exclusively "objective," concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests. These interests constitute, in the word's most literal [Latin] significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are about some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent. Since this disclosure of the subject is an integral part of all, even the most "objective" intercourse, the physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly to one another. This second, subjective in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking can leave behind no such results and end products. But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the "web" of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality.[287]

This passage suggests that the public does not always precede the performance of the action itself. Rather, "the space of appearance *comes into being* wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all

[287] HC, pp.181-184.

formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government ... *it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being*."[288] In the following pages, Arendt challenges an instrumental concept of action - which she detects in most of Western philosophical and political tradition - informed by the category and consequentiality of 'means-ends'. Instead, referring to Aristotle's concepts of ἐνέργεια (full actuality) and ἐντελέχεια (full reality), Arendt conceives of action as an activity that does not pursue an end (that is ατελώς) and leaves no work behind, but exhausts its full meaning in the performance itself.[289]

Building on the connection Arendt draws in her *Denktagebuch* between the public and the private dimension of plurality, I suggest that it is possible to detect two notions of the 'private' in Arendt's work that are to some extent connected to each other. The first one is probably more immediately traceable in Arendt's works such as *The Human Condition* and *On Revolution,* and it is more or less explicitly connected to the space and management of the household. Here, human relationships are conceived on the model of the family. This concept of the private lends itself to an antagonistic reading of Arendt's distinction between private and public as mutually exclusive spheres. Furthermore, this first notion of the private is connected to the social and the so-called social question, which in Arendt's view regards matters that should not be of public concern.

The second concept of the private needs to be retraced specifically in *The Life of the Mind* and in Arendt's *Denktagebuch.* In some passages in these works, the private is described as the space opened from time to time by the activity of 'thinking', understood as 'understanding'. In Arendt's view, understanding does not produce meaning but *depth*, what gives profoundness and rootedness to human existence and

[288] HC, p.199, emphasis mine.
[289] HC, p.206; See NE, book I.

human actions that can emerge from this darker ground. Understanding is what helps human beings make themselves at home in the world.[290]

Similarly, in *The Human Condition* Arendt reminds us how, in ancient Greece and Rome, the "realms of birth and death" were considered sacred and, as such, they had to be preserved in a concealed sphere:

> The sacredness of this privacy was like the sacredness of the hidden, namely, of birth and death, the beginning and end of the mortals who, like all living creatures, grow out of and return to the darkness of an underworld[291]

This sacred dark sphere does not seem to correspond to the private space of labour, as much as to the 'finitude' of human existence. I argue that this second notion of the private can be conceived as a dimension of intimacy that has its own kind of relationality and plurality. However, this sphere is not sharply separated from the public, but it is rather continuous with it. For Arendt, this is a space for intimacy we can share with friends and lovers.[292]

Maria Tamboukou and Liesbeth Schoonheim highlight that it is possible to detect multiple and sometimes contradictory concepts of love in Arendt's published works and in her *Denktagebuch.*[293]We can think for example of Arendt's "love for the world" (*Amor Mundi*) which has a political connotation and was indeed a prospective title for *The Human Condition*, to her discussion of the concept of love in St. Augustine (and the distinctions she makes in this text between love as *cupiditas*, the love between

[290]Arendt in her *Denktagebuch* speaks of 'recollection' and 'reconciliation', See DKT, XII, 28, 31, pp.290-291; XIII, 6, 11, 299 and 301. To some extent, the connection between the private intended as the space of thinking and the public has been explored by Roger Berkowitz in his essay "Solitude and the Activity of Thinking" in Berkowitz, R., Keenan, T. and Katz, J. (eds.), *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*, New York: Fordham University Press, New York, 2010.
See also Arendt UP.

[291] HC, p.62.

[292]See for example HC, pp.70-72 and the essay *Reflections on Little Rock.*

[293] See Tamboukou, *Epistolary Narratives of Love*, and Schoonheim, Liesbeth. "Among Lovers: Love and Personhood in Hannah Arendt." *Arendt Studies*, vol. 2, 2018, pp. 99–124. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48511484

creator and creature and neighbourly love), or her idea of love as alienation from the world.

Similarly, as Roger Berkowitz points out, we can retrace multiple meanings of friendship throughout Arendt's work.[294] Different accounts of friendship can be found for example in her essay on Lessing, in the *Reflections on Little Rock*, as well as in the exchange of letters with Jonas, Blücher and Scholem. Friendship has an intimate aspect as it goes on between two human beings who give birth to a secret world. In this sense, it seems to be intertwined with and to recall a kind of love. At the same time, however, friendship presents political traits in that this kind of relation is framed as a dialogue between two *about a world*, or about something which appears when the friends talk together. As Arendt puts it

> Friendship to a large extent, indeed, consists of this kind of talking about something that the friends have in common. By talking about what is between them, it becomes even more common to them. It gains not only its specific articulateness, but develops and expands and finally, in the course of time and life, begins to constitute a little world of its own which is shared in friendship.[295]

Arendt seems to recover this second account of friendship from Aristotle's notion of φιλία that we can find in books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics.* In these books, the word φιλία is often mentioned in relation to the term συζῆν,"living-together" and it is intertwined with the concept of happiness.[296] With the word φιλία, Aristotle

[294] Roger Berkowitz, "Friendship and Politics," lecture presented in the *Exile and Utopia* International Symposium, Trento University, 13-14 April 2024. As I will show, I distance myself from Berkowitz claim that friendship and love are for Arendt sharply distinct.
[295] Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 82.
[296]In book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Artistotle claims "[...] it was said at the beginning that happiness [εὐδαιμονία] is a kind of activity… if being happy lies in living and being active…and we are better able to observe our neighbours than ourselves and their actions than our own…then the blessed person will need friends of this sort... for an isolated person life is difficult, for being continuously active [ἐνεργεῖν]is not easy by oneself, but is easier in the company of people different from oneself, and in relation to others." NE, 1169 b 29 – 1170 a 7 p.237. However, in book X, Aristotle will eventually try to make happy life as autonomous as possible. It will thus be identified in the βίος θεωρητικός, in the contemplative life, or in the activity of the soul according to virtue, a

designates not only the relationships between family members or friends in a broad sense, but also those between adult males endowed with political rights, that is, between fellow citizens.It is essential that friends live together, that is, share words and deeds:

> [...] the good man existence *is* desirable because of his perceiving himself...he needs to be concurrently perceiving the friend – that he exists, too- and this will come about in their living together, conversing and sharing their talk and thoughts.[297]

In Aristotle too friendship seems to present exclusive and intimate traits that assimilate it to love:

> [...]it is a good thing not to seek as many-friends as possible, but to have just as many to suffice for living a shared life, for it would not seem even possible to form intense friendship with many people. This is why one cannot be in love with more than one person, either; for *being in love is a kind of extreme form of friendship*.[298]

By sharing words and deeds, friends and lovers create a microworld. In a 1971 letter to Heidegger after Blücher's death, Arendt writes

> Between two people, sometimes, how rarely, a world grows. It is then one's homeland; in any case, it was the only homeland we were willing to recognize. This tiny microworld where you can always escape from the world, and which disintegrates when the other has gone away [299]

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condition that allows human beings to momentarily assimilate to the immortals (1177 b 33 p.252). Regardless of the outcome of Aristotle's argument, the precious indication that the philosopher offers us (and that Arendt promptly grasps) is that, from the standpoint of the of human beings living together (and not of a condition of "divine isolation"), happiness as full actuality and full reality is actualized only in living together (*Συζῆν*), in Arendtian terms in interacting with each other.

[297] NE,1170 b 9-13 p. 238.

[298] Ibid., 1171 a 8-13 p.239, emphasis mine.

[299] Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters, 1925–1975*, p. 173.

Building on this passage, we may suggest that the world, into which it is possible to enter as single entities, is formed starting from the in-between that grows between two or more people. When this "microworld" does not born, the dual relationship becomes symbiosis and isolates itself from the rest of the world. This is the risk that Arendt identifies in love. While recognizing the "unequaled power of self-revelation" of love, which gives lovers a privileged glimpse into the "who" of each other, Arendt looks with suspicion at the exclusivity of such a bond.[300] As long as love fuses bodies together, there can be no mutual gaze. One recognizes themselves in the other in the manner of the who which is mirrored in the interiority of the mind. But they cannot see the uniqueness of the loved one. This way, the lover overlooks and forgets 'who' loves. Indeed, although lovers are able to draw on each other's "who," the space of appearance that opens up between them risks crystallizing in the moment of falling in love. In this case, the image of the other is removed from the flow of time and fixed on a single side. This makes lovers unwilling to accept the complexity of the "who" that was initially seen. In *The Human Condition* she writes

> love, although it is one of the rarest occurrences in human lives, indeed possesses an unequaled power of self-revelation and an unequaled clarity of vision for the disclosure of who, precisely because it is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with what the loved person may be, with his qualities and shortcomings no less than with his achievements, failings, and transgressions. Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others. As long as its spell lasts, the only in-between which can insert itself between two lovers is the child, love's own product. The child, this in-between to which the lovers now are related and which they hold in common, is representative of the world in that it also separates them; it is an indication that they will insert a new world into the existing world. Through the child, it is as though the lovers return to the world from which their love had expelled them. But

[300] HC, p.242.

> this new worldliness, the possible result and the only possibly happy ending of a love affair, is, in a sense, the end of love, which must either overcome the partners anew or be transformed into another mode of belonging together. Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces[301]

In this passage, Arendt points to both the "world destroying" and "world creating" elements of love.[302] In a note, she specifies that

> [The] world-creating faculty of love is not the same as fertility, upon which most creation myths are based. The following mythological tale, on the contrary, draws its imagery clearly from the experience of love: the sky is seen as a gigantic goddess who still bends down upon the earth god, from whom she is being separated by the air god who was born between them and is now lifting her up. Thus a world space composed of air comes into being and inserts itself between earth and sky[303]

As Schoonheim remarks, for Arendt, the 'world-creating' principle of love is not limited to begetting children but also, more generally, in producing a new little world.[304] From this position, the love relationship would no longer be an experience of escaping from the world, but on the contrary a way to build it together. In this dimension, lovers reveal to each other who they are. Rather than taking us "beyond" the world, perhaps love has the power to bring us back to it and to something similar to the relationship that each of us has had with the mother starting from intrauterine life. From this perspective, we could therefore say that people who love each other always give life to something, to

[301] Ibid.
[302] See Schoonheim "Among Lovers: Love and Personhood in Hannah Arendt", p. 118 and DKT, XVI, 3, pp. 372-374.
[303] HC, note 82 p. 242.
[304] Schoonheim "Among Lovers: Love and Personhood in Hannah Arendt".

a world at least. The love relationship could thus be considered as a pre-political experience that, from time to time, regenerates the world and the public rather than an anti-political one.

3.3 Will and Freedom

*Chi vive, quando vive, non si vede: vive... Se uno può vedere la propria vita, è segno che non la vive più: la subisce, la trascina. Come una cosa morta, la trascina. Perché ogni forma è una morte […]Possiamo dunque vedere e conoscere soltanto ciò che di noi è morto. Conoscersi è morire (*Luigi Pirandello, *La carriola*, in Novelle per un anno, 1917*).*

In this section, I argue that natality can be conceived as a threshold concept to also rethink the interplay between the life of the mind and the *vita activa.* In *The Human Condition,* Arendt states that "traditionally the term *vita activa* receives its meaning from the *vita contemplativa*".[305] On the contrary, I argue that Arendt rethinks the life of the mind from the standpoint of the *vita activa*. In this sense, she does not simply recover the traditional distinction between *theoria* and *praxis*, as it is often believed. Rather, she helps understand how these two spheres are interrelated and can enlighten each other.

Arendt designates thinking as the introspective activity par excellence .[306] When we think, the plurality that characterizes the public space is reduced to the duality of consciousness, "to know with myself". We find ourselves face to face with our interiority. We are absent from the world and present to ourselves. In the flow of thought there is no deed, there is no body, no word pronounced. Nevertheless, for Arendt, it is an activity. An activity of reflection:

[305] HC, p.16.
[306] LM, part I, p.79.

> Nothing perhaps indicates more strongly that man exists *essentially* in the plural than that his solitude actualizes his merely being conscious of himself, which we probably share with the higher animals, into a duality during the thinking activity. It is this duality of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity, in which I am both the one who asks and the one who answers[307]

On the contrary:

> the two-in-one becomes One again when the outside world intrudes upon the thinker and cuts short the thinking process. Then, when he is called by his name back into the world of appearances, where he is always One, it is as though the two into which the thinking process had split him clapped together again.[308]

Words and actions set into motion a process of unification. Only in this way we can speak and listen, act and suffer, see and be seen.

What is important for us is that plurality, that Arendt defines as the "law of the earth," even lodges the human mind in the form of a dual relationship. Nevertheless, in this case, the relationship is fictitious. It is not between two distinct human beings. The reflective nature of thought makes the public realm of typical activities fold in on itself. The thought process describes a movement opposed to any other activity that appears publicly. The plurality of public space is incorporated and the thinker, who externally appears as one and only one, internally splits. Reflection can take place only in this way.

The globe is reduced to a controllable dimension. This dematerialization is viewed with suspicion by Arendt. The risk that Arendt highlights is that the self-sufficient duality intrinsic to the activity of thinking can be extended to the relationships

307 Ibid., p. 185.
308 Ibid.

with other human beings, thus causing the end of a common and plural world. As Arendt puts it

> [P]olitical freedom is possible only in the sphere of human plurality, and on the premise that this sphere is not simply an extension of the dual l-and-myself to a plural We. Action, in which a We is always engaged in changing our common world, stands in the sharpest possible opposition to the solitary business of thought, which operates in a dialogue between me and myself. Under exceptionally propitious circumstances that dialogue, we have seen, can be extended to another insofar as a friend is, as Aristotle said, "another self." But it can never reach the We, the true plural of action. (An error rather prevalent among modern philosophers who insist on the importance of communication as a guarantee of truth-chiefly Karl Jaspers and Martin Buber, with his I-thou philosophy-is to believe that the intimacy of the dialogue, the "inner action in which I appeal" to myself or to the "other self," Aristotle's friend, Jaspers' beloved, Buber's Thou, can be extended and become paradigmatic for the political sphere.)[309]

In this passage, Arendt seems to have in mind specifically the duality and self-sufficiency of the activity of thinking. On the contrary, as Arendt remarks, judgment "does not cut itself off from 'all others.' To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides ".[310] This way, it clears up the space for action.

If, for Arendt, in the activities of thinking and judging, the "outside" or the public realm folds in on itself and is, so to speak, internally reproduced and processed, in the activity of willing something that is inside in pro-jected outside. This transition is not merely "expressive" or productive. Mostly, as Arendt remarks, it matches the will of the agent almost never. This is the reason why to act means to start something new and

[309] LM, part II, p.200.
[310] LKPP, p. 43. I will further discuss Arendt's concept of thinking and judgment in chapter four.

each action can appear like an event that breaks into human affairs. Such an interruption, *per se*, introduces a new beginning into the world. As Arendt points out

> [...]the will... unites the mind's inwardness with the outward world...This Will could indeed be understood as "the spring of action"; by directing the senses' attention, presiding over the images impressed on memory, and providing the Intellect with material for understanding, the Will prepares the ground on which action can take place[311]

According to Arendt, since Aristotle, will was conceived as *liberum arbitrium* [προαίρεσις] namely as a decision between two possibilities already given.[312] Moreover, since, in Aristotle's view, everything that is is preceded by a state of potentiality, and this concerns both what, in order to be realized, depends on human beings' actions, and natural phenomena, every idea of Will as an organ of the future was for him completely superfluous. If human action is reduced to a mere occasion which causes something that already potentially exists to be converted into action, it loses all its initial power.

The challenge that Arendt poses to an understanding of will as *liberum arbitrium* is that of postulating the existence of a will capable of "calling into being something that was not before," an idea that she traces back to St. Augustine: [313]

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[311] Ibid., part II, p.101.

[312] In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states

> What affirmation and denial are in the case of thought (ἐνδιανοία), pursuit and avoidance are with desire (ἐνὸρέξει); so that, since excellence of character is a disposition issuing in decisions, and decision (προαίρεσις) is a desire informed by deliberation (ὄρεξιςβουλευτική), in consequence both what issues from reason must be true and the desire must be correct for the decision to be a good one, and reason must assert and desire pursue the same things (NE, 1139 a 21-26 p.177)

Desire sets the goal and stimulates reason to calculate the means to achieve it. This type of calculating reason is called practical thinking (ἡ διάνοια πρακτική).Unlike purely speculative reason (ἡ διάνοια θεωρητική), such thinking deals with "what can be otherwise" and which depends exclusively on the intervention of human beings.

[313] As Arendt underlines in LA, in chapter XX of book XII of the *De Civitate Dei* titled "Of the impiety of those who assert that the souls which enjoy true and perfect blessedness, must yet again in these periodic revolutions return to labor and misery", Augustine disrupts the ancient Greek cyclical time concept in order to answer to the question why the eternal God created mortal men. In Augustine's view, God created man in order to introduce a new beginning in the world and to explode the above-mentioned periodic revolutions.

> What will be at stake here Is the Will as the spring of action, that is, as a "power of *spontaneously* beginning a series of successive things or states" (Kant). No doubt every man, by virtue of his birth, is a new beginning, and his power of beginning may well correspond to this fact of the human condition. It is in line with these Augustinian reflections that the Will has sometimes, and not only by Augustine, been considered to be the actualization of the *principium individuationis*. The question is how this faculty of being able to bring about something new and hence to "change the world" can function in the world of appearances, namely, in an environment of factuality which is old by definition and which relentlessly transforms all the spontaneity of its newcomers into the "has been" of facts-*fieri; factus rum*[314]

Human beings' capacity of beginning derives from the fact that they themselves are a beginning. According to Augustine, unlike other living creatures, only "Man" was created as a singularity. This singularity manifests itself and is confirmed, from time to time, in the faculty of willing.

For Augustine, this faculty can give rise to an internal conflict, especially when we realize that "Non hoc est velle quod posse," "to will and to be able are not the same."[315]This internal conflict points again to the intrinsic duality of the "life of the mind". However, while in the activity of thinking this "duality in me" provides a condition of serene self-sufficiency, in willing it causes a state of restlessness and extreme agitation. This is because, as Arendt remarks, "in flagrant contrast to thinking, no willing is ever done for its own sake or finds its fulfilment in the act itself […] the will always wills to *do* something."[316]

The will, until it is determined to act, is free, released from any constraint. It does not limit itself to selecting the means in view of a pre-established end, but freely

[314] LM, part II, pp. 6-7
[315] Ibid., p.87 and 95.
[316] Ibid., p.37.

conceives ends that are pursued for their own sake. Until a space capable of welcoming human freedom is configured outside - the space of action -, the individual is in a condition of absolute sovereignty, which is however paralyzing. In fact, the omnipotence of the will can only be maintained within the human mind.

The will is tense, turned outwards and towards the future. This tension cannot be resolved except by action. Until the will finds peace in the action, it configures itself as an internal conflict. If the tension is not resolved externally, it torments the individual internally. The friction between the two parts of the will generates that propulsive force which, if it manages to push itself out of the human mind, seeks someone to oppose it, externally reconstituting what was happening internally. In this way, the union of multiple wills is converted into initial power and the process of action is thus set into motion. As Arendt puts it

> [...]the Will's redemption cannot be mental and does not come by divine intervention either; redemption comes from the act which - often like a "coup d'etat," in Bergson's felicitous phrase -interrupts the conflict between *velle* and *nolle*. And the price of the redemption is, as we shall see, *freedom*... the Will is redeemed by ceasing to will and starting to act[317]

The price that is paid to the healing of the will is freedom intended as internal and individual omnipotence. When we act, we lose our sovereignty. Freedom becomes political and depends on the power of the many gathering together. Meaningfully, Arendt concludes

> Every man, being created in the singular, is a new beginning by virtue of his birth; if Augustine had drawn the consequences of these speculations, he would have defined men, not, like the Greeks, as mortals, but as "natals", and he would have defined the freedom of the Will not as the *liberum arbitrium*, the free choice between willing and

[317]Ibid., p.102.

nilling, but as the freedom of which Kant speaks in the *Critique of Pure Reason* [namely as a "faculty of spontaneously beginning a series in time"] [...] And had Kant known of Augustine's philosophy of natality he might have agreed that the freedom of a *relatively* spontaneity is no more embarrassing to human reason than the fact that men are *born* – newcomers again and again in a world that preceded them in time. The freedom of spontaneity is part and parcel of the human condition. Its mental organ is the Will [318]

[318]Ibid., pp.109-110.

Chapter Four. Birth, Natality, Maternity

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have highlighted the importance of Arendt's shift of focus from the philosophical centrality of mortality to that of natality. I have set the concept of natality within the context of the western philosophical tradition and I have shown how this perspectival shift allows for a focus on the plurality of human beings.

Arendt conceives of natality as an authentic existential condition on which human beings' capacity for beginning is grounded . As Christina Schües notes , the Arendtian category of natality "means that human beings are born from someone in the world" and "it points to the idea that the fact of being born stands for our relationality in the world and leads to the capacity to begin."[319] Indeed, what Arendt calls the "human condition of natality" means, at the same time, having –been- generated and being capable of bringing something new into the world. Precisely because we have been generated we are capable of generating something new.

Although Arendt points to the fact that each human being is not self-generated, one of the main critiques that have been addressed to her–particularly by feminist thinkers, as we shall see–is that of having proposed an image of "natality" that recalls the concrete experience of birth, but is also significantly detached from it and from the whole generative process. Symptomatic in this sense is the model Arendt draws on to speak of her idea of natality and, more generally, of the condition of "being-born", namely that of the Creation (from nothing). In her doctoral dissertation Arendt writes:

[319]See Christina Schües, "Natality. Philosophical Rudiments Concerning a Generative Phenomenology," in *Thaumàzein| Rivista di Filosofia*, 4, 9-35, 2017, p.10.
It is worth noting that, in the preface to the English edition of Arendt's doctoral thesis, the editors point out that, for the sake of readability in English, they replaced the word "creature", as well as neologisms such as "creatural" and "aboriginal" that often appeared in the first Ashton translation of the thesis with words such as "man" or "person". The editors specify that they left the terms above only in the contexts where "natality" and the linkage to the "Creator" were at issue. However, the fact that Arendt used the term throughout all her work highlights the importance she gives to the fact that human beings are not self-created, but have received life from someone else. See LA, p. XIII.

> All that is created is seen in the image of human life, coming out of nothingness and rushing into nothingness. To the extent that even this precarious mode of existence is not nothing, it exists relating back to its origin. It is the hallmark of human life that it can explicitly adopt this reference and consciously hold on it in *caritas*.[320]

Arendt goes on to say that human beings are constitutively prompted to imitate God's creative power by recalling their own origin (*redire ad creatorem*). She also specifies that "for the person who turns back to its absolute past, the Creator who made him, the Whence-he-came reveals itself as identical to the Whither-he-goes".[321] Arendt speaks in this sense of a "twofold before" of human existence that corresponds to the nothing before birth and the nothing that awaits after death.[322]

In this chapter I argue that this equation is Arendt's error. By conceiving a human being's birth as a coming from nothing that corresponds to and is interchangeable with the nothing that, in her view, will occur after death, Arendt obscures a fundamental question: From *whom* did we come? *Who* gave us life? In other words, Arendt obliterates the obvious but still philosophically underexplored fact that human beings have been generated (and not created) by another human being.

Can a philosophical reflection on the significance of birth for the human capacity of beginning legitimately disregard the newborn's relationship with the mother? Why is it difficult to reflect on and to narrate human beings' "origin" starting from birth and the primary relation with another human being? What about the maternal capacity of beginning? As Stella Villarmea points out

[320] Ibid., p.55.
[321] Ibid., p.56.
[322] Ibid., p.57.

> Philosophical reflections on the question of origin have a long history of identifying 'origin' with key concepts such as 'beginning', 'logos', or 'foundation', as developed by the great exponents of the history of philosophy. But what happens when we take the expression 'rethink the origin' literally? In philosophy we are not used to associating 'origin' —*logos, arché, Ur-*— with 'birth', *our* birth.[323]

In this sense, Villarmea argues that it is necessary to explore new genealogies - understood in the literal, Greek sense of new *logoi* or studies of *genos*, generation –that acknowledge the importance of birth and who is giving birth.

In this chapter I argue, furthermore, that a perspective that underlines the importance of the initial relations that accompany the birth process can highlight the intrinsic plurality of each natal moment even more strongly. In fact, as Christina Schües reminds us

> birth is not just the start of a person, but simultaneously the start of a relationship… Birth means to be born from someone (the m-other) [sic] and to be born with the m-other[324]

The reasons for Arendt's overlooking of what Cavarero calls "the maternal figure" in the birth process may be multiple, not least the fact that reflections on women's labour,

[323]Villarmea, 'A Philosophy of Birth." See also Villarmea, 'Rethinking the origin'.
It is worth remembering that Arendt's notion of natality originates from the Latin concept of *initium*, which for Augustine means a specific kind of beginning: that is, the beginning of time and temporality in the world through the creation of man as distinguished from the beginning of the world (*principium*). As Arendt remarks, for Augustine the latter has a less radical meaning since it does not mean that nothing was made before, whereas *nobody* was before the creation of man. See HC, note 3, p. 177.
Francesca Rigotti suggests that "the scene of birth is an "originary scene" in at least three senses. First, birth *originates* something that is born in that moment. Second, what or who is born is *original* because it is not a copy, a re-production or imitation, it is thus authentic. Finally, what or who is born is *new*, extra-ordinary, in some cases even queer." Francesca Rigotti, *Partorire con il corpo e con la mente*, p. 129, my translation, emphasis mine.
[324] Schües "Natality. Philosophical Rudiments Concerning a Generative Phenomenology," p.20. It is worth underlining that the relationship that starts even before birth is not always or not only with the birth mother. On the contrary, multiple "maternal subjects" accompany human being's birth. As I will elaborate in this and the next chapter, the crucial point is that human beings' birth is marked by a relationality that is critical to the unfolding of human life and of a political and plural sphere as intended by Arendt.

motherhood and the public/private distinction started in Marxist feminist debates and consciousness raising groups in the 70s, only a few years before Arendt's death in 1975.[325]

We may say that it was already quite exceptional, in the context of twentieth century European philosophy, that Arendt set birth at the centre of her political thought rather than death. Also, is well known, Arendt was not sympathetic with feminist movements of her time as she saw in them the same risk that she retraced in other political movements, namely the risk of annihilating differences and treating "woman" as a constructed, monolithic subject. Indeed, as Honkasalo points out, none of her major works deal with women's liberation or women's struggles. The only published text where Arendt explicitly reflects on the women's movement of her time is a book review of Alice Rühle-Gerstel's *Das Frauenproblem in der Gegenwart* (1932). [326]

As a consequence, in the years between 1990-2000, feminist interpreters of Arendt such as Seyla Benhabib, Mary Dietz and Elizabeth Young-Bruehl charged her with re-proposing a masculine image of the public space, while uncritically accepting the ancient relegation of 'reproductive labour' (in Arendt's words, the "labor of women in giving birth") to the private sphere of bodily necessities.[327] In *The Human Condition*, Arendt highlights affinities between labour and reproduction, stressing the "deformation of the human body" which is entailed by both activities and the need to conceal them

[325] This debate was particularly developed by feminists writing on the issues related to biological and social reproduction, family, and sexuality. In the 70s and 80s, many feminists argued that women suffer from a triple burden of work: domestic work, reproductive work and work in the productive labour market. As Sandford remarks, these feminist thinkers "struggled to explain the specificity of women's oppression with gender – blind Marxist categories, and argued that the category of labour itself had to be expanded to include traditional women's tasks such as bearing and rearing children, caring for the sick, cleaning, cooking etc..." Stella Sandford, "What is maternal labour?" pp. 2-6.
A classic work on this topic is Silvia Federici's *Wages against Housework*, Falling Wall Press, 1975. See also Carol Pateman, 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy'. In C. Pateman, *Disorder of the Private Women*, Polity, Cambridge,1989.

[326] Hannah Arendt, "On the Emancipation of Women," in EU, pp. 67–68. See Julian Honkasalo, "Cavarero as an Arendtian Feminist."

[327] HC, p.30. See for example Mary Dietz, *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics*, Routledge, New York/London,2002 and Elizabeth Young-Bruehl "Hannah Arendt among Feminists" in Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later, edited by Jerome Khon and Larry May, MIT Press, UK, 1996.

from the public sphere.[328]In a passage from this text Arendt claims: "it is striking that from the beginning of history to our own time it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy...Hidden away were the laborers who 'with their body minister the [bodily] needs of life (Aristotle, *Politics*), and the women who with their bodies guarantee the physical survival of the species".[329]The equation between labouring and begetting is also supported by the fact that, etymologically, "most European words for labor, the Latin and English *labor*, the Greek *ponos*, the French *travail*, the German *Arbeit*, signify pain and effort, and are also used for the pangs of birth".[330]The Italian word *travaglio* derives from the same etymology as the French *travail*.

These reflections led many interpreters to also detect a devaluation of the body itself in Arendt's thought. According to these readers, Arendt conceives of the body as intrinsically antipolitical. For example, Bonnie Honig remarks that "the human body is, for Hannah Arendt, a master signifier of necessity, irresistibility, imitability, and the determination of pure process. The body is a univocal instance of complete closure".[331]

From this standpoint, it has often been argued that Arendt separates human beings' first appearance in the world through the event of birth from their capacity to appear again, through action and speech, in the shared scene of political life. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt calls the latter a "second birth in which we take upon ourselves the naked fact of our first physical appearance in the world."[332] For instance, Fanny Söderbäck points out that: " [for Arendt] the capacity for beginning is announced

[328] HC, p. 48.
[329] Ibid., p.72.
[330] Ibid., note 39 p.48.
[331] Bonnie, Honig "Towards an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," in Judith Butler, & Scott, J.W. (Eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (1st ed.), Routledge, London/New York, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203723999 ,1992 , p. 217.
[332] HC, pp.176-177.

by the birth of a child, but it is only actualized as freedom once we put it to work in a shared space of equals".[333]

According to this reading, human beings' "first birth" can be constructed as mere biological birth and relegated to the private and social spheres, while the "second birth" through which we enter a shared sphere of equal adults can be seen as public and political.

In this chapter, I will rethink the interplay between what Arendt calls "first and second birth" as non mutually exclusive or, at best, connected in logical/consequential way.[334] I argue that what Arendt calls human beings' "first birth" can be rethought as already a political and existentially significant event that is staged in a complex network of relations.

In the previous chapter, I have argued that it is possible to retrace two notions of the private in Arendt's work, one that corresponds to the space of labour and the management of the household and is opposite to the public sphere, and one that can be conceived as a dimension of intimacy that welcomes the 'finitude' of human existence and gives depth and rootedness to human life. I have argued that the latter is not sharply separated from the public, but it is rather continuous with it in that it is made by relations -with friends and lovers – that own their own kind of plurality and hold a world-creating power.

Building on this dynamic reading of Arendt's private/public distinction, I argue in this chapter that it is possible to complement and rethink Arendt's concept of natality

[333] Fanny Söderbäck, "Natality or Birth?" p. 275. I find it surprising that, in this essay, Söderbäck embraces this rigid and quasi- metaphysical interpretation of Arendt's public/private distinction. In her *Revolutionary Time*, Söderbäck proposes a compelling theory of "temporal return" that disrupts the alternative between linear and cyclic interpretations of time. This rethinking also challenges metaphysical dualisms such as nature / culture, body / mind etc. by underlining the dynamic relation that binds them. As I will discuss in this chapter, the author employs this concept of "revolutionary time" to rethink for example Kristeva's semiotic/maternal – symbolic/paternal distinction to argue that the semiotic cannot be considered inert matter or passive receptacle and be located outside history/time. Rather, it is an already active force that interplays and gives rhythm to the symbolic. This way, Söderbäck questions the standard critique to Kristeva's account of the maternal as material, atemporal and passive as provided for example by Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Fanny Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time.* As I have argued in chapter three, it is possible to suggest a similar reading of Arendt's public/private distinction.

[334] HC, p.176-177.

with reflection on maternal subjectivities and relations understood as intimate and affective dimensions that inform and are critical to the generation of the public. In other words, I argue that the maternal relation too should be included amongst those relationships that have the world-creating power that Arendt attributes to friendship and love, rather than being uncritically conceived as mere reproduction of the human species. Indeed, from the standpoint of the common world, maternity suggests the capacity to bring something or someone *absolutely new* into the world. On the contrary, according to Arendt's account, labour performs precisely the opposite movement as it "incorporates" and immediately consumes what it produces.[335]

By re-thinking Arendt's concept of natality including reflection on maternal subjectivities and the relations that mark the beginning of each human being's life, in this chapter I will argue that we can better grasp the idea of a past that precedes human beings' coming into the world as the condition for the capacity of beginning, as well as the intrinsic relationality of the human condition. Indeed, the movement of unconcealment that characterizes each natal moment is not self-performed but rather depends on the plurality that precedes (past) and exceeds (future) the natal event in itself. As Anne O'Byrne remarks: "What occurs second is the event that begins the process by which that birth turns out to have been my birth, an event that can happen only in a context provided by those who have been around longer than I have".[336]

Firstly, I will give account of the concepts of maternity that have been provided by thinkers of sexual difference, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Luisa Muraro in particular. I will set their reflections in the context of second wave feminist thought in Europe and twentieth century continental philosophy. I will focus specifically on the attention that philosophers of that time gave to the "question of the other." Indeed,

[335] See HC.
[336] O' Byrne, *Natality and Finitude*, p.105.

particularly through reflection on sexuality, embodiment, femininity and the maternal, the thinkers of sexual difference have provided original critiques of the subject and alternative ways to rethink otherness.

From this starting point, I will discuss Adriana Cavarero's original re-reading of Arendt's idea of natality, exposing similarities and differences with the feminist thinkers presented before. To some extent, Cavarero aligns with those who charge Arendt for re-proposing a masculine concept of the public space and a metaphorical understanding of birth based on the model of the Creation.[337] However, Cavarero does not endorse a dismissive approach to Arendt's categories. On the contrary, she uses Arendt's original rethinking of politics to develop her own account of uniqueness, embodiment, plurality and birth.

Building on Cavarero's position, I will suggest that the maternal power to generate someone absolutely new can be connected with the Arendtian capacity of beginning, which is typical of the agent. Drawing specifically on *Relating Narratives,* I will argue that the intimate relational dimension between mother and child, friends and lovers can be related to the political space that, for Arendt, unfolds through the interactions among human beings.[338]I will argue that Cavarero does not address the importance of the relational model provided by reflection on these intimate relations for what Arendt would call the "life of the mind." In the following chapter, I will argue that Cavarero overlooks the question of time in relation to maternity, focusing rather on the "natal scene" as a seemingly fixed image.

Finally, I will critically discuss the relation between maternity and femininity and the limits of the framework of "sexual difference" via Butler's *Gender Trouble*.

[337] See for example IP.
[338]See RN and IN.

4.1 Maternity and the Thought of Sexual Difference: Kristeva, Irigaray, Muraro

Many notable works discuss Arendt's notion of 'natality' through a feminist lens, examining women's role in giving life, highlighting the materiality of the process of pregnancy, and refusing metaphorical discussion of the birthing experience.[339]

As Honkasalo points out, it is possible to detect two ways in which feminist thinkers have criticized, appropriated and re-elaborated Arendt's thought. On the one hand, US-based, second-wave feminist theorists have criticized Arendt for her hostility toward the women's movement and the feminist politics of the time. By interpreting her conceptual distinctions, such as the public/ private, the political/social, action/ labour as rigid and exclusive, early second-wave interpreters charged Arendt with embracing a male bias in her thinking. On the other hand, continental feminist thinkers such as Cavarero and Kristeva perceived Arendt's contribution to feminist theorizing as evident in her work because of her feminine position and feminine textual style. In contrast to American feminist critics of Arendt such as Adrienne Rich, Mary O'Brien and Wendy Brown, Cavarero and Kristeva used Arendt's categories to open up a space for theorizing embodiment, intimacy, maternity, relationality and plurality from a radically feminine and feminist perspective.[340]

As we have seen in the first chapter via discussion of Heidegger, Derrida and Levinas, twentieth-century continental philosophy aimed to overcome a metaphysical concept of subjectivity. In short, these philosophers contested a notion of the "subject" as artificially isolated from others, autonomous, self-centred, abstracted from history and the world. This idea of the "subject" was inserted in and supported the

[339] See for example Söderbäck, "Natality or Birth?" and Fulfer, 'Hannah Arendt and Pregnancy in the Public Sphere.', together with the thinkers I will be discussing in this chapter.

[340]Honkasalo "Cavarero as an Arendtian Feminist", p.38. Honkasalo has also extensively addressed the relation between Arendt and feminism in "Arendt and Feminism," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Gratton and Yasemin Sari, Bloomsbury, London 2020.

See for example IP and Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*.

dichotomous, hierarchical and metaphysical setting that can already be detected in Plato and develops in different configurations throughout the history of Western philosophy. This setting was based on a rigid binary economy that reduced the complexity and plurality of reality into positive and negative poles.

In order to overcome this metaphysical binarism, as well as an artificial idea of subjectivity, many twentieth-century philosophers turned to what Cavarero, borrowing a phrasing by Maurizio Ferraris, calls a "rhetoric of alterity".[341]From phenomenology to hermeneutics, to deconstruction, to psychoanalysis *the other* enters the philosophical landscape, undermining the mastery of the metaphysical subject. The setting is thus reversed. It is no longer possible to reflect from a closed, constructed subjectivity, artificially freed from any relation to others. The ego itself becomes opaque, split, intimately exposed to an inescapable otherness. It is necessary to go beyond the boundaries of the self, to lean towards the other, to observe ourselves and the world starting from the gaze of others.

It is in this context that continental feminist thinkers develop their reflections. These philosophers reflected on an extraneousness that, for centuries, had relegated them to the margins of society, had excluded them from the political debate and exiled them from *lógos*. For them it was not a thought experiment which, at best, could provide ethical, romantic or aesthetic answers to the question of otherness, often reduced to an inebriating passage through the exotic. To them, the philosophical impasse was inexorably connected to the political one. For this reason, they were the first to notice that, if, on the one hand, the ethical turn of the twentieth century made it possible to circumvent and challenge the rigidity of the metaphysical binary scheme, on the other, "[by]continuing to transport the category of alterity into the intimacy of the

[341] RN, p.90. Cavarero refers to Maurizio Ferraris' *Mimica*, Bompiani, Milan 1992.

self, contemporary philosophy ... produce[d] the inevitable consequence of impeding every serious naming of the other in so far as he/ she is *an other*.[342] As Cavarero puts it

> 'The Other or 'the other,' capital or lower-case, often gets invoked by contemporary philosophers as a proof of their good intentions with respect to the individualistic spirit of the times. Whether it is the alterity that invades the self, rendering him nomadic and fragmented, or the alterity that lures the self more subtly with his embrace, these others never have the distinct and unrepeatable face of each human in so far as he [/she] is simply another. Intolerant, as usual, of many elementary givens of existence - a large part of contemporary philosophy disdains the ontological status that binds the reality of the self to the (well, yes, empirical) material presence of someone other.[343]

In other words, continental feminist thinkers realised that a large part of the twentieth century (male) debate around the question of the other ran the risk of reducing this question to a mere theoretical exercise. On the contrary, starting from their own experience as "others" in a patriarchal philosophical discourse, they insisted on attention to the more concrete, empirical aspects of human life by reflecting on questions of sexuality, embodiment, maternity and vulnerability. Often, they also bounded their theoretical reflection to feminist political activism.

While in the Anglo-American landscape a post-structuralist and deconstructionist feminist current took hold, which would then pave the way for gender studies, from the seventies and eighties in Europe spread above all the thought of sexual difference, in the French and Italian versions. The latter feminist current was inspired primarily by the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray who underlines the need to remove the feminine from symbolic male dominance, interpreted as the

[342]Ibid., p.43, *emphasis mine*.
[343] Ibid. I have critically discussed the "question of the other" in Heidegger, Derrida and Lévinas in the first chapter of the thesis.

neutral universal. In Irigaray's account, 'Man' is a universal that applies to everyone precisely because it is no one. It disincarnates itself from the living singularity of each one, while claiming to substantiate it. It is at once masculine and neuter.

Going beyond the so-called emancipationist feminist thought which, philosophically, did not question the primacy of independence, of the sovereignty of autonomous subjects, claiming politically equal conditions between men and women that ended up hiding either the specificity of the two categories and the singularity/uniqueness of each human being in the name of an abstract freedom, the thinkers of sexual difference developed a philosophical and political language that was no longer that of equality, of collectivity/ community, but precisely that of difference and of particularity.

By accepting the risk that this approach could strengthen the logic and practice of exclusion, these philosophers began to claim their own specificity. What was at stake was no longer to take part in a pre-established politics, but to change the very idea of politics. It was no longer a question of assimilating women to a society grounded on pre-established roles, but to identify spaces of resistance, figures capable of escaping easy classifications. It was no longer enough to adapt to a predefined and apparently neutral *logos*, but it was essential to be able to express oneself, inventing new words if necessary.

Irigaray

In 1974, Luce Irigaray published her masterpiece *Speculum: La fonction de la femme dans le discours philosophique* (later re-titled as *Speculum: De l'autre femme*) in Paris.[344] This text marked the break with her mentor, the French psychoanalyst Jacques

[344]The English version is published as Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y. 1985.

Lacan, and cost her suspension from university positions. In the first part of the book, Irigaray engaged in a tight discussion of Freudian psychoanalysis. The second and third parts propose a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, culminating in a detailed analysis of the myth of the cave included in Plato's *Republic*.

With an esoteric tone, Irigaray highlights the (specular) game that, in the Western tradition, supports every oppositional/binary scheme. Referring specifically to the masculine (positive pole/subject)-feminine (negative/object) binary, the philosopher draws attention to the fact that the positive (masculine) pole is to be located at the centre and not, as one might think, alongside the respective negative (feminine) pole. This way, it is possible to retrace what she calls a "logic of the same" even where apparently this does not appear. The negative, in fact, whether it is placed to the side or whether it is below, above, beyond, front, behind, but also before or after, inside/within, it is still functional to the reaffirmation of the positive, of presence, of the One, of the Same, of life, of the word, of being, etc. There is only one source. In this sense, Irigaray employs the image of the sun, or rather of the solar system and she speaks of the "photo-logical economy" "heliotropism," "heliogamy," "economy of light," "economy of relationships between white and black."[345]

Irigaray uses a fascinating language that suggests a connection between the motions/movements of the universe and those of the same (of the One, of life, of being), so that both seem to be inscribed in, follow and re-produce a natural cyclic movement. The main purpose is that of disentangling the feminine -but also the maternal and the idea of beginning - from a male gaze and discourse that infinitely repeats and remains imprisoned in itself:

> But what if the "object" started to speak? Which also means beginning to "see," etc. What disaggregation of the subject should entail? Not only on the level of the split

[345] See SP, parts II and III, pp.133-353.

> between him and his other, his variously specified alter ego, or between him and the Other, who is always to some extent *his* Other, even if he does not recognize himself in it, even if he is so overwhelmed by it as to bar himself out of it and into it so as to retain at the very least the power to promote his own forms. Others who will always already have been in service of the same, of the presuppositions of the same logos, without changing or prejudicing its character as discourse.[346]

However, the philosopher warns that it would be a false illusion trying to challenge the (male) logic of the same by shattering, fragmenting, dissolving, destroying what should be at the centre, namely the masculine/neutral subject of western metaphysics. The reference to *specularity* is fundamental in this respect. The author speaks of "speculative economics," "economics of optical illusion," "economics of the imitator," "speculogamy," "speculative matrix," "art of geometry," "mimic game." The beginning is deleted.[347] There is nothing left in the centre, there is no one. It is no longer possible to refer to an alleged foundation or to a unity. Only pieces remain, segments which, in turn, are further decomposable and multipliable, infinitely. One resolves and dissolves into the other. Copies of an original that has always already withdrawn:

> Where will the other spring up again?... In the *duplicity* of his speculation?...resemblance proliferates all the more in a swarm of analogues. The "subject" henceforth will be multiple, plural, sometimes di-formed, but it will postulate itself as the cause of all the mirages that can be enumerated endlessly and therefore put back together again as in one. A fantastic, phantasmatic fragmentation[348]

346 SP, p.135.
[347] See SP, parts II and III, pp.133-353.
[348] SP, p.135.

This is the point where, for Irigaray, we enter a game of mirrors. In fact, although there is no one left at the centre, it would be a mistake to think that this would interrupt the mirror relationship between the Same and his other. The fragments that remain are nothing more than images of him, apparently different from each other in that they are positioned at different points in time and space, but in fact mirrors of the same thing. A disquieting scene opens up. It seems to be in a circus that always presents the same show: "the 'subject' plays at multiplying himself, even deforming himself... He is father, mother, and child(ren). And the relationships between them. He is masculine and feminine and the relationships between them."[349] It becomes increasingly difficult to escape from this glass labyrinth.

At this point, Irigaray helps us to see an analogy between the two movements. Upon closer inspection, both the circular and destructive/deconstructive movements reiterate the same gesture: the removal of the beginning. This need can be traced back to the Twentieth century prejudice towards any metaphysical foundation, an ultimate origin, a stable ground or a first source. In short, to an initial power that would give rise to hierarchies and exclusions –as if this were the only way philosophy can understand the "beginning." In this sense, two apparently contradictory phenomena are symptomatic. On the one hand, the importance that much of contemporary philosophical discourse gives to the question of death in its various forms and, on the other, the persistence of a terminology that refers to the power of the maternal.

Irigaray elaborates on these points by insisting on the (philosophical) need to appropriate the "(re)productive power of the mother," who, losing her human traits, becomes "mine," "receptacle," "cave," "belly," "residue," "sack," "stone," "the still nothing where everyone comes to look for other food to nourish the self-similarity," "hole," "void," "fluid," "flow," "waste," "membrane rigid...petrified...frozen by the

[349] Ibid., p.136.

'how' or the 'as if' of figures evoked, without a beginning," "interval," "silence," "darkness of night," "darkness," "anarchy of matter," "abyss," "shadow," "blind spot," "death."[350] It may also be interesting to note the reference to woman as "guardian of the blood," guarantor of a "male genealogy," of a "being that does not know genesis," of a "beginning-less origin," which refer to an "economy of property," an "economy of enjoyment," a "re-production (of oneself) without matter or mother."[351]

With this gesture, for Irigaray, a peculiar trait of femininity is philosophically removed, one that does not define women once and for all but that for her highlights a specific female power: the power to give life.

Kristeva

In Kristeva's thought, the maternal power to generate turns out to be a fundamental (pro)creative capacity. The purely biological reproduction reveals for her symbolic or, better, semiotic creativity.

Kristeva reinterprets Jacques Lacan's idea that every significant and culturally accepted language is formed starting from a detachment from the maternal body. She identifies linguistic experiences that, exceeding the laws of conventional language, recover and bring into light the primary and, in Kristeva's account, symbiotic relationship with the birthing mother. In other words, Kristeva detects into some manifestations of language, particularly in the poetic word, a manifestation of the maternal (pro)creative power, which decentres, subverts and disrupts the linearity of conventional language.

[350] See SP, parts II and III, pp.133-353.
[351] Ibid.

To a Lacanian symbolic (paternal) order, which is based on a removal of the original bond with the mother, Kristeva opposes a semiotic (maternal) order, capable of expressing that semantic multiplicity that is lost in the univocity of ordinary language.

An early thematisation of the maternal appears in her doctoral dissertation titled *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974).[352]At the centre of Kristeva's theory we find the concept of "semiotic *chóra*." *Chóra* is a Greek term that we find in Plato's *Timaeus* to indicate the disorder that precedes divine/demiurgic creation. Among the multiple meanings of this word, Kristeva recovers that of "receptacle," using it to indicate that phase in which, in early childhood, the child's body is closely connected to that of the mother. In the essay "Women's Time, " Kristeva defines *chóra* as "matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics."[353] Heterogeneous and pre-linguistic, this space calls into question the linear time of history, identities, and language. According to Kristeva, the semiotic *chóra* points to the articulation of primary processes and drives. It is conceived as a "maternal space" that confounds the boundaries of self and other.

The vital relation that binds the mother to the child brings to light a way of communicating that escapes linguistic conventions, recovering gestures –non-verbal expressions of thought–that perish in the passage from the immediacy of the bodily relationship with the mother, to the mediation that require interactions between adults. The common point of view that is thus lost may be recovered only in moments of exceptional physical and emotional intensity, such as those of childbirth, of dream, of artistic experience or poetic production. For the Bulgarian-French philosopher, such experiences precede, or rather, exceed the dominant (masculine) symbolic order, with respect to which she identifies a radical discontinuity that she calls "thetic break." If the

352 RPL.
353 WT, p. 191.

symbolic is seen as the sphere of truth, of (ordinary) significance, in the semiotic there is neither truth nor falsehood, but only pure experiencing, authentic sound, rhythmic movement. This way, therefore, although she does not question the hegemony of the symbolic (patriarchal) order, Kristeva detects spaces and moments in which the maternal, the beginning of life that has always been removed, emerges in the *logos* in the form of chaos, of disorder, of heterogeneity that interrupts the monotony of daily speaking.

The philosopher Luisa Muraro too focuses on the unique and unrepeatable relationship that mother and child entertain starting from intrauterine life: a space made up by tactile interactions, rhythms, synchronized movements, shared sensations and emotions that the creative mother-child couple constitute in a slow and silent temporal dimension. One within the other, yet distinct from each other to the point that to mark this unique way of being in relationship there is a cord (source of oxygen and nourishment), which at the same time reveals the distinction.

According to Muraro, this relationship "leaves in us not a memory, but an indelible trace" which is capable of giving us back "the authentic meaning of being."[354] In the "acoustic world" of intrauterine life, Muraro identifies the place where the word is born as a community, as a dialogue or being-together of two human beings who share an experience of harmony that does not leave room for fiction.

Pushing Kristeva's position further, Muraro argues that the symbolic order is established not in discontinuity with respect to the primary relationship with the mother, a discontinuity marked by a (thetic) break, but rather starting right from it. In this sense, Muraro questions the very assumption that language is formed thanks to a progressive

[354] Luisa Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 2006, pp. 25-26, my translation. This book has been translated into English as Luisa Muraro, Francesca Novello and Alison Stone, *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*, SUNY Press, 2017.

departure from the matrix of life, which would allow the child to move from a sphere of in-distinction or a state of fusion to a speaking based on conventionally established linguistic norms. In other words, for Muraro there is no break between the symbolic and the semiotic, but the semiotic we could say, nourishes, re-fills, gives meaning to the empty truths of the symbolic order, putting the relationship between being and language, body and word back into motion.

If, for Kristeva, the semiotic receptacle is found outside of an historical dimension, in a pre-verbal and, ultimately, pre-originary phase that can be recovered only in rare ecstatic experiences, for Muraro it is a place where, from time to time, language is regenerated. Criticizing what she calls the "[postmodern] regime of mediation," according to which "it is claimed that what we are talking about would no longer be the world of experience but a world of words... of already made mediations."[355]Muraro therefore identifies an area, accessible from time to time, in which language is immersed again in the "creative experience of the origins," recovering that profound meaning that, in detachment from the mother, human beings have lost.

Kristeva's account of the maternal as pre-symbolic and drive-ridden led feminist interpreters such as Judith Butler to critique her position for essentialising/reifying motherhood (and women) by placing them in a natural and a-historical regime that prevents any philosophical discussion.[356]The platonic concept of semiotic *chóra* itself that Kristeva uses to speak of maternity seems to re-propose a passive, merely material idea of the maternal. In other words, by apparently distinguishing between a pre-symbolic, natural maternal receptacle and a symbolic-logic, active paternal language and creative force, Kristeva seems to re-propose an idea of motherhood/women as

[355] Ibid., p. 79 and 41.
[356] I will also address Butler's critique of Kristeva in the last section of this chapter.

bearers of a matter, of the space and material that needs a demiurgic/ male power in order to be able to actually give life to someone new.

In this respect, Söderbäck's interpretation of Kristeva's semiotic-maternal/symbolic-paternal distinctions is compelling. In her *Revolutionary Time,* Söderbäck draws attention to the peculiar temporality that relates these two spheres, that are not simply separated from each other but are interdependent and intertwined.[357] By challenging a metaphysical reading of this binary according to which the maternal-symbolic would correspond to an unspeakable, natural outside that is prior to and opposed to culture and the symbolic order, the author emphasises the simultaneity and interdependence of the two registers. In this sense, "to 'return' to the maternal or the semiotic does not simply mean to travel 'backwards' in time," or rather perceiving a pre-original, immemorial drive. The semiotic is always already there.

Following this interpretation, Söderbäck underlines that, on closer inspection, both Plato and Kristeva do not conceive of *chóra* as mere inert matter that awaits demiurgic intervention. Rather, *chóra* is a space and material that is active, rhythmic and animated, in constant motion. It is the rhythmic movement of this matter that gives time and variation to the demiurgic creation. Otherwise, "the demiurge alone would create nothing but copies," nothing or no one new.[358]

4.2 Adriana Cavarero: Including the "Maternal Figure" in the Discourse around Birth

In *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, Cavarero discusses Kristeva's position in relation to that of Hélène Cixous. She underlines how Kristeva's notion of semiotic *chóra* points to "the preverbal and unconscious sphere, not yet inhabited by the law of the sign, where rhythmic and vocalic drives reign." Cavarero

[357] Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time*, pp. 201-232.
[358] Ibid., p.207.

also stresses that "this semiotic *chora* has a profound bodily root and is linked to the indistinct totality of mother and child" as opposed to "the paternal order of the separation between the self and the other, between mother and child, and between signifier and signified" that is the symbolic system of language.[359]

Cavarero too does not conceive the relation between Kristeva's semiotic-maternal and symbolic-paternal as simply oppositional or chronological. She also grasps the importance Kristeva gives to the *vocalic element* in the early stages of the relation between mother and child. However, the problem she detects in Kristeva's account of the maternal is precisely her insistence on the symbiosis between mother and child that, yes, questions the idea of an autonomous, self-formed subject, but at the same time erases what for her is immediately announced in vocalic expression: the *uniqueness* of each human being. Before communicating "merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear," the human voice for Cavarero communicates itself, its uniqueness. Without this communication, the scene of infancy and the relation of the infant to the mother is reduced to a mere semiosis of needs.[360]

Furthermore, by conceiving the relation between mother and child as primarily symbiotic, Kristeva seems to regard (psychic) "matricide" as a necessary element of subject formation, of the individualisation process.[361]On the contrary, for Cavarero the relationship between the mother and the child does not need to be broken through

[359]FOV, p. 133.

360 Ibid., p. 176.

[361]I believe that Cavarero's aversion towards psychoanalytic theory as lacking political relevance and conceiving the human self as a mix of unconscious drives should be separated from the relevance that psychoanalysis as a practice can have in her work. In fact, in *Relating Narratives*, Cavarero refers to the psychoanalytic setting to speak of the human practice of reciprocal storytelling. Furthermore, Cavarero seems to only consider psychoanalytic or, more generally, psychological theories that are based on a presumed scientific paradigm that considers the self as natural or naturalistic and constituted by interior drives. As Butler underlines, most of psychoanalytic theories today, the feminist theories in particular as elaborated for example by Jessica Benjamin, Luce Irigaray and Bracha Ettinger, reject the naturalness of drives and of the self, as well as the scientific status of psychoanalysis by starting precisely from the relationality of the self.
On this topic see the dialogue between Butler and Cavarero "Condizione umana contro 'natura' " in *Differenza e relazione: L'ontologia dell'umano nel pensiero di Adriana Cavarero e Judith Butler*, edited by Olivia Guaraldo and Lorenzo Bernini, Ombre Corte, Verona, 2009, pp. 122-134.

psychic matricide in order for the infant to enter into the realm of the symbolic, the social, and the linguistic, a position that recalls Muraro's theory of a "symbolic order of the mother" mentioned before.

Building on Arendt's concept of human plurality as a "paradoxical plurality of unique beings," Cavarero stresses that "[each] relation carries with it the act of distinguishing oneself, constituting the uniqueness of each one through this distinction."[362] In this case, the uniqueness of each human being is manifested through the uniqueness of the voice as distinguished from the devocalised philosophical *logos*:

> In the uniqueness that makes itself heard as voice, there is an *embodied existent*, or rather, a 'being-there' [esserci] in its radical finitude, here and now. The sphere of the vocal implies the ontological plane and anchors it to the existence of singular beings who invoke one another contextually"[363]

By insisting on the materiality of the human voice, of the word addressed to someone who is present and able to respond, Cavarero understands the Arendtian issue of plurality from the viewpoint of an *embodied*, which for her always means *sexed* (*sessuata*), uniqueness. This uniqueness is primarily entrusted to the relational dimension between an "*I*" and a "*you*" that simultaneously form and recognize each other.[364] This way, the Arendtian in-between that, at the same time, binds and separates those who interact is preserved.

362 FOV, p.171.
363 Ibid., p.173, *emphasis mine.*
[364]As Olivia Guaraldo points out, "at least until the decisive event of 9/11, Cavarero makes use of the Arendtian frame by insisting on the theme of plurality from the side of *uniqueness in relation*. There is, in other words, a certain hesitation in dealing with the theme of plurality from the side of the collective dimension." Olivia Guaraldo, "Inclining toward Democracy: From Plato to Arendt" In *Political Bodies: Writings on Adriana Cavarero's Political Thought* edited by Paula Landerreche Cardillo and Rachel Silverbloom, 19-36. SUNY Press, 2024, p. 27.Guaraldo also underlines that Cavarero's book *Surging Democracy* restores the previously neglected collective dimension, the plurality from the side of "the many" and not primarily of the "I"- "You" relationship. Adriana Cavarero, *Surging Democracy: Notes on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021.

Rather than speaking of a general or absolute "other", Cavarero sets at the centre of her reflections the "you" who is invoked and addressed in the Arendtian question "who are you." For Cavarero, the response to this question starts not from the philosophical inquire " *where* did you come from", but from the interrogative "who gave you life", *from whom* you came from. Since the beginning of life there is always a unique human being who generated and interacted with us. Amending Arendt's account of birth as a coming from nothing, Cavarero highlights that we are all born from another (female) human being.[365]

In *Relating Narratives*, Cavarero emphasizes that "besides being she from whom the existent comes, the mother is also the other to whom the existent first appears."[366] Every human being who comes into the world is already emplaced in the relational web which then extends to human plurality. For Cavarero, the primary relationship with the mother conferes an expressive, relational, and contextual status to our identity.[367] Far from being always "identical" to itself, this identity reveals and reconfigures itself as something unique within a relational context. As Cavarero puts it

> From a relational and expositive identity, which is immersed in the flux of existence and which is unpredictable by definition, the life-story of a self whose identity gives itself as a simple unity, as the coherent development of an immutable substance, certainly cannot result. This unity is rather *the temporal succession of an unrepeatable existence*, which, continuing to appear, made a story for herself – or, rather, the temporal configuration of an ipse[368]

[365]IP, p. 6.
[366]RN, p.21. The Italian title *Tu che mi guardi tu che mi racconti* explicitly refers to a "you" who "sees" and "narrates" me.
[367] Although Cavarero narrowly focuses on what she conceives an exclusive relation between mother and child at the expenses of other relations that accompany the beginning of each of our lives for example with fathers, other care givers and siblings, I believe that her insistence on the building of uniqueness in relation to others at the early stages of life remains of crucial importance.
368 Ibid., p.72, *emphasis mine*.

> Our identity always presupposes the presence of someone who is able to confirm our uniqueness as we come into the world. Specifically, for Cavarero the mother has a privileged gaze with respect to the "who" of the newcomer. In its inaugural fragility, this "who" escapes any social identification ("what"). At the moment of the birth, the bond that has remained somewhat secret during gestation is revealed. In the intimate exteriority of the first glance between mother and child, the life story of each of us begins. In the future, the mother will be able to narrate this beginning.

The particular way in which Cavarero interprets the Arendtian category of natality therefore allows us to reflect on the "anomalous notion of a self that is expressive and relational, and whose reality is symptomatically external in so far as it is entrusted to the gaze, or the tale, of another."[369] The focus shifts from understanding a "thing" to a relationship, from the already formed individuality of the newborn "I" to the mother-child creative couple. The beginning of life is mediated by someone who contains and is immediately able to attest our presence.[370]

Conceived as a dynamic relationship between past and present, Cavarero configures the process of individualisation as intrinsically narrative, entrusted to the practice of reciprocal storytelling. In *Relating Narratives* the model of this narrative practice informs specifically the intimate relations of friendship and love. In this work, Cavarero reports the story of two friends, Emilia and Amalia, who, in the 70s, attended "La scuola delle 150 ore" in Milan.[371] Emilia often narrated her story, the story of her life, to her friend Amelia who eventually decided to write it down for her. This initiative

[369] Ibid., p.41.

[370] As I will discuss in the next chapter, in *Inclinations* Cavarero provides a reassessment of the dual "I"- "You" relationship in terms of asymmetry.

[371] This story is reported by Amalia in the book *Non credere di avere diritti* [*Don't Think You Have Any Rights*] after the premature death of her friend Emilia. This text has been published in English under the title *Sexual Difference: the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990.
"The 150-hour schools," were schools founded by the Italian Left in the 1970s, whose purpose was to provide supplementary education in the arts and sciences for workers or housewives who lacked higher education - workers were allowed to take 150 hours, paid, out of their work year in order to attend these schools.

deeply moved Emilia who always conserved the paper where the friend had wrote her story for her in her handbag.

As happened with many women of that time, Cavarero underlines, the setting of the reciprocal narration between Emilia and Amalia was the domestic, private space of intimate relations. As Cavarero remarks

> the scene where uniqueness constitutes itself 'in relation.' ... does not yet have the luminous characteristics of the public scene, in so far as it arises from the obscurity of the private sphere; but it is first of all in the private sphere that the relations of the feminine experience become a friendship.[372]

Although not yet a proper political and plural scene, the narrative exchange between Emilia and Amalia already opens up a relational space where they can appear to each other in their uniqueness. In this respect, Cavarero refers to the phenomenon of "consciousness-raising groups," which characterized Italian feminism in the 1970s. For Cavarero, in the practice of "consciousness raising," self-narration as well as the practice of "starting from oneself"[partire da sè] found a political scene - that is, in the Arendtian sense, a shared and interactive one.[373]

Love too stages for Cavarero a scene of reciprocal exhibition, rather than fusing/blending the lovers into unity:

> In love, the expositive and relational character of uniqueness plays out one of its most obvious scenes. On the stage of love, the questions 'who am I?' and 'who are you?' form the beat of body language and the language of storytelling, which maintain a secret rhythm... love is the clearest proof that the uniqueness of the who always has a face, a voice, a gaze, a body, and a sex... . In love, the who is clearly an unrepeatable, embodied, uniqueness: this and not another, through the indissolubility of flesh and

[372] Ibid., p.58.
[373] Ibid., p.59.

> spirit...'You are unique,' 'you are the only one' ['sei unico,' 'sei unica'] say lovers to one another. And in this way they simply say what is obvious about the existent. The relationship of lovers is indeed a privileged relationship where two uniquenesses appear to each other together, drawing on a corporal and verbal language of meaningful transparency[374]

For Cavarero, maternal love speaks the same language. In her account, the lovers remember the twofold movement of the relation with the mother, at once passive and active. In the act of loving each other they re-peat the ritual of the beginning of life in which the Arendtian impulse to self-exposure first appears.

It is interesting to note that, for Cavarero too as it happened with Arendt, the private sphere can present a peculiar kind of relationality that is not merely opposed to the plurality of the public space but is rather continuous to it. It is in these intimate relations that the web/tissue of politics starts to be woven and can be done and undone.

We might say that, in Cavarero too it is possible to detect two notions of the private: one that is opposed to the luminous public space and one that stages intimate relations (between mother or other caring figures and child, friends and lovers) where the plurality that characterises the public starts to be build. If we recall the passages from Arendt's *Denktagebuch* I mentioned in the previous chapter, this second notion of the private is to some extent also connected to the activity of thinking intended as "understanding." In this case, understanding is conceived as an activity that makes human beings feel at home in the world. It is what gives depth and rootedness to human life. When developing her concept of narration, Cavarero introduces the notion of "narratable self" that is described as "something familiar," corresponding to the spontaneous narrating structure of memory. Cavarero explicitly refers to the Greek

374 Ibid., pp.109-111.

word *oiketes* that suggest that "the self makes her home" in a circular memory.[375]For Cavarero memory is circular in that it performs a self-narration that remains enclosed in a fictitious I-you relation. As Cavarero puts is

> Like an impossible game of mirrors, the self is indeed here both the actor and the spectator, the narrator and the listener, in a single person. The self is the protagonist of a game that celebrates the self as other, precisely because the self here presupposes the absence of another who truly is an other[376]

In this case, Cavarero argues, the in-between that arises in the I- You relation with another who truly is an other is annihilated. Indeed, following Arendt, Cavarero is suspicious of the "metaphorical and disembodied voice of the soul or consciousness", the silent work of thought that has no voice, neither invokes nor speaks, but only cogitates. Here, the *dia-legein* goes on in solitude and, in Cavarero's account, in a timeless or eternal present dimension.[377]

Cavarero's position has the merit of warning against the dematerialization that occurs in the activity of thinking, a risk that occurs also when intimate relations become so symbiotic that they annul the essential difference and distance between the two. As Irigaray has shown, in this case, the further threat is that of completely annihilating the "the other" as truly an other by re-proposing a logic of the same.

However, I argue that Arendt's last writings dedicated to the analysis of the Socratic faculty of thought and the Kantian faculty of judgment help us elaborate a different concept of thinking that does not destroy the in-between, but rather prepares, opens up the necessary space to welcome others' perspectives.

Arendt's first input to reflect on the activities of thinking, willing and judging in her last work *The Life of the Mind* was her attending the Eichmann trial in

[375]Ibid., p.34.
[376] Ibid., p.40.
377 See FOV, pp.173-174.

Jerusalem.[378] In Eichmann's responses to the court, Arendt had seen a profound lack of capacity of thinking that she calls *thoughtlessness* (*Gedankenlosigkeit*). In relation to this quasi inhuman lack of thinking that originated monstrous, evil deeds, Arendt asks

> Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to pass or attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually "condition" them against it?[379]

How could the activity of thinking condition human beings against evil-doing if it remained enclosed in itself and prevents recognition of others? In other words, how could this silent and inward activity have effect and (positively) impact what Arendt would call the world of appearance? Although Arendt does not make it explicit, I argue that her position can help us disclose a way of thinking (and thus philosophising) that does not annul differences in order to perform its activity.

On the contrary, Arendt seems to suggest that the condition of possibility of evil-doing is given by the silence of the dualism inherent in thinking, when in the contradictory (in the literal sense of *contra-dicere*, to speak back) dimensions of existence a single, absolute and all-encompassing point of view imposes itself, negating all the others.

By contrast, the inner dialogue in which the mind splits itself and allows itself to be inhabited by the difference represents the place in which the constitutive plurality of human existence enters the intimate region of the ego, breaking its monologue and

[378] See the introduction to LM, pp. 3-16.
[379] Ibid., p. 5.

opening it to the needs of being- together. This is how human beings - no longer individui, but plural in themselves - learn to live ethically and think politically.[380]

If plurality can already be retraced in the duality of thinking, in the activity of judgment it is possible to observe a "plural phono-sphere," an internal "pluriphony" that prepares, informs and is connected to the plurality that characterises the public space.[381] In other words, not only in the public sphere of action and in the reciprocal storytelling that is performed in intimate relations, but also in thought and judgment the connective tissue of politics starts to be build. Cavarero's sharp separation between thinking and action, philosophy and narration, *logos* and voice that has the primary aim to recast the centrality of (sexed) unique embodiment risks re-proposing a metaphysical distinction between these activities and spheres, with the consequence of obscuring their interplay, their mutual impact, as well as the relevance of relationality and difference for the life of the mind.

4.3 Judith Butler: Challenging the Relation between Maternity and Femininity

Despite the heterogeneity of positions, the philosophers of sexual difference mentioned above reflect on maternity starting from the specific link that, for them, connects the maternal to femininity.

While, for these philosophers, the feminine is not exhausted in the maternal experience, they nevertheless claim the capacity to bring someone into life, the "maternal power to generate," as a specific female power which, as such, constitutes an

[380]See Maria Teresa Pacilè "Lo *spettatore plurifonico*: il nuovo soggetto morale nella teoria del giudizio di Hannah Arendt", in *Società Italiana di Filosofia Morale* Vol 11 on *Etiche applicate e nuovi soggetti morali*, edited by Mariafilomena Anzalone e Oreste Tolone, Orthotes Editrice, Naples-Salerno, 2024, pp. 393-398. Reflections on the ethical and political importance of the activities of thinking and judging in Arendt can be found in Seyla Benhabib, "Judgement and the Moral Foundation of Politics in Arendt's Thought," «Political Theory» 1 ,1988.

[381]Cavarero speaks of "political phonospheres" and of "pluriphony" in her *Surging Democracy.* However, she refers these terms to the voices of people gathering together in political spaces rather than the silent dialogue of the mind.

element of significant distinction compared to the masculine.[382] As Cavarero puts it, referring to the myth of Demeter in *In Spite of Plato*:

> Maternal power is the full power both to generate and not to generate: she does not have to generate, but she has generated already and she can generate again...the myth of Demeter reveals a sovereign figure of female subjectivity who decides, in the concrete singularity of every woman, whether or not to generate.[383]

It is important to remark that, for the thinkers of sexual difference –in this case exemplified by Cavarero's position– the connection between maternity and femininity cannot be traced back to a presumed "natural" function based on an uncritical differentiation of sexes as male and female. If it is true that Cavarero sees the fact of "being sexed" (*sessuate/i*) as a constitutive *given* of the human condition and narrowly reduces it to the exclusive alternative male-female, however, this differentiation is not static and self-evident. Rather, it needs to be recognized by someone else from the very beginning of each human being's life, a recognition that, in Cavarero's account, is paradigmatically represented by the mother's first glance at the child. Furthermore, each human being should be able to claim, represent and actively live his or her embodied and thus sexed subjectivity. As the translators of *In Spite of Plato* point out,

> [*s*]*essuazione* [sexedness] is a central category of Italian feminist discourse that historically has a similar function to the English category of gender. However, *sessuazione* encompasses the biological concept of sex within the larger category of

[382] See IP, p.60. In the same text Cavarero explicitly states that " [m]en are excluded from the exclusively female experience of generating life." Ibid., p.68.
[383] Ibid., p. 64. Cavarero seems to overlook the fact that actually not every woman can decide to generate.

> cultural gender, rather than functioning as its binary opposite. Hence its strong deconstructive potential within Anglophone discourse.[384]

In other words, the Italian term *sessuazione* disrupts the Anglophone sex/gender binary by questioning the supposed naturalness of the former and the very idea that what is "naturally" given is beyond any philosophical enquiry. In this respect, Cavarero draws a compelling philosophical connection between the terms "nature," "natural" and "natal" based on the etymology of the Greek word *physis*, from *phyein*, "to be born," which connotes the act of generating as a way of manifesting oneself, of becoming present. Similarly, the Latin *natura* derives from the verb *nasci* which means to be generated, to be born, to grow. For Cavarero, this etymological connection suggests a dynamic concept of nature intended as "the world's act of constituting itself, which is preserved for humans by a sovereign female subjectivity." [385] In this sense, the deconstructive potential of the thought of sexual difference lies in claiming human beings' *sexedness* (*sessuazione*) to remark a positive female specificity as distinct from the masculine but not framed and controlled by a patriarchal discourse. If, in the Western patriarchal discourse, the "power of maternity" is depreciated to mere reproductive function and the mother to a container of the unborn child, the critical position of the thinkers of sexual difference is capable of generating imaginaries of a new sexed subjectivity –embodied (*incarnata*) in a female body–that "claims the choice of regeneration as its own" and inscribes, rethinks the gestures of birthing, rearing and caring for the children in a feminine symbolic order that can be passed down and reconfigured through specific female genealogies.[386]

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[384]Ibid., p. XX. On the limits of the Anglophone gender – sex distinction as well as the English translation of French terms such as *sexe* or *la difference sexuelle* for a critical reflection on the concept of "sex" see Stella Sandford, "Sex: a transdisciplinary concept" in From structure to rhizome: transdisciplinarity in French thought (1).*Radical philosophy*(165), pp. 23-30. ISSN (print) 0300-211X, 2011.
[385] IP, p.67.
[386] Ibid., 66-67.

It is the "givenness" of sex duality that Judith Butler contests. With the publication of her seminal book *Gender Trouble* in 1990, in the wake of Michel Foucault, Butler begins a radical critique of sexual binarism. In this text, Butler argues that there is neither a "true" gender identity nor a form of natural "sexedness," but only discursive horizons that produce the truth about sexes and their differences. For Butler, these horizons are not neutral. Rather, taking the sexual binary for granted and considering heterosexuality as a paradigm of normality, these discursive horizons strengthen the mechanisms of exclusion and un-speakability that regulate the coexistence of human beings in society, forcing the complexity and variety of the human to fit into a pre-established grid.[387] In other words, the presumption of sex duality (the exclusive division between male and female) is for Butler not a given that needs to be rethought or claimed. Rather, this duality itself has a normative and prescriptive function in relation to human beings.[388]

In this sense, Butler contends that the problem of feminism is not so much, or at least not primarily, the patriarchal regime that the philosophers of sexual difference challenge by claiming a female specificity, but the heteronormative regime that, imposing a supposedly natural evidence –the distinction between male and female–sets the boundary between what is or is not (to be) considered "normal." In this way, this regime not only controls but also produces those subjects (masculine or feminine) that it purports only to name. In short, in Butler's view, gender produces sex, culture gives meaning to what one believes to be "natural."

Given that the heteronormative regime is radically discursive and historically constructed, for Butler it is possible, from time to time, to implement strategies of subversion, parodying, playing those roles (first and foremost sexual roles) which,

[387] See Olivia Guaraldo, " Figure di una relazione. Sul pensiero di Judith Butler e Adriana Cavarero," in *Differenza e relazione*, p.104.

[388]In this respect, Sandford mentions the emblematic case of intersexed infants who are forced to conform to one or the other of the terms, often without success. Stella Sandford, "Sex: a transdisciplinary concept.," p. 29.

apparently natural and given once and for all, are in fact established through the repetition of specific gestures. In this respect, Butler speaks of a "performative identity," or of a constructed, mobile identity that can unmask the fixedness of socially imposed roles. Subjugation and the concomitant possibility of destabilization do not only occur on a superficial level, but are also played out in the psychic dimension, or in that presumed interiority which, in turn, reveals itself to be discursively constructed and culturally oriented.

By problematizing the very distinction between "male" and "female," Butler questions the connection between maternity and femininity that the philosophers of sexual difference had taken as a starting point for their reflections. For Butler, the greatest danger is not only taking for granted the connection that links the topic of maternity to the category of femininity (socially constructed), but also and most importantly that of placing the maternal experience in an a-historical, pre-discursive horizon. Butler's target in *Gender Trouble* is, first and foremost, Kristeva, who

> describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. She thereby safeguards the notion of culture as a paternal structure and delimits maternity as an essentially precultural reality.[389]

By safeguarding the law of a biologically necessitated maternity as a subversive operation that pre-exists the paternal law itself, according to Butler, Kristeva reinforces the systematic production of its invisibility and, consequently, the illusion of its inevitability, thus excluding subversion as practically and culturally viable.[390] In particular, Butler criticizes the idea that the maternal body would be recognized as the locus of "pre-individual jouissance," or that condition of in-distinction, impossible to

[389] GT, p.103.
[390] See ibid., p.118.

bring back to memory, in which the child's body and mind are inextricably intertwined with those of the mother. By postulating an origin that cannot be discursively known, Kristeva produces for Butler a reification of motherhood and more particularly of the maternal body, which, escaping the possibility of a linguistic elaboration, ultimately submits itself to the dictates of the patriarchal and heteronormative symbolic order. Furthermore, Butler argues that

> Because Kristeva restricts herself to an exclusively prohibitive conception of the paternal law, she is unable to account for the ways in which the paternal law generates certain desires in the form of natural drives. The female body that she seeks to express is itself a construct produced by the very law it is supposed to undermine.[391]

Borrowing Foucault's idea that repression can *produce* the object that it should simply deny, Butler underlines how Kristeva's argument aims to only highlight the removal/interdiction of the feminine/maternal from the mainstream (patriarchal) symbolic order, without taking into account the productive potential of this removal. In this way, Kristeva's position ends up contributing to the production of that category and the generation of those drives that, in her account, should exceed the symbolic order. In other words, for Butler, not only the maternal experience, but also the very desire for maternity, which, as such, should be placed in an unconscious, drive-ridden dimension, can actually be induced by the reproductive needs of the dominant heterosexual paradigm.

Ultimately, therefore, Butler challenges what we may call a mystical a concept of maternity, a vision that locates maternity outside of every historical, discursive, contingent dimension, thus reducing it to an unquestionable "natural" horizon.

[391] Ibid.

As mentioned before referring to Söderbäck's *Revolutionary Time*, a critique that we may address to Butler's reading of Kristeva's concept of maternity is their acceptance of the metaphysical distinction between "nature" and "culture", where nature is seen as something that temporally and logically precedes or exceeds the dominant symbolic order. In other words, when Butler criticizes Kristeva for relegating maternity to a place outside of culture, they seem to accept the very distinction between a static, a-historical and thus unquestionable nature and a mobile, temporal, linguistically articulated culture.

Similarly, as Stella Sandford points out "in *Gender Trouble*, Butler remained mortgaged to a presumptive natural-realist ontology, according to which sex could not be said to exist, coupled to an epistemological problematic according to which the in-itself of sex could not be known," a position that Butler will revise in subsequent works such as *Bodies That Matter*.[392]

By opening a dialogue between the thinkers of sexual difference, Cavarero in particular, and Butler's gender theory, we might argue that what Cavarero calls the "given" –the giveness of "being sexed" - is always already mediated by the glance and the words of those who witness it. Similarly, as Guaraldo suggests, we may say that Cavarero's "embodied uniqueness" *goes queer*, it is mobile and in continuous reconfiguration, rather than being limited to and having to conform to sex binary.[393] This way, I suggest that we can reconfigure and to some extent disentangle the connection between maternity and femininity by questioning the exclusiveness and the giveness of the connection between the two. Rather than being seen as an exploitation of a specific female capacity, I argue that maternity can become a philosophical and political category able to speak for, to represent and being claimed by each human

[392] Sandford, "Sex: a transdisciplinary concept," p.27 ; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* Routledge, New York, 1993.
[393] See Guaraldo "Figure di una relazione", p.116.

being. Rather than being projected onto a “neutral horizon” that erases singular differences, the category of maternity so constructed would be tied up with and embedded in the human uniqueness, which emerges only in a relational context. From this starting point, in the next chapter, I will open a dialogue between Butler and Cavarero around the questions of vulnerability and relationality.

Chapter 5. An Attempt to Articulate 'Birth' and 'Maternity' as Philosophical Categories

Introduction

Having opened a dialogue between the different positions discussed in the previous chapters, in this chapter I will reflect on the relational aspects of the human condition that, often in a tragic way, also reveals its vulnerability. The themes of relationality and vulnerability are particularly explored by Cavarero and Butler who, after the beginning of the new millennium and the event of 9/11,critically draw on thinkers outside the feminist context –Lévinas, Foucault, Agamben and Arendt amongst others–in order to outline a new idea of responsibility.

To this end, Butler primarily recovers Lévinas's position and looks at the category of mortality and wound. In the wake of Arendt and Cavarero, I will show how this position should be complemented with and critically addressed through reflection on birth and maternity in order to dismiss a metaphysical and disembodied concept of subjectivity as well as a monolithic vision of femininity and to pave the way for an understanding human existence and politics starting from the relationality of the human condition. In particular, I will reframe Cavarero's interpretation of relationality and vulnerability as represented in the "maternal scene" as a possible alternative to Levinas's ethical account of the 'Other' in relation to death, wound, and transcendence. In this way, I will argue that we should consider Cavarero's notion of "maternal inclination" as a paradigm with which to rethink ethics and politics.[394] Via discussion of Cavarero and Lévinas, I will recursively re-address the questions of time and the other in relation to the category of mortality discussed in the first chapter and will outline a

[394] See IN.

possible concept of maternal temporalities that are world-oriented and which unfold through and inform human relations.

5.1 Maternity, Relationality, Vulnerability

In the light of the events of 9/11 and the following escalation of violence, Butler and Cavarero attempt to radically re-address the question of subjectivity.[395] The new millennium opened with a catastrophic event, which exposed America's nerve: the powerful continent that reveals itself to be dismayed and wounded. For many days, the news broadcast images of the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York hit by two airplanes hijacked by Al Q-Aida terrorists.

This event and the following escalation of violence constituted a turning point in Butler and Cavarero's thought. Starting from their respective feminist positions, the two thinkers re-opened the question of a subject no longer simply exposed to otherness, but afflicted by it to the point of reaching total helplessness. The worsening of asymmetries in war contexts, distorted by the lack of head-on collision, stages episodes of terror that Cavarero describes by coining the term "horrorism."[396] In the terrorist/horrorist attack, mostly perpetrated through suicide bombing, what is mostly offended is the *unity* of the body, of the human figure, which reveals the *uniqueness* of a life story brutally interrupted. The original relationship of interdependence in which human beings are born and exist, turns into tyrannical oppression of the other, which leads to disfigurement, the total annihilation of the figure of the other. The mutual exposure that manifests human singularity is abruptly distorted. The Arendtian "who" is thrown into the most macabre in-distinction. As Donatella Di Cesare puts it:

[395] I also address these topics in Anna Argirò "Maternità, relazione, vulnerabilità: Una prospettiva filosofica."In gender/sexuality/italy, 6, 2019, pp. 159-173, https://dx.doi.org/10.15781/r5dr-ra64.
[396] HO.

> the explosion [of bodies] is loaded with symbols. The torn body [*il corpo dilaniato*] is a symbol both of life here, devoid of dignity, and of a fragmented and defeated sovereignty.... The helpless, who reveals all his exposed vulnerability is the innocent who falls anonymous, rejected in a mass of deformed limbs, unrecognizable shreds of flesh. The massacre is this disorganic totality that reproduces, however, the inhuman order of which the victim was a part, that indissoluble whole, of which each one is a small knot, in a compact plot, a finely woven web.[397]

Similarly, by focusing on the acts of torture committed by US personnel in Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo prisons and the public obscuration of the faces of the detainees, Butler points to the effacement of the uniqueness of the victims that prevents recognition of their humanity and raising of moral and political responsiveness. As Butler puts it:

> The question of reconstructing or, indeed, restituting the "humanity" of the victims is made all the more difficult by the fact that faces, when not already shrouded as part of the act of torture, had to be deliberately obscured to protect the privacy of the victims. What we are left with are photos of people who are for the most part faceless and nameless [...] the humans who were tortured do not readily conform to a visual, corporeal, or socially recognizable identity; their occlusion and erasure become the continuing sign of their suffering and of their humanity[398]

On the one hand, by focusing on suicide bombing, Cavarero underlines that the contingent situation of the helpless reveals, in the most tragic way, human beings' condition of vulnerability. [399] On the other hand, Butler draws a distinction between

[397] Donatella Di Cesare, *Terrore e modernità*, Einaudi, Turin, 2017, pp.128-148, my translation.
[398] FW, p.77 and p. 94.
[399] Following Arendt, Cavarero also describes the extreme violent dehumanization which the Nazi concentration camps inflicted on their inmates as an assault on their embodied singularity. See HO.

precariousness as a shared human condition and *precarity* as the "politically induced condition that would deny equal exposure through the radically unequal distribution of wealth and the differential ways of exposing certain populations, racially and nationally conceptualized, to greater violence." [400]

In order to outline an idea of responsibility that starts from the acknowledgment of human vulnerability and precariousness, Butler turns to what we may call Lévinas's "ethical dimension of mourning." In the violent events of the new millennium, Butler sees an offense against life that manifests itself as an offense against death. In *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, Butler uses the term "grievable" to refer to a life worthy of mourning.[401] As Butler puts it

> Over and against an existential concept of finitude that singularizes our relation to death and to life, precariousness underscores our radical substitutability and anonymity in relation both to certain socially facilitated modes of dying and death and to other socially conditioned modes of persisting and flourishing. It is not that we are born and then later become precarious, but rather that *precariousness is coextensive with birth itself* (birth is, by definition, precarious), which means that it matters whether or not this infant being survives, and that its survival is dependent on what we might call a social

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In *Inclinations* Cavarero recalls the etymology of the term "vulnerability" which derives from the Latin *vulnus*, "wound": the traumatic laceration of the skin. On the relation between skin and *vulnus*, however, Cavarero also highlights a secondary etymological conjecture that follows the root *vel* and indicates above all skin that is smooth, hairless and naked. This second etymology is connected to the first. However, it points not only to a potential wound, but also to a caress, a light touch. See IN, p.159.
On the multiple interpretations of the concept of vulnerability within political and feminist debate see Valentina Moro, "Feminist archives: narrating embodied vulnerabilities and practices of care," in Biblioteca della Libertà, LVII, n. 235 (2022), pp.39-71, DOI 10.23827/BDL_2022_18. In particular, Moro draws attention to the crucial distinction between, on the one hand, the account of vulnerability based on the idea of a neoliberal autonomous and independent subject which understands it in terms of 'seeking protection from' and, on the other hand, a feminist tradition that thinks of vulnerability as a site of agency from which to foster collective practices in the name of care. The latter adopts relationality and interdependency as a starting point to understand vulnerability.

[400] FW, p.28.

[401] Over the past three years, the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 has exposed a shared condition of precariousness on a global scale. It is interesting to note that, even in this case, the exposition of human vulnerability has been accompanied by the interdiction of celebrating funerals for the victims as a part of the social distancing measures, thus preventing regard, testimony and grief.

> network of hands. Precisely because a living being may die, it is necessary to care for that being so that it may live. Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear. Thus, *grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters*.[402]

However, Butler stresses that "the debate restricts itself not only to a moral domain, but to an ontology of individualism that fails to recognize that life, understood as precarious life, implies a *social ontology* which calls that form of individualism into question." [403]

The constitutive dependence on an outside that precedes us is therefore no longer only influenced by society's expectations—on the basis of which we must assume a predefined gender, body, sexual role—but it also entails the possibility of the violent offense. The two elements are now intertwined. Each of us is always already exposed to others' injury. Butler thus focuses on aggressive, broken relational forms that open up an ethic based on *vulnus*, on wounding by others. The emphasis is placed above all on the precariousness of the human condition, a condition in which relationality is revealed in the first place as a violent affection, as exposure to others' dominion. The Foucauldian nexus that binds power, society and violence even in the smallest human relations, tragically manifests itself in the offense to the life of others.

If, as we have seen in the previous section, the possibility of escaping the dominion of society was initially entrusted to what we may call the "parodic resistance" of the individual, now Butler sees the possibility of initiating and performing a social

[402] Ibid., p. 14, *my emphasis*.
[403] Ibid., p.19. Similarly Cavarero speaks of a *relational ontology* that can challenge an ontology of individualism. For both thinkers, relational/social ontologies should set at their centre an account of the bodily condition of human life that serves as a point of departure for a rethinking of responsibility. This is because of the "socially ecstatic structure of the body," which "in its surface and its depth... is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable by definition." Ibid., p.31.

and political transformation carried out by a community starting from the intermediate phase of the "I–You" relationship. Starting from the contingency of the encounter with the other, which tragically makes itself felt in the capacity of annihilating the other, Butler argues that an ethical-political community unfolds from time to time. This community subsumes within itself the particularity and exclusiveness of interpersonal, dual relationships by demanding a responsibility no longer anchored to the idea of subjectivity.

5.2 Cavarero and Lévinas

In the theatre of horror that shatters every singularity, the violent face of the human condition comes to light. This is what is tragically revealed to us. If, in light of this awareness, Butler shifts attention to the aggressive aspects of relationality, looking at the category of mortality, Cavarero, on the other hand, reflects on unbalanced power relations by focusing on the "maternal scene."

Indeed, in her *Inclinations*, she reconfigures the dual I–You relationship in terms of asymmetry. In this text, Cavarero proposes the figure of the "inclined subject" – paradigmatically represented by the mother who leans towards the infant–as an ethical posture that is unbalanced, yet essentially relational insofar as it is exposed and extroverted toward an "outside" of the self.[404] In this way, Cavarero sketches a relational ontology based on a "postural ethics" that is spatially imagined as a diagonal, an "oblique plan," as Butler puts it, that displaces the autonomous, erect self of Western individualism from its "vertical pedestal." [405]

For Cavarero, the focus on the scene of birth reveals the intrinsic vulnerability of the human being. Since the very beginning, our first appearance in the world in an

[404] See Olivia Guaraldo, "Inclining toward Democracy: From Plato to Arendt", p.28.
[405] Ibid. ; Judith Butler, 'Leaning Out, Caught in the Fall: Interdependency and Ethics in Cavarero', in Timothy J. Huzar, and Clare Woodford (eds), *Toward a Feminist Ethics of Nonviolence*, New York, NY, 2021; online edn, Fordham Scholarship Online, 23 Sept. 2021.

unequal relation with someone who gives us life, inaugurates this shared condition of vulnerability. In this case, however, the "relational space of reciprocal appearance" is not characterized by equality and symmetry.[406]"In spite of Arendt," Cavarero writes, "relational ontology—in its radical version, devoid of any residue of individualist ontology—does not call for symmetry, but rather for a continuous interweaving of multiple and singular dependencies."[407] If, on the one hand, Arendt's concept of natality emphasized adult human beings' reciprocal appearance in the plural context of politics, Cavarero's concept of birth, on the other, highlights the intimate and asymmetric relationship between mother and child, through which the child is exposed to the mother's gaze, care and wound.

Cavarero comments on Leonardo Da Vinci's painting "The Virgin and Child with St. Anne" , which shows that *there is a reciprocity of glances* between Mary and Jesus, between the mother and the child.[408] However, the two are not on the same plane: Mary is inclined, leaned towards Jesus, who looks up at her. The relationship between them is unbalanced, asymmetrical. As Cavarero remarks, "to lean over the infant is to lean over an other who is absolutely exposed to being wounded but who cannot wound in return. This relation is structurally ...asymmetrical."[409]

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[406] IN, p.109 .
[407] Ibid., pp.20-21.
[408] Drawing on a rich variety of women's literary texts, diaries, letters and testimonies, works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and the more recent *Maternal Encounters* by Lisa Baraitser report a panoply of female voices whose very diversity challenges monolithic representations of maternal desire and experience. This is absent in Cavarero's work, who reflects on literary, philosophical and religious (female and maternal) figures in order to rethink them outside of a patriarchal symbolic order. Furthermore, as Cavarero herself remarks, the "maternal scene" she often mentions is for her only a *hermeneutical* figure to elaborate philosophical and political concepts. As thinkers such as Söderbäck have pointed out, this theoretical choice runs the risk of proposing an abstract, exclusive and, to some extent, idealised image of maternity. If complemented with reflection on real narrations of maternity, the "maternal scene", as Cavarero's conceives it, can be disclosed as a locus of plurality (of people, practices, institutions) and of different vulnerabilities that change according to the contexts of each maternal experience. See Cavarero and Butler, "Condizione umana contro 'natura', p.131; Söderbäck, "Natality or Birth?"; Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters. The Ethics of Interruption*, Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2009; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. London, England: Vintage Classics, 2015.
[409] IN, p.106.

In its inaugural fragility the infant is totally dependent and exposed not only to the mother's care, but also to her wounding.[410] As Cavarero remarks "the ethical valence of inclination... consists in the alternative between care and wound."[411] For Cavarero 'inclination' is not an ethical answer per se, but only the *predisposition* to provide an ethical response. As she puts it "The alternative between care and wound, as well as that between love and violence, is... entirely inscribed in inclination as a predisposition to respond".[412] It is precisely this original exposure/inclination, the fact of being alternatively, or, at the same time, exposed to and inclined towards others, which, from time to time, urges the decision between wound and care, between violence and love.

Cavarero's account of vulnerability and asymmetry as paradigmatically represented in the maternal scene shares some similarities with Lévinas's ethics based on *vulnus*. Differently from other twentieth-century thinkers who have used the figure of the 'other' to emphasize the effect of dissolution, both Cavarero and Lévinas do not dismantle the subject through an inner *alteration* that, on the one hand, fragments and dissolves the self, and on the other prevents recognition of the other as a singular and unique other. Rather, they both give a positive account of the figure of the other, acknowledging their specificity. For both thinkers, the relation between the self and the other is radically asymmetric and reveals the intrinsic vulnerability of human life.

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[410] I agree with Lisa Baraitser's concern regarding Cavarero's emphasis on the infant's vulnerability and dependence on the mother with the effect of obscuring mothers' own dependencies and vulnerabilities. As Baraitser puts it "[Cavarero] understands care as a dilemma provoked by the utterly dependent other, in which the 'mother' chooses to respond. This figure, bending towards the vulnerable infant is terrifyingly powerful in her capacity to wound rather than care, but we could also think of her as off-balance - inclined, yes, but also weighed down, perhaps by other children, by hateful projections, by the exhaustions of working the double shift, by the specific violences aimed at what Joy James calls the 'captive maternal,' the black maternal body that goes on underpinning so many white women's activities, as well as their theories. As we de-idealise the inclined mother, we make room for her own vulnerabilities, her own openness to wounding and care, vulnerabilities that accumulate rather than diminish over time." Lisa Baraitser, paper presented in the roundtable on "Misogyny and Its Roots" at the COWAP Europe Conference "Intolerance to the Feminine", Rome, 22-23 October 2022.
The text Baraitser mentions is Joy James, "The womb of western theory: Trauma, time theft and the captive maternal" in *Carceral Notebooks*, vol 12, 2016.

[411] IN, p. 105.

[412] Ibid., p.105.

However, if, as we have seen in the first chapter, for Lévinas the asymmetric relationship between the self and the other is informed by the categories of uprightness, death and transcendence, for Cavarero it points to the unbalanced relation of the scene of birth, where vulnerability is paradigmatically represented by the figure of the newborn. For her, the relation to the other does not point outside of the limits of the world, it is not "metaphysical" in the specific sense we find in Lévinas. On the contrary, it is world-oriented and points to the concreteness of the scene of birth.

In the coda of her *Inclinations*, Cavarero highlights not only the persistence of the centrality of the category of death in Lévinas' thought as well as the insistence on the question of transcendence, but also the problematic geometry that shapes his concept of ethics and the "Other," still oriented towards uprightness. As Cavarero points out

> [In Lévinas] the term rectitude (droiture) does not have a generic sense; it appears mainly in reference to the face-to-face encounter with the other, that is to say, an ethical context in which the 'extreme rectitude of the face of the neighbor,' as well as the uprightness of 'an exposure unto death,' interpellates me personally and calls me to respond. [413]

As we have seen in the first chapter, this idea of uprightness is bound up not only with the themes of responsibility and death, but also of transcendence and the infinite. The face-to- face encounter with the other breaks the immanence and self-enclosure of the self. This raised the controversial question as to whether Lévinas's concept of the "Other" refers to an empirical other who can be encountered within the world, or to a more general (and abstract) idea of absolute "otherness/alterity" which can open to transcendence and break the formal immanentism of the western philosophical

[413] Ibid., p.133.

tradition.[414] In this sense, it is important to keep in mind that often Lévinas speaks of the relation to the Other as a 'metaphysical' relation, and frames ethics as a *way to* metaphysics intended as the possibility to overcome the above mentioned immanentism of the Western tradition. In this connection between ethics and metaphysics, it is possible to detect the Platonic background which informs Lévinas reflections on transcendence, and specifically the idea of the 'Good beyond being' we find in Plato's *Republic*.

If, on the one hand, Levinas's merit was that of grasping the asymmetric relation between the self and the other which points to the intrinsic vulnerability of human beings, on the other hand, he articulates it in terms of Highness, of absence, of something that points outside the limits of the world. In this way, the Levinasian Other seems only to have the philosophical function of relating and disrupting the subject through a radical alterity. The Other in himself, without this pointing to transcendence, would be a mere, empirical other incapable of breaking the immanence of the present.

As discussed in the first chapter, in *Time and the Other*, the relation with a radical and transcendent alterity is elaborated as the erotic relation where the Other par excellence is represented by the *feminine*. The perspective of the future opened by eros is then accomplished by the relation between the father and the son and conceived as "fecundity", a concept that will be developed in *Totality and Infinity.*

Cavarero's account of the maternal relation significantly differs from Lévinas's reflections on paternity and fecundity, a fecundity that, as Cavarero remarks, is "neither pregnancy, gestation, labour, nutrition, nor, crucially, generation and care."[415] For Lévinas, it is only the father who generates the child—which is to say, the other whose futurity, and infinity, irrupts into the present of the ego. As we have seen, it is precisely

[414] See chapter One of this thesis.
[415] IN, p.148.

this discontinuous dimension of time that, after all, interests Lévinas, which does not open a shared dimension between the father and the son.

I contend that the problem here is not primarily that of speaking of a "paternal fecundity," dismissing the maternal power, labour and care, but of using the images of pregnancy and parenting to speak of a form of relationality that does not actually involve a relation –of care, love, wound–between two empirical human beings. In this way, all the potential of the focus on the "maternal scene" that should retrieve the figure of a concrete and unique other, pointing to an embodied, world-oriented and world-building relation, is effaced.

On the contrary, Cavarero's discussion of the previously mentioned Da Vinci painting traces a continuity – or in Cavarero's terms, a 'matrilineal line' – which starts from Anne's "serene and pleased" gaze on the exchange of glances between Mary and Jesus.[416] The three, in the frame represented, are truly *present* to each other, although occupying different positions in the painting. They can interact, listen to each other's voice, exchange deeds from different positions which are not given once and for all. In other words, Lévinas's account of asymmetry seems to prevent rather than guarantee the possibility of an actual and active relation (relazione in atto) between the self and the other. On the contrary, Cavarero discloses an "asymmetrical reciprocity" that is revealed by the co-presence of different characters in relation. Rather than suggesting the paradigm of 'election', passivity but also *elevation* which still informs Lévinas's perspective, Cavarero's reinterpretation of Mary's posture discloses the possibility of an "active inclination" as a response to the other's vulnerability.

[416] Ibid., p.99.

5.3 Maternal Temporalities

Dobbiamo però rispettare il ritmo, lasciare una parte impenetrabile, inesplorata, che prepara però alla vita. Il dolore che prepara alla gioia, l'inverno alla primavera, il vuoto alla vita piena (Anonymous).

In *Relating Narratives,* Cavarero discusses the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in order to speak of the relation (without relation) with someone who is invisible, who cannot be seen. In the myth, the death of Eurydice and the prohibition of seeing her when Orpheus descends into the underworld to bring her back to the world of the living, becomes a perfect image of this lack of relation. As is well known, the story does not have a happy ending: "rising from Hell and 'on the very verge of light,' Orpheus turns around in order to 'look back at Eurydice'." This way, he breaks the gods' prohibition of seeing the loved one. In a flash, Eurydice dissolves.[417] It is precisely this "logic of 'unrelation'" (irrelazione) that I detected in Lévinas' account of asymmetry and temporality informed by a focus on the other's death, a logic that also grounds Lévinas' reflections on fecundity and paternity. [418]In fact, although Lévinas does often speak of the ethical relation with the Other (the word 'relation' frequently appears in Lévinas's work), however, as we have seen in chapter One, he conceives of it as a "relation without relation.[419] Indeed, the relation with the Other is not a simultaneous, reciprocal and synchronic relation, rather it is radically diachronic and asymmetric. As a relation with someone or something absolutely other, it is never fully realized, it never becomes "actual."

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is also mentioned by Denise Riley in her essay *Time Lived, Without Its Flow* which presents notes written in the wake of her

[417] RN, p.97.
[418] Ibid., p.99.
[419] TI, p.80.

son's death.[420] Here, Riley describes the violent interruption of glances and touch, the foreclosure of a shared dimension between her and her son. This un-relationality prevents projection on any future and makes it hard to recall a past when the son was still there, alive. Riley finds herself stuck in a static and empty present as if she was sharing the "timeless time" of the dead child or as if the child had brought her into his timeless dimension.[421] This is perhaps the only way she can still be with him. Going back to the world and its relations would mean to lose him, just as Orpheus lost Eurydice. The mother thus performs the ethical, incessant exercise of remembering and keeping the child alive within herself, like a "pregnancy run in reverse" as Riley puts it.[422] However, this pregnancy, this limbo where the mother literally finds herself "between past and future" does not anticipate a future birth.

Riley's notes disclose a natal or maternal perspective on death.[423] The narration of the mourning of the child tragically reveals what has been lost. The two will never be able to speak, see and touch each other again. They will never be *present* to each other. Yet, their "old conjoined temporality" is not broken. The time of the child is so to speak incorporated by the mother again, who feels the old "doubled sense of time" without being able to project it onto a future life. What is mostly foreclosed is the vivid present,

[420]Denise Riley, *Time Lived, Without Its Flow,* Picador, London, 2019, p. 47.
[421] Ibid., p.44.
[422] Ibid., p.51.
[423] In her article "Natality and Mortality: rethinking death with Cavarero," Alison Stone questions the philosophical opposition between the categories of death and birth that grounds Cavarero's work and rather develops an account of mortality as essentially relational in the light of the Italian philosopher's reflections on birth:

> If someone's birth is their entrance into a shared world with others, then their death must equally be their irreversible departure from this shared world. The significance of someone's death to the extent that they anticipate it, then, is not that they will cease to be there as such, but that they will cease to be there with these others, with the particular others with whom this person has been related, in the particular places and contexts that they have shared [...] Cavarero's relational ontology, when read strongly relationally, suggests [that i]f I am constituted of a web of relations with others, then when I die, these relations end, relations that were equally parts of the webs of relations that constituted each of those other people. So something of each of those people does die at the same time. Conversely, when others die part of me dies; our deaths are not separate from one another.

Alison Stone, "Natality and mortality: rethinking death with Cavarero" in Continental Philosophy Review 43 (3), pp. 353-372, 2010, pp. 362-363.

caught in between two absences – the past before the child's birth and the future after the mother's death – where the two, from their different positions, can actually interact, exchange words, share the same world, care, love, hate or wound each other, the present of a life together.

In order to speak of the tragic, violent foreclosure of a shared dimension and visibility between mother and child, Cavarero mentions the myth of Demeter which tells how Demeter's daughter, Kore, is forcibly taken from her mother to be wedded to god Hades, the "kingdom of the dead located under the surface of the earth."[424] When Kore is kidnapped, snatched out of Demeter's sight, she stops generating, she becomes sterile. As Cavarero puts it

> [...] the maternal power to generate is coextensive with the *reciprocal visibility* of mother and daughter... *Phyein* becomes possible only in this reciprocal visibility [...] When this visibility is denied Demeter does not regenerate[425]

Generation can occur only in relation. The threat of a complete annihilation of the earth is resolved in a mediation that corresponds to and follows the logic (and temporality) of the alternation of seasons: winter-death/ spring-birth.

It was precisely the dimension of the present - where there can be a plurality of people truly present to each other - that was dismissed by the thinkers addressed in the first chapter. If, in Heidegger's account the present was pointing to a metaphysical and static presence that obscured *Dasein*'s dynamicity, for Derrida and Lévinas it disclosed a perfect matching between the self and the other that annihilated differences and prevented the unfolding of time. Hence, the three thinkers focus on death. In Heidegger's case death was the possibility par excellence, the one "not to be outstripped" and that could not be shared with others. In Derrida and Lévinas' it

[424]IP, p.58.
[425]Ibid., pp. 60-67, *emphasis mine*.

represented the tragic possibility and to some extent anticipation of the death of the other that guaranteed distance from the other.[426] Since the Other, in his radical alterity, cannot be comprehended in the sphere of the proper and of the same, he interrupts, diverts time towards an unanticipable future. Indeed, in Lévinas' view, the "relation without relation" with the Other is "the very accomplishment of time" to the extent that it is the condition of possibility of " the encroachment of the present on the future."[427] Since the very beginning, Lévinas remarks that "time is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but ... it is the very relationship of the subject to the Other."[428]

Time flows only in togetherness. However, I argue that a focus on birth and maternity allows us to outline a world-oriented and "fleshed" concept of time that unfolds as a shared temporality. The flow of time is not given by the constitutive delay of (the relation with) the other opened by the focus on the possibility of their death. Rather, it configures itself as an "immanent transcendence" whose fulcrum is the vivid and dynamic present where human beings are "epidermically given to one another," as Butler would have it, they can interact, hear each other's voice, exchange words and deeds.[429] This aspect of maternal time is distinct from its cyclical or monumental forms

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[426] A similar temporal structure, that anticipates the possibility of the loss of the other, informs Butler's concept of "grievability," which however seems to disclose a shared temporality (rather than a temporality reciprocally broken or diverted as Lévinas conceives of it) between the self and the other that emerges precisely because it is threatened by the possibility of the death of the other:

> In ordinary language, grief attends the life that has already been lived, and presupposes that life as having ended. But, according to the future anterior (which is also part of ordinary language), grievability is a condition of a life's emergence and sustenance. The future anterior, "a life has been lived," is presupposed at the beginning of a life that has only begun to be lived. In other words, "this will be a life that will have been lived" is the presupposition of a grievable life, which means that this will be a life that can be regarded as a life, and be sustained by that regard. Without grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life. Instead, "there is a life that will never have been lived," sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost. The apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of precarious life. Grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living, exposed to non-life from the start.

However, the crucial difference is that a maternal temporality is oriented towards the anticipation of the birth, the present together and the future of the child. Something new to come awaits. Judith Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 15.

[427] TO, p.79.

[428] Ibid., p.39.

[429] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Fordham University Press, 2005. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt13x01rf

(from repetition and eternity) that seem to inform a logic of reproduction. Rather, maternal time interrupts and deforms cyclic and linear concepts of time, it constitutes a break in the ordinary flow of time by inserting something once thought of as private (the intimate relation with an other) within public time. In this sense, as Baraitser puts it, the maternal *queers* public time by continuously re-waving it through interpersonal relations.[430]

The world that human beings have in common is constantly reconfigured through human relations that allow one to transcend one's self-referential horizon, flowing into a continuous process of renewal of the world. Thanks to this "original" getting-in-touch, the temporal dialectic of birth is constantly put back into motion and thus we can continue our "natal path." Our first birth thus becomes "a memorial event for all the other births of our life." [431] It points to a primary connectivity that is generative and is never forgotten.

5.4 Maternity and the Public

The retrospective look at our first radical appearance in the world highlights not only our neo-natal condition, but also the "filial" one, the fact that no one is self-made. In this sense, we notice that human beings' "natal path" is not only oriented towards future possibilities, but it is also addressed to the past. In our birth we observe the coexistence of two movements: to move away from the origin, to go back to it. This swing reminds us of another movement which appears as a relationship involving someone who gives birth and someone who comes into the world. Each new birth interrupts and puts the flow of time back into motion again. The "ex" of existence which, in Arendt's account, corresponds to a dynamic and continuous exposure to others, is embodied by someone who gives us life. Maternity as intrinsically and

[430]Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time*.
[431]Zucal, *Filosofia della nascita*, p. 452, my translation.

empirically relational temporalises time not as a rigid, linear consequentiality. By pointing to a past that preceded our birth, it gives profundity to our existence.

This movement is not self-performed but rather depends on the plurality that precedes (past) and exceeds (future) the natal event in itself. In this sense, maternity becomes a borderline experience and concept that points to an event of transformation. As Giacomo Pezzano points out,

> The lexicon of the "in-between," of the border-line, grasps the dimension of the... "in the meantime," of the "in progress"... which characterizes the course of a process, the event of transformation in its happening. [This lexicon] points to what, so to speak, takes place after death and before rebirth, or to that *dilated space* which, at the same time, precedes and follows birth and for which - thinking about pregnancy - one is not yet a child and not yet a mother, but they are "jointly becoming" [432]

Human beings' existence unfolds in this dilated space where birth becomes an *in itinere* or repeated event. This space recalls what the Israeli painter, psychoanalyst and theorist Bracha Ettinger calls the "matrixial," a term that combines the notion of the matrix with that of the maternal.[433] Ettinger uses the final stages of inter-uterine life to give an image for a relation where the not-yet infant and not-yet mother are in a space of encounter that lays down "a primordial capacity for being- together," without merger, and yet without catastrophic separation, as Baraitser puts it.[434] This capacity is retained as trans-subjectivity throughout life, a subjectivity between two subjects, rather than subjects and objects.

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[432]Giacomo Pezzano, "Divenire: Piccolo lessico filosofico della trasformazione," Thaumàzein–Rivista di Filosofia, no. 4–5 (2016–2017): 67–123. http://dx.doi.org/10.13136/thau.v4i0, p.94, my translation.

[433] Bracha Ettinger, "Matrix and metamorphosis*." in Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies. Indiana University Press.* 4 (3): 176–208. 1992.

[434] Lisa Baraitser, talk on "Misogyny and Its Roots".

Furthermore, this subjectivity develops in relation to the maternal body for every human being, and is therefore the prototype for a sexual difference that is established as a difference 'with' - a state of 'with-ness', another neologism that Ettinger makes from "witnessing" and "being- with." This aspect of being- with- others that all birthed human carry with them is distinct from either fusion or separation, and refuses the binary logic of sexual difference. Rather, it proposes a different way of understanding sexual difference as a continuous process of differentiation in relation, that results and unfolds in a unique life story, as Cavarero would have it.

By recalling Arendt's position, we can suggest that, together with human existence, the public also unfolds as a dimension (an *in-between*) that is from time to time generated, reshaped and cared through actions and speeches. The unfolding of the public space through what Arendt calls the "'web' of human relationships" is temporally articulated and dislocated.[435] As remarked before, the public space so generated does not call for symmetry, but rather for a continuous interweaving of multiple and singular dependencies. What we have called an "asymmetrical reciprocity" marks not only the temporality that informs the movement of human existence through relations that precede and exceed our coming into the world, but also the spatial unfolding of the public which, from this point of view, becomes a dimension where care and wound, power and powerlessness are joined together and are intimately related.

[435] HC, p.183.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have underlined the limits of what we might call the "thanatological critique of metaphysics" – a critique of the Western metaphysical tradition starting from a new understanding of death, mortality and subjectivity, inaugurated by Heidegger in *Being and Time* and developed by Lévinas and Derrida in relation to the figure of the "other"– by attempting to articulate a concept of human finitude, temporality, relationality and the idea of "beginning" starting from birth and maternity.

To do so, I have turned my attention to Arendt's concept of "natality" which, at the same time, points to the fact that human beings are born from someone in the world and, by virtue of this "having-been-generated" (or 'created', in Arendt's account), that they hold a "capacity of beginning." In chapter Two, I have offered a critical reconstruction of the topic of natality in Arendt's published works such as *The Human Condition* and *Between Past and Future* as enlightened by writings published posthumously (her doctoral thesis on *Love and St. Augustine* and *The Life of the Mind* specifically) and texts not intended for publication, most notably her *Denktagebuch*. I have also made it explicit how the concept of natality is informed by the dialogue between Arendt and twentieth-century German *Existenzphilosophie*, Heidegger and Jaspers in particular, and via them St Augustine. I have argued that this background persists in Arendt's mature reflections on the political significance of the concept of natality and can help rethink the distinctions she makes in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind.*

Indeed, I have showed how the topics of "natality" and "beginning" in their varied configurations cross most of Arendt's work. From her doctoral thesis on *Love*

and Saint Augustine, which Arendt revised for publication in the late 50s / early 60s, to her last and unfinished work *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt questions herself about an origin which seems to stand outside the human condition and yet is the source of human beings' capacity of beginning something new in the common world. Human beings' capacity to act is indeed an actualization of what Arendt calls "the human condition of natality" to the extent that it depends and responds to the beginning that came into the world when we were born (intended as having-been-created). In this respect, Arendt quotes the famous line *Initium ut esset homo creatus est ante quem nemo fuit* from Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* in almost all her published works. The beginning is seen by Arendt as a human experience and capacity of something absolute. However, I have showed that, for Arendt, the absolutist trait of each new beginning does not point to and cannot be conflated with a traditional notion of authority. Based on the semantic ambiguity of the Greek term ἀρχή, which, at the same time, means "beginning" and "rule", it has been traditionally assumed that there is an implicit connection between the act of "beginning" and that of "ruling." Arendt challenges this connection by questioning any hierarchical concept of power and emphasizing rather that power is generated only when people gather together in a public space.

By focusing on the interplay between past and beginning that emerges specifically when reading Arendt's major works in the light of her doctoral thesis, I have outlined a possible Arendtian concept of time and history inspired primarily by Benjamin, Heidegger and Augustine that remains implicit in her work. In this respect, I have argued that Arendt questions a concept of time intended as a linear or a cyclic movement by pointing towards a non-progressive and non-teleological temporality set out by the repetition of the beginning that came into the world when we were born. In Arendt's view, this 'return to the past' introduces a new beginning not primordially closed, as Heidegger maintains in *Being and Time*. Rather, the event of a new beginning

is radically contingent and depends on the plurality of human beings that confirm and take part to it. By unfolding in a potentially infinite network of actions and reactions, the event of a new beginning keeps itself open to unpredictable consequences. This potential infinity is what determines the intrinsic "frailty" or precariousness of each new beginning.

By reconstructing the roots of Arendt's thought in German *Existenzphilosophie* as well as focusing on some passages from Arendt's *Denktagebuch* and private correspondences, in chapter three I have suggested a more dynamic and interrelated understanding of Arendt's distinction between public and private and the *vita activa* and the life of the mind. By building on some entries from Arendt's *Denktagebuch*, I have argued that it is possible to retrace at least two notions of the private in Arendt's work, one that seems to correspond to the space of labour and the management of the household and is opposite to the public sphere, and one that can be conceived as a dimension of intimacy that welcomes the 'finitude' of human existence and gives depth and rootedness to human life. I have argued that the latter is not sharply separated from the public, but it is rather continuous with it in that it is made by relations -with friends and lovers – that own their own kind of plurality and hold a world-creating power.

Taking seriously Arendt's remark in a 1971 letter to Heidegger that what will then be published posthumously as *The Life of the Mind* is a sort of second volume of *The Human Condition*, I have showed how these two works can enlighten each other and challenge the traditional separation between *theoria* and *praxis* that is often assumed as uncritically informing Arendt's reflections. In this respect, I have argued that the distinction Arendt makes between "metaphysical" and "political" thought - the former centred around the category of death and the latter around the category of natality - in the first pages of *The Human Condition* should be reinterpreted as a

possible way to critique the western metaphysical tradition itself, rather than reading the two fields as separated.[436]

In particular, I have highlighted the intrinsic duality and plurality of the mental activities of thinking, willing and judging, an interpretation that I have further developed in the fourth chapter in relation to Cavarero. If it is usually the activity of judgment that is considered to be central in Arendt's political thought, I tried to show how willing,understood not as *liberum arbitrium* - a freedom of choice that arbitrates and decides between two given things - but as the capacity to "call something into being which did not exist before" can constitute a conjunction between the "mind's inwardness and the outward world" as Arendt puts it.[437] I have thus discussed the relation between will and political freedom by showing how will can be considered as the "spring of action" without however the agent being able to control or foretell the consequences of each act that is actualised in a plural space.[438]

Building on a dynamic reading of Arendt's private/public distinction, in chapter four I have argued that it is possible to complement and rethink Arendt's concept of natality with reflection on maternal subjectivities and relations understood as intimate and affective dimensions that inform and are critical to the generation of the public. I have argued that the maternal relation too should be included amongst those relationships that have the "world-creating power" that Arendt attributes to friendship and love,

[436] What has emerged from my researches around Arendt's concepts of natality is that, contra many interpreters that consider her as a consistent thinker, Arendt often proposes multiple and sometimes contradictory accounts of core concepts for her thought such as those of action, love, natality, friendship, thinking, public and private. Rather than seeing this inconsistency as a weakness, I hope I have demonstrated that this semantic multiplicity opens up a generative interpretative space that challenges univocal readings of Arendt's thought. In particular, I have found that a relational (rather than comparative) reading of her published, posthumous and unpublished works can make it explicit something that cannot be found in the strict tripartitions and distinctions that appear in Arendt's published works, especially when focusing only in their English version. The time I have spent at the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College has been of crucial importance to appreciate the importance of this relational approach.

[437] LM, part II, p. 101.

[438] This topic has also been addressed by Anne Eusterschulte in her talk "The Politics of 'Willing': Hannah Arendt's Critique of Fatalism" presented at the conference *The Politics of Beginnings: Hannah Arendt Today*, conference, ICI Berlin, 15–16 February 2023 <https://doi.org/10.25620/e230215>.

rather than being uncritically conceived as mere reproduction of the human species. By re-thinking Arendt's concept of natality including reflection on maternal subjectivities and the relations that mark the beginning of each human being's life, I have argued that we can better grasp the idea of a past that precedes human beings' coming –into- the-world as the condition for the capacity of beginning, as well as the intrinsic relationality of the human condition.

Firstly, following Julian Honkasalo, I have detected two interpretative lines of Arendt's thought, one that spread specifically in the US second-wave feminist context and has criticised Arendt for re-proposing a masculine/metaphysical account of the public/private, labour/action distinctions, and one developed in particular by continental feminist interpreters such as Cavarero and Kristeva, who, in different ways, have used Arendt's categories to open up a space for theorizing embodiment, intimacy, maternity, relationality and plurality from a radically feminist perspective and from the perspective of theories of sexual difference.[439] I have set my own approach to Arendt within the second interpretative line.

Secondly, I have given an account of the concepts of maternity that have been provided by Kristeva, Irigaray and Muraro. I have set their reflections in the context of second wave feminist thought in Europe and twentieth century continental philosophy, by focussing specifically on the attention that philosophers of that time gave to the "question of the other." I have showed how, these continental feminist thinkers realised that a large part of the twentieth century (male) debate around the question of the other ran the risk of reducing this question to a mere theoretical exercise. On the contrary, starting from their own experience as "others" in a patriarchal philosophical discourse, they insisted on attention to the more concrete, empirical aspects of human life by reflecting on questions of sexuality, embodiment, maternity and vulnerability. This way,

[439]Honkasalo "Cavarero as an Arendtian Feminist", p.38.

they have provided varied and original critiques of the subject and alternative ways to rethink otherness by articulating a thought of "sexual difference" that has the primarily aim of disentangling the feminine from a male gaze and discourse.

From this starting point, I discussed Adriana Cavarero's original re-reading of Arendt's idea of natality, exposing similarities and differences with Irigaray and Kristeva. To some extent, Cavarero aligns with those who charge Arendt for re-proposing a masculine concept of the public space and a metaphorical understanding of birth based on the model of the Creation.[440] However, Cavarero does not endorse a dismissive approach to Arendt's categories. On the contrary, she uses Arendt's original rethinking of politics to develop her own account of uniqueness, embodiment, plurality and birth. Building on Cavarero's position, I suggested that the maternal power to generate someone absolutely new might be connected with the Arendtian capacity of beginning, which is typical of the agent. Drawing specifically on *Relating Narratives*, I have argued that the intimate relational dimension between mother and child, friends and lovers can be related to the political space that, for Arendt, unfolds through the interactions among human beings.[441] I have argued that Cavarero does not address the importance of the relational model provided by reflection on these intimate relations for what Arendt would call the "life of the mind." I have thus expanded the argument started in the third chapter by arguing that, not only in the public sphere of action and in the reciprocal storytelling that is performed in intimate relations, but also in willing, thinking and judging the connective tissue of politics starts to be woven. I have suggested that Cavarero's sharp separation between thinking and action, philosophy and narration, *logos* and voice that has the primary aim to recast the centrality of (sexed) unique embodiment risks re-proposing a metaphysical distinction between these

[440] See for example Cavarero, IP.
[441] RN and IN.

activities and spheres, with the consequence of obscuring their interplay, their mutual impact, as well as the relevance of relationality and difference for the life of the mind.

Finally, I have introduced Judith Butler's critique of the "giveness" of the alternative male – female in *Gender Trouble,* as well as of a concept of maternity intended as an a-historical, pre-discursive experience. The target of Butler's reflections in the latter sense was Kristeva who, according to the US philosopher, by relegating motherhood and, more specifically, the maternal body outside of any linguistic elaboration, has produced a reification of it, with the consequence of ultimately submitting it to the dictates of the patriarchal and heteronormative symbolic order. Yet, building on Söderbäck and Sandford, I have showed how, at least in *Gender Trouble,* Butler seems to accept the metaphysical distinction between "nature" and "culture", where nature is seen as a something that temporally and logically precedes or exceeds the dominant symbolic order, rather than grasp the interrelation between the two, as well as the dynamic of nature itself. I have thus suggested that Cavarero's theory of sexual difference and Butler's gender theory can serve as a mutual critique and enrich each other,and pave the way for a concept of maternity tied up with human uniqueness.

In chapter Five, I have discussed Butler and Cavarero's accounts of subjectivity, otherness and vulnerability after the event of 9/11 and the following escalation of violence. From their different positions, the two philosophers have elaborated original understandings of relationality, vulnerability, helplessness, precariousness, inventing also neologisms such as the concepts of precarity, horrorism and grievability. If, on the one hand, Butler primarily recovers Lévinas's position and looks at the category of mortality and wound, in the wake of Arendt and Cavarero, I have showed how this position should be complemented with and critically addressed through reflection on birth and maternity in order to dismiss a metaphysical and disembodied concept of

subjectivity as well as a monolithic vision of femininity and to pave the way for an understanding human existence and politics starting from the relationality of the human condition.

In particular, I have reframed Cavarero's interpretation of relationality, asymmetry and vulnerability as represented in the "maternal scene" as a possible alternative to Levinas's ethical account of the 'Other' in relation to death, wound, and transcendence. Via discussion of Cavarero and Lévinas, I have recursively re-addressed the questions of time and the other in relation to the category of mortality discussed in the first chapter. I have outlined a possible concept of maternal temporalities that shows how the flow of time is not given by the constitutive delay that marks the"relation without relation" (as Lévinas' puts it) with the other opened by the focus on the possibility of their death. Rather, it configures itself as an "immanent transcendence" whose fulcrum is the vivid and dynamic present where human beings' are "epidermically given to one another," as Butler would have it, they can (inter-) act, hear each other's voice, exchange words and deeds.[442] I have argued that this aspect of maternal time is distinct from its cyclical or monumental forms (from repetition and eternity) that seem to inform a logic of re-production. Rather, recalling Arendt's account of natality, I have suggested that maternal time interrupts cyclic and linear concepts of time by inserting something once thought of as private (the intimate relation with an other) within public time.

Bringing together Arendt's idea of natality and feminist reflections on the maternal addressed in this thesis, I hope I have shown that it is possible to elaborate birth and maternity as philosophical categories through which to rethink subjectivity, temporality, the life of the mind, the relation between public and private, the notion of the public itself, vulnerability, difference and otherness starting from an essential

[442] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

relationality and capacity for beginning of the human condition. The potential of birth and maternity as philosophical (ethical and political) categories could be further explored by critically addressing and expanding the positions of philosophers, especially feminist thinkers, in the Western tradition, which has been the specific context of this thesis, through studies on the maternal provided by different traditions of thought, such as Black and Asian studies. This way, it would be possible to give voice to different understandings of maternity, femininity, care, vulnerability and power outside the presumed universality of Western thought.

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