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Arendt and Spivak: a feminist approach to political worlding and appearing

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ARENDT AND SPIVAK:
A FEMINIST APPROACH TO POLITICAL WORLDING AND APPEARING

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To my family

Each utterance is its own occasion and as such is firmly anchored in the worldy context in which it is applied.

Edward Said, “The Text, the World and the Critic”

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Abstract

"Arendt and Spivak: A Feminist Approach to Political Worlding and Appearing" offers the first systematic and comparative reading of Hannah Arendt and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Beginning with their mutual interests in political speech and appearance (the ability for individuals to represent themselves as individuals and not be reduced to their social identity) this dissertation argues two points. First, considering the political in terms of worlding (the fact that humans are both conditioned and conditioning beings) means taking a two-handed approach to the political: addressing the seemingly contradictory need for both political equality and an understanding of the impossibility of escaping those privileges that undercut equality. Second, framing political appearance in terms of Arendtian and Spivakian temporality offers a feminist model of political appearance that challenges the connection between politics and patronymic inheritance.

The dissertation begins by arguing that a feminist model of political equality must engage with "worlding," a term adapted from Martin Heidegger. Engaging with worlding through a feminist lens requires engaging with the ways in which intersectional privileges (race, gender, class, etc.) shape models of political equality and mediate each individual's access to the political. Gaining access to the political helps facilitate an individual's ability (or inability) to appear and be heard as a unique political being. Furthermore, awareness of such intersectional conditioning facilitates a theorist's own account of privilege, political access, and worlding itself. As a result, I argue that any account of political equality must continually engage with the impossibility of equal political appearance.

In order to challenge the problem of the transparency of the political philosopher—as opposed to generally marking the limitations of philosophy—and in order to locate philosophy within the world, the second and third chapters of this dissertation examine Arendt's and Spivak's respective understandings of the determining and determined effects of patronymic political inheritance and the temporality of thought. I argue that their understanding of the worlding of patronymic inheritance demonstrates the limitations of current models of political appearance and that their models of temporality offer a new feminist approach to theorizing political appearance. They challenge linear, patronymic models of political history and political theory, and their work can shift the way that we relate to the past, present, and future by emphasizing the tension and productive relationship between theory and world. Their models reframe political appearance and equality, challenging an additive model based on linear progress where failures are seen as passing obstacles and successes are seen as endemic to the political. For instance, an additive model of equal rights assumes that the United States has becomes more equal and that the inequalities of legal segregation, and restricted voting were temporary problems overcome as the United States has made linear progress toward its already inherent perfection. By contrast, the models of temporality developed by Arendt and Spivak, require continual redirection and self-critique while challenging political inequality.

In the final chapter, I argue that bringing together Arendtian plurality and the Spivakian double bind may yield a feminist model of political appearance. According to Arendt, plurality serves as the foundation for political appearance and is grounded in its twofold nature of equality and distinction. According to Spivak, double binds offer a

model for dwelling within the boundaries of two contradictory laws. By reading equality and distinction in terms of a double bind, I attempt to posit plurality as a dynamic concept. I argue that plurality's grounding in a dynamic double bind keeps difference and equality from becoming tropes posited as universals. The problem is that when working for equality, one begins to violate the call for difference, and when trying to acknowledge difference, one begins to violate equality. This "problem" offers feminism a new model for thinking through political appearance and worlding by focusing on the impossibility of deriving a formula for defining either concept without reference to the other. This model is inherently feminist because it challenges the assumed stability of linear, patronymic political progress. Despite the potential for this new model, I also argue that it must not be assumed to transcend the legacies of traditional political thought. Even within the double bind of equality and difference, plurality, as a concept, must always be understood as constructed within a determining or worlding context. Given the inevitability of worlding, the best tool for feminism becomes re-engagement both with those political ideals that enable a privileged perspective and with feminism's own situated conditions and privileges.

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This is not the conflation of literature and philosophy. It is the use of the resources of writing to philosophize.[1]

-Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Introduction

I

Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, first published in 1958, considers the importance of worldy existence. She states: "with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world."[2] She then warns that, "A life without speech and without action…is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men."[3] Speaking and acting allow us to appear before others and facilitate our life in a world made and inhabited by others who speak and act as well. Therefore, following Arendt, we might say that, to deny someone the ability to appear would be to deny his or her life among others.

Thirty years later, in 1988, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was published as part of collection of essays on Marxism and culture.[4] Her essay explores the way that the gendered subaltern—women who lack access to the mechanisms of capitalism—can be used as alibis (despite the subaltern's own heterogeneous interests) to affirm theorists', activists', and governments' interests. At

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[1] "Responsibility—1992: Testing Theory in the Plains" in *Other Asias*. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 58-96.
[2] *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 176.
[3] *The Human Condition*, 176.
[4] "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

the end of the essay, in a moment of despair and outrage over the reduction of the suicide of her relative Bhubanesawari, a freedom fighter, to a love affair, Spivak declares that, "the subaltern cannot speak!"[5] This sentence incited angry refutations, worshipful praise, and a broad field of academic and popular responses.[6]

In fact, Spivak's declaration received so much attention that her point often gets lost in the shuffle of other people's interests. Her point is not that the subaltern could not speak, but that her speech is only heard insofar as it fits with the interests of those in power. In a rewrite of the essay published as part of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* she explains, "I was so unnerved by this failure of communication that, in the first version of the text, I wrote, in the accents of passionate lament: the subaltern cannot speak! It was an inadvisable remark."[7] Here we see that her lament results from a failure in communication and not a literal silencing.

Spivak claims that Bhubanesawari attempted to speak through her body and that there are several signs regarding how she wanted her suicide to be understood. However, these signs were not attended to by her family members because, as Spivak argues, these family members were invested in validating their own particular cultural-historical positions, affirming their own worldview.[8] The family diagnoses was that the suicide was the result of illicit love, but Spivak stresses the fact that Bhubaneswari committed suicide while she was menstruating and thus could not be pregnant, and further stresses

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[5] It is important to note that Bhubaneswari is not actually a subaltern. Spivak does not offer an example of a subaltern being silenced, because her use of such an example would only further serve to demonstrate the use of the subaltern in support of the elite theorists interests. ("Can the Subaltern Speak?", 308).

[6] See for example Busia, Abena, "Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female," *Cultural Critique* Vol 14 (Winter 1989-90), 81-104. Leerom, Medovoi et al.,"Can the Subaltern vote?" *Socialist Review* 20.3 (July-Sept. 1990), 133-149. Romanow, Rebecca "But…Can the Subaltern Sing?" *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 7.2 (2005).

[7] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 308.

[8] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 308-309.

that to commit suicide during menstruation is a culturally relevant act given the social sanction against committing *suttee* during menstruation.[9] In order to read her suicide as the result of an affair, the signification or "speech" surrounding Bhubaneswari act must be ignored. Therefore, instead, of appearing, her actions were reduced by contemporary women to, "a case of illicit love."[10] This reduction, Spivak suggests, may be the result of contemporary women's needs and worldviews. As she writes, instead of claiming that Bhubanesawari had to be silenced, "I am pointing, rather, at her silencing by her own more emancipated granddaughters: a new main stream."[11] She then adds a few pages later that, "Bhubanesawari had fought for national liberation. Her great-grandniece works for the New Empire. This too is a historical silencing of the subaltern."[12] The writing-over of her act in support of the interests of her female relatives, keeps Bhubaneswari from appearing in the world as her self.

Putting Bhubaneswari's suicide in the context of Arendt's work we can argue that considering this action without considering the way that the suicide was carried out denies Bhubaneswari's humanity. As Arendt explains, "In acting and speaking men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world..."[13] Therefore without speech we cannot appear in the human world.

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[9] Spivak notes, "She generalized the sanctioned motive for female suicide by taking immense trouble to displace (not merely deny), in the physiological inscription of her body, its imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male…The displacing gesture—waiting for menstruation—is at first a reversal of the interdict against a menstruating widow's right to immolate herself; the unclean widow must wait, publicly, until the cleansing bath of the fourth day, when she is no longer menstruating, in order to claim her dubious privilege" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 307).
[10] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 308.
[11] Ibid*.,* 309.
[12] Ibid*.,* 311.
[13] *The Human Condition,* 179.

Arendt addresses the significance of silencing in *The Human Condition*, examining the silencing of individuals in terms of those cases where actions are denied their accompanying speech. She notes that "Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words. The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word…"[14] In order for one's activity to be understood as action, one must also be heard disclosing the action; one must be part of a space of appearance. She writes, "It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exit not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly."[15] Such a space facilitates communication and allows individuals to appear. The difference between having access to such a space and being foreclosed from it is the difference between being held as a person and being viewed as an object.

Arendt's argument that actions without speech are not really actions corresponds to Spivak's claim that the subaltern cannot speak. We can see that in the case of the subaltern, this speechlessness is a product of the reduction of the subaltern's actions to information used to legitimize the worldviews of those who claim to "hear." This view, which places the subaltern as an object of study within an already formulated account of her experiences, overwrites her humanity and silences her speech.

Arendt's and Spivak's projects argue for the importance of individuals appearing before each other as speaking and acting beings, and both are interested in the

[14] *The Human Condition*, 178-79.
[15] Ibid., 198-99.

worldliness necessary to facilitate or inhibit such interactions. What makes their works so important is the specificity of their historical and practical workings. Such awareness challenges any simple claims to universality, either within the political or with regard to the purity of theory, and in this way their works remain engaged with their own worlding, understood as their own conditioning and conditioned existence.

II

Arendt and Spivak are not alone in their interests in political appearance (and the denial of political appearance), the field of ethico-political philosophy that attends to questions of appearance, recognition, and humanity is broad and multifaceted. Two examples of compelling work on these questions are Charles Taylor's *Politics of Recognition* and Martha Nussbaum's *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Both offer insightful approaches to theorizing political appearance, but both fail to pay attention to their own privilege in theorizing about the role of privilege. Like Spivak and Arendt, these two thinkers are concerned with appearance and recognition, but because of their similar interests and concerns the distinctions between all four thinkers are of the utmost importance. The difference that is important to this project is that while Taylor and Nussbaum investigate power relations, and argue for a more complex understanding of recognition, at moments both loose sight of the ways that their own approaches might also participate in the very problems that they seek to address. In very different ways they each make assumptions regarding cultural transparency and the transparency of theory.

For example, at moments in his work Taylor's language suggests his own theoretical superiority over those whom he is trying to advocate for. For instance he claims that the goal of his project is, "to give the peoples of what we now call the third world their chance to be themselves unimpeded."[16] While Taylor's goal may be driven by a desire for social justice, his wording is highly problematic. His desire "to give the peoples…their chance to be themselves unimpeded" implies the superiority of his own position and he assumes the natural purity of the third world. Taylor's model is paternalistic and assumes that those with privilege are in a position to *give* others a chance to be what "we" think they should be.[17] Ultimately, he suggests that this audience take on what has historically been referred to as the 'white man's burden.'

Nussbaum performs a similarly problematic maneuver in the introductory chapter of her book: *Women and Human Development*. In this text Nussbaum assumes the transparency of her rhetorical examples regarding the mistreatment of women. For example, she uses a proverb to demonstrate her argument regarding the mistreatment of women. She quotes out of hand without any other reference to India that, "As the old Indian proverb puts it, 'A daughter born / To husband or death / she's already gone."[18] Although this offhand use of a proverb is a tiny problem of no consequence to her philosophical argument, the fact that Nussbaum simply includes this proverb without any attention to the way that proverbs operate in Indian culture, let alone in American culture,

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[16] "Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* Amy Gutman ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 31.

[17] Patchen Markell offers an insightful and engaged critique of Taylor's work in *Bound by Recognition*. He asks, "does the pursuit of recognition, for all its democratic good intentions, actually blind us to certain ineliminable, and perhaps also valuable, aspects of our own situation?" (*Bound by Recognition* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003], 4).

[18] *Women and Human Development: Women and Human Development, the Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

demonstrates the danger of using examples out of hand, and thus the danger of applying such a philosophical concept.

By using examples without context Nussbaum implies that other cultures are open to her easy citation without questions of context or specificity. There are many American proverbs that belittle women such as "A good wife and health are a man's best wealth" or "Women are the root of all evil."[19] To simply cite a proverb as if its role and meanings within a culture were transparent is disingenuous. While it does not necessarily damage her theory, it points to the dangerous ways that assumptions regarding cultural transparency may influence the application of a theory.

My concern with Nussbaum and Taylor is that they do not pay attention to their own limitations. That is, as pertinent as their arguments are, they fail to pay attention to the limits of their own situation (or worlding), and at moments they read the other and themselves in terms of unquestioned cultural transparency and without regard to the way that their assumptions regarding transparency are used in order to support their own agendas. The task that I take on in this project is to consider *how* to argue for things like recognition and dignity while also paying attention to the difficulties in theorizing and applying something that is supposed to be a model for equality but is thought from within a position of privilege.

I have chosen to pursue this task of considering *how* to argue for recognition and privilege through an examination of the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Hannah Arendt. I find Spivak and Arendt to be particularly well suited for this task for two reasons: first, their attention to context, and second, their continual examinations of their

[19] *Dictionary of American Proverbs* Wolfgang Mieder, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 86 and 915.

own approaches questions related to the political (Arendt through her account of comprehension and Spivak through her concept of postcoloniality). In other words, they attempt to limit their claims to the context of their world and acknowledge that their perspectives are in part determined by the world. This means that even though these two thinkers may at moments lose sight of worlding, they attempt continually grapple with the tension between politics and philosophy and so keep at the fore questions related to their own limitations to theorize from a universal perspective.

III

Worlding, as defined in Spivak's work, and implicitly present in Arendt's discussions of world and humanity, offers a term for attempting to hold in mind the way that political philosophy, insofar as it is concerned with what occurs and not with pure being, is itself both determined by and open to interpretation through the analogies, the tropes, and examples that it uses.[20] In an interview with Elizabeth Grosz titled "Criticism, Feminism and The Institution," Spivak defines worlding as "a texting, textualizing, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood."[21] This textualizing is useful insofar as it can help us to understand events, but it is also dangerous when the ascribed meaning is taken to be objective. Arendt summarizes this concern in her famous interview with Gunter Gaus: "What Remains? The Language Remains." Arendt states that, "When I talk about these things, academically or nonacademically, I always mention that there is a vital tension between philosophy and

[20] *The Human Condition, 9*.
[21] "Criticism, Feminism and The Institution in *Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge. 1990, [1-17]). 1.

politics… He [the philosopher] cannot be objective or neutral with regard to politics."[22] To take this seriously means that we discuss political appearance within the world; we must pay attention to the way that such accounts are shot through with specific histories, power relations, worlding, and privilege.

IV

Paying attention to philosophical silencing in terms of the reduction of worlding to simple transparency—the appropriation and silencing of others through their reduction to simplistic texts read from an objective perspective by transparent theorists—is at heart a feminist and postcolonial endeavor, and I hold that feminist and postcolonial insights into the staging of philosophical universals as well as the consolidation of worlding are vital to political philosophy. Postcolonialism and feminism are not necessarily on the same page: one can be postcolonial without paying attention to feminist concerns, and feminist without paying attention to postcolonial concerns. However, both disciplines provide tools that I find useful for considering the way that what is not properly philosophical is used to support philosophical (as well as cultural, historical, and ideological) theories. Gender and otherness serve as two primary (and often overlapping) tools of dividing up the world. As a result of the primacy of gender and otherness for meaning-making, postcolonial and feminist critiques provide useful tools for demonstrating the way that privilege works to disguise worlding as transparency.

[22] "What Remains? The Language Remains," in *Essays in Understanding*, *1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, Jerome Kohn ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 2.

Reading Spivak as a postcolonial feminist is easy to justify, especially on the surface. She is often identified as a feminist and postcolonial theorist, and she frequently demonstrates her concern with anti-sexist and feminist agendas.[23] Arendt's relationship to feminism and anti-sexism, however, is more difficult to justify, at least on the surface. She makes no claims to being a feminist, and although she voices concern with the situation of women she also voices skepticism regarding the efficacy of anti-sexist agendas.[24] I hold that this does not mean she cannot or ought not be brought into dialogue with anti-sexist and feminist discourses. While part of this project is devoted to reading Arendt in terms of a feminist agenda (see in particular chapter 2), part of this project is devoted to demonstrating the practicality of Arendt's model of plurality *for* feminism.

V

In chapter one, I begin with a reading of Spivak's concept of worlding, as an interpretation and deployment of Heidegger's "worlding the world."[25] In tension with Heidegger's account of worlding in terms of poetry and art, Spivak's account focuses on

[23] For example, Sangeta Ray writes that, "Spivak is a literary theorist, a postcolonial critic, translator, feminist, Marxist, and deconstructionist" (*Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words* [West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons Ltd. 2009], 3).

[24] In her essay "On the Emancipation of Women" published in *Understanding and Politics* Arendt notes that, "in addition to her profession, she [a woman] must take care of her household and raise her children. Thus a woman's freedom to make her own living seems to imply either a kind of enslavement in her own home or the dissolution of her family" (67). However, she also notes problems with feminism's ability to pursue a particular agenda: "Whenever the women's movement crosses a political front it does so only as a unified, undifferentiated whole, which never succeeds in articulating concrete goals (other than humanitarian ones)" (68). ("On the Emancipation of Women" in *Essays in Understanding*: *1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* ed. Jeremy Kohn [New York: Schocken Books, 1994], 66-68).

[25] As a result of the interests and training of Spivak and Arendt, as well as my own interests and training, deconstruction's role in this project is complex. It informs my reading of worlding and permanent parabasis, as well as my understanding of feminism. Yet the work of Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Paul De Man are not the focus of this project. Although, where mentioned, I try to do justice to their work, their authority here is marginal, and not my primary concern.

imperialism's application of worlding as a transparent calculus with which to theorize the world in terms of objects of knowledge. Spivakian worlding takes into account the fact that world is open to both artistic complexity and simplistic calculation at the same time. Next, I examine Arendt's criticism of philosophy's traditional theorization of the political in terms of the universal subject, and the way that relying on a universal displaces the differences between individuals and thus makes difference a secondary concern. Bringing the two halves of the first chapter together, I suggest that Arendt's concept of a common world can be understood in terms of Spivakian worlding, while her account of mass society resembles Imperialistic worlding. I conclude that worlding, in terms of what is supposed to be a transparent calculus, affirms the universality of the subject by disguising the fact that any account of universality ignores fact that humans are conditioned and conditioning beings.

The second and third chapters explore Arendt's and Spivak's respective understandings of the temporality of thought, as well as their respective analyses of roles of traditional structures of meaning making and inheritance, showing how these structures have come to frame the world in terms of universality. The second chapter begins with an investigation of Arendt's concept of comprehension and her model of grappling with the legacies of history that cannot and ought not be forgotten. I consider comprehension as a unique model for approaching the past, present, and future that resists defaulting to an understanding of the past or present in terms of simple historical causality. I argue that this model provides an alternative to thinking history in terms of human progress and avoids understanding historical events in terms of an allegory for humanity as a whole, as such it challenges worlding understood in terms of calculation.

Next I turn to Arendt's concept of natality. I argue that natality, the fact that each person is a beginner, offers a way to think the contingencies of history that disrupt historical causality without reducing such contingencies back into a linear model of history.

The second half of this chapter works through Spivak's analysis of feminism's insight that the universal subject is traditionally depicted as a trope of man, in addition to her critique that feminism often mistakenly reposts this trope standing in for a universal when it attempts to correct the trope of man. In other words, feminism recognizes the universal subject is often depicted as a particular white man of privilege, yet when feminism attempts to correct this trope of the universal it often simply posits a new trope of the universal as "woman." Thus feminism often adopts and legitimizes the original universal trope of man and preserves the phallogocentric inheritance that it seeks to destroy. In this way feminism engages with the phallogocentric model with out actually challenging its worlded frame. I suggest that the insidious nature of the phallogocentric model can be challenged through Spivak's reading of Nietzsche and Derrida on the feminine, and her account of the excess shared materiality between mother and child and the marginal excess of the clitoris as not contributing to patronymic inheritance.

Despite the contrast between feminine excess and natality, I conclude this chapter by arguing that together Arendt's concept of natality with Spivak's reading of feminine excess disrupts patronymic order and phallogocentric worlding by demonstrating the limitations of traditional theoretical models to account for difference and the new. These two concepts can be read together to create feminist quasi-model of inheritance that displaces continuity in favor of the appearance of the incalculable and of discontinuity.

The third chapter compares Spivak's and Arendt's approaches to temporality and suggests the possibility that these approaches might open up a new way to relate to worlding. Linked to the theme of patronymic inheritance introduced in the second half of chapter two, the first half of the second chapter provides a reading of Arendt's essay, "What is Authority?" and the preface to her book *Between Past and Future*, in which I consider the possibility of moving beyond traditional ways of approaching the political. I focus on both the dangers of clinging to a tradition that no longer has authority as well as the dangers of assuming that one can simply move beyond tradition. This is where I take my greatest leeway in my reading of Arendt, aligning her work with feminism's critique of patriarchy in general and the patronymic in particular. I argue that her work provides two important insights for feminism. First, she provides a reading of Kafka's "He" in terms of a diagonal of thought, which offers the first building block of a feminist model of *thinking* the political. Second, she argues that elements of tradition that lack an explicit connection to authority can become tyrannical forces that lose sight of their own worlding and thus can be used as if they were objective elements of reality.

Next, I examine Spivak's concept of permanent parabasis, the continual interruption of a master narrative, as a model of feminist thought. I argue that this model offers an expansion of Arendt's diagonal of thought, moving the diagonal beyond a single line, to an infinite series of diagonals derived from infinite presents. I demonstrate the ways that both permanent parabasis and the diagonal of thought help us understand the feminist potential of Arendt's work, and possibility of inheritance that exceed the model of a patronymic order. These two models are thus helpful for destabilizing any master narrative of history that might be mistaken for a transparent account of the world.

Having addressed questions relating to the relationship between the past and the present, continuity and the new, and the problem of excluded appearance within tradition, the final chapter considers the possibility of thinking the political in terms of plurality and the double bind. Using Spivak's application of Gregory Bateson's concept of the double bind—understood as two worlded and worlding contradictory laws, I argue that Arendt's concept of political plurality, which serves as the foundation for political appearance and is grounded in its twofold nature of equality and distinction, can be read in terms of the double bind. Furthermore, not only can plurality's twofold nature be read in terms of the double bind, plurality, because it displaces universality to a secondary position, can be understood as part of a double bind with universality as an already worlded concept. I demonstrate this through a reading of Arendt's discussion of plurality in relation to the claim in Genesis that "Male and Female he [God] created them both" and in contradistinction to claims that Adam is the sole root of humanity, with Eve made from Adam's rib.[26] By reading these two lines of Genesis together we see the complexity of transforming our approaches to political appearance because such transformations can only occur within a conditioning and conditioned framework.

I conclude that, on the one hand, Arendt's account of plurality works to keep any worlded depictions of difference and equality from being assumed to be universal. I argue that plurality's prioritization of difference, equality, and appearance within the political offers feminism a new model for thinking through political appearance and worlding by focusing on the impossibility of deriving a formula for defining either concept without reference to the other. On the other hand, following Spivak's analysis of the double bind, I argue that such a model must not be assumed to erase the legacies of

[26] *The Human Condition*, 8.

traditional political thought nor should plurality ever be assumed to be a concept derived outside of worlding and therefore even with the double bind of equality and difference, plurality, as a concept must always be understood as a concept within worlded context.

Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition. The impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force. [27]

-Hannah Arendt

Chapter One

Arendt on Universal Political Subjects and Spivak on Imperialistic Worlding

Introduction

The questions that frame this dissertation are considered in depth in the introduction to this dissertation but can be summarized as follows. First, what would it mean to provide a theory of political appearance while also paying attention to worlding? Second, what would it look like to ground the political in plurality instead of a universal political subject? In order to begin to address the first question, this chapter first provides an account of Heidegger's concept of worlding and then an analysis of Spivak's reworking of his term. I use these concepts to describe imperialism's staging of its colonies as sites for legitimizing imperial power and self-understanding. To address the second question, I take up Arendt's critique of western political philosophy, arguing that a universal subject, when used as an unquestioned starting point for theorizing the political, cannot account for the primacy of difference, and that such a subject participates in a theoretical model similar to Spivak's account of imperialistic worlding.

[27] *The Human Condition*, 9.

Spivak's and Arendt's critiques begin with seemingly opposite topics of hegemonic worlding (Spivak) and a critique of the universal political subject (Arendt). Yet one finds important similarities regarding the roles of difference, universality, and "world" in their respective theories. Moreover, I argue that these similarities, especially the relationship between "world" and political appearance, yield productive insights for the possibility of reimagining the political in terms of a feminist agenda, with regard to the silencing of certain people and the denial of their recognition as speakers and actors.

For Spivak, worlding means the turning of both objects and people into objects to be understood, and it entails the concomitant assumption that the "worlder" can adequately understand and thus can provide an objective account of others. Spivak argues that, as a whole, western geo-politics disavows the contingency of its worlding, because such politics assume that theoretical concepts and rational calculus can be objectively applied to the world, sanctioning first world and capitalist-driven interventions intended to address the problems of the developing world. According to Spivak, in order to apply such a model, western global politics must generally invest in top-down, calculative approaches to worlding. She argues that such approaches often fail to pay attention to their own omissions and contradictions. To keep from revealing such omissions and contradictions, she holds that the west often participates in the managed displacement of difference into the category of that which has yet to be theorized. Such self-affirming models cannot be challenged by pointing to other worlds because pointing to other worlds structures such worlds as sites for future information retrieval in support of the dominant world.

Arendt argues that because western philosophy traditionally begins with and relies on a universal subject, it misunderstands political plurality. It fails to recognize that humans are political as a result of their differences. As Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*, "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."[28] Therefore, acting beings are as the same insofar as they are all fundamentally different.

Philosophy's misunderstanding of the political becomes particularly dangerous because it does not overlook difference entirely; instead, as I will argue, it relegates any theorization of difference to second place and recuperates it under the banner of universality. The application of political philosophy may disguise the universal subject's inadequacy by framing the political in terms of such non-political structures as universal kinship and universal historical progress. As a result, difference is introduced into the political in terms of consanguinity and natural development and becomes managed difference. In this way, essentialism, the very thing that Arendt argues does not belong to the political, becomes the ground for determining political agency and, inversely, for the exclusion of those who, through the lenses of kinship and history, are reduced to a social identity of parvenu or pariah and cannot appear as themselves in the political.[29]

[28] Ibid., 8.
[29] Carl Schmitt warns of the dangers of invoking universal humanity for political ends in *Concept of the Political*. He writes, "To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity" (*Concept of the Political Expanded Edition* [Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007], 54).

1 Spivak: Imperialistic Worlding

Throughout her immense body of work, Spivak repeatedly frames her accounts of the imperialistic production of a supposedly rational world in terms of worlding. To address this frame, it will not be enough to take into account the fact that different worlds exist, we must also address the way that privilege offers the illusion of the rationality of particular worlds and persons while silencing and objectifying others as irrational objects of study. In order to address the relationship between worlding and privilege as well as the application of universals within a conditioning and conditioned world, this section presents Martin Heidegger's concept of worlding the world and Spivak's appropriation of it.

In an early interview with Elizabeth Grosz titled "Criticism, Feminism and The Institution," (1984) Spivak defines worlding as "a texting, textualizing, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood."[30] From this brief definition we already see that worlding requires both an awareness of something that is open to interpretation as art and the transformation of that something (or someone) into a text for study. Therefore to consider worlding is to consider the ways in which things and persons are recognized as objects *for study*. Thus, they are already determined in some way. Spivak's task is to take account of how things or persons are determined as objects of study.

[30] "Criticism, Feminism and The Institution," 1.

1.1 Heideggerian Worlding

Spivak draws heavily on Martin Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art."[31] Worlding signifies the way that we bring meaning to things—determining them, but also the way that this meaning determines us. As Heidegger explains,

> The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are at hand. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. The *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the path of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being.[32]

For Heidegger, a "world" is more than the sum of its parts. Moreover, "world" is not something that we can detach ourselves from, to make into an object of study. It is more than discrete objects or particular discourses. It is the meaning that we are born into, is perhaps minimally shaped by our existence, and continues on after we die.[33]

Although world is beyond a framework and is something that we are always already subject to, this does not make it a totalizing concept; instead Heidegger stresses the possibility of accessing the world that has us through the rift between world and earth.

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[31] "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)*, David Farrell Krell, ed., (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 143-212.
[32] "The Origin of the Work of Art," 170.
[33] Arendt's explanation of the world offered in "Introduction into Politics" further clarifies Heidegger's account. She writes that "the space between men, which is the world, cannot, of course, exist without them, and a world without human beings, as over against a universe without human beings or nature without human beings, would be a contradiction in terms" ("Introduction into Politics," *Promise of Politics* Jeremy Kohn ed. [New York: Schocken Books, 2005] 106). In this way we see that the world, which is a human created condition is also what conditions humanity.

He both distinguishes and joins world and earth. Earth provides the ground for the world and world and earth are distinct but together. He argues that,

> World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and the earth juts through world. Yet the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.[34]

Earth and world are distinct but bound together in a continuous struggle. Our access to earth occurs through the opening of world, and so this access does not give us access to anything apart from the conditions of worlding.

We can *mistakenly* depict the earth as raw matter, and the world as built out of meaning and representations. Acknowledging this depiction as well as the fact that it is a mistake requires a double move of imagining something (earth), which by definition cannot be depicted, and at the same time limits "world" to already determining representations. Micheal Haar's work is helpful for clarifying the relationship between world and earth. He notes in his essay, "Earth in the Work of Art" that "the earth is no more the raw material existing in itself than the world is an assembly of preestablished forms."[35] Haar continues, "In the interpretation of art, the concept of earth is used with two different meanings: one the one hand, it refers to the endemic foundations of a

[34] "The Origin of the Work of Art," 174.
[35] "Earth in the Work of Art" in *Phenomenology and Beyond: The Self and Its Language*, *Contributions to Phenomenology*, Harold A. Durfee and David F.T. Rodier eds. (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 84-101), 84.

people…on the other, it designates what is traditionally called material…which is related to a natural foundation."[36] In this way earth is both related to what we understand as raw material, but also is part of the particularities of a people, thereby naturalizing the concept of earth.

Heidegger avoids the naturalization of earth and world by arguing that worlding must be understood in terms of poetry. Put into historical and cultural terms, he explains:

> Projective saying [poetry] is saying which, in preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into a world. In such saying, the concepts of a historical people's essence, i.e., of its belonging to world history, are preformed for that people.[37]

Projective saying, or poetry, determines and is determined by what is meaningful in the world. In this way certain structures of meaning are established, allowing something to appear. As Haar explains in *Song of the Earth*, "Poetry lets language turn back towards its power of calling. For Heidegger, poetry makes the very occurrence of the division between the apparent and the non-apparent appear."[38] Here he suggests that, for Heidegger, poetry points at something that belongs to language as "its power of calling," drawing out the division between world and earth. Therefore, poetry transcends information retrieval and is not concerned with objects of knowledge. Haar writes: "Words taking over the initiative means that the purely instrumental relationship to language is suspended, which is the ordinary use of language governed by the

[36] "Earth in the Work of Art," 84.
[37] "The Origin of the Work of Art," 199.
[38] *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*. Trans. Reginald Lilly. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 116.

transmission of information."[39] In this way poetry is not an instrument for information retrieval but engages with and allows for the openness of world and earth.

This engagement is part of the rift of world and earth. Heidegger writes, "This rift does not let the opponents break apart; it brings what opposes measure and boundary into its common outline."[40] In this way Heidegger stresses that "poetry, as clearing projection, unfolds of concealment and projects ahead into the rift-design of the figure, is the open region which poetry lets happen, and indeed in such a way that only now, in the midst of beings, the open region brings beings to shine and ring out."[41] Poetry, therefore, provides the space for the Figure, where "Figure is the structure in whose shape the rift composes itself."[42] This means that poetry evades the problems of the tensions between world and earth.

The difference between poetry (or, for Spivak, literature broadly defined) and information is that the experience of poetry engages with the ambiguity of meanings while calculus concerns certainty. Spivak does not hold Heidegger accountable for the way that his concepts can be applied as calculus and in terms of imperialistic models, nor does she see her reading as a necessary outcome of his work.[43] Poetry undoes certainty and thus shows the joining to world and earth, producing the world and earth as joined, and pointing to what is yet unsaid. In contrast, information requires the transparency of

[39] *Song of the Earth*, 118.
[40] "The Origin of the Work of Art," 188.
[41] Ibid., 197.
[42] Ibid., 189.
[43] In a footnote to "Rani of Sirmur," an essay discussed later in this chapter, Spivak explains that in contrast to her account of imperialism, "it should be noted that Heidegger's attitude toward this "struggle" [between earth and world] is benign since he *is* speaking of the work of art. My (necessarily false) analogy is substituting colonized space as a 'phantasmic 'earth'" (ft.nt. 18, p253). ("Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives" *History and Theory*, Vol. 24 No. 3 [Oct., 1985], 247-272).

both world and earth, so as to provide unambiguous logic as if everything were directly sayable and as if one has mastery over the information one conveys.

1.2 Spivak: Worlding as Calculus and Art

Because of her interest in the worlded application of theory, Spivak blurs the practical distinction between art and the transmission of information by pointing to the fact that both require reading or interpretation. In her essay, "Reading the World: Literary Studies in the Eighties" she explains that everyone reads the world as a book:

> Especially the "leaders" of our society, the most "responsible" non-dreamers: the politicians, the businessmen, the ones who make plans. Without the reading of the world as a book, there is no prediction, no planning, no taxes, no laws, no welfare, no war. Yet leaders read the world in terms of rationality and averages, as if it were a textbook.[44]

To read the world as a textbook is to assume that the world is straightforward, that one has access to the only relevant perspective, and that there is a direct knowledge and transparent subject who considers such knowledge objectively. Spivak challenges this model, arguing that, "The world actually writes itself with the many-leveled, unfixable intricacy and openness of a work of literature."[45] This way of reading aligns with Heidegger's understanding of the work of art; however as argued below, her concern is with the practical co-existence of literature and information retrieval as it is staged

[44] "Reading the World: Literary Studies in the Eighties," *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Routledge: New York, 1988), 95.
[45] "Reading the World: Literary Studies in the Eighties," 95.

through imperialistic interests. She is well aware that her *application* of philosophical concepts is a mistake in terms of her object (the particularities of historical moments).[46]

Spivak engages Heidegger's concept of worlding the world as a lever for her postcolonial critique. She uses worlding in order to elucidate the workings of imperialism and phallogocentrism. Her application of philosophy in terms of the empirical and anthropological makes her use of the concept vulgar.[47]

Although Spivak discusses worlding in many of her essays and interviews, her interview "Criticism, Feminism and The Institution" and her essay "Inscriptions: Of Truth to Size" provide two of her most in depth accounts. In "Inscriptions: Of Truth to Size" she offers readings of two different art exhibitions. Within this account she considers the vulgar application of worlding first in terms of gendering and then in terms of geopolitics. In terms of gendering, she points to the way that art is often already bound up with the vulgar. She states that Heidegger "claimed that a work of art worlded a world on uninscribed earth, [that it] wrote a *monde* on a virgin *terre*".[48] In the context of the essay, she is playing on the name of the art exhibit *Magiciens de la terre*. What she suggests is that *le monde* and *la terre* signal that gender is already in play. Of course in German both world and earth are in the feminine (*die Welt* and *die Erde)*, but either way world and earth are already rely on gendering through language.

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[46] For instance, in terms of her controversial reading of Kant, Spivak writes, "I will call my reading of Kant 'mistaken.' I believe there are just disciplinary grounds for irritation at my introduction of the 'empirical and the anthropological' into a philosophical text that slowly leads us towards the rational study of morals as such" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 9).

[47] Spivak's use of the vulgar resonates with Derrida's use of the term in his reading of Heidegger. Spivak comments on this concept and offers a quote from Derrida in her translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, noting that "Derrida demonstrates that, although Heidegger would purge Kant and Hegel—indeed what Heidegger sees that the entire Aristotelian tradition—of the 'vulgar concept of time'—there can be no concept of time that is not caught within the metaphysical clôture: 'wishing to produce that other concept, one quickly sees that it would be constructed with other metaphysical or ontotheological predicates'" ("Translator's Preface" in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974, ix-lxxxvii], ix).

[48] "Inscriptions: of Truth and Size," *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (Routledge: New York, 1993), 211.

This gendering may seem trivial and of a secondary concern because we understand the gendering of nouns to be natural, but such simple gendering signals the way that gender is never not implicitly being used to order the world. Spivak explains that "this is not a special pleading for special interest." Instead, "From any exhibition tacitly celebrating the move from *le monde* to *la terre*, an attempt at graphing an aesthetics of sexual difference, *as offered* by the constellation of objects, can, I think, be expected."[49] Her claim is that the world is not gender-neutral. This means that gender is not simply a "special interest" concern to be worked out in the margins. Instead, as she explains in her most recent book, *An Aesthetic Education in an Era of Globalization*:

> Gender is our first instrument of abstraction…if we aspire to be citizens of the world, we must not only fight the habit of thinking creation and innovation are our own cultural secret, we must also shake the habit of thinking that our version of computing gender is the world's simply ignore it unless we are specifically speaking of women and queers.[50]

If gender is one of the first organizing principles for meaning, when an account loses sight of not just gendering but its own inability to grasp the way that gender signifies, then such an account makes gender a special interest while at the same time affirming itself as objective in relation to gender. This assumed objectivity is a product of assumptions that one knows that gender is not in play and thus knows where gender fits into meaning, and so such assumed objectivity attempts to deny its own worlding.

After pointing to the fact that it is already organized in terms of gender, Spivak makes three claims about worlding in relation to geopolitics. First she considers the

[49] "Inscriptions" 215.
[50] *Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 31.

imperialistic mistake of actually assuming that there is virgin earth.[51] In her interview "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," she explains worlding in terms of an imperialist project. She notes, "I am thinking basically about the imperialist project which had to assume that the earth that is territorialized was in fact previously uninscribed. So then a world, on a simple level of cartography, inscribed what was presumed to be uninscribed."[52] Through worlding there is both an awareness that something exists and then an attempt to give it meaning. With imperialism we have the imperial power operating as "worlded material" while the new colony occupies the place of "raw earth." In this way the colony becomes an object of study and then is studied in order to produce meaning and be brought into the world. What is lost sight of is both that this raw material is already inscribed by inhabitants as well as the fact that the position of the supposedly objective cartographer is already subjectively worlded.

This first mistake of assuming that there is such a thing as virgin earth allows for a second mistake: because there is no virgin earth, Spivak explains that "the geo is already graphed. There *is* geography. Every desire for a wholly new reinscription of the *terre* can only ever be a palimpsest."[53] In this way any attempt to map—in order to create what is supposedly virgin earth—must write over, look over, or naturalize what was written before as if it were simply part of the landscape. In order to have a coherent reading of a palimpsest one must actively ignore what was written before, concealing it in order to maintain what is overwritten. Therefore the ideal of virgin earth is not just an error; it is also a disavowal of previous mappings.

[51] "Inscriptions," 211.
[52] "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," 1.
[53] "Inscriptions," 211.

Spivak's third point is that to challenge imperialistic worldings from a position of privilege may lead to a nostalgic reaffirmation of imperialistic worlding. Looking at the photo of a child displayed in the art exhibit, she explains that "the returned glance of the other is not of the Africa—a Roman proper name inscribed on a bit of earth long ago—not of the African of magic—but of the naked and benignly ironic African child, grave with the wisdom of the brutality of modern geography learned in its blood."[54] Here she suggests that in recognizing the fact that the world is already worlded and is not virgin earth, one must not substitute a naturalized representation of the other ("the African of magic"). To simply affirm native worldings is a nostalgic response that participates in the same logic as imperialistic mapping through naturalization of an indigenous position. Such attempts to protect a world from a position of power often cast that world in terms of cultural purity or authenticity, ignoring the fact that any mapping is always a palimpsestic writing over of previous mappings.

Africa, as a western name, is already worlded, signaling an asymmetrical power dynamic, but that is not to say that this name belongs to the west. In the photograph described above, Spivak points out that there are already children who are already engaged in bloody fights, and who are already caught up in worlding which is both local and caught up in western hegemony insofar as the name Africa has a long history. The depiction of this child is thus staged by the photographer, the museum, and the critic, and any attempts to undo the staging by pointing at anything natural about the child repeats an imperialistic mistake by assuming the transparent access to pure Africa and the transparency of the western subjects' examination of the art. Thus the significance of

[54] Ibid.

Spivak's note that the photographer insisted that the picture was not posed![55] The danger of the work of art within the imperial context cannot be denied. The photo was both posed and not posed.

Art is world-revealing as well as a staged site for information retrieval, but the information is often considered to be a truth about the subject of the work of art, in the case of the photograph. Instead, as Spivak explains:

> I have felt more and more that there is no innocent gaze, that the space of a museum is a space which assigns *us*, makes *us* visible, for we are necessarily unable to work with the structural possibility that every signification ascribed here is parasitical, beside itself.[56]

This is Heidegger's lesson that the ascription of the elements of the artwork to a particular cause does not reveal information but reveals the world in which we are immersed. Spivak's lesson is that when we attempt to ascribe meaning—and we cannot in some minimal sense prevent ourselves from ascribing meaning to an object of knowledge once we make it an object for study—we cannot see the necessarily attendant concealment.

1.3 Worlding as Imperial Calculus

Turning from the world of art to geopolitics, we see that Spivak maintains a thread of connection: on the side of art, we maintain a space for meaning otherwise, even as we participate in meaning-making that we assume is transparent. On the side of

[55] Spivak notes, "I was assured that the photographs were not posed," (ibid.).
[56] Ibid., 209.

geopolitics we read for transparency and attempt to remove parasitical meanings. According to Spivak, imperialistic worlding even in its contemporary forms serves to validate the imperialist's actions and self-identity. She offers several accounts of worlding in terms of Great Britain's relationship to India, the most famous of which occurs in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and which was briefly discussed in the introduction. In her essay, "The Rani of Sirmur," she explicitly addresses the relationship between self and other produced through imperialism. I shall therefore briefly consider both essays, beginning with "The Rani of Sirmur."

In this essay Spivak considers the figure of Captain Geoffrey Birth, a twenty-nine-year-old of modest birth who participated in the worlding of the British Empire by surveying and drawing up maps of India. She describes Birch and his situation as follows:

> He [Birch] is advancing his career, riding about in the hills with a single native escort—a slightly romantic figure if encountered in the pages of a novel or on the screen. He is actually engaged in the consolidating of the Self to Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground. He is worlding *their own world,* which is far from mere uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging *them* to domesticate the alien as Master.[57]

Through Birch, the native is positioned as foreign, and in order to be recognized by those in power the native must accept the position of foreigner. Spivak explains this in her rewrite of "The Rani of Surmir" in the following way: "The truth value of the stranger is being established as the reference point for the true (insertion into) history of these wild

[57] "The Rani of Simur," 253. Emphasis Spivak.

regions."[58] This reinscription of the imperial stranger as both the authority and the subject is particularly dangerous because it naturalizes the foreign/other as belonging to the "wild regions." This reinscription also assumes that the imperialist/subject is the true authority on history and, as such, can theorize the other and bring these wild regions into history. As Spivak notes later on in her revision, "What is at stake is a 'worlding,' the reinscription of a cartography that must (re)present itself as impeccable."[59]

Birch gathers information for Great Britain's authoritative map of India. The consequence of this is that those who make the map, Birch, but also his superiors, cast themselves as knowing subjects able to objectively, or impeccably, depict the world while the native inhabitants become objects of knowledge, shaped as objects to be studied through the worlding/mapping process. What is omitted in such a model is the fact that the imperialist and the native are both subject to worlding. Neither has an objective account of the world. Yet Birch, from a position of privilege, can ignore or forget his worlding as he sees fit.

Because of the supposed impeccability of the imperialist worlding, one cannot simply listen to the voice of the other; the resultant structure and the power relations mean that the voice of the other is reduced to an object of knowledge. As mentioned above and in the introduction, Spivak's most famous examination of this problem is found in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," an essay in which Spivak considers the way that the subaltern, understood as those on the lowest rung of the economic ladder and with the least amount of access to the government for self-advocacy—in particular women—become tools for affirming different iterations of western worlding. As Drucilla Cornell

[58] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 213.
[59] Ibid., 228.

points out in "The Ethical Affirmation of Human Rights," the statement that the subaltern cannot speak is a claim "that there is no existing representational space in which the gendered subaltern can make itself heard."[60] This lack of a representational space is precisely the result of a worlding that fails to acknowledge its own contingency and which depends upon the other as an object of knowledge.

The subaltern cannot speak not because she does not speak, but because this consolidation of worlding puts the theorist in the position of speaking for and theorizing about those without access, speaking for others and depicting others as objects for study. The imperialist model of worlding allows the theorist to decide who matters and to set the stage for the appearance of the subaltern, particularly the subaltern woman who is staged as the target for development and the victim of tradition.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak describes this targeting and victimization of women through an account of widow suicide in India and the fight between traditionalists and the British imperial government over its regulation. She offers two sentences written in support of each other and which silence the subaltern: "White men are saving brown women from brown men" and "The women wanted to die."[61] These two sentences articulate the problem of imperial power and the effect on those without access to it. Neither sentence allows for the complexities of worlding; both assume transparency and eliminate gendering on the side of the authoritative pronouncement. In the first sentence the women are victims who must be saved. In the second sentence the women are agents able to make completely free choices. These two sentences eliminate

[60] "The Ethical Affirmation of Human Rights: Gayatri Spivak's Intervention," in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 101.
[61] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 287.

any difference, complexity, or possibility of their own incomplete depictions, washing out all other meanings and possibilities of signifying otherwise. Furthermore, because of power dynamics, anything the widows might say is framed in terms of one sentence or the other.

This last point is key for Spivak: "The subaltern cannot speak" not because she does not speak, but because the two sentences above, and the governing interests of those collecting information, keep the subaltern from being understood. Spivak's answer to this problem is not to attempt to find the true voice of widows; instead, her goal is a kind of listening to the fragments that cannot be properly brought into either the narrative of the traditionalist or the narrative of the imperialist. This will not restore the true voice of the widow, but as Cornell writes, "noting the failure of representation itself becomes a form of listening."[62] Noting that which is not acknowledged in terms of its poetic, worlded complexity becomes a form of listening. This is then part of a model which, in *Habitations of Modernity* Dipesh Chakrabarty explains as "to be possessed—of an openness so radical that I can only express it in Heideggerian terms: the capacity to hear that which one does not already understand."[63] Chakrabarty's definition is apt, but might be slightly reworked as the capacity to hear that which one will never fully understand.

This absorption of the other into a meta-narrative-mega-map depends upon the displacement of the other in order to constitute a 'proper' world that will reflect back to the imperialist country how it already wants to know itself. This empty space becomes the place for the western imperialist to work out his or her own identity, establishing him or herself in relation to universal subject by considering objects of knowledge. This

[62] "The Ethical Affirmation of Human Rights," 101.
[63] *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 36.

displacement of difference is precisely what I will argue can be demonstrated through Arendt's critique of western philosophy's use of the universal subject. Her account of the problem of applying universality to the political fills out Spivak's argument regarding the construction of the other as an object of knowledge and the consequent displacement of difference.

2 Arendt: The Dangers of Beginning with Universality

Two of Hannah Arendt's essays, "Introduction into Politics" and "The Tradition of Political Thought," both of which appear in *The Promise of Politics*, offer a good picture of her critique of Western philosophy's deployment of the universal subject. As she explains in her essay, "Introduction into Politics," philosophy misunderstands the political if it begins with the universal subject or "man" and consequently assumes that "there is something political *in* man that belongs to his essence."[64] She argues that this is wrong: "this simply is not so; *man* is apolitical."[65] Therefore in developing a political philosophy based on a universal, western philosophy begins from a mistaken origin.[66] For

[64] I use masculine pronoun here for two reasons. The first is straightforward: in general, Western philosophers were not thinking of women as political subjects. With a few notable exceptions, the inclusion of women remains an afterthought in most philosophical texts. The second reason is more complicated. Arendt's use of masculine pronouns is par for her time; however, given her brief discussions of gender it would seem that she actively intends to signify both men and women under the term "men." Thus her inclusion of women under the category "men" provides an interesting, and perhaps symptomatic, complication of grappling with questions related to the articulation of plurality. The significance of gender in Arendt and Spivak's works is developed at length in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

[65] "Introduction Into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*, 95.

[66] Margret Canovan reads the distinction between politics and philosophy in terms of the difference between politics' requirement that we be with other people, and philosophy's need to be solitary (*Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 260-62). Canovan's account addresses the hostility between politics and philosophy but does not address how

Arendt, this mistake is most likely the product of philosophy's traditional point of engagement.[67] She suggests that because philosophy usually considers humanity in terms of reasoning or fabrication, and reasoning and fabricating are things that can be done alone, Western philosophy is positioned to think of politics in terms of a universal subject and not in terms of relations between persons.[68]

2.1 Universals Displacing Difference

By locating the political *in* the singular subject, western philosophy begins with the assumption that "man" is already, according to "his" singular nature, political, and it then theorizes political community in terms of the multiplication of that singular subject. In this way the political is theorized as internal to the subject and does not actually require the (theoretical) presence of different beings, displacing the thing necessary to it in the first place. However, because politics concerns community, philosophy must belatedly engage with the fact that it involves different individuals. In other words, philosophical accounts that begin with a universal subject move difference, and relations between persons, to a secondary position. This means that they cannot account for the intrinsic role of difference, but can only see difference as supplemental to intrinsic sameness.

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philosophy then theorizes the political and the resultant implications (*Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought* 263-264).

[67] "The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 62.

[68] "The Tradition of Political Thought" in *The Promise of Politics,* Jeremy Kohn ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 60. In "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," Arendt identifies a similar problem in western ethics insofar as the west has moved to a model of ethics that denies the plurality inherent in thinking with oneself Some Questions of Moral Philosophy" in *Responsibility and Judgment* ed. Jerome Kohn [New York: Schocken Books, 2003] 68-75, 76-78). "

In contrast to the claim that the singular individual is inherently political, Arendt states that politics arises "*between men* and so quite *outside* of *man*."[69] The political is found in the coming together of different individuals, and politics requires different people united through the common, public recognition of the fact that they are different. As she explains, "Politics is based on the fact of human plurality….[It] deals with the coexistence and association of *different* men."[70] Thus difference is primary and a community is political insofar as it engages with difference. The notion of plurality and the idea of a political derived in the space between individuals is developed in the fourth chapter, but for now it is sufficient to note that this primary difference roots Arendtian plurality and politics.

As I argue below, to incorporate difference after first denying it means that the difference that is incorporated is difference managed by universality and not the essential difference that Arendt sees as defining political plurality.[71] Arendtian difference as unmanaged difference stands in contrast to the secondary managed difference largely assumed by western political philosophy. Thus philosophy founds politics on universal sameness; this universal sameness gives us "the political subject" who is supposed to be universal but, insofar as we depict this political subject as a particular being in the world, 'he' is in fact imbued with traits that stand in for universality. In other words, common traits are substituted for the unrepresentable theoretical trait of universality.[72] An example

[69] "Introduction into Politics", 91.
[70] Ibid., 93.
[71] Arendt points to Hobbes as a noteworthy exception to western philosophy's assumption of a universal political subject, stating that he recognizes that politics arises between individuals (Ibid., 95).
[72] The mechanics of this substitution of a trait for truth are developed in chapter two in terms of Spivak's reading of feminism and deconstruction.

of this is the way that 'he' stands in as the sign for a universal political subject, but also represents the male gender.

Arendt holds that God and the Platonic ideal are the two most common models for the universal political subject, and, in "The Tradition of Political Thought," she outlines two problems with using the philosophical ideal or personal God. First, if we appeal to God's image or to an eternal ideal, then what is privileged is the possibility that we can all emulate this ideal. Arendt explains that, "on this basis [of the personal God of monotheistic religions], there can, of course, be only *man*, while *men* become a more or less successful repetition of the same.[73] As flawed repetitions, humans remain oriented toward this ideal and must grapple with their continuous failure to fully actualize it. With this model, difference remains secondary after the primacy of idealized sameness, and thus difference matters only negatively, as signs of our different failures to actualize that universal ideal. The second problem is that both ideals draw humanity outside of the realm of human affairs, and into the realms of philosophy and religion. In these realms, Arendt states that we are all equal in terms of such concepts as our equality in sin or our equality before death.[74] Insofar as death and our relationship to God are outside of the realm of human affairs, to bring these models to bear in the world means that politics is no longer about the relationships between individuals but is mediated by divine/external concerns.[75] As a result, what marks our universality is something separate from the political.

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[73] "The Tradition of Political Thought," 60.
[74] *The Human Condition*, 215.
[75] A common way of expressing this has often been to quote Matthew: "Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's'" (*The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version*. [Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, Inc, 1989] 22:21).

To emulate the ideal and to move beyond the human, locating the political in one's relationship with God or nature requires the ability to depict the ideal and to depict humanity.[76] A common attribute is often used as a representation of the ideal and so the ideal (whether it is God or a Platonic form) loses its theoretical purity. This becomes especially dangerous when one uses such representations as if they were not mistakes and applies a calculus to measure a common attribute. So when one appeals to God's image, or a Platonic ideal, and then attempts to calculate God or ideal, one loses sight of the difference between the realm of everyday humanity and that of theoretical purity.

In order to represent the ideal of humanity, and thus to get around plurality, Arendt considers the western tradition's turn to such common attributes as kinship and human history. She argues that the politicization of these two concepts and the consequential erasure of plurality enable western philosophy's faulty conception of the political to appear as if it were adequate to theorizing the political. In distinct but similar ways, kinship and history manage difference so that anything different or new can never appear as what it really is: radically different from anything that has come before; instead, it is managed—or, to use Spivak's language, mapped—as inevitable and predictable objects of knowledge. The use of kinship and history warrant further examination, as they provide clues to the mechanics of managing difference, and as they demonstrate the way that Arendt's concerns regarding the relationship between philosophy and the political parallel Spivak's concerns regarding imperialistic worlding.

[76] This is the problem Spivak addresses when she considers worlding in terms of imperialism: "earth" and "world" are held as calculable objects of study.

2.2 History as Progress

Arendt directly accuses western philosophy of using history as a substitute for the political. In "Introduction into Politics" she states that, "The West's solution for escaping from the impossibility of politics within the Western creation myth is to transform politics into history, or to substitute history for politics."[77] This solution is not supposed to be the substitution of particular histories, but in conjunction with the universal subject, the solution is to consider a universal history of human kind. As Arendt explains, expanding on the quote above, this solution leads us to a single human history:

> In the idea of world history, the multiplicity of men is melted into *one* human individual, which is then also called humanity. This is the source of the monstrous and inhuman aspect of history, which first accomplishes its full and brutal end in politics.[78]

To construct such an account of politics requires theorizing all of human history and knowing humanity's ultimate end.[79] The decidedly un-political, inhumanity of this history enables the universal subject by being substituted for it; the constructed history of this monstrous figure explains humanity's development or "natural" progression toward the perfect realization of this universal subject. This yields a model of history as human progress where all individual acts are subsumed under the banner of human development, and the goal of all action becomes the achievement of human perfection.

Furthermore, in order to construct such a history of human progress, one must assume the causal necessity of the past and thus the resultant necessity of the present and

[77] "Introduction into Politics," 95.
[78] Ibid., 95.
[79] Arendt sees this model of history as being both indebted to and unimaginable by Hegel and Marx ("From Hegel to Marx" in *The Promise of Politics*, Jeremy Kohn ed. [New York: Schocken Books, 2005] 74-75).

future as part of an already known. In this way, a universal history accounts for a determined, already historical, politics of the present and future. This model, and the necessarily emphasis on a known human future, is described in Arendt's reading of Marx's relationship to Hegel. She holds that if Hegel presents the dialectic of history, Marx turns this dialectic into a method. As she explains, "Hegel interpreted the past as history and in so doing discovered dialectics as the fundamental law of all historical change. This discovery enables us to shape the future of history."[80] Similar to Arendt's reading of the application of God or a Platonic ideal to the world, we see here that the ideal of a philosophical concept (Hegel's dialectic) applied to the world as a calculus is used to determine the future.

In order for this model to work, anything new must automatically be folded into the already determined history of humanity as progressing toward its ideal. The result is that, "Marx formalizes Hegel's dialectic of the absolute in history as a *development*, as a self-propelled process, and in this connection it is important to recall that both Marx and Engels were adherents to Darwin's theory of evolution."[81] Drawing on Arendt's argument we can see that, in connecting history to development, there is an assumption of the superiority of the present over the past, yet the present is seen as caused by the past. Such a model requires foreclosing the possibility of anything that is not part of the progression of humanity.

Considering the implications of Arendt's work, we can also see that the application of history is dangerous, not just because it forecloses the newness of the present and future, but also because—using Spivak's vulgar application of worlding—

[80] "Introduction into Politics," 75-76.
[81] Ibid., 75.

those who are in a position of privilege are the ones who determine and depict what counts as progress, naturalizing their values in terms of the necessity of human progress and thus worlding in terms of calculus. As a result, those who are different become an essentialized part of an earlier stage of development.

Arendt's critique of history understood as progress, a model of history supported by the use of others as examples of a lack of progress, is one of the central points of investigation in postcolonial theory. Contemporary discussions of the global division of labor and the map of development often argue that Western industrialized or "developed" nations are the model for third and fourth world countries. In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty calls this "first Europe, then elsewhere".[82] As he points out, "the validity of Europe as the center of history is no longer accepted by theorists, western or otherwise; yet he explains that "the Europe I seek to provincialize or decenter is an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought."[83] In these habits of thought, concepts of universality and secular humanity are depicted in European terms. As a result Chakrabarty explains that "the goal" is often (either directly or indirectly) to industrialize third world countries so that they can "produce local versions of the same [European] narrative".[84] Such narratives are construed as narratives of progress and the development of the undeveloped or underdeveloped world until Europe's others can be brought out of their 'backwards ways' and into the supposedly universal 'present.'

[82] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7.
[83] *Provincializing Europe,* 4.
[84] Ibid., 7.

This model works to ensure the continued displacement of plurality in favor of a universal history and the maintenance of a universal subject, not just by declaring similarity, but also by linking difference to hierarchy and coding geography as history. As with imperialistic worlding, anything new, and thus anything different becomes a site for information retrieval and is subsumed under a common narrative of humanity becoming its universalized self as written by those in a position of privilege. Difference is then only possible as managed difference that produces sameness; that is, all difference is simply that which must be overcome for historical development, and managed difference is that which has yet to evolve.

2.3 Human Family

While history as progress manages difference by looking forward to a perfect universal human history, kinship manages difference by looking backwards to consanguinity, looking to a shared root of humanity through a common ancestor and shaping the political in terms of the family. The danger with models of kinship is that, according to Arendt, families are spaces where people cannot appear as individuals but instead are given roles and participate in a hierarchy structured by kinship, appearing as different iterations of the same bloodline. With the politicization of the family, we again have a universal notion of "man," this time in terms of consanguinity making all humans the same through biology.[85]

In "Introduction into Politics," Arendt points to two products of the substitution of kinship for politics: "Any original differentiation is effectively eradicated, in the same

[85] *The Human Condition*, 53.

way that the essential equality of all men, insofar as we are dealing with *man*, is destroyed."[86] The reason that families eradicate difference is that they bring people together and unite them under a shared identity usually marked through a patronymic.[87] When this model is introduced into the political, plurality is displaced. She then goes on to add that:

> Families are founded as shelters and mighty fortresses in an inhospitable, alien world, into which we want to introduce kinship. This desire leads to the fundamental perversion of politics, because it abolishes the basic quality of plurality, or rather forfeits it by introducing the concept of kinship.[88]

By describing the loss of plurality as its abolishment, but then rephrasing this loss as the forfeiture of plurality through the introduction of kinship, she draws attention to the fact that plurality is given up rather than destroyed. "This perversion of politics" keeps plurality from appearing.

Yet just as we saw with history, difference, which is displaced by pointing to a common human family, slips back in through the divisions that are made between families, and the way that kinship is used in order to keep out the inhospitable and alien. Arendt explains that "it [kinship] is credited on the one hand as being able to unite extreme individual differences, *and*, on the other hand, as a means by which groups resembling individuals can be isolated and contrasted."[89] The unity of different individuals and isolation of groups is the inversion of politics, because unification based

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[86] "Introduction into Politics," 94.
[87] While in Totalitarianism this kind of bringing together of individuals is described as an iron band, here the family serves as a fortress. It is important to note that, contrary to Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's reading in *The Attack of the Blob*, family and totalitarianism are not the same. While the family and totalitarianism resemble each other, the family writ-large gives us a model for the social and not for totalitarianism. (*The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).
[88] "Introduction into Politics," 94.
[89] Ibid., 94.

on consanguinity is based on having or lacking a shared origin. In other words, with the politicization of kinship we see the essentialist idea that an individual can be the representative of a group of people simply because of shared heritage and genes. In this way, appeals to universality are structured under a concept of identity politics that attempts to essentialize difference as biological, united (and consequently divided) under that biological banner.

The politicization of kinship reduces people to their genetics, while, on the other hand, it introduces metaphors of biology and familial hierarchy into the political. If we remember Spivak's warning that gender is one of the foundational tools of meaning making, we can see that a model of society, humanity, or the political that is based on human kinship will necessarily be caught up with the cultural understandings of family. Kinship is founded on social structures that are not biological, yet these structures use the biological as evidence of their validity. For example a brother is both a biological event and a social term; however the social determines the significance of the biological, because the term can be applied to those who are not biological brothers. If politics is understood in terms of fraternity, then politics is based on a metaphor of consanguinity, a given identification that necessarily includes some people while excluding others. Furthermore, when biology is used as a social explanation, then differences between groups can easily be staged in terms of evolution. While kinship assumes a common heritage in "universal man," it tracks this heritage through the social, staging social difference in terms of biological difference.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt discusses the way the social takes up the model of the family and attempts to think kinship writ-large: as a national or even global family.

She explains that "society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest."[90] The interests of all are subsumed under the good of the family and the good of the family, without privacy, is then brought into the political for management as a proper family. For Arendt, "the monolithic character of every type of society, its conformism which allows or only one interest and opinion, is ultimately rooted in the one-ness of man-kind."[91] That one-ness occurs through the erasure of difference and operates as a familial model writ-large. But because there is difference, it is reintroduced at the biological level through management of bodies not thought to conform to correct models of family and not thought to properly belong to the human family.

Arendt provides a helpful explanation of this making-public of the private in her discussion of the rise of the poor during the French Revolution. In "The Social Question," she notes, "Since the revolution had opened the gates of the political realm to the poor, this realm had indeed become 'social.' It was overwhelmed by the cares and worries which actually belonged in the sphere of the household and which…were matters of administration."[92] While Arendt may at first seem unfeeling with her dismissal of "the poor" as a political group and her dismissal of the expression of needs in the political, her point is that these needs must in fact already be met in order for plurality and thus the political to emerge. This is because in situations where people lack the basic life needs, their claims are based on an appeal to biology and thus necessarily deny difference. Needs, she argues, are prior to the political, which for her is the space of debate and persuasion; insofar as there ought to be no debate about who is entitled to housing, food,

[90] *The Human Condition*, 39.
[91] Ibid., 46.
[92] *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 91.

or education, these concerns are not political. Instead, these are needs that ought to be filled so that human beings can exercise their capacities as speaking and acting political agents.

If the political becomes a place to address human needs, then the political also must be involved with, and have a paternalistic relationship to, those who cannot fulfill their basic needs. As Arendt notes, with the social comes the rise of the visibility of "activities formerly banished to the privacy of the households."[93] We might then say that the political subject becomes the individual who has rights and therefore has no more "political" needs. Consequently, rights become the concern of those who do not have or are denied the resources necessary to meet their bodily needs. One contemporary example of this management of families is discussed in Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*. She notes that:

> Western Liberal feminists have typically understood the private as an axiomatic space of women's subjugation to men, the domestic dominion that lassos women to unpaid work in the home, reproductive expectations, heteronormative nuclearity, and vulnerability to domestic violence: the "patriarchal family home."[94]

Thus the family is supposed to be the site of oppression and must be opened up to the watchful gaze of the political; however, as Puar argues, the fact is that this understanding of the oppression of women within the private ignores the "vicissitudes of state racism that permeate the domestic private domains of women of color and immigrant women."[95] That is, it is only certain families that are policed as those which do not properly conform

[93] *The Human Condition*, 68.
[94] *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 124.
[95] *Terrorist Assemblages*, 124.

to models of kinship. She notes, turning to Gilliom's account of Ohio's welfare and social services, "the poor face a level and intensity of directly targeted surveillance that relatively few of us may currently experience but that we can expect to see more of in the coming years."[96] Building on Gilliom's account, Puar writes, "The private is, therefore, offered as a gift of recognition to those invested in certain normative renditions of domesticity and as an antidote, with many strings attached, to those otherwise unable or unwilling to avoid public surveillance or who cannot make recourse to the private in any sustained manner."[97] The right to privacy is the right of citizens: it is a right granted to those who are wealthy enough not to need social services, it is granted to those who have no history of psychological problems, and it is not granted to those who are socially suspect. The similarities to Arendt's argument are striking: the cares and worries of the household and the management of the household become proof of one's status, while the mismanagement of the household as a result of poverty, or even simple difference becomes proof of inadequacy.

Through kinship and consanguinity, the political becomes that through which essentialized identities demonstrate that they belong, by showing their fitness within already established models of family. Difference is reduced to identity politics in the social and the exclusion of others who are not part of the human family. In short, consanguinity stands in for the political, and difference is reduced to social standing. In this way, the universal subject is embodied in a common origin of blood or genes and then human difference is reintroduced and managed in terms of biology.[98]

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[96] Gilliom as quoted in *Terrorist Assemblages* (ibid.).
[97] Ibid., 124.
[98] Hortence Spiller's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" offers an in-depth account of the way that families in the US are conceptualized in order to demonstrate and produce the black bodies as not part of the human

In summary, both kinship and history can be understood as managing difference by organizing either the past or the future in terms of either biological or historical necessity. It is because of worlded concepts such as kinship and history that the disparity between a universal subject and human difference can be managed. Difference staged in biological or historical terms becomes something to overcome as we relate to our common human ancestry or as we think ahead to our common human history. In this way we begin to see the way that universals can be affirmed and denied at the same time.

This model of the universal aligns with Spivak's concerns regarding imperialistic worlding. Imperialistic worlding seeks to map the world as virgin earth, incorporating it into one complete map. Similarly, the staging of universals in the political requires the possibility of a complete map, either of human nature based on kinship or of human progress. In both such models, difference becomes something to overcome, and part of the justification for imperialistic, or calculative worlding (in an attempt to know all objects and others) in terms of kinship and progress is to have a complete picture of humanity or to achieve the end of history in which all differences are resolved as sameness.

Yet just because the political is traditionally modeled on the universal subject does not mean that plurality does not exist in practice. In "The Political Tradition," in the midst of a discussion of the failure of western philosophy to think the political, Arendt points to political events that demonstrate the existence of plurality. For her, these are moments that, while not incorporated into philosophy, do not necessarily disappear. She provides three examples of political experiences of plurality that have not been theorized

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family but as meat, as well as the impropriety of the African-American family as proof of the propriety of the Caucasian-American family. ("Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics* (Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer, 1987) 64-81.

by western philosophy even though they have been recorded in history:

> The experience of action as starting a new enterprise in pre-polis Greece, the experience of foundation in Rome and the Christian experience of acting and forgiving as linked…have a special significance because they remain relevant for our history even though they were bypassed by political thought.[99]

She recognizes all three of these experiences as linked to the practical necessity of plurality in politics and sees them as supplements to western theory, falling outside of a narrative of history or of kinship purview, but forgiveness has a special place in her work.

Additionally, in her discussion of total world annihilation, she suggests that there is an intrinsic plurality in foreign affairs because negotiations between states depend upon there being multiple states and different interests between them and thus something to be negotiated.[100] Through the three historical examples and the case of international politics we see that just because western philosophy fails to theorize plurality and attempts to manage difference, this does not mean that plurality disappears.[101]

Such plural politics does not emerge out of a concern for "humanity" understood in terms of universalized human needs, rights, or progress—a concern that substitutes an

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[99] "The Tradition of Political Thought," 60.

[100] For Arendt this semi-plurality between states is not enough to preserve the political. She writes: "If in fact the only relevant concern of politics is foreign policy, or the danger that always lurks in relations between nations, that means no more and no less than that Clausewitz's statement that war is the continuation of politics by other means has been set on its head, with politics as nothing other than the continuation of war, in the course of which the means of force are periodically replaced with those of cunning" ("Introduction into Politics," 200).

[101] Luce Irigaray's argument regarding the maintenance of the Western Subject is similar to Arendt's reading of Western philosophy's misunderstanding of the political. Irigaray argues that the Western Subject evolves from the only acknowledged subject, to the ideal Subject (*Democracy Begins Between Two*, trans. Kirsteen Anderson [New York: Routledge, 2000] 122). We begin with a model of the singular male, and the female becomes the constitutive outside of this model. As Elizabeth Grosz notes, this results in "a phallic economy, an economy based on sameness, oneness or identity with the masculine subject—an '*a priori* of the same'" (Elizabeth Grosz *Sexual Subversions* [St Leonards: Allen and Unwin,1989]105). For Irigaray this sameness depends upon the exclusion of the feminine and its utilization as the ground for the subject.

idealized notion of the human for a concern with the world. For Arendt to place "humanity" at the center of concern is unpolitical. She explains, "For at the center of politics lies concern for the world, not for man—a concern, in fact, for a world, however constituted without which those who are both concerned and political would not find life worth living."[102] The political concerns human worldliness. According to Arendt, the subject on its own is worldless; therefore, we can conclude that the universal subject is worldless.

Missing from universal accounts of the political world is the world understood not in natural terms but as conditioning humans and conditioned by them. Arendt defines the world as a product of human beings:

> For the world, and the things of this world, in the midst of which human affairs take place, are not the expression of human nature, that is, the imprint of human nature turned outward, but, on the contrary, are the result of the fact that human beings produce what they themselves are not... It is within this world of things that human beings act and are themselves conditioned…[103]

Arendt carefully distinguishes the world from something internal to humans or something natural.[104] For her, any account of the universal political subject cannot give us access to a particular world. Accounts of the world that depend upon universality are world denying because "under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the 'common nature' of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that,

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[102] "Introduction into Politics," 106.
[103] Ibid., 106-7.
[104] Arendt writes, "The world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the momvent 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 this man-made world together" (*The Human Condition*, 52).

differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives not withstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object."[105] The concern with a common object is, a concern with a political principle, this object is the organizing principle that we share perspectives on. For this dissertation the political principle is that of appearance. I return to the topic of an organizing principle in the fourth chapter and conclusion of this dissertation. For now, our focus is on the fact that a common world does not produce a single, universal, perspective. Instead, as Arendt argues, "The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective."[106] The danger of the single perspective is the danger produced by positing a universal subject. It is the danger of world understood in terms of a supposedly universal perspective.[107]

To begin to consider the political in terms of Arendtian plurality and Spivakian worlding requires a different approach to spatiality and temporality, one which does not succumb to a notion of history as progress (and so consign what is new and different to a repetition of an already established model) or to a model of kinship and consanguinity which assumes possible access to our very natures. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, both thinkers offer tools for rethinking worlding. The next chapter delves deeper into the particulars of Arendt's approach to models of understanding and further explores the relationship of the structure of world and universal through Spivak's reading

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[105] Ibid., 58.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Arendt's examination of the common world *in Life of the Mind* is in tension with the model offered in *The Human Condition*. The model in the *Life of the Mind* stresses the fact that humanity's different, subjective perspectives affirm the fact that we are part of a common species. She notes, "Though each single object appears in a different perspective to each individual, the context in which it appears is the same for the whole species" ((*The Life of the Mind* [New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977] 50). I cannot follow Arendt to this conclusion. I find her move to naturalize context to be troubling, but because to speak of a species is to move outside of the political sphere, I have chosen to focus on her definition of common world as presented in *The Human Condition.*

of feminism, deconstruction, imperialism, and the troping of universals. The goal is not to find a timeless answer to the questions of worlding or a definitive political philosophy, but to address the topics of plurality and political appearance (Arendt) while paying attention to worlding both in terms of the production of objects of knowledge but also in terms of literary ambiguity and impossibility (Spivak).

What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.[108]

-Audre Lorde

This is how many men affirm, with quasi good faith, that women are *equal to men and have no demands to make, and* at the same time *that women will never be equal to men and that their demands are in vain*.[109]

-Simone de Beauvoir

Chapter Two

With Worlding: Comprehension and Feminist Critique

Introduction

As argued in the first chapter, Arendt's critique of the application of universal concepts to the political and Spivak's critique of the application of philosophical concepts to the political demonstrate the dangers of an "objective" perspective, such a perspective is according to Arendt, world denying, and according to Spivak a product of a understanding of the world as transparent. The next step in this dissertation is to consider how to theorize political appearance and the dangers of worlding without unwittingly repeating the mistaken application of universals or supposedly transparent calculus. In this chapter, I argue that Spivak and Arendt both acknowledge and grapple with the fact

[108] "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House: Comments at the 'Personal and Political' Panel" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Latham: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), 98.
[109] *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 4.

that the things that they want to destroy are also what shape them, their work, and their present. This complicity makes any simple destruction or overcoming of the past impossible.

In the first half of this chapter, I present Arendt's account of comprehension offered in the preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and expanded in her response to Eric Voegelin's review of *Origins*. I examine how comprehension allows her to think through the events and philosophical concepts that led to totalitarianism without succumbing to a master narrative that reduces totalitarianism to the repetition of history, an allegory for human good or evil, or a historical inevitability. I then consider the connections between comprehension and Arendt's concept of natality. I argue that natality, as the capacity for and actuality of new beginnings, is bound up with comprehension. Comprehension, when considered in terms of natality, offers an approach to the past and present that attempts to preserve a space for political appearance and action while also accounting for the way that the human condition, and in particular our worlded interests, shape even the most horrific of events.

In the second half of this chapter, I consider Spivak's essays, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" and "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in order to outline her relationship to feminism, deconstruction, and phallogocentric inheritance. I consider her argument that feminism and deconstruction both challenge and to some extent repeat the problems of phallogocentrism and imperialism. Then, parallel to my consideration of Arendtian natality, I consider Spivak's reading of the physical inheritance between mother and child and excess of the clitoral. I argue that physical inheritance and clitoral excess can challenge imperialism and phallogocentrism by offering a strategic site of

presence that disrupt lineages and master narratives through their excess. I then conclude by considering the relationship between natality, maternity, and the clitoral as sites of the excess of the present that exceed the master narrative.

1. Arendtian History that Resists Simple Causality

Arendtian comprehension is in many ways a response to and criticism of historical and political approaches to totalitarianism. Arendt challenges the fact that totalitarianism and its aftermath are often used either as a rallying cry for humanity to rise up and finally conquer evil or as a sign of humanity's unavoidable moral downfall. As part of this challenge, she critiques the way that totalitarianism, and historical events in general, are understood in terms of simple historical causality, where one event causes the next. Comprehension is a way of understanding past events that accounts for the singularity of events while grappling with the fact that even something as unfathomable as totalitarianism can be understood in terms of the western political tradition's worlding interests. Comprehension, as that which attempts to think from within the particular worlded present of the thinker relies on Natality. Natality, as the capacity to begin, keeps the present from being causally determined by the past, and opens up the possibility of exploring the past in terms of the situation of the present.

1.1 Comprehension

In the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt explains that she wrote *Origins* "against a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair."[110] She criticizes her contemporaries for theorizing what happened as either a demonstration of humanity's decay, or the ultimate victory over evil. She argues that this despair and optimism form two sides of the same coin, and often lead to mistaken reductions of the events leading to totalitarianism, the Holocaust, and World War Two as part of a totalizing narrative.[111] Either narrative changes the events of totalitarianism into an allegory for human morality, and, as such, these allegories utilize events to illustrate of the struggle for humanity's soul.

Yet at the same time that she worries about the creation of allegories, she also critiques the way historians may overlook the complex connections between totalitarianism and the Western tradition's interest in the relationship between a higher law and positive law. In ignoring such complexities, theorists locate totalitarianism in terms of an allegorical struggle for humanity's soul as opposed to understanding it from within a worlding context of events, interests, and particularities of the western political tradition. [112]

Challenging models of history based on human progress, Arendt claims that "we can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will

[110] *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1968), vii.
[111] *Origins,* vii.
[112] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines allegory as "the use of symbols in a story, picture, etc., to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning, typically a moral or political one; symbolic representation. Allegory, n., def. 1. *Oxford English Dictionary* online edition (Oxford University Press, 2013).

bury in oblivion."[113] This claim challenges the standard working models of humanity as developing and carrying on the accomplishments of its past while leaving behind its shortfalls. Overarching histories often make claims to the legacy of the good while claiming to have overcome the bad. Such claims foster a model of historical progress while reducing all historical evils to mistakes overcome and left in the past. In this way, bad events are understood as having historical significance, but as lacking any determining effect of the present.[114]

Similar to her condemnation of totalizing narratives grounded in either despair or optimism, Arendt also rejects a model of history that embraces the past and future while condemning the present. She argues that "all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain."[115] To draw upon the past as an intact space separate from the present is to assume that our understanding of the past does not determine and is not determined by our present. Similarly, to attempt to depict the future as a utopia possible after we have overcome the events of the past and present (in Arendt's example, totalitarianism and the Holocaust) is again to create an artificial separation between past, present, and future. To do so is to view history from an exterior, and supposedly non-worldy perspective. Such a perspective assumes the transparency of history understood by the theorist in isolation.

In contrast to attempts to find a perfect future through nostalgia for the past or to disavow the effect of the horrors of the past, Arendt attempts to comprehend the past in

[113] *Origins*, ix.
[114] We can see the same problematic in considerations of the roles of slavery and genocide in American history. The labor and lives of slaves are recognized as building the United States and the genocide and displacement of Native Americans as providing earth necessary for the United State's manifest destiny. In both cases, narratives of abuse and displacement are often told as accidents, reduced to products of their time, while the supposedly central narrative of American progress constitutes what is necessary to our present.
[115] *Origins,* ix.

complex and dynamic terms. For her, comprehension is not a means of producing a linear narrative of the inevitability of the past or boiling events down to what she terms "history by commonplaces." As she explains, "comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt."[116] In challenging an understanding of history in terms of causality, and by making room for the outrageous and unprecedented, she proposes an understanding of the present based on contingencies and not on direct causality.

Despite these provocative claims regarding her approach to the history of totalitarianism in *Origins*, her explanation of comprehension and of her method is limited. In 1953, Eric Voegelin wrote a review of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, suggesting that it lacks a sufficient account of methodology. In her response to Voegelin, Arendt admits that she did not adequately explain her method and then attempts a more thorough explanation of both her method and the reasoning behind it.[117] As part of this explanation, she clarifies the significance of comprehension, building on her earlier comments by contrasting it with the "explaining away" of contemporary modes of analysis. Early in her response, she notes that her method is different from "whole fields of political and historical sciences as such."[118] Then, toward the end of the same response, she explains that, in theses fields, "terms like nationalism, imperialism, totalitarianism, etc., are used indiscriminately for all kinds of political phenomena…and

[116] *Origins,* viii.
[117] "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* ed. Jeremy Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 402.
[118] "A Reply," 402.

none of them is any longer understood with any particular historical background."[119] This indiscriminant conflation of terms lead to confusions of meaning and the reduction of historical particularities to repeated stories, and Arendt argues that:

> This kind of confusion—where everything distinct disappears and everything that is new and shocking is (not explained but) explained away either through drawing some analogies or reducing it to a previously known chain of causes and influences—seems to me to be the hallmark of the modern historical and political sciences.[120]

This kind of analysis based on generalizations does away with singularity by focusing on commonality and writing an experience back into a progressive narrative. Such generalizations lose sight of historical specifics that would highlight the worlded interests as well as the responsibility of individuals. The specifics of historical events allows for an examination of the ideas and concerns that condition historical events and obfuscate responsibility.

As Arendt explains, the danger that she and her peers must confront when writing about totalitarianism and the Holocaust is that they write about a subject that they do not want to conserve. Thus historians have faced a paradox: "they had to write in a destructive way and to write history for purposes of destruction is somehow a contradiction in terms."[121] The danger is that in order to avoid preserving totalitarianism, historians might make the oppressed group into what Arendt terms "the subject of conservation." But, as she explains, this is not a good solution: "The way out has been to hold on, so to speak, to the Jews, to make them the subject of conservation. But this was

[119] Ibid., 407.
[120] Ibid., 407.
[121] Ibid., 402.

no solution, for to look at events only from the side of the victim resulted in apologetics—which of course is no history at all."[122] To write history from the side of the victims, constructing them as "subjects for conservation" is to position victims as complete innocents and thus outside of history, and to position the author as similarly outside of history, able to benevolently conserve those who are perfectly pure. In this way, history seems to happen to victims who are swept away by its forces, yet maintain a consistent nature, while the historian seems to be safe from historical influence and without a nature. Arendt's association of this kind of history with apologetics brings this point home. As a defense and vindication of the Jewish people, the goal of an apologetic history becomes a defense of a population in terms of its natural purity, absolute victimhood, and as a consistent and homogenous body of people.[123] As such, these populations' histories support allegories of purity, to be offered supporting roles in the western narrative of responsibility.

Arendt addresses the same problem in other terms in her account of understandings of the Jewish people as scapegoats for totalitarianism. In the first chapter of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, she explains, "Just as anti-Semites understandably desire to escape responsibility for their deeds, so Jews, attacked and on the defensive, even more understandably do not wish under any circumstances to discuss their share of responsibility."[124] As a result of this desire to avoid responsibility, on the side of anti-Semites who desire to see their hatred justified by nature, and the side of those who want

[122] Ibid., 402.
[123] This claim has been taken as an accusation of the guilt of victims. Arendt maintains responsibility without guilt, and insists on responsibility in order to avoid the apolitical status of the pure victim. A pure victim cannot be political because they have no opinion or position. This is similar to her argument for the political status of lies presented in "The Tradition of Political Thought" in *The Promise of Politics,* Jeremy Kohn ed. [New York: Schocken Books, 2005) 40-62
[124] *Origins*, 7.

to see the Jewish people as pure victims, both sides "liquidate the very possibility of human activity."[125] This liquidation of human activity is a product of the fact that, according to Arendt's model of political action, those with absolute purity lack the ability to act because they lack the ability to be responsible for their actions. This equates to a lack of political personhood because persons who cannot act and speak cannot be agents of history. The pure victim appears in such accounts not as a member of history, but as part of the state of nature. As such, they can then be cut to the appropriate size necessary for the story. This means that any appearance of Jewish persons will be reduced to their victimhood and not their identity. Without an identity, one's actions become understood in terms of the *nature* of the population, thus essentializing Jewish people and making their victimhood a part of their nature, while maintaining the idea that historical change and responsibility only involves the aggressors. In this way Jewish persons cannot appear as speaking and acting individuals. Thus, understood in terms of Spivak's critique of imperialistic worlding, the "pure" essentialized people become the *object* of history while the European aggressor becomes the knowing subject.

Wary of the dangers of attempting to prove the pure innocence of victims, Arendt attempts to provide a history of totalitarianism that does not offer an apologetics for Jewish heritage and events or a justification for totalitarianism and the Holocaust (in terms of progress, causality, or master allegory). This attempt leads her to offer what she describes in the introduction to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as "a historical account of the elements which crystallized into totalitarianism."[126] These events come together to form totalitarianism, but that is not the same as understanding them in terms of historical

[125] Ibid., 8.
[126] "A Reply," 403.

inevitability. Each event remains a product of human actions (or lack of action) and, as such, is beyond the law of causality.

When Arendt calls for greater attention to historical background she worries about the reduction of historical events to causality, whether this is blaming or recognizing an individual or group as the cause of events larger than any individual action, or reducing events to causal chain. In her essay, "Understanding and Politics," Arendt expands on this idea.[127] She notes, "Not only does the actual meaning of every event always transcend any number of past 'causes' which we may assign to it...but this past itself comes into being only with the event itself."[128] When we consider an event, the events that precede it often appear as causing it. In contrast, Arendt's method means paying attention to those events that cannot be separated from the events of totalitarianism, but could not have caused the outrageous events that followed. As she explains, "The event illuminates its own past; it can never be deduced from it."[129] The fact that comprehension resists the introduction of a causal historical narrative, further contrasts her version of history with an allegorical model, which tends towards symbolic representation depicted in the drive for something deeper. It is not that underlying meanings cannot be found within the events of history; instead, it is the case that such subterranean streams do not necessitate any particular eruption. Therefore, any deeper meaning is not a universal narrative of humanity, but a narrative of particular interests and conditions. As Arendt explains in her response to Voegelin, "The problem originally confronting me was simple and baffling at the same time: all historiography is necessarily

[127] "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)" in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954, Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* ed Jeremy Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 307-327.
[128] "Understanding and Politics," 319.
[129] Ibid.

salvation and frequently justification; it is due to man's fear that he may forget and to his striving for something which is *even more than remembrance*."[130] The first point, that historiography saves the past from erasure is expanded by the second, that when we offer a historical account we must demonstrate the significance of that history for the contemporary moment and thus to some extent render it allegory or master narrative.

Therefore while Arendt argues against a causal narrative of history, in addition to condemning the political and historical sciences for their generalizations and conflations, she also challenges the idea that totalitarianism falls outside of traditional political concerns. Her interest in more than remembrance is directed toward the illumination of the structural elements (both ideas and events) that lead to totalitarianism. Although it is decidedly different from anything that has come before, she argues:

> If it is true that the elements of totalitarianism can be found by retracing the history and analyzing the political implications of what we usually call the crisis of our century, then the conclusion is unavoidable that this crisis is no mere threat from the outside…and that it will no more disappear with the death of Stalin than it disappeared with the fall of Nazi Germany.[131]

If totalitarianism can be seen as a crystallization of different historical elements, then its danger and importance extends beyond the historical events themselves. Totalitarianism must be a sign of some internal, worlded crisis. Building on this idea, Arendt suggests that totalitarianism "must rest on one of the few basic experiences which men can have whenever they live together, and are concerned with public affairs."[132] Therefore, although the events linked to totalitarianism and the model itself are by no means

[130] "A Reply," 402. Emphasis mine.
[131] *Origins*, 460.
[132] Ibid., 46.

inevitable, totalitarianism itself is also not something outside of the scope of the human condition and is thus both conditioned by and conditioning of the world.

Arendt's concept of comprehension acknowledges worlding, that is the way that the "subterranean stream" of western history provided the conditions for it, and she resists naturalizing it by insisting that things could have been otherwise, and that this stream is not the subterranean stream of human essence, but are instead the worlded conditions. Within her analysis of totalitarianism, she must account for the way that events determined totalitarianism while leaving open the possibility of things happening otherwise. In leaving open the possibility that things could have been otherwise, Arendt leaves open a space for humanity's capacity to begin something new.

1.2 NATALITY

According to Arendt, natality defines the human capacity of beginning something new. She writes, "With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance."[133] While this birth is demonstrated in our insertion into the human world as something different from physical birth, it requires physical or given birth, thus the two are bound together. The structure of natality in relationship to physical birth can be explained in terms of a *hysteron proteron* model: that which comes first is secondary, while that which comes second is primary. Thus, physical birth, which contains our givenness as embodied beings, comes first; yet, natality, which requires physical birth, is actually that which gives physical birth its

[133] *The Human Condition,* 176.

worlded significance in relation to this second birth. Furthermore, to understand natality as a kind of birth is to suggest it be understood in terms of physical birth.[134]

In this way natality becomes rooted and connected to something natural even as it breaks the laws of natural causality. It is a miracle; it is something that cannot be explained in natural terms: "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted."[135] As a miracle, it is both outside of natural causality and disrupts causality by allowing for the possibility of the new.

Even more importantly, natality's status as outside of the normal or "natural" world means that it is actually outside of both nature and world. It exceeds nature insofar as it is not physical birth, and it exceeds the normal world, insofar as it suggests a break in any perfect worlding. Such a break can thus not be described as natural, and ironically, this means that natality cannot be naturalized but also cannot be taken on as a "cultural" element. Arendt builds on this idea of natality's unique status, explaining: that the insertion into the world is not conditioned. Instead,

> It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it is not conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.[136]

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[134] Peg Birmingham argues that, unlike Arendt's later writings, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* this connection between natality and givenness is explicit*:* Arendt, "points to another dimension of the event of natality, pointing approvingly to the Augustinian insight that the event of natality is also about that which is given" (*Hannah Arendt and Human Rights*: *The Predicament of Common Responsibility* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006], 34).
[135] *Human Condition*, 247.
[136] Ibid., 177.

The fact that this new beginning is not conditioned is in tension with the way that humanity lives in the world as conditioned beings. As Arendt writes in the first chapter of *The Human Condition*:

> Men are conditioned beings because everything they come into contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence.... In addition to the conditions under which life is given to man on earth, and partly out of them, men constantly create their own, self-made conditions.[137]

So, prior to conditioning there is an originary supplement outside of this conditioning, which both disrupts the world but also allows for it. Furthermore, we carry with us a response (but not a causally determined response) to our own newness by beginning something new ourselves.

Even though Arendt never mentions natality in her account of comprehension nor comprehension when she discusses natality, as that which allows for the new it must be the reason that we must approach history through comprehension. Natality grounds political appearance for acting and speaking beings, and Arendt explains that "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting."[138] When considered with natality in mind, we can never give an adequate account of natality within history. It is only when natality is marginalized that history can be written in terms of causality or master narratives. It is only after one speaks or acts that one's ideas can be reduced to a product of causality, generally understood in terms of identity politics, or recognized as part of the unique appearance of the individual, an appearance

[137] Ibid., 9.
[138] Ibid.

that resists reduction into causal terms. Moving slightly outside of Arendt's own framework, we can conclude that the moment of beginning cannot be brought into history as a pure beginning, but can be understood in terms of the moment of the present, as such it offers a space through which to challenge the conflation of world with a universal perspective. It challenges such a conflation by theorizing a miraculous gap in the conditioning effects of the world. The concept of the gap of the present will be fully developed in the following chapter, but for now, with the present understood as the moment that future and past cannot be used to determine, the present serves as the site of disruption for a master narrative, while natality serves as its non-natural, miracle guarantee. Thus comprehension is an attempt to approach history with regard to both the conditions that lead to historical events, but also with an eye to the fact that human beings should not be understood in terms of simple causality.

2 Spivak: Troping Universals and Sites of Excess

This section examines Spivak diagnosis of feminism's critique of phallogocentric troping, as well as its imperialistic and phallogocentric inheritance. Spivak holds that the exposure of feminism's relationship to inheritance can help feminism understand its own enablement and exclusions and thus challenge universalized and transparent worlding. Her critique of inheritance is a critique of traditional western inheritance but is also an examination of the uses of inheritance. Within a model of inheritance and a discussion of the difficulty of challenging its framework, we then consider Spivak's account of the

material excess of maternity and the sexual excess of the clitoris. As with natality, these two sites of excess offer sites to challenge the transparency of world.

2.1 Deconstucting and Inheriting Troping Universals

In "Displacement and the Discourse of Women," Spivak agues against conflating deconstruction with feminism, while in "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," she suggests the usefulness of deconstructive critique for feminist theory.[139] In both of these essays she works back and forth between the uses and limitations of feminism, imperialism, and deconstruction, each time worrying the connections between them, demonstrating their shared inheritance and how, at their most dangerous, they enable each other, enforcing a blindness to other concerns and building a world in terms of unacknowledged exclusions.

In "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," Spivak works at the dangerous, enabling connection between imperialism and feminism. She begins by aligning feminism with deconstructive critique. Crediting Paul de Man with providing her theoretical model, she defines critique as the discovery "that the basis of a truth claim is no more than a trope."[140] She then argues that academic feminism engages in deconstructive critique insofar as it recognizes that "to take the privileged male of the white race as a norm for universal humanity is no more than a politically interested figuration. As Spivak explains, feminism holds that "it [man] is a trope that passes itself off as truth, and claims that

[139] "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in *Displacement Derrida and After,* ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1983), 169-195 and "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," *The Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 7, [1986], 225-240. (This essay is reedited as part of *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999]).
[140] Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," 225.

woman or the racial other is merely a kind of troping of the truth of man—in the sense that they must be understood *as* unlike (non-identical with) it and yet *with* reference to it."[141] Thus feminism, in its identification of the figuration of the universal as a privileged, white male, and the subsequent production of women in reference to this figuration, overlaps with deconstruction. This overlap makes feminism deconstructive but only to a point; Spivak argues that feminism's initial deconstructive moment does not go far enough. Again using de Man as her model, she argues that feminism must engage in a more radical deconstructive critique in order to contend with its own structural limitations.[142]

She argues when feminism does not engage in sustained deconstructive critique it risks obfuscating its own limitations and assuming its transparent success. As Spivak explains in general terms, "even as it establishes the truth of the discovery of the trope, the critical philosopher's text begins to perform the problems inherent in the very institution of epistemological production, of the production, in other words, of any truth at all."[143] Thus with regard to feminism, in establishing the truth that the universal subject is a (masculine) trope, the feminist enacts the problems of producing truth. This participation in the production of truth produces at least two politically invested figuration truths/tropes of the universal subject. In other words, feminism deconstructs the masculine universal subject insofar as it demonstrates that it is a trope; however because feminism posits the truth of its discovery, it produces a truth and thus solidifies the trope of the masculine subject as true. Furthermore, in an attempt to correct the

[141] Ibid.
[142] In this essay Spivak is not concerned with presenting the similarities and differences between critique and deconstruction and makes them functionally the same.
[143] Ibid.

figuration of the universal subject through a counter example (that women are not men), it posits a trope of the definition of woman. Academic feminism, when it does not perform a sustained critique, critiques the universal subject while positing its own version of that universal subject.

The model established is one that moves from truth (universal subject) to critique (subject as trope of white, privileged male) to corrected truth (universal subject), which is also a trope (universal subject as including those othered in the first model but still modeled in response to the 'original' masculine trope). In other words, there are two dangers here. The first is found in the tendency to posit a new trope as truth that is more inclusive than the trope of the white, privileged male but that still excludes. In academic feminism this exclusion has often resulted in the troping of woman as a privileged, heterosexual and white.) Insofar as feminism's object is assumed to be the universal situation of women, a universal trope of woman is posited as the supplement to the old model of the universal subject. Thus feminism participates in the same logic of the universal subject that it critiques: it posits a new, imperialistic trope, with reference to the old imperialistic trope. The second danger is a result of the legacy of critiquing and correcting the truth as trope of the universal subject. This new "universal" subject is created in both opposition and reference to the "original" version of the universal subject. As Spivak writes, feminism, along with other discourses, "are marked and constituted by, even as they constitute the field of their production."[144] Insofar as feminism seeks to replace the universal subject, it declares its own legitimacy in reference to it. Thus feminism inherits from that which it critiques, taking on the structure of the universal subject and holding that universal subject as its origin since feminism's critique arose as a

[144] Ibid.

result of the positing of the universal subject. This model is of course open to further critique; the subjectivity of the subject and its figuration can be called into question again and again, but insofar as the model of the subject is taken as a discovery of a new component of the world to be added to the old, the initial debt of inheritance remains, and at worst remains without acknowledgement.

For Spivak, deconstruction helps make visible this connection between imperialism and feminism, between the universal subject and feminism's installation of a new universal subject. Deconstruction serves as a tool for demonstrating the dangers of a feminism that must consolidate a trope in order to make a claim against sexism. As she writes in her most recent version of this essay:

> These problems—that truths can only be shored up by the strategic exclusions, by declaring opposition where there is complicity, by denying the possibility of randomness, by proclaiming a provisional origin or point of departure as ground—are the substance of deconstruction's concerns. [145]

Deconstructive critique facilitates the consideration of inheritance and the structure of worlding truths. However, while its ability to demonstrate this complicity is helpful for feminism, this does not make deconstruction inherently feminist. Spivak addresses the dangers of conflating deconstruction with feminism in her essay "Displacement and the Discourse of Women," but she also suggests that feminism, which inherits the testament of the universal subject (either through adopting it or responding to it through its discourse), might be better at disrupting the logic of patriarchy than deconstruction.

In "Displacement and the Discourse of Women," Spivak examines the limits of deconstruction, holding that, as part of the philosophical tradition, it performs a double

[145] *Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 147.

displacement of women, opening up the 'female element' as the site of lack and madness, but not allowing for the appearance of women. In so doing it renders women doubly displaced to draw out the female element, and this double displacement is directly connected with the traditional model of inheritance, which grants the son a place in the world through the father's name and testament. Spivak suggests, "It is excellent to posit this female element as the irreducible madness of truth-in-law, but we are daily reminded that a little more must be undertaken to budge the law's oppressive sanity."[146] Despite its utility and its important work for feminism, deconstruction cannot challenge the laws of inheritance for women because, as Spivak demonstrates, it cannot open up a positive space for women.

According to Spivak, the philosophical tradition's initial displacement of women occurs in the construction of the male subject as the universal subject which makes a metaphor of "Woman" in order to produce "Man." Her example is Hegel's distinction between thought and object illustrated metaphorically in terms of Adam's relationship to Eve: "Just as Adam says to Eve: 'Thou art flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone,' so mind says 'This is mind of my mind,' and the alienness (*Fremdheit* as opposed to *das Eigene*; alterity as opposed to ownness) disappears."[147] Using 'woman' as a trope for 'man' allows for the unquestioned solidification of man.

Using woman to maintain this solidification, philosophy as constituted by phallocentrism uses this solidification of "man" in order to legitimize inheritance. Spivak summarizes Derrida's critique of phallocentrism as a critique of the patronymic: "the patronymic, in spite of all empirical details of the generation gap, keeps the

[146] "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," 190.
[147] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* as quoted in "Displacement and the Discourse of Women," 169.

transcendental ego of the dynasty identical in the eye of the law. By virtue of the father's name the son refers to the father."[148] Thus we see familial inheritance solidifying public identity as a place in the world, through the transfer of the name from father to son as if transferring a sacred meaning derived from sacred ancestors.

Deconstruction recognizes that Adam is a trope, not just Eve, and that the performance of this continuity of naming, as if each generation that bears its father's name as truth not trope were the same as the previous generation, requires displacement and effacement. As Spivak explains Derrida is interested in the fact that "all human beings are irreducibly displaced although, in a discourse that privileges the center, women alone have been diagnosed as such."[149] The problem, according to Spivak, is that to work at this centrism Derrida uses "woman's discourse," the trope of masculine discourse, as his model and consequently displaces women for "women" or what she terms "the female element." She writes, "It is my suggestion, however, that the woman who is the 'model' for deconstructive discourse remains a woman generalized and defined in terms of the faked orgasm and other varieties of denial."[150] It is this generalization and emphasis on women as fake/trope that Spivak equates with deconstruction's "feminization" of philosophy and results in women's double displacement (first through traditional philosophy and then through deconstruction's occupation of "women's discourse"). However, she states emphatically, "I do not regard it [deconstruction] as just another example of the masculine use of women as instruments of self assertion."[151] Yet insofar as Derrida addresses the "we-men" of philosophy, he

[148] "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," 169.
[149] Ibid., 170.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid,. 173.

cannot provide 'real' solutions or speak to what Spivak terms, "we-women."[152] For her, deconstruction can take us to the point where we recognize that, "Western discourse is caught within the metaphysical or phallogocentric limit, his point is precisely that man can problematize but not fully disown his status as subject."[153] Although Derrida can consider the androcentic nature of philosophy and man as the hero of philosophy, she claims that he cannot speak for women since he considers a "female element" and not a "female person."[154]

This leads Spivak to warn about the danger of adopting deconstruction as if it were feminism—it is worth remembering that, for her, *nothing* is *not* dangerous.[155] She depicts this danger as the danger of becoming professional women, or "Athenas who privilege the law against women."[156] She quotes Aeschylus, "The mother of what is called her child is not its parent, but only the nurse of the newly implanted germ."[157] Athena is privileged by the fact that she springs from her father's head. This gives Athena exceptional status and privilege necessary for her to understand her femininity without reference to other women, or to "women's experiences." The right of exception is a product of her 'natural' privileged status (Zeus *as her father*). Thus she is free to deny any feminine allegiance while also claiming to be able to judge as a woman even though it is only because of her exceptionalism—as a woman—that she is allowed to

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid,. 174.
[155] For Spivak argues in multiple places that "victories are also warnings." See among others, Spivak, "1994: Will Postcolonialism Travel?" *Other Asias* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 63, and *Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 377.
[156] I take her use of gender her to be a sign of the times and not a claim that male or otherwise identified feminists don't need to worry about their use of deconstruction.
[157] "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," 174.

judge where women, identified as women (in this case mothers who are not parents), are not so empowered.

This demonstrates the problems of legal power granted in terms of one's exceptional privilege as opposed to legal rights granted on the basis of legal equality—a problem stated in other terms in Arendt's account of the parvenu as one who takes on characteristics assigned by the dominant culture in order to establish his or her political appearance.[158] Thus, to appropriate one of Spivak's famous statements, "one's privilege becomes one's loss."[159] The danger is that one may assume one's privilege through deconstruction and become a "professional woman," conflating one's own position of privilege as the position of the liminal figure of woman and one's appearance as a woman, instead of as a guardian of the phallic order of inheritance. As she notes in "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," when feminism fails to continue to perform deconstructive critique, it falls into the same trap: "performing the lie of constituting a truth of global sisterhood where the mesmerizing model remains male and female sparring partners of generalizable or universalizable sexuality who are the chief protagonists in that European contest."[160] That is, feminism, armed with the trope of universal sparring between the universalized sexes (where there may be intra-gender differences but there are still universal sexes), is able to mobilize around the concept of "women" and "equality." This constitutes the trope as truth of all-women-everywhere being in-it-together. This is similar to the imperialistic model in which, as Spivak explains, "Europe had consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as

[158] *Origins,* 66.
[159] "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution", 9-10.
[160] "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," 226.

"Others," even as it constituted them, for purposes of administration and the expansion of markets, into programmed near-images of that very sovereign self."[161]

2.2 Application in Imperialist Contexts

In "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" Spivak illustrates the danger of feminism's adoption of this model with three examples: Baudelaire's "Le Cygne," Kipling's "William the Conqueror," and a memo concerning race policies of the East India Company. These examples demonstrate why feminism's account of the universal subject as a trope, which operates through establishing the abnormality of the feminine, racialized other, needs to be sutured with deconstructive critique. The first two texts, Spivak explains, "offer us a mirror of our performance of certain imperialist ideological structures even as we deconstruct the tropological error of masculinism."[162] We see a particular European woman of privilege as the other to the European man of privilege. We then see how feminism makes the mistake of taking on (if not completely or perfectly) the role of the individual, the masculine subject, and so participates in the further displacement of the racialized, othered woman who lacks privilege.

First, Spivak argues that "Le Cygne" shows us the way that Baudelaire plays with woman as a poet's object who can never really have the status of a subject, because, as Spivak states, "the ontic differential between the poet-operating-as-controlling-subject and the woman-manipulated-as-sign will not disappear."[163] That is, woman (as woman) remains on the side of the sign while man (as man) remains on the side of the subject.

[161] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 199.
[162] "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," 226.
[163] Ibid., 227.

She argues that, "not only the power but even the self-undermining of man, may be operated by the troping of the woman."[164] Even in undoing "himself," the subject may use "woman" to maintain his subject status. However, the cost of this revelation and the cost of any attempt to posit this woman as a subject through a feminist reading is, as Spivak explains, "the performance of a blindness to the *other* woman in the text."[165] In other words, any straightforward attempt to read this first woman as a subject or even just to read her as an improper subject who maintains the centrality of the masculine subject marginalizes the other woman in the text. In Baudelaire's case, this marginalized other woman is '"the negress" to whom he refers when he notes, "Je pense à la négresse," and who, Spivak observes, remains without a name, left in a vague location and without a subject position.[166]

The first woman in Baudelaire's poem has a name—Andromache—and because she has agency over him she becomes almost a man, almost a subject. But she has this agency in the poem only in relation to his narration of her. While Adromache holds this place of trope-subject, for the Baudelaire, the other woman holds the place of the female element. As Spivak notes, "against all this labyrinthine specificity and exchange between male and female is juxtaposed the immense vagueness of the negress' geography, etched in no more than three words: "la superbe Afrique" (the superb Africa).[167] Thus, in a feminist reading that attempts to read Adromache as a subject, the third woman, 'la superbe Afrique,' functions as the other, even as to some extent Adromache herself also operates as the poet's other. In the imperialist model of the subject, the Model Woman

[164] Ibid., 228.
[165] Ibid. Emphasis mine.
[166] Ibid,. 228.
[167] Ibid., 229 ("Le Cygne" 1.44).

(as a white, privileged woman in western model) can almost write herself into the subject position through the manipulation of this other woman. Because of the benefit of privilege and access to speech and writing, the Woman-as-subject helps to maintain the universal as masculine subject, as well as to sustain the power dynamic that renders global sisterhood impossible.

This maneuvering of the woman as a "not-quite not male" subject, and this displacement of the other-other in order for this woman-subject to appear, is clearly seen in Spivak's analysis of Kipling's "William the Conqueror."[168] In this text, William, a white European woman, is not quite able to inhabit the place of "man." In establishing herself as such, she reduces the de-gendered populus into "India" writ-large. That is, in contrast to William's specificity, the entire non-European population of India is writ-large as one mass of people (with no distinction). Then, at the end of the work, the population of India is further displaced when analogized as "famine," and, as Spivak explains, "The narrative purpose of 'Famine'—the container of the specificity of south India—is instrumental."[169] The famine ends, and so the two British characters are free to return "home" to northern India and the European culture which they have helped establish in India. Thus according to Spivak's reading, the British become the proper inhabitants of India as "home," and the merely present natives become improper subjects and inhabitants. As Spivak succinctly notes, "feminist literary criticism celebrates the heroines of the First World in a singular and individualist fashion, and the collective presence of women elsewhere in a pluralized and inchoate fashion."[170] Her point is that

[168] "Not quite-not-male" is a description Spivak offers of Jane Eyre as "the female individualist" in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, (116).
[169] "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," 232.
[170] Ibid., 237.

the story "can be made to offer us a mirror of our performance of certain imperialist ideological structures even as we deconstruct the tropological error of masculinism."[171] That is, in "Le Cygne" and "William the Conqueror," the Women-as-Subject is posited through further othering and through the occupation of the masculine space. Thus woman's inhabiting of the universal subject position seems to depend upon the othering of others, now both men and women, in order to establish the almost self-sameness of the European male and female when considered from this seemingly larger perspective.

The third case Spivak considers in "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" is the ungendering in an internal document from the East India Company. Here she problematizes the idea of placing skin color as *the* measure of a lack of privilege in relation to European feminism. The argument is that, racism is a problem, but that as "chromatism," it can also work as a tool for concealing those who are in the position of least privilege.[172] She explains, in this example:

> The standards being applied in the document to legitimate racial discrimination show that both the native male and the native female are clearly inferior to the European female. Indeed, as in 'William the Conqueror' and the classroom reaction to it, sexual difference comes into play only in the white arena.[173]

That is, sexual difference remains something to be considered only within the "European" context, and racism, as chromatism, as markers of the outside are part of a "colonialist axiomatic."[174] Thus chromatism can become a tool to further a colonialist agenda, facilitating a notion of European subjecthood through chromatism-based exit

[171] Ibid., 226.
[172] Ibid., 236.
[173] Ibid., 236.
[174] Ibid., 237.

from gender indifference and entrance into European sexual difference.[175] With this entrance into the European inclusion/exclusion narrative, those who have limited privilege as colonial subjects marked by skin color are often used as tokens representing those without it this limited privilege.

How is the problem of imperialism's legacy to be addressed? This problem is only made more problematic by the fact that, "the epistemic story of imperialism is the story of a series of interruptions, a repeated tearing of time that cannot be sutured."[176] That is, imperialism will act as a cognitive mapping which establishes itself as if there were no other truths, but that all other truths are merely tropes of Truth. To attempt to create a single, cohesive narrative that claims the authority of tradition is to make the other, the object of knowledge, knowable, and to prioritize the position of the knowing subject. Thus, for Spivak, this other haunts those of European inheritance (an inheritance applied in the broadest terms and including all of those who take up and are taken up in the European tradition) such that we cannot truly create an uninterrupted narrative.[177] But also each narrative that we create depends upon the exclusion of some other that secures the place of the narrative and which grants its authority.[178]

In conclusion, Spivak's critique of deconstruction—in terms of its kinship with the philosophical tradition and her critique of western feminism's inheritance from imperialism—demonstrates the problems of assuming one's freedom from the past and

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[175] This point is also made by Hortense Spillers in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Spillers argues that women, as enslaved through the slavery system in America, whose bodies are stolen just like male bodies, "Under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and male body become territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender specific" ("Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* [Summer 1987], 65-81), 67.
[176] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 208.
[177] Ibid., 208.
[178] "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Cultural Studies," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (Routledge: New York, 1993), 269.

one's capacity to allow for the equal appearance of "women" and "men" without troping women and men, and without relying on old models of understanding. This shows us the dangers of assuming that one can simply form new worlds to allow for the equal appearance of all, or that expanding access to the political through adding to the tropes already in place, will create a political space with the possibility of equal appearance. Because of feminism's reliance on old models, we see the continuation of inheritance (although without the previous visibility of the authority of the phallocentric) and the dangers of attempting to deny such an inheritance in a way that further solidifies a master narrative through the effacement of other narratives, and to produce such a single narrative is to produce a totalizing account of the world.

2.3 Excesses

Even though these inherited narratives cannot allow for competing legacies, and the feminine is staged withi masculine-centric worldings, Spivak argues that the experiences of women exist. She argues that the experience of motherhood, when used as a strategic and not-essentialist example of women's experiences, exceeds the laws of inheritance and reason. She posits that, "the difference in the women's body [as mother] is also that it exists too much, as the place of evidence, of the law as writing…I am speaking in the narrow sense, of the law as the code of legitimacy and inheritance".[179] Her insight is that insofar as women can claim to have experiences of pregnancy and motherhood, they disprove the displacement of women's experiences within legacies of

[179] "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," 184.

inheritance, not because they do not have proof of inheritance, but because the proof is undeniably apparent.

In this way "woman as mother provides a site for the deconstruction of deconstruction and opens up space for another (im)possible narrative (a narrative which is not possible under the law but we must hold as possible in its impossibility).[180] The fact of this experience of women as mothers, which is not an essentialist claim that all women are mothers nor a claim regarding the true experience of motherhood, points to the possibility of another narrative, a narrative of maternity, but to simply construct such a narrative would be to fall victim to identity politics and depict a trope as a truth.

Therefore, another (im)possible narrative appears insofar as mothers have no need to prove maternity: their bodies perform the presence of the law of inheritance. Spivak writes that, "in the body of the woman as mother, the opposition between displacement and logocentrism might itself be deconstructed".[181] While deconstruction pursues the feminine position as lost and logocentrism seeks the law of the father, women give birth to children and thus cannot be perfect subjects because their material existence overlaps with the existence of other beings (their children) and demonstrates direct lineage, thus actually outdoing the law of the father which constructs inheritance in terms of the name that allows one to appear before the law as heir. Yet, if it is possible to write this narrative and this model of lineage from the side of the mother, such a narrative repeats the similar mistake discussed in terms of feminism's repetition of the troping of truth. It would maintain, through repetition, the inheritance of the law and to maintain mother as

[180] Chapter three offers an in depth consideration of Spivak's concept of the experience of the (im)possible.
[181] Ibid.

trope for father and the model of sexuality to be the opposition of phallus and womb, and re-positing a universal of the womb as flesh and the phallus as master signifier.

In contrast to such a model, Spivak writes, "If my present conviction is that to sublate the natural or physiological evidence of motherhood into a prospective historical or psychological continuity is the idealist subtext of the patriarchal project, what then do I propose".[182] She answers this question by a positing the clitoris as a possible interruption to the model of sex-for-procreation and the continuation of the name of the father. The clitoris, similar to the gap of the present presented in Arendt's work, inhabits a space outside of inheritance, calculated as excess and existing apart for a narrative of dependence or historical progress (understood in terms of the temporal advancement of generations).

For Spivak, if we take seriously the law in the narrow sense as "the code of legitimacy and inheritance", then the clitoris conflated with female orgasm becomes a non-reproductive, site of women's presence,[183] and offering counter-evidence to the model of female orgasm as absence or fakery. Beginning with what Spivak labels only, "the historical understanding of women as incapable of orgasm" she holds that Nietzsche takes woman's only sexual pleasure to be impersonation, "At the time of the greatest self-possession-cum-ecstasy, the woman is self-possessed enough to organize a self-(re)presentation without an actual presence (sexual pleasure) to represent. This is an originary dis-placement," and leads her to conclude that "the woman who is the 'model' for deconstructive discourse remains a woman generalized and defined in terms of the

[182] Ibid., 190.
[183] Ibid., 184.

faked orgasm and other varieties of denial".[184] But this category of women in terms of fakery and denial, opens up the previously covered over experience of female orgasm and clitoris as sites of excess. As Spivak writes "it will help us to remember that the text (of male discourse) gains its coherence by coupling woman with man in a loaded equation and cutting the excess of the clitoris out."[185] Thus, the clitoris (both figurative and literal) offers a site of disruption, because, "In legally defining woman as object of exchange, passage, or possession in terms of reproduction, it is not only the womb that is literally 'appropriated'; it is the clitoris as signifier of the sexed subject that is effaced".[186] In other words, the womb becomes displaced as the trope for inheritance, while the clitoris is doubly displaced.

In naming the clitoris we find the suggestion of another narrative, of a narrative of effacement, a narrative that cannot be inherited both because it exists outside of the patriarchal model of reproduction *and* because it belongs to the narrative of women. Spivak's adoption of this model will not take the shape of the overt celebration of women that would "take the discourse of the 'patriarchy' as a straw monster, and pursue it mightily…lead[ing us] to little more than self-congratulation and euphoria."[187] To perform such a celebration would be to ignore the troping of truth and perform the problematic, imperialist gesture. The clitoral does not function in terms of inheritance; yet, using at as a strategic, non-essentialist example of that which is left out in order to produce a single narrative, we can begin to see, other possibilities, other models, while

[184] Ibid., 170.
[185] Ibid., 191.
[186] Ibid., 190.
[187] Ibid., 191.

also having to face the danger that turning these models into narratives is to perform the very problem that we desire to escape.

Thus we see in Spivak's work on inheritance, both a critique of the enabling of deconstruction in relation to the philosophical tradition and a critique of western feminism's inheritance from imperialism. We have also see the dangers of attempting to deny such an inheritance in a way that further solidifies one's own narrative through the effacement of other narratives. For Spivak, when one attempts, through feminism, to demonstrate the trope of the universal subject one assumes that one is then free to world the world according to the truth of the discovery of this trope. However, as her analysis of inheritance suggests, these new tropes follow the structure of the old. As she writes in "Inscriptions: Of Truth to Size": "every rupture is a repetition".[188] If every rupture is also a repetition then the model we use to investigate our past or present must be one that can grapple with both discontinuity and continuity.

Like Arendt, Spivak seems to be interested in the crystallization of elements that give rise to models of feminism and which, on the other hand, ignores complicity. Unlike Arendt, Spivak is more insistent with her concern that even as we disrupt a master narrative, master narratives spring up around us.

Arendt's model of comprehension, her interest in continuity, singularity, and a reading of history that attempts to consider events within a historical scope but not necessarily in terms of commonality resonate with Spivak's approach to the problem of feminism's inheritance of and contribution to privileged structures of troping the universal. Although neither Arendt nor Spivak articulate these models in terms of worlding, we can see that both are invested in considering how to approach the

[188] "Inscriptions of Truth to Size," 210.

conditioning and conditioned nature of worlding, challenging the possibility of a totalizing master narrative, and focusing on the ironic inversions present in accounts of Jewish innocence or feminist progress. Thus in considering crystallization and comprehension Arendt challenges us to think our relationship to the past not in terms of the master narratives of history, but in terms of the subterranean streams which are both worlded insofar as they are a product of particular historical threads, and covered over, through worlding in favor of a narrative of human progress. With Spivak's model, we can understand that the incapacity to see the problematic relationship between trope and truth may be a problem of worlding. Where the model of inheritance to some extent determines the appearance of the content and therefore naturalizes what ought to be considered only as a trope.

Arendt's model of natality: as the miracle of the human capacity to be beginners as well as the givenness of human existence provides an interesting counter-note to Spivak's concept of feminine excess (both in terms of maternity and the clitoris). But despite the differences between them, both concepts illustrate the power of master narratives and suggest ways of thinking and actively holding the limits of such narratives by insisting on the significance of that which cannot be causally explained or that which is excluded in order to allow for causality.

Using natality and feminine excess are the inversion and disruption of models of causality, and historical progress. They point to the limits of worlding not because they are not worlded in both literary and calculative terms (as we try and give them meaning we make them into objects of study and thus world them), but because they cannot be properly brought into a master narrative, even as they support it. As I demonstrate in the

next chapter, the space that natality and feminine excess point to is the space of the present, the space of disruptive appearance, where we might find a practice of catching the world out and thus might hold onto the possibility of egalitarian access to political appearance.

"I can't explain MYSELF, I'm afraid, sir" said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."[189]

-Lewis Carroll

Chapter Three

Inheriting the World and Disjunctions in Time

If today we find ourselves not in the abstract position of a philosopher set apart from events, community, and our historical moment, but as thinkers within the world, how are we to understand our relationship to the world? How do we understand ourselves as both shaping and shaped by it without forgetting that to make such an 'objective' claim about our own worldliness requires that we take an impossible step outside of it? For both Hannah Arendt and Gayatri Spivak, identity and knowledge are conditioned by the world. As a result, we must try to do the impossible: we must try and consider how our understanding of world is structured through our situated understanding of ourselves within it, and how, as a result of our constitution within it, the world necessarily exceeds our calculations.

The last chapter presented Arendt's concept of comprehension and her approach to knowledge that she did not want to preserve. It also presented Spivak's critique of phallogocentric inheritance and her demonstration that it can act as a site where we can, to some extent, catch ourselves out in our relationship to the worlding. This chapter connects with the previous chapter, turning to Arendt's discussion of inheritance of

[189] *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (New York: Random Hause, Inc, 2006), 34.

tradition, understood in terms of title and place within the world. Developing Arendt's concept of inheritance in terms of a patronymic—understood as the father's family name and the inheritance associated with ancestors—and, taking some leeway with Arendt's concept in order to pursue this project's feminist interests, I argue political inheritance confers the legitimate appearance of some, and illegitimacy of others. I also argue, however, that rejecting inheritance as the model for organizing and authorizing political appearance does not necessarily produce democratic access to the political but instead makes exclusion harder to address.[190] Exposing the limitations of inheritance as well as the limitations of attempts to correct it reveals the need for new conceptions of world-building and revising understandings of the individual's appearance within that world.

As a result of their critiques of inheritance and traditional thought, Arendt and Spivak both seek a new model for relating to the past and future. As I argue, the models that both thinkers present focus on the present as a site of possible rupture with a master narrative of history. Arendt, through a reading of Kafka's "He," offers the potential for thought, while derived from the space between past and future, to open up a new path of infinite possibility. Spivak, through a reading of Paul de Man's concept of permanent parabasis, considers the possibility of thinking the infinite disruption of the construction of a master historical narrative.

[190] Patronymic, n., "A name derived from that of a father or male ancestor, esp. by addition of an affix indicating such descent; a family name." The *Oxford English Dictionary Online.* Third Edition, June 2005. definition A 1.

1 Arendt: Inheriting Meaning and The Break in Tradition

One of Arendt's most fundamental claims is that totalitarianism was the final stroke causing an irrevocable break in tradition. In order to describe this break, she invokes inheritance as a metaphor for tradition. Using this metaphor she argues that tradition's inability to structure meaning in the contemporary world is like the loss of one's name, the loss of a place in the world, and the loss of publicly recognized appearance; however, as I discuss below, even though Arendt uses inheritance as a metaphor for the workings of tradition, the link between inheritance and tradition exceeds the confines of simple metaphor.

1.2 Authority and the Name of Man

In "What is Authority?", Arendt argues that the western tradition arose out of the recognition of a sacred and authoritative origin, and this recognition allowed for continuity of meaning across generations. Her essay considers the foundation of Rome, and she explains that, "all authority derives form this foundation, binding every act back to the sacred beginning of Roman history, adding, as it were, to every single moment the whole weight of the past."[191] In this way tracing one's lineage back to the beginning of Rome becomes both a burden and an advantage. As one carries the weight of cultural history, this cultural history also legitimizes one's authority. In explicitly political terms Arendt explains:

[191] "What is Authority?," in *Between Past and Future*, *Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 123.

> Those endowed with authority were the elders, the Senate or the *patres*, who had obtained it by decent and by transmission (tradition) from those who had laid the foundations for all things to come, the ancestors, whom the Romans therefore called the *maiores.*[192]

The authority of the *patres*, literally the Senate but also literally the fathers, is a product of two irreducible and overlapping elements: lineage and tradition. Thus we see an overlap in the roles of one's ancestors and one's upbringing that cannot be reduced to genetics or culture while also demonstrating the complexity of patronymic inheritance as more than either culture or genetics.

Authority does not influence through violence or force; instead, Arendt explains that, "the authoritative character [of the *patres*]…lies in its being a mere advice, needing neither the form of command nor external coercion to make itself heard."[193] Authority means that one's council that cannot be ignored, meaning that those with authority are those who do not need violence or bribes to command the attention of others. She states that, "they [authorities] 'augment' and confirm human action but do not guide them."[194] To confirm an action is to recognize it as an act and, as discussed briefly in the introduction to this dissertation, the ability to speak in public and be heard is necessary for both the identification of one's acts as political and one's appearance as a political actor. Therefore, the confirmation of one's actions by authority is crucial to political appearance.

In summary, the authority to determine who appears and the guarantee of one's political appearance depends on the *patres* who pass on the authority and guarantee. The

[192] "What is Authority?," 122.
[193] Ibid., 123.
[194] Ibid.

passing on of authority and legitimization generally occurs through the patronymic. The patronymic, carried from generation to generation, connects sons with the authority of their ancestors. Even though Arendt does not discuss tradition explicitly in terms of the patronymic or in terms of gender, we can see how gendering and the patronymic are at work in naming. The patronymic affirms one's authority, or lack of authority, and can guarantee political appearance, linking tradition to patronymic inheritance, which is familial inheritance, but is carried by the male line.[195]

Traditionally the father's name, as an indicator of lineage, guarantees a legacy and thus authorizes political appearance for sons who bear his name; with the break in tradition, the father's name is no longer a guarantee of one's place in the world from which to appear. This loss of place is illustrated by Arendt's claim, "With the loss of tradition we have lost the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but this thread was also the chain fettering each successive generation to a predetermined aspect of the past."[196] If we understand tradition as bound up with patronymic inheritance, then on the one hand, the common world that is built upon that tradition is guaranteed by the past; while on the other hand, the past limits the appearance of the new in the political by chaining the present to the past.

Jumping over a thousand years ahead to modernity, we have a break in tradition, a loss of authority, and therefore we ought to see the egalitarian possibility of appearing in

[195] Roman naming is far more complicated than the account given above, and the traditions surrounding naming changed throughout Roman history. In *The Means of Naming*, Stephen Wilson explains the relationship between family names and father's names. He writes, "There is evidence that the *gentilicium* was originally a patronymic, that is a name taken from the father's name. By the classical period, however, it was an authentic hereditary family name and indicated membership of a *gens* or clan. Both men and women took the *gentilicium*, and it was transmitted in the male line. The *gens* in turn derived its name from a real or supposed agnatic ancestor" (*The Means of Naming: A Social and Cultural History* of personal naming in western Europe [London: UCL Press, 1998] 7).
[196] "What is Authority?," 95.

public. The break between tradition, authority, and religion ought to make the patronymic irrelevant, allowing equal and democratic access to the political and open up the possibility of the radically new and different. However if we consider Arendt's critique of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man" offered in *Origins of Totalitarianism* we see a different picture of political appearance, as tradition loses its authority and before the final break of totalitarianism. Here she explains that the authority behind the Declaration of the Rights of Man is the *name of man*. She writes, "The people's sovereignty…was not proclaimed by the grace of God but in the name of Man."[197] As a consequence of this authority founded through humanity, one might expect that people would be held as equal without any question of devotion or religious authority but simply as a result of their humanity.

While such recognition is theoretically possible, Arendt argues that it was also the case that with the invocation of "the name of Man" as the foundation of the political, the rights of particular individuals could now, paradoxically, be denied. She explains that,

> The Rights of Man, after all, had been defined as 'inalienable' because they were supposed to be independent of all governments and because they had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no *authority* was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them."[198]

Therefore with the birth of the rights of man, one also finds that the "name of Man" leaves individuals without the authority previously tied to naming. It is as if the expansion of the name into a universal signaled the loss of anyone in particular to protect. These rights were supposed to be a political guarantee, and yet there was no authority to

[197] *Origins*, 291.
[198] Ibid., 291-92. Emphasis mine.

guarantee them, and violations of human rights did not stop. Instead, the violation of human rights requires that the violators assume that the victims are not properly human. This is the same loss of humanity presented in the previous chapter in terms of the reduction of Jewish persons to pure victims. Thus one position: Jewish persons as pure victims, affirms the other: persons who are pure victims are such because they do not appear as individuals.

Arendt explains this dehumanization in terms of the naturalization of social differences and the politicization of biological difference: "The new refugees were persecuted not because of what they had done or thought, but because of what they unchangeably were—born into the wrong kind of race or the wrong kind of class or drafted by the wrong kind of government."[199] Therefore to belong to the right race, class, or political ideology is to not have to question the significance of these things for one's political appearance; but on the other hand, to be singled out on the bases of them becomes an insurmountable problem. To return to worlding, we can see how those who belong to the "right" group or groups can view their position as universal and without determination, and thus assume that their worlding is transparent, while those who are excluded are faced with the way that they are excluded can see the conditions and privileges required to appear in the political.[200]

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[199] Ibid., 294.

[200] In "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" Peggy McIntosh demonstrates the way that racial privilege can part of the world and be unrecognized by those who enjoy its advantages. She writes: "My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us" ("White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" in *Peace and Freedom Magazine* [Philadelphia: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, July/August], 10-12).

This problem is insurmountable because without a tradition, and with authority supposedly found in "Man," the lack of access to the political cannot be understood. If the political is supposedly open to humanity as "Man" and certain people are denied access to the political, then it must be that something about their nature makes them imperfectly human. The practical difference between this model and that produced through tradition is that, with tradition, one could ground the bases of inclusion or exclusion in one's family legacy and thus argue for or against it.[201] The model of human rights and the supposed openness of the political make arguing for one's inclusion impossible, since, theoretically although not practically, all humans are already included. In this way human rights can paradoxically be used to exclude as even as they attempt to include. As I argue in the second part of the previous chapter, this paradox of exclusion, when the political is supposedly grounded in universality, is vital to feminist theorizations of inclusion and exclusion and supports Spivak's critique of inheritance.

1.2 The Political Repercussions of the Break

Arendt's reading of the groundlessness that arises with the final break in tradition and the consequent limitations to political appearance can be further examined in terms of her account of the work of Rene Char. In the preface to *Between Past and Future*, Arendt considers Char's inability to name his experiences and find a place for them in the world, using him to demonstrate the end of tradition as a failure of inheritance. Her

[201] As Wilson notes in relation to attempts to take on a name with a family legacy, "Nero made a law confiscating the bulk of property of a deceased freedman who had taken 'the name of any family without good reason', which suggests that the practice was quite common" (*Means of Naming*, 32). Here the problem of inclusion and exclusion based on naming is quite clear.

reading of Char does not explicitly deal with the patronymic: he clearly has a last name and is therefore connected to his ancestors. However, as I argue, his loss of a place in the public world is related to the break in tradition, the end of traditional inheritance, and, therefore, the lack of authoritative support for his appearance.

Arendt begins the preface by quoting Char and then identifying him as a poet and writer of the *Résistance*. The quote she begins with is offered first in French and then translated into English: *"Notre heritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament*—'our inheritance was left to us by no testament.'"[202] She claims that through this quote he gives voice to the experience of a generation, explaining, "It is the namelessness of the lost treasure to which the poet alludes when he says that our inheritance was left [to?] us by no testament."[203] Thus, according to Arendt, he does not attempt to present the lost treasure itself, a treasure that has no name, but instead he alludes to the namelessness of that treasure. He alludes to something that cannot be properly brought into a system of meaning.

The problem is that without testimony Char cannot bring his experience into the world, and without testament he cannot entail a space for the experiences of future generations. Arendt states that, theoretically, "The testament, telling the heir what will rightfully be his, wills past possessions for a future."[204] This echoes her claim in "What is Authority?" where she directly connects testimony to authority, noting, "Tradition preserved the past by handing down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors who first had witnessed and created the sacred founding and then augmented it

[202] "Preface: the Gap Between Past and Future," *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 3.
[203] "Preface: the Gap Between Past and Future," 3.
[204] Ibid., 5.

by their authority through the centuries."[205] That is, a system of meaning-making requires a testament for understanding one's inheritance; without a testament and the resultant appearance guaranteed by it, there is no way to recognize the worldly meaning of one's own experiences, and there is no way to pass on the significance to future generations.

Loss of inheritance offers a telling metaphor for the loss of tradition, but, as noted above, this metaphor provides more than just a useful analogy because tradition and inheritance are historically linked. In her essay, "The Tradition of Political Thought," she explains that, "[tradition's] chief function is to give answers to all questions by channeling them into predetermined categories."[206] With this understanding of tradition as both handing down the past and allowing the present to understand itself through tradition's categories, we can begin to glimpse the way that it structures meaning and facilitates the inclusion and exclusion of particular experiences. In order for experiences to be recognized in the public world, they require a 'proper' name, the authority that links them to predetermined categories, and the founding and continuation of tradition.

The problem for Char is that without testament, he finds himself without the entitled support of tradition. However, similarly to biological inheritance, which may exist without the legitimacy of the patronymic, he has not lost the meaning of his experiences (which he expresses through his aphorism). But he cannot find a place for them in public meaning because they lack a proper name or place to appear in public. Thus, the question of his relationship to his experience becomes this: can Char properly enter into the public as himself since his experiences are denied a place in the world? As a person whose political experiences as a member of the *Résistance* are not supported by

[205] "What is Authority?," 124.
[206] "The Tradition of Political Thought," 55.

authority, it would seem that he can only be recognized as "himself" if he breaks with his political identity, returning to a social-political identity that is dependent on masking his identity. As Char himself writes, "If I survive, I know that I shall have to break with the aroma of these essential years, silently reject (not repress) my treasure."[207] He would have to put back on the social masks that shaped his life before the war in order to participate in a public space that cannot be truly public because it cannot be a space of true appearance.[208]

Arendt explains that for Char, "the treasure was lost not because of historical circumstances and the adversity of reality but because no tradition had foreseen its appearance or its reality, because no testament had willed it for the future."[209] This lack of a testament results in the inability of the living to name their experiences or will their meaning to future generations.[210] Furthermore, she suggests that without a structure within which we can place our experiences, we forget them, since "the human mind is only on the rarest occasions capable of retaining something which is altogether unconnected."[211] Thus a failure to remember at the societal level, a lack of an epistemic system, or even the incursion of another epistemic model voids meaning of events and

[207] "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future," 4.
[208] Arendt notes, "In this nakedness [of the Résistance], stripped of all the masks—of those which society assigns to its members as well as those which the individual fabricates for himself in his psychological reactions against society—they had been visited for the first time in their lives by an apparition of freedom…because they had taken the initiative upon themselves and therefore, without knowing or even noticing it, had begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear" (ibid., 4).
[209] Ibid., 5-6.
[210] In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt writes, "The sheer naming of things, the creation of worlds, is the human way of appropriating and, as it were, disalienating the world into which, after all, each of us is born as a newcomer and a stranger," 100). The difference between this quote and the quote above illustrates the difference in concerns presented in these two books. In *Between Past and Future,* Arendt emphasizes the difficulty of creating public worlds at her contemporary moment, whereas in *Life of the Mind* the world is not complicated by politics or events.
[211] "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future," 6.

the public lives of individuals like Char, and also endangers their private meaning because, as quoted above, the treasure must be rejected.

Of course this lack of orientation through a collective tradition does not mean that the actions of the French *Résistance*, and Char's own experiences, did not happen. Instead, it means that, at best, they can only be understood as particular events; they cannot be brought into a traditional narrative and so easily acquire public meaning. Moving beyond the boundaries of Char's story, Arendt connects his experiences to the western tradition's general inability to give a common name to the experience of revolution:

> The history of Revolutions…which politically spells out the innermost story of the modern age, could be told in parable form as the tale of an age-old treasure which, under the most varied circumstances, appears abruptly, unexpectedly, and disappears again, under different mysterious conditions, as though it were a *fata morgana*.[212]

The comparison of the treasure of revolution to a *fata morgana*, a fairy world that appears and disappears, stresses the ephemeral, other-wordliness of this treasure and its place outside a traditional historical narrative. Fairy time is never the same as human time but intersects and diverges from it, and, without a place in a stable world, its 'narrative' can never be coherent, can never be brought into tradition as such. This applies to revolutions because, insofar as they are revolutions, they are potential starting points for new traditions. But even fairy worlds and revolutions have a name, and Arendt denies that Char's experience has a proper name, asking, "Does something exist, not in outer space but in the world and the affairs of men on earth, which has not even a name?" Her

[212] Ibid., 5.

answer is that "Unicorns and fairy queens seem to possess more reality than the lost treasure of the revolutions."[213] Since, for Arendt, revolutions by definition disrupt tradition, it is impossible to find a place for them in tradition. Nevertheless, even if revolutions themselves appear like fairy worlds, the break caused by a revolution opens up the possibility of new political worlds, new traditions, and new inheritances.[214] In contrast, the break in tradition, caused by totalitarianism, produced a break so large that it would be wrong to describe what emerges as new traditions or new models of inheritances. To do so would be to attempt to apply concepts of authority, inheritance, and tradition that cannot be revived after totalitarianism and are not appropriate for the contemporary moment. Such models cannot be appropriate because they do not allow Char to bring his experiences into the political.

Arendt's depiction of the end of the western tradition as a complete collapse allows her to entertain the possibility, although not the inevitability, of something new. As Arendt explain in "The Tradition of Political Thought," the break in tradition "has caused immediately an atrophy in the dimension of the past and initiated the creeping and irresistible movement of shallowness which spreads a veil of meaninglessness over all spheres of modern life."[215] However, this loss of meaning with the break in tradition does not mean that traditional concepts have disappeared. Arendt insists in *Between Past and Future* that the contrary is the case:

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[213] Ibid.
[214] It is worth noting that by definition Arendt's account of revolution denies the legitimacy of Marx's account of revolutions. Her reading of Marx appears in *Between Past and Future* as part of an account of the dangers of equating historical progress with political action. ("Concept of History: Ancient and Modern" in *Between Past and Future*, 41-90).
[215] "The Tradition of Political Thought," 42.

> It sometimes seems that this power of well-worn notions and categories becomes more tyrannical as the tradition loses its living force and as the memory of its beginning recedes; it may even reveal its full coercive force only after its end has come and men no longer even rebel against it.[216]

Even though we may not have a traditional relationship with tradition, elements of it can live on in a reduced form of afterlife as mere social mores and customs or, alternatively, it can be applied with tyrannical force in ways that do not reflect contemporary needs and offer no meaningful foundation from which to build and maintain a community. [217] This tyrannical application of deracinated tradition yields what Arendt characterizes as "formalistic and compulsory thinking."[218] Such thinking can only exclude the new or reduce it to repetitions of sameness. Examined in terms of the patronymic, we can say that its continuation and use after the break in tradition can be deployed tyrannically without fostering a space for appearance.

Thus the only thing to do to avoid this tyrannical thinking, which takes its most terrifying form in totalitarian ideology, is to shift from a model of meaning based on a sacred foundation, a common ancestry, and tradition to a model of worldly meaning that better relates to the contemporary experience of homelessness, a condition that emerges as part of the break in tradition. This argument will require that Arendt move away from a model of the world as inheritance, and thus of a home as provided through inheritance,

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[216] "Tradition and the Modern Age" in *Between Past and Future*, 26.
[217] In "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," Arendt ties the collapse of morality to the rise of totalitarianism, noting that "Morality collapsed into a mere set of mores—manners, customs, conventions to be changed at will…the problem it raises is not resolved if we admit, as we must, that the Nazi doctrine did not remain with the German people, that Hitler's criminal morality was changed back again at a moment's notice…." (*Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn. [New York: Schocken Books, 2003], 54).
[218] "Tradition and the Modern Age," 26.

to a model structured by participation and active seeking after meaning. It will require the pursuit of fairy castles.

Arendt describes the contemporary experience as living in the gap of the present, a gap whose structure cannot be inherited and thus cannot be passed on as tradition. She states, "This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past."[219] As a space that cannot be inherited or ordered for future generations, the present must be worlded anew for each individual, even though with the collapse of tradition everyone in the western world finds his or herself dwelling in this gap.

Here the question is begged, if Arendt is theorizing the collapse of the western tradition through the rise of totalitarianism, how does this collapse relate to the rest of the world? This is a troubling spatial/temporal slippage in her work creating an implicit inclusion and exclusion that rests on the model of inheritance she attempts to destabilize. On the surface it seems that any account of this gap will, to some extent, be vulnerable to the critiques of worlding put forth in the previous chapter, and Arendt's note that this gap is probably "coeval with the existence of man on earth" seems to suggest the necessity of such a critique.[220] However, on closer examination it becomes clear that Arendt avoids simply positing this gap as an element of an essentialist human nature where all humans must inhabit this gap. She does so by suggesting that this "coeval" gap could be otherwise realized in time and place and that it had been a condition unique to those

[219] "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future," 13.
[220] Ibid., 13.

engaged in thought.[221] Therefore, although this does leave open the question of the effects of the breakdown in the western tradition and where the effects Arendt describes extend to, the human relationships to the gap can change, and thus the gap's significance and its definition for humans must also be geographically mutable. As a result of the gap's mutability, and the abrupt changes finalized through the collapse of western tradition, she claims that we are "neither equipped nor prepared" to inhabit this gap between past and future, yet we find ourselves today living in it in an everyday kind of way. She is not, however, making a universal claim about the gap or its effects.[222]

Moving forward with her argument, Arendt notes that, with this break in tradition, "It [the gap] became a tangible reality and perplexity for all; that is, it became a fact of political relevance."[223] Given this political relevance, today we must grapple with this gap as part of our reality and public world and not just as an element of the structure of thought. This is not to say that the gap offers some kind of authentic way of being in contrast to other ways of being (traditional or otherwise); instead, Arendt explains that the reason that we are not prepared to inhabit it is that such gaps had previously been the exclusive domain of those who "made thinking their primary business" and in the everyday world, the very existence of such gaps had long been covered over by tradition.[224] She writes, "Throughout the thousand years that followed upon the foundation of Rome and were determined by Roman concepts, this gap was bridged over by what, since the Romans, we have called tradition."[225] With the rise of modernity and,

[221] Arendt writes, "When the thread of tradition finally broke, the gap between past and future ceased to be a condition peculiar only to the activity of thought and restricted as an experience to those few who made thinking their primary business" (ibid.,14).
[222] Ibid., 13.
[223] Ibid., 14.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid., 13.

ultimately, with the rise of totalitarianism, the bridge that was the classical western tradition grew thin and then snapped. Thus we see how, at least theoretically, Char, living and acting at the breaking point of tradition, lacks an inherited locus for his experiences.

In order to make this argument, Arendt offers a metaphor for the experience of the public world that is based on the analogy of thinking as finding a home in the gap between past and future. She explores this metaphor through a reading (and rewriting) of Franz Kafka's "He"—a parable about a man who is not anybody, nor merely somebody, but who is without a name.

1.3 "He" and The Gap of the Present

Although Kafka writes "He" before Char's time, Arendt claims that "He" depicts Char's relationship to tradition. If Char illustrates the outward effects of the break in tradition, then "He" illustrates the inward experience. While, with Char, she offers a reading of the loss of inheritance and tradition's role in shaping both world and thought, with Kafka, she presents a metaphorical mapping of the structure of thought and the gap of the present. One of these two models is provided by a highly metaphorical narrative that is seemingly detached from any particular moment in history, while the other is rooted in the historical particularity of Char's experience. With these two models, Arendt stages, on the one hand, the difficulty of recognizing the new without a structure of meaning-making, and, on the other hand, the possibility of a rooted but structure-less model of thinking that cannot be passed on to future generations through inheritance.

Arendt's translation of Kafka's "He," her comments on her translated version, her rewriting of "He," and her comments on her rewriting are quite extensive for such a short parable. She begins with a fairly straightforward translation of the German. She writes:

> He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives him back.[226]

This first part of the parable sets the scene, staging a battle fought on two fronts and moving linearly along a time line. After presenting this vision of a battle, Arendt, translating Kafka, then complicates our understanding of the scene explaining that what we see is only *theoretically* the case: "But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions?"[227] So the explanation of the fight given earlier was lacking because it did not account for where "he" would like to go. This intention creates the possibility of a new force, a force that cannot be seen from a theoretical position because such intentions cannot be seen and therefore there can be no guarantee as to what his intentions are; however, after asking who it is who really knows the intentions of "He," Kafka's parable then proceeds to explain "he"'s dream:

> His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment—and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet—he will jump out of the

[226] Ibid., 7.
[227] Ibid.

> fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists and their fight with each other.[228]

As a dream, the parable complicates any idea of clear or willing intentions: As a dream the conscious "He" may not be aware of his desires and his dreams may not be the same as his intentions. Yet, although this desire may be beyond the intentions of "He," according to the parable, it structures his relationship to his own time. At a point when it is so dark that one can assume the character loses all spatial and temporal reference points, and thus already feels himself to be outside of time, he can leap into his own dreamt space. From this position outside of the fight between past and future, "He" can umpire (Arendt's translation of *Richtung*) the fight from a space outside of time.

Arendt then proceeds to rewrite this last part of the parable, justifying her revision by claiming, "Without distorting Kafka's meaning, I think one may go a step further."[229] With this further step she tries to move the parable beyond what she understands to be the traditional image of temporality as moving in a straight line, and the traditional metaphysical model of stepping outside of time.[230] For her, this kind of jump into metaphysics is the philosophical dream of thinking from a theoretically pure position. Attempting to make Kafka's model of time more dynamic and less structured, as well as hoping to avoid the dream of a transcendent position placing the individual out of the world of space-time, Arendt changes the end of his parable.[231] She replaces the leap outside of time with the collision of the forces of the past, future, and "He." She suggests

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[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid., 11.
[230] Ibid. In *Life of the Mind*, Arendt writes, "What are this dream and this region but the old dream Western Metaphysics has dreamt from Parmenides to Hegel, of a timeless region, an eternal presence in complete quiet, lying beyond human clocks and calendars altogether, the region, precisely, of thought?" (207).
[231] Ibid.

that, "the gap where 'he' stands is, potentially at least, no simple interval but resembles what the physicists call a parallelogram of forces."[232] Thus, out of the opposing forces of past and future, a third diagonal force is produced: a force directed by the angle of past and future, but initiated only with the insertion of the individual into time. As she writes, the significance of this new model is that it offers a new way to relate to the past and future:

> If Kafka's "he" were able to exert his forces along this diagonal, in perfect equidistance from past and future, walking along this diagonal line, as it were, forward and backward with slow, ordered movements which are the proper motion for trains of thought, he would not have jumped out of the fighting line and be above the melee as the parable demands, for this diagonal, though pointing toward the infinite, remains bound to and is rooted in the present.[233]

The significance of this revision is that "he" no longer exists in simple linear time, where thoughts progress with time. Instead, as Arendt explains, "This diagonal force, whose origin is known, whose direction is determined by past and future, but whose eventual end lies in infinity, is the perfect metaphor for the activity of thought."[234] Thus this third force offers the previously invisible path of his intentions from which "He" can think out of time but from a place determined, in part, by the particularity of his present. This disjointed space resembles the *fata morgana* and the space of revolution. It is a space that belongs to the individual, and cannot be brought into the narrative of chronological history. In these spaces, Thought takes him in his own direction, distinct from the directions of the past and future, but derived from his intersection with them.

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[232] "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future," 12.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid.

In some ways this new diagonal mimics the dreamt of external space offered to us in Kafka's version, as both the diagonal and the leap out of time provide for an umpire's position. As Arendt writes, walking the line of the force:

> [H]e would have found the place in time which is sufficiently removed from past and future to offer "the umpire" a position from which to judge the forces fighting with each other with an impartial eye.[235]

What can it mean that this is an impartial position from within the perspective of "he"? The position belongs to "he" so it must be partial; yet, as his own diagonal, it is his impartial position from which to judge the past and future from a particular present, suggesting that at another time this diagonal would be obsolete. The question will be how to inhabit this space between past and future and also how to understand it in relation to the world.

The problem for the contemporary moment is that this theoretical position of "he" walking the diagonal stands in contrast to what Arendt suggests will be most likely to happen: "that the 'he,' unable to find the diagonal which would lead him out of the fighting-line and into the space ideally constituted by the parallelogram of forces, will 'die of exhaustion'… oblivious of his original intentions [of umpire]."[236] This is the condition Arendt thinks we inhabit today, except without the ability to make a home in this newly open present.

She then offers this pivotal explanation of how to understand and apply her version of Kafka's parable: "To avoid misunderstandings: the imagery I am using here to indicate metaphorically and tentatively the *contemporary* conditions of thought can be

[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid., 13.

valid only within the realm of mental phenomena." [237] At first glance this comment seems simple: she has provided a figure or trope that illustrates contemporary conditions of human thought, but, as a figure, "He" is a particular figuration and thus not, as Arendt points out, "somebody."[238] She has not offered an account of human thought *per se,* but an account of a particular individual who lacks a name. Her reading of "He" as a figure or trope means that "he" cannot provide a universal truth. Even as we are inclined to take "he" up as *the* model of thought and *the* metaphor for the contemporary conditions of thought, "he" as a particular trope can only be *a* model.

Her claim, that this figure reflects the contemporary conditions of thought, means that her illustration of the human condition of thought and the gap in time remain intimately bound to the world in which we live, and that even though the gap itself has always existed, her staging of "He" in seemingly general terms is meaningful from within the contemporary conditions of thought. Furthermore, the link Arendt draws between Rene Char's aphorism and Kafka's "He" suggests that "He" is a metaphor for the conditions of thought, to the conditions of being in the world where, as Char writes, "our inheritance was left to us by no testament."[239] However, Char is also contrary to Arendt's claim that "[t]he incident which this parable relates and penetrates follows, in the inner logic of the matter, upon the events whose gist we found contained in Rene Char's aphorism."[240] While Char can inherit, his inheritance has no meaning because it contains no testament. The position of "He" is more radical: there seems to be no inheritance; "He" lives in a space which cannot be inherited and thus cannot be understood in terms of

[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid., 3.
[240] Ibid., 7.

continuity, inclusion, or exclusion. Thus it is significant that Arendt identifies the space of the present in which "He" takes places as a place that cannot be inherited. She writes, "This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but *cannot be inherited and handed down from the past*."[241] Here she seems to be making a claim regarding the human condition—i.e. that this gap is ontologically open; it is a space that cannot be part of patronymic inheritance and cannot have a proper name.

Arendt stresses the individual experience for each human being, writing, "[E]very new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew."[242] Thus she suggests that each human being is a new beginning, an ipseity that is characterized by a particular self-caused insertion and interruption of time. Yet even as this self-caused insertion is part of the human condition, as something that can only be indicated and not inherited, our relationship to it is determined by worlding, so that, as noted above, when tradition remained intact, "it [the gap] was a condition peculiar only to the activity of thought."[243] Therefore, similar to the disjointed space/time of revolution, this gap would appear and disappear as individuals engaged in thought.

It is worth noting that, unlike her account of "He" in *Between Past and Future*, Arendt's discussion of "He" in *Life of the Mind* does not mention Rene Char, and her account of Kafka reflects a change in focus. In *Life of the Mind*, Arendt focuses on thought, and the world in general, without reference to totalitarianism or tradition. As a result, this later text does not raise questions related to inheritance or the public world,

[241] Ibid., 13. Emphasis mine.
[242] Ibid., 13.
[243] Ibid., 14.

and she does not offer an account of world which foregrounds the historicity of tradition in relation to this gap. This version is therefore of less significance for this dissertation because the questions of the specific historical-temporal worlding appear only indirectly and in the background. My concern is that, in this later version, Arendt does not consider tradition as the thing that bridges over the gap between past and future, but instead considers the bridge as the "continuity of our business and our activities in the world, in which we continue what we started yesterday and hope to finish tomorrow."[244] This substitution of continuity and everyday activities for tradition makes Arendt's reading more universal and makes her reading seem less determined by the historical moment than it does in the model based on the collapse of western tradition.

Despite these differences between the two readings, in *Life of the Mind* Arendt reaffirms the status of "he" as a figure, and provides us with further clues about how we can read her earlier account. She writes, "Kafka's tale is, of course, couched in metaphorical language, and its images drawn from everyday life, are meant as analogies, without which, as has already been indicated, mental phenomena cannot be described at all."[245] Speaking in general terms, she suggests that the metaphor allows one to connect our concepts to the world and "undo, as it were, the withdrawal from the world of appearances that is the precondition of mental activities."[246] Her definition and understanding of metaphor and the relationship between world and metaphor is more clearly articulated in this later version.

Her description of the umpire in *Life of the Mind* fits her earlier version and sheds light on how to understand his objectivity. She notes that to be objective is:

[244] *The Life of the Mind*, 205.
[245] Ibid., 206.
[246] Ibid., 103.

> [t]o assume the position of "umpire," of arbiter and judge over the manifold never ending affairs of human existence in the world, never arriving at a final solution to their riddles but ready with ever-new answers to the question of what it may be all about.[247]

Thus we see that the umpire, still within the past and present, has the ability to think about meaning in the world, not in terms of a definitive truth but in terms of timely answers. This resonates with Arendt's claim in *Between Past and Future* that her plan is not to "retie the broken thread of tradition or to invent some new fangled surrogates with which to fill the gap between past and future."[248] Instead, she explains that, "throughout these exercises the problem of truth is kept in abeyance; the concern is solely with how to move in this gap—the only region perhaps where truth eventually will appear."[249] This interest in how to live in the present resonates with the concern of how to think and understand the world without having to use inheritance as the tool to build a space and find a place in it. Thus, although names, or, in this case, truth, may appear as part of the present, the concern is not with the search for truth as it is with the search for a lost inheritance.

Arendt's model of the gap between past and future lends itself to a new model of worlding. Her description of Char's experience demonstrates the problems of appearing as oneself in a political moment where tradition no longer serves to clear a space and organize political appearance. Although she does not write as a feminist, we can see how Arendt's understanding of the end of tradition and the loss of testament might align with feminist interests in the gender politics of inheritance and with questions of implicit and

[247] Ibid., 209-10.
[248] "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future," 14.
[249] Ibid.

explicit inclusion and exclusion from public narratives. Similarly her attempt to help us to think without using a structure worlded by a tradition that is comprised of proper names (which must necessarily be tied up with questions of legitimacy and gendering) is helpful for thinking of alternative models of considering the relationship between thinker and world, reforming a model of thought based on a metaphysical leap outside of the present, to a model based on a conditioned diagonal derived from the present. It is with Arendt's account of the possibility of new models of time and new models of inheritance in mind that we turn to Spivak's account of temporality and parabasis.

2 Spivak: Temporality and Parabasis

As discussed in the previous chapter, Spivak argues that feminist philosophy corrects the error of assuming that "man" is an adequate trope for universal humanity. While acknowledging the value of this correction, she critiques feminism for the way it often repeats, obfuscates, and solidifies the model of conflating tropes with universals. Spivak explains that feminism, in its attempt to add women to the trope of the universal, repeats the same model that it critiqued, and thus feminism obfuscates the model's limitations. Furthermore, because the figure of "woman" is supposed to correct the figure of "man," it solidifies "the figure of man" as primary, making "the figure of women" a secondary correction to the original model. This limited correction offers a model for the way that philosophy often overlooks worlding and conflates the "figure of man" with the universal concept of humanity. This way of relating to the troping of universals by repeating, obfuscating, and solidifying them reinforces the slippage

between a master narrative of "man" (or "man" and "woman") understood as a worlded figuration and an objective account of humanity.

Part of the conclusion arrived at in the last chapter, and summarized in the previous paragraph, is that any engagement with a master narrative will always results in some kind of complicity with it. Spivak calls this complicity a "folding together."[250] In this section, I argue that her solution to this problem is a continuous interruption of a master narrative in an attempt to demonstrate its worlding and thus its conditional, non-universal, status. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, she explains approach to master narratives as: "A caution, a vigilance, a persistent taking of distance always out of step with total involvement [with the master narrative], a *desire* for permanent parabasis, is all that responsible academic criticism can aspire to."[251] This being out of step, this suspension maintained through a desire for permanent parabasis—the continuous interruption of a master narrative—means that Spivak's approach to worlding strongly resembles Arendt's depiction of the infinite diagonal of thought.

2.1 Permanent Parabasis

Unlike Arendt's understanding of the diagonal of thought as a space opened up in an everyday way through the break in western tradition, Spivak uses permanent parabasis in an attempt to break up the supposedly universalizing narratives of the western tradition by revealing their contingency. Permanent parabasis is a concept that appears throughout her immense body of work but which she never considers for more than a few sentences

[250] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 361.
[251] Ibid., 362.

or at most a few paragraphs in any given essay. Citing the Oxford English Dictionary, she defines parabasis: "as 'going aside,' 'address to the audience in the poet's name, unconnected with the action of the drama.'"[252] Thus parabasis is an aside that interrupts the flow of a narrative. Despite her limited sustained engagement with permanent parabasis, as I demonstrate in the following pages, it is a predominant theoretical model in Spivak's work. She explicitly adopts this concept from the work of Paul de Man.[253]

In "The Concept of Irony," de Man defines parabasis as "the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register."[254] To shift registers implies a change in discourse. He offers Schlegel's *Lucinde* as a text that performs just such a shift, arguing that *Lucinde* combines the incompatible codes, or rhetorical registers, of both philosophical discourse and sexual discourse. According to de Man, "They [the philosophical and sexual registers] interrupt, they disrupt each other in such a fundamental way that this very possibility of disruption represents a threat to all assumptions one has about what a text should be."[255] This shift in register signals an incompatibility and threatens assumptions regarding the philosophical nature of the text, yet the sexual register does not erase the philosophical or vice versa. In this way, parabasis challenges the possibility of a single comprehensive reading or narrative.

Building off this definition, we can understand permanent parabasis as extending beyond a particular interruption and offering more than just a single contradictory register. Permanent parabasis is interruption at all points.[256] This kind of interruption

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[252] "Marginality in the Teaching Machine" in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (Routledge: New York, 1993), ftnt *38*, 298.
[253] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 430.
[254] "The Concept of Irony," *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 178.
[255] "The Concept of Irony," 169.
[256] Ibid., 179.

might seem to do away with a master narrative and lead to complete incomprehensibility, yet a continual interruption of the narrative requires that there be a narrative to continually interrupt. Therefore, as de Man notes, "critics who have written about this have pointed out, rightly, that there is a radical contradiction here, because a parabasis can only happen at one specific point, and to say that there would be permanent parabasis is saying something violently paradoxical."[257] The paradoxical nature of permanent parabasis is that, even as it suspends a narrative, it is dependent on that narrative for its interruptions.

De Man uses this model of permanent parabasis to define irony: irony is "the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes."[258] Claire Colebrook provides a helpful description of de Man's definition of both irony and "the allegory of tropes" in *Irony in the Work of Philosophy*.[259] She notes that, "Most speech and narrative, de Man argues, operates at the naïve level of allegory, as though our language corresponds to some outside world or nature. Allegory relies, therefore, on the assumed difference between word and world." Thus we see speech as representational, and we assume a transparency to that representation. The "allegory of tropes" is the organization of the world in a manner that stabilizes literal meaning. If allegorical nature is assumed to be objective, then considering the world through language is equivalent to reading the world in terms of a textbook. But, as Colebrook explains, such representation of the world in terms of the allegory of tropes also implies that there is a world before representation; therefore, she writes, "This idea of allegory…already rests on a prior act of nonallegorical

[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] *Irony in the Work of Philosophy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

narration, the narration that separates point of view from the world."[260] This prior story is the story of our worlded separation from the world so that we can then reflect back on it. Such narratives are often reduced to transparency in our attempt to focus on the relationship between language and object. Yet, as we considered in chapter one, such transparency is a mistaken relationship to worlding. Irony is the permanent interruption of the narrative of our separation from the world.

Although Spivak does not discuss the connection between worlding and irony, we can see the connections between Heideggerian worlding and irony. This prior narration narrates our separation from the world, yet to assume the continuity of such a narrative is to ignore the way that earth and world both reveal and conceal. Colebrook's analysis is again helpful for understanding this point: "There can only be a nature that corresponds to our point of view *after* narration has given 'us' point of view."[261] Therefore, not only is the world shaped by worlding, but our relationship to worlding is already determined before we can reflect on worlding. To forget the fact that narration provides a point of view is to assume transparency between world and earth, and thus the possibility of a perfect (textbook) representation or calculation of the world. Irony is the unceasing disruption of such literal meanings and master narrative.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak defines irony as "permanent parabasis or sustained interruption from a source relating 'otherwise' (allegorien = speaking otherwise) to the continuous unfolding of the main system of meaning."[262] In this way, permanent parabasis is an interruption of a master narrative so that the narrative is suspended. As she explains in a footnote to "Marginality in the Teaching Machine,"

[260] *Irony in the Work of Philosophy*,156.
[261] Ibid., 157.
[262] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 430.

"We appropriate this [permanent parabasis] as a transaction between postcolonial subject-positions, persistently going aside from seeming allegorical continuity."[263] In this way, the postcolonial subject positions are the positions that interrupt allegorical continuity. If the master narrative of the west is told as a continuous narrative, what is revealed through permanent parabasis is the way that this seeming continuity arises from the foreclosure of other ways of meaning, and thus other narratives.

The trouble is that, as noted in Spivak's critique of feminism, any attempt to correct a universal by offering a counter narrative as an addition to the master narrative does not actually challenge the structure of the master narrative; what we gain is an additive model. Any attempt at adding other narratives affirms the idea of a master narrative and thus the primacy of whatever narrative that is being challenged. Therefore what is so useful about permanent parabasis is that it attempts to continuously undo the master narrative. It does not do so through other narratives that would ultimately reaffirm the concept of a master narrative, but through continual interruptions that reveal, first, the structure of the master narrative as disjointed and dependent on exclusions and, second, its impossibility of applying universally.

The task of bringing this structure to light is the task of providing a history of that which is continually being obfuscated in service to a master narrative. For Spivak, this space that is being lost to the master narrative is the present, and the task becomes to consider the way that the present is lost to master narratives. Nowhere is this task more apparent then in the title of her 1999 book: *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. This title evokes the work of many philosophers, recalling Kant's critiques of pure and practical reason, Hegel's "vanishing present" as

[263] "Marginality in the Teaching Machine" 298, endnote 38.

distinguished from the permanent beyond, and Michel Foucault's "history of the present."[264]

Although Spivak's book title can be evaluated in relation to each of these thinkers, Foucault's concept of a "history of the present" is most important to this project. Foucault coins the phrase "history of the present" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* in which he attempts to offer just such a history."[265] For Foucault such a history does not mean "a history of the past in terms of the present"—that is, a way of understanding the past through present concept—but instead a use of the past to understand the present.[266] In this way, a history of the present opens up the meaning, seeming transparency, and supposed inevitability of the present to the accidents of history.

Spivak transforms Foucault's concept of "history of the present" into a history of the vanishing present. In Foucault's famous phrase, the present seems to stand still for investigation. In contrast, Spivak's "history of the vanishing present" destabilizes the present in an attempt to provide a history of what vanishes. She stresses that the crystallization of events producing the present are always producing new presents. Insofar as any account of the present will, by the time that it is finished, always be an account of the past, the present is always out of reach; therefore any history of the present is always out of time.

If Spivak is writing a history of the vanishing present, then her goal cannot be to write a history of events that are seen as shaping history; historical events cannot vanish,

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[264] Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Trans A.V Miller. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 87.
[265] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
[266] *Discipline and Punish*, 31.

because if they did, then they would not be part of history. Rather, she attempts a history of that which is used and marginalized in service of the master narrative, and thus what cannot be investigated in definitive terms. Instead, she must consider that which eludes a master narrative, or that which is left out of the master narrative as the subject of such a narrative, but is necessary to it.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak explores what is both left out and supports the master narrative in a complex reading of Kant's foreclosure of the native informant.[267] To provide an account of her reading of Kant would take us too far afield; instead, if we consider her reading of Baudelaire's "Le Cygne" as discussed in the first chapter, we can see the way that someone might support a narrative without being included in it as a subject.

As previously mentioned, here were two women in Baudelaire's poem: Andromache and "la superbe Afrique" (the superb Africa). Spivak argues that to read the first woman as a subject and participant in the master narrative of the poem, or even just to read her as an improper subject, who maintains the centrality of the masculine subject, marginalizes the other woman in the text. While Andromache (his first woman) can be a trope-subject, for Baudelaire, the other woman holds the place of the nameless female element. As Spivak notes, "against all this labyrinthine specificity and exchange between male and female is juxtaposed the immense vagueness of the negress' geography, etched in no more than three words: 'la superbe Afrique' (the superb Africa)."[268] In this way, we see how Andromache's identification as a subject (and thus her identification with the

[267] In a footnote, Spivak condenses her argument to explain that "woman is shown to be demonstrated abundantly by Kant's text, even if often in the ruse of disavowal. As I hope to show, the figure of the 'native informant' is, by contrast, foreclosed (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 13, ftnt., 20)
[268] "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," 229 ("Le Cygne" 1.44).

masculine narrative of subject) closes off the second woman. This second woman does not get a narrative; her identity is general, vague and without an individualistic story or name.

The lesson of "Le Cygne" is that although the second woman appears, she appears without specificity; she is present only in the moment and supports the individuation of Andromache. We see in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* that women who support the margins, as "la negress" does, "are insufficiently represented or representable in that narration. We can docket them, but we cannot grasp them at all."[269] This docketing is the attempt to capture the vanishing present, arresting the master narrative. It is an attempt to catch out what is obfuscated in the maintenance of and additions to a master narrative, and thus only appears in the moment as support.

This docketing interrupts the master narrative by demonstrating its lack of completion. The footnotes of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* offer a clear demonstration of this technique of pursuing a history of the vanishing present. They offer a running commentary on the body of the text through which Spivak attempts to bring her text up to date, demonstrating the incompleteness of her book and its failure to account for the margins. In the preface to the text Spivak describes her footnotes in the following way: "'a moving base' that I stand on as the text seeks to catch the vanishing present, has asserted itself in narrative footnotes."[270] Therefore, the footnotes interrupt the narrative of the text in order to bring the text into the present by pointing out how things have changed; however, because the footnotes must be written, they too lose hold on the present. This means that the text that Spivak produces is always in need of reworking in

[269] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 244.
[270] Ibid., x.

order to bring its interruptions up to date.[271] Spivak explains this way of writing as follows: "A caution, a vigilance, a persistent taking of distance always out of step with total involvement, a desire for permanent parabasis, is all that responsible academic criticism can aspire to."[272] This model of providing a running commentary in footnotes and continually attempting to update the text makes Spivak's text feel off-balance and continually interrupts any narrative, challenging its authority. This feeling of being off-balance can be understood in terms of permanent parabasis and the paradoxical lack of equilibrium that such constant interruption must cause. Yet, in a book, parabasis cannot be obtained because the book must be completed and so the footnotes themselves come to an end and produce their own narrative. The book becomes some kind of system onto itself.

2.2 Colonialism, Neocolonialism, and Postcoloniality

Shifting registers from the coherence of a book to the history of colonialism, postcolonialism, and neocolonialism, we again see Spivak deploying a model of permanent parabasis. Here the interruptions understood as permanent parabasis become a way of being postcolonial.

Although Spivak does write about the events that ended colonialism, her primary concern is postcoloniality and its relationship to neocolonialism. For her, postcoloniality operates as a disruptive term between the systems of colonialism and neocolonialism, and

[271] *An Aesthetic Education*, 215.
[272] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 362.

she calls on her readers to read together and distinguish between colonialism, neocolonialism, and postcoloniality:

> Let us learn to discriminate the terms *colonialism*—in the European formation stretching from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries—*neocolonialism*—dominant economic, political, and culturalist maneuvers emerging in our century after the uneven dissolution of the territorial empires—and *postcoloniality*—the contemporary global condition, since the first term is supposed to have passed or be passing into the second.[273]

This sentence's structure is telling. The three terms: colonialism, neocolonialism and postcoloniality are defined and connected by dashes; the terms—and their definitions—run together. The first term—colonialism—passes into the second—neocolonialism—and then third—postcoloniality. This structure suggests a blurring between these concepts and their definitions. Yet, despite this blurring, postcoloniality stands apart from colonialism and neocolonialism, distinguished as an "-ality" and not an "-ism."

In contrast to an "-ism," which suggests a doctrine, system, or ideology (for example, feminism, Marxism, totalitarianism, or racism), "-ality" suggests a way of being or state of being (spirituality, sexuality, or reality). Postcolonial-*ity* is a way of being in relation to the different but connected systems of colonialism and neocolonialism. Thus postcoloniality, as a way of being in relation to these systems, does not fully extricate a person from the prescribed path between colonialism and neocolonialism.

For Spivak this means that postcoloniality is the habitation of a double bind or paradox between the contradictory demand to end neocolonialism and the fact that, as an

[273] Ibid., 172.

elite theorist, Spivak is a product of colonialism. Because she is invested in neocolonialism, she offers a repetition of two registers that cannot be read at the same time. She is product of colonialism in particular because she is a citizen of India. Her relationship to colonialism is different than someone who is English or French and thus was born into a former colonial power. Spivak identifies the benefits of the elite theorist who is worlded on the colony side of the equation as the ability to speak and be heard. As she explains, "Postcolonial persons from formerly colonized countries are able to communicate to each other (and to the metropolitans), to exchange, to establish sociality, because we have had access to the so-called culture of imperialism."[274] This allows the postcolonial subject to communicate both with the former imperial power as well as with theorists from other former colonies. In this way, colonialism enables the elite postcolonial theorist because it offers the ability to appear before others; however, this happy consequence does not make it good.

Furthermore, the advantage of being part of the elite also requires some degree of conformity with neocolonialism understood in term of economic, cultural, and political structures. Spivak's easy example of this is her description of her own clothing:

> I was wearing a jacket over a sari, and, to layer myself into warmth I was wearing, under the jacket, a full-sleeved cotton top, rather an unattractive dun-colored cheap thing, "made in Bangladesh" from The French Connection. By contrast, the sari I was wearing, also made in Bangladesh, was an exquisite woven cloth produced by the Parabartana Weavers' collective.[275]

[274] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 191. This is an updated version of her essay, "The Question of Cultural Studies," originally published in *Outside, in the Teaching Machine*.
[275] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 414.

Spivak's clothing is a product of both exploitative labor and well-paid labor. I see the significance of this description operating on two levels: first, insofar as she buys from The French Connection she participates in neocolonialism as economic exploitation. Second, at a deeper level we see that both sari and shirt are a product of transnational commerce and require some complicity with trade laws and thus global capitalism as standardized by neocolonial powers.

Spivak's response to this cultural advantage is to notice the way it is bound up with someone else's disadvantage and thus not a product of luck (that she has money to spend) but of inadvertent exploitation.[276] Therefore one has a moral obligation to reject any notion of one's own "lucky" position within the elite. She argues, "Shall we then assign to that [imperialist], a measure of 'moral luck'?"[277] To assign moral luck to one's culture is to assume that it is simply the luck of the draw that one finds oneself on one end of a social hierarchy or another, or part of one culture or another, and that such luck, and its concomitant worlding, can be approached from an objective position without concern with one's complicity. In this way, Spivak attempts a state of being-in-parabasis, where to read the narrative of one's coming-into-being is part of the narrative of someone else's obfuscation.

Spivak explains that one ought not view culture in terms of moral luck, even as one inhabits such a culture as the accident of one's birth: "I think there can be no doubt that the answer is 'no.' This impossible 'no' to a structure which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and the everyday here

[276] Ibid., 191.
[277] Ibid. In a footnote, Spivak cites Bernard Williams for the phrase "moral luck" (191, ftnt.114). (Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981]).

and now of 'postcoloniality' is a historical case."[278] This kind of "no" to one's culture is an impossible "no," but it is a "no" which provides a way of being in the present. Such a "no" requires constant attention and is always a failure. To say "no" to one's own advantages requires constant attention because this "no" always comes after an implicit "yes"; because of this, we have two contradictory laws in operation. In this way, the postcolonial position is the habitation of a double bind, or set of conflicting rules, where the first law tacitly affirms one's privilege and the second law requires that one renounce one's privilege.

To put this in the language of worlding, the first law concerns the way that a person in a position of privilege is worlded by that privilege. The second law concerns the *attempt* to reject that privilege through critique. This requires a way of being in line with permanent parabasis. The desire for permanent parabasis is the desire to continually interrupt one's own determined and determining narrative. Through privilege, such a determining and determined narrative is normalized as a Subject's perspective. To Therefore the desire for permanent parabasis is a desire for a constant critique of the advantages and losses incurred through the privilege of appearing.

It is worth noting that, because postcoloniality acknowledges complicity with privilege, this "no" is quite different from the kind of "no" that assumes complete separation from colonialism, and thus the ability to theorize from an objective position. Such a complete separation cannot engage in postcoloniality. Spivak explains, "Elite 'postcolonialism' seems to be as much a strategy of differentiating oneself from the racial underclass as it is to speak in its name."[279] In other words, elite postcolonial*ism* (not

[278] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 191.
[279] Ibid., 358.

postcolonial*ity*) produces stratification as the theorist distinguishes herself from her object of study but also depends upon transparent identification with the object of study in order to legitimize the theorist's claims. Such non-critical attempts at a complete separation, as performed by the elite theorist, often leads to theorists' appeals to a pure tradition and transparency of world. For instance, non-critical postcolonial theory often attempts to speak for the underclass, as if their position were transparent. While often well-intentioned, such attempts both tacitly affirm the privilege of the theorist as well as his or her access to the culture under scrutiny. In this way, the margins continue to be obfuscated. There is no interruption and no question of worlding.

By obfuscating the privilege of the theorist, the differentiation between theorist and subject matter, as well as the supposed transparency of the subject, carries with it the implicit support of neocolonialism through cultural informancy. As Spivak writes, "my suggestion is that academic assertions of this [cultural] difference, supporting the simulated specificity of a radical position, often dissimulate the implicit collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of neo-colonialism."[280] Through an argument based in simulated cultural purity, academic postcolonialism participates in an understanding of the world as if one inhabited an objective position and the world itself could be turned into an object of knowledge.

This is similar to the predicament that Arendt finds herself in when she writes about totalitarianism, Jewish identity, and history pre-and post-World War Two. In Attempts to affirm the position of victims as victims (of the Holocaust and of globalization) also affirm the authority and privilege of the theorist as objective and somehow separate from these events. However, as we saw in the previous chapter,

[280] Ibid., 361.

Arendt's model of comprehension, her grappling with a history one cannot want to remember, and her insistence that there is no such thing as a pure victim means that she challenges the possibility of a perfect causal account of the Holocaust and totalitarianism. Thus, in a manner similar to Spivak, she resists (although neither theorist escapes) this complicity with a particular master narrative.

3.0 Spivak and Arendt

Already we can begin to see some of the productive ways in which Spivak and Arendt's models of permanent parabasis and the diagonal of thought can be read together and the implications for worlding. If we relate to worlding in terms of a way of being, we open up the possibility of a dynamic relationship to the world. But before reflecting on the similarities between these two models, it is worth pausing to consider Spivak's account of the relationship between the postcolonial as an event, theory, and state of being. Her account can help us to flesh out a problem that arose during our consideration of the break in tradition. The problem that haunted the last chapter concerns the influence of the break in the European tradition: whom does the break in tradition affect, and does it affect different peoples in different ways?

3.1 Equivocations between Event, Theory, and State of Being

Returning to Spivak's analysis of the link between postcolonialism, neocolonialism, and colonialism, we can see that postcolonialism conceals its link to the

neocolonial. This concealment can be brought to light by paying attention to the way that narratives of continuity actually utilize equivocations in order to give the appearance of a coherent master narrative where certain people of privilege "know better." The complicity between neo- and postcolonial is concealed through equivocations between the postcolonial as a state of being, an event, and a theory. These equivocations conceal the limitations of the theorist and the impossibility of constructing a perfect narrative.

For instance, the end of colonialism at the level of the state does not mean the end of the experience of colonialism. The construction of a single narrative of the end of colonialism would mean that the experiences of those still experiencing colonialism are marginalized. This point is clearly illustrated in Spivak's early essay, "French Feminism in an International Frame."[281] She describes a walk along a river on her grandfather's estate and overhearing the conversation of two women washing their clothes in the river. She recounts:

> One [woman] accuses the other of poaching on her part of the river. I can still hear the cracked derisive voice of the one accused: "You fool! Is this your river? The river belongs to the [East India] Company!" [...] I was precocious enough to know that the remark was incorrect. It has taken me thirty-one years and the experience of confronting a nearly inarticulable question to apprehend that their facts were wrong but the fact was right. The Company does still own the land.[282]

In this case, the material conditions for these women have not changed even though the state is no longer colonial. Spivak suggests that the point is neither to correct these women nor to romanticize them. Either approach objectifies these women and positions

[281] "French Feminism in an International Frame," *In Other Worlds*. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Routledge: New York, 1988).
[282] "French Feminism in an International Frame," 186.

the theorist in a position of intellectual superiority. Thus both positions further a worlding which conceals the complicated worlding of both these women and of Spivak, and which conceals the differences between postcoloniality as a way of being and postcolonialism as the event that ends internationally recognized colonialism.

With the end of colonialism and the development of neocolonialism and postcolonialism, we see the coming-together of events and ideas at a particular moment, as well as the openness of timelines not reducible to a linear, progressive history. World events, ways of being, and intellectual traditions are thus linked in a way that cannot be severed, and yet are not identical. States of being and state-recognized events are not identical, but present competing narratives that cannot be wholly separated.

As we offer a narrative of the events of postcolonialism (or post-totalitarianism in the case of Arendt), the illusion of linear progress that both Arendt and Spivak say "no" to begins to consolidate and must repeatedly be fragmented by an insistence on distinctions.[283] This insistence on distinctions works to preserve fragmentation by pointing to conflations and discrepancies, and by refusing master narratives of progress. In this way investigations in to the present resist the reduction of the world to a single narrative. These are the kind of single narratives that necessary for a history of the postcolonial that reads being postcolonial, the end of colonial rule, and theory without dissonance or difference.

Beyond the implications of the diagonal of thought and permanent parabasis as a way of being, resisting a reduction to a common narrative can also provide a way to consider the larger implications of Arendt's claims about the break in the European

[283] For instance, Arendt examines the definition of words like authority or her analysis of freedom, and Spivak insists on always looking at models of pure identity in order to demonstrate their obfuscation of heteronym and their disavowal of difference.

tradition, especially in terms of its global context discussed in the beginning of this chapter. One potential limitation of her account of totalitarianism is that, because her interest is in the history of totalitarianism, her reading of imperialism maintains the centrality of a European perspective. This is not problematic in itself, but it frustrates any attempt to think about her focus on the break of European tradition as determined and determining beyond the notably porous political and cultural boundaries.

In Arendt's account, the break in tradition is clearly European; yet she does not consider the boundaries of this break to clarify the boundaries of European and the boundaries of the influence of the European tradition. She leaves open the question of its scope. Are Americans affected by the break in the same way as Europeans? Are Algerians affected by the break in the same way as the French? Are Spaniards affected in the same way as Germans? If the break has different effects in different places, then the question becomes, "What does this break actually look like? Can it be a complete break in the way that Arendt describes it?" In this way, tension is created between Arendt's claim and the local experience of it. Yet given the global impact of imperialism and the end of World War Two, it seems likely that the European break in tradition was significant beyond the boundaries of Europe, and that it becomes significant for the rest of the world whenever its models are adopted outside of Europe.

The problem is that when one attempts to avoid the problems of a universalizing narrative, one must be ever more specific and avoid the kind of consolidations that normalize one group while displacing difference and discontinuity onto other groups. Thus one continually runs into the problem of trying to form conclusions as well as to represent and to theorize, while demonstrating the way that theory and representation are

inadequate. In the case of the break in the European tradition and the globalization of western models (particularly models of the nation-state), each localized example will exceed and undermine any larger claims. Ignoring the problem of worlding, one runs the risk of appropriating a totalizing view without regard for such a view's limitations and the consequent obfuscations produced by it.

3.2 The Diagonal and Parabasis

Despite the difficulty of addressing the extent of the break in tradition, Arendt's model of the diagonal of thought provides a model for reframing worlding. Her first translation of Kafka's "He" and the desire of "he" to leap outside the clash between past and future is a desire for a metaphysical leap. The leap taken by "he," as the metaphysical leap of philosophy outside of time, resembles Spivak's account of the leap of postcolonial*ism* to separate itself from the master narrative of neocolonialism. Both are attempts at establishing theoretical positions from which to gain the perspective necessary for the construction of a master narrative. Arendt does not claim that philosophy believes itself to make such a leap, but that it dreams of such a leap. Similarly Spivak does not claim that postcolonialism ever thinks it has made such a move to perfectly account for neocolonialism. Arendt and Spivak aim to restructure the approach to thinking through these complex topics, replacing the desire for objectivity and a perfect vantage point with a desire for a position appropriate for one's own time.

Arendt's re-envisions the metaphysical leap of "He" as a diagonal produced through the clash of past, future, and "he." She writes, "The insertion of man, as he

breaks up the continuum [of past and future], cannot but cause the forces to deflect, however lightly, from their original direction."[284] This deflection of forces produces a new direction: "This diagonal force, whose origin is known, whose direction is determined by past and future, but whose eventual end lies in infinity, is the perfect metaphor for the activity of thought."[285] In Arendt's version, the diagonal remains rooted in the particular present of "He." Therefore, while moving along this line does provide a different perspective than that of remaining within the melee between past and future, the path itself is nevertheless clearly affected by the particular moment in which one finds oneself.

If we push Arendt's concept of the diagonal beyond her own account, we see that a further consequence of it is that when one walks, or thinks, back down the diagonal, it will be now out of joint with the present. The diagonal of the present, the infinite path of thought, is always a particular product of a particular clash between past and future. Thus the diagonal, insofar as it offers a path out of the fight, will always make us out of joint with the present when we stop our thought train and return to the gap.

This disjointed relationship to the present resembles Spivak's model of permanent parabasis. The present, as something to try and capture, or write a history of, is always vanishing; it is always being lost to the master narrative of history. We are always moving elsewhere, and what is lost is that which is differed by the narrative. In other words that which vanishes is that which supports but is different from "History." Therefore we seem to have an infinite repetition of the clash between past, future, and "he" so that new diagonals are always forming. These are new interruptions that,

[284] "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future," 11.
[285] Ibid.,12.

although produced out of the clash between past and future, open up new possibilities, and move us out of rectilinear time, or, in Spivak's language, master narratives.

Arendt's diagonal and Spivak's permanent parabasis offer a way to think the continual displacement of supposedly comprehensive narratives of human progress, by emphasizing the particularity of an uncapturable present. Permanent parabasis and the diagonal of thought show us how to interrupt the master narratives that we participate in, and they suggest how we might reframe our relationship to the political in terms of our desire to account for the present as worlded beings as opposed to form a metaphysical outside.

This is the moment of Narcissus: If I make disappear what I cannot not desire, I disappear too. But this is only one end of the shuttle. [286]

-Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,

CHAPTER FOUR

PLURALITY, ETHICS, AND THE DOUBLE BIND

Introduction

Building on the arguments presented in the previous chapters, in this chapter I argue that the strength of Arendt's concept of plurality is that plurality is founded on the mutual exchange between individuals. Because of this, it grounds the political in the gap between individuals: thus it performs the continuous displacement of the universal subject into a secondary position in relation to difference. As with permanent parabasis and the diagonal of thought (two models of thinking the interruption of master narratives of history), plurality resists a narrative of historical progress because the political only exists so long as the space between individuals remains intact. As soon as individuals cease to maintain the relationship between each other, the space between individuals disappears; therefore, although such a space can be inspired by, and inspire, other sites of plurality, it resists models of political appearance based on cultural inheritance. As such, plurality offers a possible tool for challenging the problems of unacknowledged worlding and the policing of political appearance discussed in chapters one, two and three.

[286] *An Aesthetic Education, 226.*

Yet, even the solutions offered in Arendt's concept of plurality have to be considered in terms of the determining effects of worlding. While plurality, through its emphasis on difference, challenges a universal model of the political, any attempt to articulate plurality will by definition participate in the situated knowledge, interests, and privileges of the theorist, and even attempts to articulate this participation necessarily participate in worlded interests. Therefore, as I argue in what follows, Spivak's concept of the double bind as "living with contradictory instructions" provides a framework for both thinking plurality's character as well as thinking it in relation to worlding. Furthermore, I argue that reading plurality in terms of the double bind corresponds with Arendt's description of plurality's twofold nature of distinction and equality. Arendtian plurality is itself a double bind. I begin with Spivak's concept of the double bind, and then consider the application of the double bind to Arendt's concept of plurality.

1 Spivakian Double Bind

While Spivak's use of the double bind is integral to grasping the implications and applications of her work—she uses this term in passing throughout her corpus—she only really addresses the concept of the double bind in her most recent book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, defining the double bind as "learning to live with contradictory instructions."[287] Spivak states that she gets her model of the double bind

[287] *An Aesthetic Education*, 3.

from the work of Gregory Bateson.[288] Therefore, in order to grasp of her model, it is worth spending some time considering his.

1.2 Bateson's Contradictory Laws

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Bateson presents six steps necessary for experiencing the double bind, explaining that these steps lead to "an unresolvable sequence of experiences."[289] The first step is the presence of a victim and at least one perpetrator, where the perpetrator is in a position of authority such that the victim depends upon the perpetrator for his or her self-identity. The second step is that there must be a recurrent theme experienced by the victim so that he or she has repeated experience that "comes to be an habitual expectation."[290] These first two steps (two or more persons in a hierarchical relationship, and repeated experiences) provide the background for the next four steps, which form a set of contradictory rules operating on different registers.

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[288] It is interesting that Spivak does not draw on Jacques Derrida's model of the double bind. My hunch is that this is a result of Spivak's interest in giving her theory a worlded history, locating it as an already-worlded concept that carries the baggage of a relationship to schizophrenia. Thus the concept itself is in a double bind between its theoretical and its historical meaning. Derrida's application of the double bind (also in terms of Bateson) resonates with Spivak's account. In *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, he writes, "If a double bind is never one and general but is the indefinitely divisible dissemination of knots, of thousands and thousands of knots of passion, this is because without it, without this double bind and without the ordeal of aporia that it determines, there would only be programs or causalities, not even fated necessities, and no decision would ever take place. No responsibility, I will go so far as to say no event, would take place" (*Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 37).

[289] "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1972), 206.

[290] "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia," 206.

Bateson writes that the first rule is one of two possible injunctions: "(a) Do not do so and so, or I will punish you," or (b) "If you do not do so and so, I will punish you."[291] Either of these two injunctions is then followed by a second rule, which he describes as "a secondary injunction, conflicting with the first at a more abstract level, and like the first enforced by punishments or signals which threaten survival."[292] Therefore even as the secondary injunction offers the same kind of threat as the first, it is not presented as a direct rule. Instead, "a more abstract level" means that it is usually a nonverbal signal, and it is thus conveyed as a "posture, gesture, tone of voice" and so on.[293] As such, Bateson explains that this injunction "may impinge upon any *element* of the primary prohibition."[294] In this way, we see that there is a kind of management at work, where the secondary rule operates on another register—with a wink or a frown—that incapacitates the victim as soon as he or she strays from the literal or logical level by contradicting some piece or element of the first injunction. One easy example of two contradictory laws is the directive often given: "just be yourself," which almost always implies the opposite: "above all, do not be yourself." The second, implied law cannot mean "do not be all of yourself," since one cannot possibly *be* someone else, so there is some question left open as to where the specifics of contradiction lies. Therefore whatever one does will be the wrong thing.

The fifth step of the double bind is the maintenance of the already-present power dynamic that keeps the victim subject to the will of the person (or persons) imposing these contradictory rules necessary for the victim's survival. The idea is that, because the

[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid., 207.
[293] Ibid..
[294] Ibid.. Emphasis mine.

victim of such a double bind cannot escape the situation (because he or she cannot avoid being invested in the relationship), he or she must submit to the double bind in order to continue to exist and thus will try to move either of the injunctions to another register. Bateson explains:

> When a person is caught in a double bind situation, he will respond defensively in a manner similar to the schizophrenic. An individual will take a metaphorical statement literally when he is in a situation where he must respond, and he may respond to the double bind with a metaphor, thus offering the possibility that the person in power may ignore the statement if he or she chooses.[295]

This appeal to either the literal or metaphorical is an attempt to avoid the other implications or rule in order to preserve one's self-identity.[296] Through this kind of avoidance, Bateson explains that the schizophrenic "would be unable to judge accurately by the context or by the tone of voice or gesture…just what was meant."[297] This repetition of contradictory laws produces the sixth step, through which the victim, "has learned to perceive his universe in double bind patterns."[298] That is, as a result of this habituation, one begins to see double binds everywhere.

[295] Ibid.. 209. I am wary of the appropriation of a representative model meant to give a framework for schizophrenia, and the way that the tropological depiction of the double bind in terms of schizophrenia works to ground *and* color in the model.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Ibid.. 207.

1.2 Spivak's Habitation of the Double Bind

In a later essay titled, "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication," Bateson amends this model, suggesting that the other possibility, instead of becoming incapacitated by the bind, is to get creative. He notes, "For others, more creative, the resolution of contraries reveals a world in which personal identity merges into all the processes of relationship in some vast ecology or aesthetics of cosmic interaction. Every detail of the universe is seen as proposing a view of the whole."[299] This model of a part representing the whole suggests an awareness of an all-encompassing, foundational double bind. Therefore it suggests a primary tension at the foundation of existence, but also the ability to think the double bind in a holistic way. Such a double bind might be the bind between the ability to make free choices and the determinism of being worlded in a way that one, as product of such a worlding, can never fully access. This last move is significant for Spivak. It is precisely this tension that grounds her work. However, this idea of an originary double bind is dangerous insofar as it may reassure us that everything else in the world can be worked out according to this single paradox, that the artist can play as if they existed outside of it.

Spivak explains that "[Bateson's concept of play] protects the subject from double bind as schizophrenia."[300] This protection is dangerous because it suggests a wholeness that loses sight of its own worlding. To turn the double bind into art is to risk two things: first, to view oneself as somehow having mastery over the double bind, and second, to ignore the way in which any originary set of rules is in fact a universal, so to apply such a

[299] "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication" in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1972), 306.
[300] *An Aesthetic Education*, 27.

universal will require substituting a trope for the universal formulation. Spivak at first models her version of the double bind on Bateson's model of play. In an interview with Ellen Rooney, she explains, "The strategic use of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword like *woman* or *worker* or the name of a nation is, ideally, self-conscious for all mobilized."[301] Here we see that the essentialist position is taken on in a self-conscious way. The danger is that it suggests the possibility of attentive mastery over the terms *woman* and *worker*.

Spivak revises her concept of strategic essentialism, and, in the preface to *Aesthetic Education*, she explains, "The point is of course, that now I feel that a double bind is rather more than a suggestion that having found it you can play it. (That, incidentally, was the problem with 'strategic use of essentialism')."[302] This explanation of the double bind as more than something to play, more than just a risk, calls attention to the fact that there is no metaphysical leap that will give one enough perspective to theorize and play it.

Another way to understand Spivak's suspicion of the concept of play is to consider it from the perspective of calculative and artistic worlding. Bateson's reimagining of the double bind in terms of play and his creative artistic engagement with the double bind is also in a double bind with calculus. Where we appeal to art, there is always calculus; where we appeal to calculus, there is a certain amount of rhetorical play. Thus where we have artistic imagination, we will also have a kind of calculated mapping. To try and assume access to the whole is to lose sight of the double bind. Worlding in

[301] "In a Word: Interview" in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* , (Routledge: New York, 1993),. Original emphasis.
[302] *An Aesthetic Education*, xi. Spivak ultimately abandons the concept of "strategic essentialism" presented in "Criticism and the Institution" (11).

Spivak's model requires attention to both the double bind of worlding, and the worlding of the double bind.

While she does not address the individual steps of Bateson's model, applying these steps to her work shows how Spivak understands the double bind to be something inescapable that one cannot transcend, even by playing it. The first two steps of Bateson's model (the identification of a victim and a perpetrator, and the establishment of a hierarchy which is necessary for the survival of the victim) is transposed in Spivak's model to the relationship between the individual and his or her validation within the world—in particular the relationship between theorist and world, and western privilege and the west's other.

In terms of the theorist's relationship to the world, Spivak often refers to the "persistent critique of what we cannot not want."[303] This is the idea that, for our survival, the westerner has to want to be recognized as a subject, as free, thus we invest in a kind of self-making that tells us that we are good. This need to be a subject is the primary injunction. The secondary injunction is that such desires (for what one cannot not want) must be curbed. This is what Spivak originally termed "the learning of one's privilege as one's loss." This secondary injunction contradicts the first, telling us to change our relationship to what we cannot not want. For instance, according to Spivak, we cannot *not* want to be a subject; we cannot resist wanting to be a speaking and acting individual recognized by others. However, this imperative means occupying, or trying to occupy, the space of the subject. If we apply Arendt's model of the universal political subject and Spivak's analysis of the troping of truth, we see that we are participating in a particular

[303] *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 110.

troping of truth that obfuscates difference and prioritizes the self-reflection of those who construct the model of the universal.

Even though Spivak does not spend much time on the double bind in her early work, in her 1984 interview with Elizabeth Grosz, "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," she already configures her thoughts in terms of the two contradictory injunctions given above: do not do this, and do this, as well as the final four steps of Bateson's double bind. Spivak states that "my project is the careful project of unlearning our privilege as our loss."[304] This statement gives us the third and fourth steps of Bateson's model: two contradictory rules. First, privilege is privilege, but, second, it is something to be unlearned. It must be unlearned because it is a loss insofar as it produces blindness and not privilege, insofar as privilege is a gain.

This early interview with Grosz also provides a useful example of how Spivak understands the application of the double bind, accounting for the unlearning of one's privilege in terms of the relationship between feminism and anti-sexism. Here we see Spivak playing out all six steps of the double bind. Step one is that there is a victim, a perpetrator, and a power structure. Spivak offers an account of the dangers of anti-sexism as a model that creates both victims and those in power, but gender is also part of the structure of self-identity. This account leads to step two, which says that there must be a repetition of experiences, or, the repeated experience of gendering and sexism. This leads to steps four and five, which form contradictory laws about whether or not sexism is good. Step five is the maintenance of the power dynamic between victim and perpetrator: we can see this in Spivak's claim, "Anti-sexism is reactive in the face of

[304] "Criticism and the Institution," 10.

where we are thrown."[305] Step six is the habitation of the double bind pattern, and Spivak does indeed describe feminism in terms of its dwelling in the double bind. She points to a double bind between feminism's attempt to address anti-sexism as well as anti-sexism's double bind with sexism. She states, "I am sure you wouldn't agree that notions of feminism could in fact be located in terms of sexual difference understood as genital difference…If you just define yourself as anti-sexist you are indeed legitimizing sexism itself."[306] This claim echoes her argument regarding the dangers of troping universals and the problem of deconstructive feminism presented in chapter two. On the one hand, she presents the law "don't be sexist," while challenging the very foundation of this law by troubling any claims to essentialist definitions of male and female. On the other hand, she explains that a feminism that avoids questions of sexual difference cannot be the answer either:

> Because if I choose to be pure in that sense, you know, displacing the question of sexual difference rather than legitimizing it by acting to confront the discourse of the sexist it seems to me that all I would gain is theoretical purity, which in itself I question in every way.[307]

What we see here is the double bind: do not be a theoretical purist, and do not be an anti-sexist essentialist. She points out that there are different rules operating on different registers. When you only focus on one register (feminism), then you miss your commitments to the other register (anti-sexism).

In fact, this model of two conflicting rules operating on different registers can be seen throughout Spivak's work. In *Ethics After Idealism*, Rey Chow articulates the

[305] Ibid., 10.
[306] Ibid., 12.
[307] Ibid., 12.

double bind in terms of Spivak's larger project, and we begin to see the playing out of the schizophrenic response offered in Bateson's account of the double bind. Chow argues:

> Caught between the deconstructive demand to be nuanced with regard to textual heterogeneity (a demand that is negative in force because such is the force of language) and the rationalist demand to be "vigilant" to "errors" committed exploitatively against the disenfranchised, Spivak's writing must become more and more self-conscious—self referential and self-subverting at once.[308]

The double bind is clear. First, Spivak's interests in heterogeneity, feminism, and irony as meaning otherwise lead her to read in terms of ambiguity. Second, she is also interested in examining contradictions in order to fight against oppression, sexism, disenfranchisement, and exploitation by pointing to particular cases. Unlike Bateson, she does not call for the play of the double bind, but instead considers it in terms of its inevitability, as part of what must be engaged in. As she states in her interview with Grosz, "In no way can we absolutely avoid making essentialist or universalist statements…because universalization, finalization, is an irreducible moment in any discourse."[309] These moments of universalization simply spring up as we try to provide meaning and to take a political stand.

As Chow explains, this leads Spivak into a spiral of self-examination: "Spivak's writing must become more and more self-conscious—self referential and self-subverting at once." Chow reads this self-referentiality and self-subversion as a result of Spivak's double bind (between rationalism and deconstruction). I believe that Chow is right; Spivak's self-referential and self-subverting moves are attempts to disrupt her own

[308] *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 40.
[309] *Ethics after Idealism*, 40-41 (and from "Criticism and the Institution," 11).

narrative in order to play the double bind, practicing what she preaches. However, they are also signs of her fractured habitation of the double bind, always worrying about other levels of meaning even as she attempts creativity by reading otherwise. She is not fully living the double bind, and to fail is a necessity if one wants to be committed to anything.

This self-referentiality mentioned by Chow is demonstrated in Spivak's own articulation of her appropriation of Bateson's model. In *An Aesthetic Education* she explores different relationships to and ways of dealing with the double bind, and offers her own version of the double bind. In the preface to *An Aesthetic Education*, Spivak claims that, "I have [in this text] actively looked for a distracted theory (poor but accurate translation) of the double bind."[310] This claim is itself a double bind. She does not say that she has found a distracted theory, even as she presents her theory to her reader. Next, she states that a distracted theory is a "poor but accurate translation." To be distracted is to go in different directions, or "mentally drawn to different objects; perplexed or confused by conflicting interests; torn or disordered by dissension or the like."[311] To go in contradictory directions is in fact the nature of the double bind, yet it also recalls Spivak's model of permanent parabasis as a continuous interruption that disrupts the master narrative or, in this case the primary rule. Thus "distracted theory" seems like an accurate translation of the double bind, so why does Spivak also call it a poor translation? A poor translation suggests lack, inferiority, in both material and mental attributes, and also a kind of minimalism, subverting her legitimacy as a translator of the double bind even as she offers a translation.[312] This "poor translation" resembles her claims, discussed in chapter one, that she has provided misreadings of philosophy. I

[310] *An Aesthetic Education*, ix.
[311] Distracted; adj. Def. 3, *Oxford English Dictionary Online Edition*.
[312] Poor, adj and n.; Def. 1, *Oxford English Dictionary Online Edition*.

do not believe that she means to suggest that she is wrong about her readings, but instead she is calling attention to the double bind between translation and original, grappling with her own self-referentiality. The original holds weight as the site of originality, yet by claiming that her reading is a misreading or a poor translation, Spivak opens up a space to then use the theory without undue concern for theoretical purity that can never be achieved even as we maintain some level of obligation to the theory on which we build.

This distracted theory is a useful representation of worlding. If worlding is both what conditions us and is conditioned by us, then it is a double bind, and any attempt to theorize it will, on the one hand, both be possible because of worlding and fall victim to it insofar as one's theorization is corrupted and enabled by it. On the other hand, in order to theorize worlding, we, to some extent, participate in its continuation and definition and therefore maintain a focus on the impossibility of transcending it. In defining worlding in terms of a double bind we also solidify it as a double bind.

1.3 Double Binds and Single Binds

Now that we see how Bateson's model works and how it resonates with Spivak's, we can turn to her account of the way that the double bind is taken up (or denied) in contemporary discourse. She suggests that, today, there are a couple ways of handling the double bind. First, it can be flatly denied through such things as appeals to universal reason, postponed through single bindings that fend off the double bind in favor of the quick fix. This model resembles Arendt's critique of the universal subject discussed in chapter one. This universal subject begins with the universal and displaces difference to

a secondary position in order to focus on universality. Difference is thus something that is managed on the margin. Spivak defines this management of both halves of the double bind as "doing the minimum of something in order to do the maximum of something else," explaining, "Such top-down, balancing-out calculations may also be why Kant calls 'mere reason' morally lazy."[313] This is an attempt to follow a plan that assumes it knows best (as a calculation), managing the terms so that the larger context is always lost.[314]

Spivak offers two different examples of this model of focusing on a single bind. These two examples serve to reinforce each other through inversion; they are the single bind of the humanities as purely training the imagination and the single bind of universities run as businesses. She states:

> The humanities version of sustainability in the early days, was to maximize imaginative training and minimize the mind-numbing uniformization of globalization…As we were trying to achieve this, the increasingly corporatized and ambitious globalist universities in the United States supervised the minimalization of the humanities and the social sciences—in order to achieve the maximum of some version of globalization.[315]

Both of these models focus on one end of a double bind, attempting to minimize the importance of the other end, and therefore losing sight of the complex relationships between the two. In this case, the humanities did not consider the way that they were

[313] *An Aesthetic Education*, 2.
[314] Spivak explains, "Kant's 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason' is written with the presupposition that mere (rather than pure) reason is a programmed structure, with in-built possibilities of misfiring, and nothing but calculation as a way of setting right" (*An Aesthetic Education,* 257). Thus from within the single bind, there is a limited view which only attempts to recalibrate a calculation as opposed to putting the equation into question.
[315] *An Aesthetic Education*, 2.

bound up with a business model of the university while the university did not consider its reliance on some kind of humanist content for globalization.

This kind of focus on the single bind is enabled through the framing of one's agenda and the construction of a master narrative. Instead of managing the double bind as single binds, Spivak suggests that one must "learn the double bind—not just learning about it."[316] This means engaging with these binds in a way that escapes the framework of supposedly pure theory and that acknowledges experience—whether one engages those binds specific to anti-sexism and feminism, the more general double bind of rationalism and deconstruction, or even the double bind of Spivak's theory of the double bind. In other words, such models must contend with the fact that, in order to establish the laws of the double bind as universals, we have to world the world in a textbook fashion as if it were simply a calculation. Furthermore, to describe worlding is again to repeat the same mistake by offering a theory of the calculation as if it could itself be outside of worlding. To try and challenge this mistaken calculation requires the acknowledgement of one's failure to recognize the frame of master narratives (i.e. setting up one story as if it were the only story, and as if it could actually be a coherent story from start to finish), which allow us to see things in terms of single binds.

To learn double binds does not mean to naturalize them as objects of study. It would be a mistake to read the double bind in terms of polarities, if by polarities we mean to imply something natural, such as the magnetic poles, in direct opposition. While the double bind also suggests an opposition, in this case it is an opposition between two human-made laws or binds that is then fit into, and organizes, worlding. Because the binds are determined and determining, we can understand their oppositional,

[316] Ibid., 5 and 1.

contradictory laws as staged and productive. Recognizing this is important because it forces us to grapple with our own frame.

We have seen this model before. Spivak, drawing on Paul de Man's concept of permanent parabasis, argues for the prioritization of ambiguity, which does not allow for the continuation of a master narrative. In Spivak's work, permanent parabasis becomes a model for *inhabiting* the double bind, insofar as the suspension of a master narrative requires an implicit recognition of the master narrative in order to suspend it. Thus it yields two contradictory rules: first, there is only a master narrative and only one register; second, one must attend to different registers so that the master narrative never happens. This model can also be seen in Arendt's concept of comprehension, discussed in chapter two, which attempts to grapple with the subterranean streams of the western tradition. Her model attempts to disrupt models of simple causality through her focus on contingencies and historical streams. As I argue in the following section, this model can help us to understand plurality in terms of worlding, as well as providing a model for thinking plurality's two-fold character of equality and distinction.

2 Arentian Plurality

As discussed in chapter one, Arendt contends that western political philosophy has made a mistake. It has attempted to theorize the political in terms of a universal subject. As I have attempted to demonstrate through out this dissertation, the problem runs deeper than simply beginning with the universal subject. Instead, the problem with theorizing the political is a problem produced through the concealment of privilege in the

depiction of both universality and difference. Arendt's model of plurality offers a weapon for combating this move to depict political subjects or categorize difference.

2.1 Equality and Distinction

In "Truth and Politics," Arendt argues that political equality is not innate because equality is not natural.[317] Although she readily admits that "all men are equal before God, or before death, or insofar as they all belong to the same species of *animal rationale*," this does not mean that humanity is necessarily equal in the political sphere.[318] She explains that in these cases, "The equalizer, whether God, or death, or nature, transcended and remained outside the realm in which human intercourse take place."[319] The reason that persons can be held as equal in these first three instances is a result of their reliance on an outside factor to determine equality.

If equality is not given in the political, then it must be something that human beings institute. Referring to the Declaration of Independence, Arendt defines equality as an opinion that is not self-evident. She argues:

> [B]y saying "we hold these truths to be self-evident," he [Thomas Jefferson] conceded, albeit without becoming aware of it, that the statement "All men are created equal" is not self-evident but stands in need of agreement and consent—that equality, if it is to be politically relevant, is a matter of opinion, and not "the truth."[320]

[317] Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 246-47.
[318] "Truth and Politics," 246.
[319] Ibid., 246-47.
[320] Ibid., 246.

The significance of this claim cannot be overstated. The significance of Arendt's claim that political equality is a matter of opinion is that there is no external guarantee of equality; instead, the guarantors are other human beings who hold this opinion. She concludes, "That all men are created equal is not self-evident nor can it be proved."[321] It is precisely because equality is an opinion and not given that we must *decide* to hold others as equal. It is also because of this that we must be alert to equality as produced within a worlding context, and therefore as shaping our conception of political equality.

Arendt repeats these same points regarding the nature of equality in *The Human Condition*. Here she reiterates that

> Political equality, therefore, is the very opposite of our equality before death, which as the common fate of all men arises out of the human condition, or of equality before God…In these instances no equalizer is needed because sameness prevails anyhow."[322]

To hold each other as equals will require some opinion that will equalize humanity and that does not rely on a definition of humanity. Chapter one considered Arendt's critique of political philosophy's attempts to equalize humanity through a universal definition of the human and thus a universal political subject. As we saw there such attempts only served to focus on essentialized difference in service to a larger human family or the final unification of humanity under a common history.

The opinion that others are equal, as something we decide to hold cannot be founded on equality but, instead, must be founded on inequality. Arendt note, "The equality attending the public realm is necessarily an equality of unequals who stand in

[321] Ibid., 247.
[322] *The Human Condition*, 215.

need of being 'equalized' in certain respects and for specific purposes."[323] The specific purpose of equality for this dissertation is to allow for equal access to speech and appearance. The problem we are faced with is how to come up with an equalizer that organizes people for appearance but does not exclude anyone from the possibility of appearing. The danger is that to ground the political subject in universality of appearance is to make equality something already essentially present in the political, and also to marginalize difference.

Even though equality seems to be impossible, the reason that we need to decide to hold others as equal is that doing so allows for the possibility to understand each other, to appear before each other as ourselves, and to plan for a common future. Within her account of plurality Arendt explains, "If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them."[324] This sentence is only slightly tempered by its negative wording. Arendt does not claim that with equality human beings will automatically understand each other or will necessarily plan for the future, but she does claim that equality is necessary for planning and understanding; it is a condition for relating to the present, past, and future. In order to understand each other, we must recognize each other as distinct individuals.

There is always going to be some danger inherent in any attempt to think in terms of equality; there is always the danger that equality will be reduced to measurable sameness or transparency. This reduction of the individual to sameness, however, is actually a product of the reduction of individuals to naturalized difference. To reduce

[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid.

equality to sameness eradicates the need for understanding and allows for the primacy of the universal subject. What keeps equality from collapsing into sameness is the other half of plurality's twofold character, distinction.

If equality that is held and not given is necessary for understanding to occur between and among individuals, then individual distinction, the other side of plurality's character, is what makes understanding necessary. While equality is something that individuals hold, the human capability for distinction is demonstrated. Arendt explains that, without distinction, human beings would not need speech or action: "If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood."[325] Thus one can assume that, without distinction, individuals would understand each other without extending any effort; people would be transparent to each other.

Arendt provides two theoretical barriers that help to keep distinction from slipping into a transparent (thus negligible) opposition. First, she differentiates distinctness from otherness, explaining, "Otherness, it is true, is an important aspect of plurality, the reason why all our definitions are distinctions, why we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something less."[326] The fact that, for her, otherness is "the reason that our definitions are distinctions" and that otherness is key to language, is telling of the problem that human beings face in theorizing distinction. When one attempts to offer distinctions between and among individuals, it is always the case that one falls into the language of otherness. That is, we describe things in terms of what they are not. But as Arendt puts it, this is why we begin "from something less."

[325] Ibid., 175-176.
[326] Ibid., 176.

Although she spends much time discussing humanity in terms of distinction as opposed to difference, Arendt's explicit definitions of distinction, variation, and otherness is limited to a few remarks. In defining otherness, she states that it has to do with "the sheer multiplication of inorganic objects."[327] One way to make sense of this claim is to think of the way that "this" oxygen molecule is not the same as "that" oxygen molecule, but either oxygen molecule can be breathed; that is, otherness has no content other than its utility or immediacy. From this perspective, we do not consider there to be a meaningful difference between two oxygen molecules in and of themselves.

Next, she differentiates between human distinctions and the variations present in all life forms; she states that even organic life "shows variations and distinctions" that make it different from simple otherness.[328] One way to make sense of this claim might be to say that living things have different qualities such that one dog, "Fido," cannot simply be traded with another dog, "Cerberus." Each dog has its own personality and traits. One dog might be friendly while the other might not and these dogs will have their own worlding. Yet, for Arendt, these personalities and traits do not make our pets distinct; we still recognize them in terms of their species and their status as (our) pets.

If animals are distinct insofar as one person's pet cannot be substituted for another (already a distinction that values relationships), what makes human beings different is the ability to distinguish or re-present ourselves. The stories we present distinguish us from other human begins. As Arendt notes, human beings have the ability to "*distinguish themselves* instead of being merely distinct."[329] To be able to *distinguish oneself* will require two elements: speech and action. This is not a distinguishing based on a system

[327] Ibid.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

of one-to-one signs, presented through the difference between Fido and Cerberus; it requires self-differentiation and the presentation of that differentiation. To act and to speak require that one does something new in the world, and that that deed is considered, by other human beings, to belong to an equal individual—that deed is not simply written back into transparent causality of tradition, class, society, or any other factor.

Yet even with speech and action, we are always subject to being reduced to difference or even otherness. As Arendt explains:

> In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice.[330]

As beings who are embodied in ways that can be compared and contrasted with others, and as beings who appear as persons, it is always possible to slip between registers of difference. She argues that,

> The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him…with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us.[331]

To describe an individual unavoidably leads to a calculative description. This means that any attempt to explain political individuals as a group remains outside of our reach. In fact, it means that we will never be able to treat the political in terms of a formula. In fact,

[330] Ibid., 179.
[331] Ibid., 181.

Arendt shifts registers at this point in the text to point out that the same impossibility of description also applies to humanity as a whole:

> This frustration has the closest affinity with the well-known philosophic impossibility to arrive at a definition of man, all definitions being determinations or interpretations of what man is, of qualities, therefore, which he could possibly share with other living beings, whereas his specific difference would be found in a determination of what kind of "who" he is.[332]

To give an account of humanity is to make an appeal to the "what", and to reduce humanity to a naturalized characteristic. Moving beyond Arendt's argument to this dissertation's concern with calculative worlding, we can see that the danger of this view of "whatness" is that, given humanity's worlding nature, as conditioned and conditioning beings, any account of biology or of shared characteristics will not be a natural account, but will be a reflection of interests. Therefore, the goal is to operate at the level of the "who." The "who" is of course also conditioned through worlding, but cannot therefore be reduced to a calculated or transparent determination, the "who" resists classification as an object of study and exceeds any "objective" definition. Yet, to recall Spivak's concern with worlding, just because the "who" ought to be reduced to the "what" and Heidegger's earth should not be conflated with raw material does not mean that such a slippage will not occur.

Arendt's definition of plurality's twofold nature works to hold this slippage between "who" and "what" at bay. This twofold character means that plurality is difficult (if not impossible) to maintain for two reasons, not because we are not constantly surrounded by others but because, despite the way that Arendt works to

[332] Ibid., 181.

distinguish otherness and difference from distinction, distinction is always already falling into otherness. Second, equality is always demanding some kind of comparability or sameness. Thus even in a discussion of distinction and equality, one is always slipping into a discussion of difference and sameness. As this happen, and as distinction and equality slip into sameness and otherness, they become *functionally identical* as methods for sorting individuals into categories, and responsibility disappears.

In holding equality and distinction as a double bind between individuals, we attempt to set the stage for a politics that ought never be complete or mastered. Because equality always risks becoming sameness and distinction always risks slipping into difference, plurality is something that must always be worked for and held, and can never be adequately theorized. This is because theory, insofar as it offers a mastery of a problem, or undoes a single bind, cannot be adequate to the political as a worlded concept wielded by conditioned beings. In fact, mastery is antithetical to Arendtian plural politics; mastery, or sovereignty, has no place in politics, even though they may be practical outcomes of political encounters as we plan for another impossible future.

She explains that sovereignty, "the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth."[333] Furthermore, Arendt states that any attempt at sovereignty yields "not so much sovereign domination of one's self as arbitrary domination of all others."[334] This leads back to the problems of the displacement of difference, and it suggests the inherent violence in such displacement.

[333] Ibid., 234.
[334] Ibid.

2.2 Plurality and Spivak's (Im)possible Ethical Encounter

This model of distinction and equality informs and parallels Spivak's concept of the "(im)possible ethical encounter." In the "Translator's Preface" to *Imaginary Maps*, Spivak notes, "'Ethical singularity' is neither 'mass contact' nor engagement with 'the common sense of the people.'" Common sense, a term that is developed in Arendt's writing, but not Spivak's, resonates with Arendt's concept of equality. In terms of the ethical encounter, Spivak seems to be pointing to something similar to Arendt's different in-between of words and deeds. Spivak explains:

> We all know that when we engage profoundly with one person, the responses come from both sides: this is responsibility and accountability. We also know that in such engagements we want to reveal and reveal, conceal nothing. Yet on both sides there is always a sense that something has not got across. This is what we call the "secret," not something that one wants to conceal, but something that one wants to reveal.[335]

In this way, the ethical encounter is an attempt to reveal, while also being aware of the fact that not all has been made present. Therefore the conversation must continue and cannot yield equivocal results. As Spivak states in the afterword to *Imaginary Maps*, "Ethical singularity is approached when responses flow from both sides." This is in contrast to "the idea, that if the person I am doing good to resembles me and has my rights, he or she will be better off."[336] The assumption that the person that "I do good to" resembles me is an assumption based on universality and privilege. The need for responses to flow from both sides is an attempt to disrupt the problem of privilege by

[335] *Imaginary Maps,* xxv.
[336] Ibid., 384.

suggesting that responsible engagement always depends on future recognition from the other side. That is one must always wait on the other. There must actually be an open-ended engagement.

The difficulty of this encounter, and the impossibility of theorizing its singularity and inability to be programmed, renders it an experience of the impossible. As Spivak explains, "Please note that I am not saying that ethics are impossible, but rather that ethics is the experience of the impossible."[337] The impossibility here is that the ethical experience cannot be represented by a calculation. The impossibility of the ethical experience lies in the inability to theorize the equality between individuals because any account of equality would reduce it to an account of sameness. This encounter reflects Spivak's earlier interest in excess and that which cannot be brought into a master narrative. Spivak's ethical encounter and Arendt's political appearance resist a formula for engagement because it depends upon the untheorizable uniqueness of the individuals engaged in the experience.

2.3 Equality and Distinction Across Time and Space

Moving beyond the similarities between Spivak's description of a particular ethical encounter and Arendtian plurality, Arendt's account of equality and distinction also provides a useful model for historical analysis. As part of her description of equality, she explains that equality allows humans to "plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them."[338] Furthermore, as part of her description of

[337] Ibid., xxv.
[338] *The Human Condition*, 175.

distinction, she emphasizes that it applies beyond one's own historical moment. As quoted earlier, Arendt writes, "If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood."[339] The significance of these two claims is that they allow us to build on Arendt's concept of comprehension developed in chapter two and her understanding of the present developed in chapter three.

In her attempt to think within history, Arendt does not limit equality and difference to living beings. In this way, she challenges the way that human progress or a common human origin can be used to transform the double bind into a single bind—that is, by declaring universality at one or the other points in time. The fact that equality and understanding are necessary for each other means that, in order to understand persons across time, the person who existed in the past or will exist in the future must be held as equal by the person living in the present.[340] To demand equality for the future requires recognizing future human beings not as superior to or inferior to individuals today, but as equals. Furthermore, by claiming that equality is a condition of planning, Arendt challenges any kind of statistical projection about what the future "will be like." Instead, she demands that we take into account the incalculable and unpredictable human element, so that we may do the impossible but necessary task of predicting what will be needed in the future.[341]

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[339] Ibid., 175.

[340] It must be assumed that there is a possibility that the person in the past would hold the person in the present as an equal.

[341] As discussed in the previous chapter, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt defines natality as a miracle that supplies "the capacity for beginning something anew" (9). She does not understand it in terms of causality, but instead explains that it has the characteristics of a miracle (247).

As discussed in terms of comprehension in the second chapter of this dissertation, Arendt does not just assume that we know better because we know the "outcome" of history, but that we assume that humanity has progressed to a point where we have the ability to know better when faced with situations that have already happened. We think we can say "never again" to events like the Holocaust, or to the development and dropping of atomic bombs, because we "know better." Thus we fail to think in terms of the equality of those in the past, and we fail to begin the process of understanding what happened, reducing the past to a calculus of historical events. Described in other terms, the assumption that our powers of comprehension are better than our forbears' implicitly marks those in the past as inferior to those in the present. When this happens, individuals are reduced to historical eras and their humanity often brushed aside.

To reject this model of inferiority and superiority, along with the implied conception of progress or the universal origin of human beings, will require that those in the present make the decision to hold people in the past and future as equal and distinct. This means that those in the past cannot be written off as "not knowing better," and the meaning of the present and future cannot be left to the superior human beings to come.

This model is often lived out in the spatial relationship between the global north and south, where differences across geography are read as examples for differences across time. This is one of the central points of investigation in postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theorists have repeatedly demonstrated the continually repeated Western blunder of assuming its own immediate capability to make sense of "the rest." This blunder relies on the space of privilege and geography, using the mythic orient as an alibi for Western "superiority." Contemporary discussions of the global division of labor and

the map of development often argue that Western industrialized or "developed" nations are the model for third and fourth world countries.[342] Dipesh Chakrabarty calls this: "first Europe, then elsewhere."[343] In this model, "the goal" is often (either directly or indirectly) to industrialize third world countries as quickly as possible so that they can "produce local versions of the same [European] narrative."[344] Furthermore, as representatives of the past, the third and fourth worlds become sites for information retrieval for the good of "their" (code for our) own future. While, on the other side, the West looks to itself to see the possible future of the world, recognizing itself as the exceptional future which is already "here." Here, we see western worlding operating without any kind of restraint placed on the assumptions about the western capacity to accurately depict the world.

Spivak and Arendt provide us with tools for thinking about and grappling with the failure of understanding across both time and space. If we take seriously the way that spatiality and temporality are often used as metaphors and metonyms for each other, this acknowledgement can help us to take seriously the necessity of seeing equality as a condition for understanding. Furthermore, we then might render such metonyms and metaphors irresponsible. In order to move away from this temporal and geographical mapping, something radical must happen: equality must be the *applied* practice for understanding and for planning across space and time, so that such analogies become obsolete. Yet its application is not something that can be taught as a calculus, because this equality remains in a double bind with distinction.

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[342] Hence the reason behind the names first, second and third worlds used during the Cold War.
[343] *Provincializing Europe*, 7.
[344] Ibid.

However, plurality might appear, and however much we might want to try and universalize it into a directly applicable model for political appearance, the danger of multiplicity taking over plurality, and thus giving way to universality, does not disappear. Rather even with a model of plurality, the universal subject is only deferred to second place in this (im)possible experience, which can only be verified by other individuals who appear and recognize one's appearance. We must continue to grapple with the way that worlding both produces calculation and disrupts it. Thus to attempt to think and hold plural politics means that there must be constant vigilance over the ways in which sameness and otherness continue to operate, and over the ways in which the universal subject moves to reclaim the scene. To fail to recognize the collapse, and to allow the collapse to validate the position of the subject through the privileged staging of appearance, is to hazard the danger of forgetting how worlding both allows us to appear but also limits our ability to theorize our own conditions.

2.4 Genesis: The Double Bind between Universal and Plural

At the outset of the first chapter of the *Human Condition* Arendt provides three claims that can help clarify what she means by plurality. First, she contrasts it with the multiplication of "Man".[345] Next, she attempts to describe it by pointing to a line in Genesis: "Male and Female created He *them*."[346] Last, in the context of a description of action, she states that plurality itself is conditioned by plurality: "Action…corresponds to the condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the

[345] *Human Condition,* 8.
[346] Ibid., 8,ftnt. 1. Original emphasis.

world."[347] These three moments present three significant and interrelated claims about plurality. First, as examined in depth in chapter one, plurality is not the product of a simple multiplication of a universal "man," for such multiplication leads to the displacement and management of difference. Second, by using the line in Genesis" about the presence of non-hierarchical sexual difference at the birth of humanity, she suggests that plurality is rooted in essential difference. Third, the fact that "men" both live on the earth *as well as* inhabit the world means that plurality is founded in both "natural" life and a constructed, human world, creating a double condition in earth and world as the condition of plurality. These second and third claims require further attention. The second claim, "male and female created he them," is examined below; the third claim is examined at the end of the chapter.

The significance of the second claim, regarding the primacy and non-hierarchy of sexual difference, provides important clues for developing a complex reading of Arendtian plurality. Non-hierarchical, essential difference depends upon recognizing and holding the equality of speakers and actors as persons who are essentially distinct from each other. Arendt's account of sexual difference follows her comment that the Romans explained life and death as "to be among men" or "cease to be among men." She then posits that this recognition of plurality as being among others is even present in Genesis:

> But in its most elementary form, the human condition of action [plurality] is implicit even in Genesis (Male and female created He *them*) if we understand that this story of man's creation is distinguished in principle from the one according to

[347] Ibid., 7.

> which God originally created Man (adam), 'him' and not 'them' so that the multitude of human beings becomes the result of multiplication.[348]

Here Arendt posits two accounts of the origin of humanity, one in terms of a universal—adam/Adam, and one in terms of the plural—them, which is represented in terms of sexual difference.

In the footnote to this claim Arendt discusses the difference between those who take the pluralist account seriously, and those who do not. She notes that Paul and Augustine do not, pointing out that, in First Corinthians, Paul "insists that the woman was created 'of the man'" and that Augustine sees humanity created in singularity while animals "were ordered 'to come into being several at once.'"[349] Arendt notes how both Paul and Augustine omit the verse that claims simultaneous creation of multiple beings, and she argues that this omission yields a specific reading of the Bible and a specific understanding of humanity that can never account for plurality.

There are some dangers and advantages to Arendt's reference to plurality in terms of sexual difference in a religious text.[350] To posit essential, sexual difference as an example of the essential nature of difference does not mean recognizing individuals in regard to the essentialization of sex, but is instead supposed to ground the fact that individuals are essentially distinct and equal by drawing on sexual difference. Sexual difference, as discussed throughout this dissertation, is one of the primary modes of solidifying but also problematizing particular worldings of the world. Thus on the one

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[348] Ibid., 8.
[349] Ibid., 8, ftnt.1.
[350] In "Socrates," she notes that, for political philosophers to be able to talk about human affairs, "they would have to accept—as they accept in speechless wonder the miracle of the universe, of man, and of being—the miracle that God did not create Man, but 'male and female created He them.'" (*The Promise of Politics,* Jeremy Kohn ed. [New York: Schocken Books, 2005], 39). In "The Tradition of Political Thought," she states, "The plurality of men, indicated in the words of Genesis, which tell us not that God created man but 'male and female created He *them*,' constitutes the political realm" (61).

hand, Arendt's use of sexual difference as the primary example of difference demonstrates the already-worlded nature of her critique. On the other hand, to posit sexual difference as ontological difference through an example rooted in the Bible and not in science challenges any claims to a biologically reducible essentialist human nature, which might lead us back down the path of reproduction and back into a heteronormative patronymic order. To summarize, to posit sexual difference as original difference from a religious perspective requires the miracle of God as opposed to inevitability and reducibility of biology.

Beyond the danger of biologism, there is another danger in this particular example. The catch is that both versions of creation are in Genesis. As shown in the quotation above, there are two irreducible creation stories of humanity: one that posits universality and one that posits plurality. Even if we simply pick one version and throw the other out, the problem of these two creation stories remains with us. For instance, as Arendt explains in "On the Nature of Totalitarianism," noting that Martin Luther claimed that "God created Man, male and female, because 'it was not good for man to be alone.' Luther says: 'A lonely man always deduces one thing from another and then carries everything to its worst conclusion'."[351] The threat of loneliness brings us back to the problem of universality and the danger of reading in terms of calculus, but the staging of God's creation of Man, male and female, hints at the trouble. If our concern is the troping of truth, then this product of the times—the use of Man for human—is an example of the problem described in chapter two: a trope, "man," is substituted for a universal "human."

[351] "On the Nature of Totalitarianism," *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, Jerome Kohn ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), in 358.

In *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights*, Birmingham makes sense of this doubling by reading the universality of Adam and the consequent role of Eve. She explains, "If Adam is the universal dimension (*Adam*: everyman) of humanity, then Eve is the dimension of the singular and unique. She is the origin of the alien and the foreign intrinsic to each human being in his or her singularity."[352] The displacement of difference onto Eve is the predicament of the role of the feminine discussed in chapter two. Birmingham's insight that it is Eve who is the *bearer* of difference, and that Adam is rendered as everyman, is a perfect account of the problem. It must be Eve who is the site of difference, because Adam is presented as the everyman in the other version of creation. To miss this is to attempt to create a coherent singular narrative—to attempt to sweep worlding under the rug.

This difficulty of a double narrative and an attempt to find an example of non-hierarchical difference are a result of the problematic way that worlding uses asymmetrical difference, which both allows for a master narrative and manages the amount of ambiguity and play. By reading these two moments of creation together, we get a sense of the problem: we want to point to essential difference (male and female he created them), yet the universal (adam as opposed to Adam) does not disappear and this leads to Eve or the female bearing difference. The lesson for the political is significant: essentialist non-hierarchical difference is vital to the project of thinking the political, feminist inheritance, and worlding in a different way, yet how can we hope to recognize such difference in persons when we cannot model difference ("male and female *He* created them") without denying the asymmetry of gender already in place (adam/Adam, God)?

[352] *Arendt and Human Rights,* 81.

Even in Arendt's plural politics, the universal subject haunts her argument. It appears in two related ways: as noted, it appears when she presents her reading of Genesis, and she does not erase the other reading. The beginning of this chapter presented her insistence that we take seriously the line from Genesis, "Male and Female he created them."[353] She calls for one reading of the Bible over another, but she does not call for the erasure of the phrase that "God originally created Man (adam), 'him' and not 'them'."[354] Though she turns away from this second reading, it remains. On the one hand, this may mean that we have a plurality of origins in the Bible that stand in contradiction; while, on the other hand, one of the origins is decidedly universal.[355] At its best, Arendt's grounding of politics in the space between individuals forces a process of continual refocusing and a call for a responsible, plural politics, which continually displaces the subject of politics in between individuals.[356] However, such a displacement of the subject remains a continual problem. The subject is not simply displaced; because the universal subject remains in the scene as the patronymic order, its displacement must be continually pursued insofar as it may serve as a trick for non-plurality.

That is, to break out of this worlding, we cannot simply forget rhetorical or calculus of worlding, which has been represented through a particular trope (such as Adam). This is, of course, the mistake often made by feminist and development activists trying to create development or gender equality in the third world. Instead, we must

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[353] *Human Condition,* 8.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Linda Zerelli gives a thorough treatment of this difference and Arendt's relationship to both sexual difference and the body. She notes that male and female operate as a crutch that allows difference to be captured by signifiers. ("The Arendtian Body," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt,* ed. Bonnie Honig [University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995], 167-194).
[356] Within a discussion of nationalism and globalization, Spivak argues, "One way or another, we cannot not want to inhabit this great rational abstraction [that is 'we the people']." "Scattered Speculations on The Question of Cultural Studies," 279.

contend with both versions of creation, the plural and the universal, and attempt to give ourselves over to the plural reading, challenging the universal while recognizing that if we find meaning through the world, then this reading of universality comes with plurality. This does not mean giving in, but it does require a continuous attention in the hope of plurality. In addition, one must realize that such hope carries a universality with it as its double bind. Worlding can help us to grapple with this two-sidedness by means of the double bind (which is now the double bind of equality and distinction and the double bind of plurality and universality). We can do this only insofar as we maintain a focus on the determining and determined, on calculus and rhetoric, on plurality and universality, looking to displace the universal through attention to the "between." The "between" need not only be between two, as in Spivak's account of the ethical, but might arise through the appearance of different individuals who gather together in the world.

Conclusion

I

This dissertation began with the assumptions that political appearance depends on our ability to be recognized and welcomed by others, to appear before them as speaking and acting beings recognized in terms of our uniqueness and not in terms of essentialized identities. To appear as unique individuals or as "who" we are, means that what we say and do resists reduction to a product of our given identities, our "whatness." The problem, however, is that given the way that hegemonic worldings are structured in terms of privilege some individuals are reduced to objects of study and they are effectively silenced within the political, while other's privileging blinds them to the contingencies of their own worlding by staging the world in universal terms. Up to this point the argument is simple enough, if there are barriers in place that limit the appearance of certain individuals, then those barriers must be dealt with so that each person has the ability to speak and appear as him or herself.

The problem is that as worldly beings both determined by and determining of the world, it is impossible to simply create universal access to political appearance. There are two reasons for this impossibility. First, as worldly beings we cannot derive a theory that transcends our own worlded interests in order to open up political appearance to everyone. Second, without a world, we would have trouble relating to each other, there would be nothing conditioned and conditioning to give us meaning and open up communication. Both of these reasons are reducible to each other: one is based on the

impossibility of transcending our own conditioning and therefore actually universalizing the conditions for appearance while the other assumes that we can transcend our conditioning, but to do so is to remove all content from the political and to empty out the world.

As considered in chapter two, Arendt's concept of mass society can be understood in relation to Spivak's concept of worlding in terms of transparent universality, or calculus. In both cases the world is taken to be transparent and the theorist is assumed to be able to think about the world without attention to his or her own interests. Arendt's concern with mass society and the nature of totalitarianism make her understanding of world resemble the preferable model of understanding in terms of the conditioned and conditioning factors of the world, whereas mass society resembles a world understood in an imperialistic sense where all engagement can be reduced to a calculation or statistics and thus no further engagement is necessary.

For the purposes of this project, we have assumed that such a perspective is impossible, and can only be established through the disavowal of other perspectives. Yet, even if the relationship between perspectives is one of disavowal, the world does not disappear. Instead, these disavowed perspective subtend and are manipulated in support of the privileged model, which then mistakenly appears as universal. We need the world in order to make meaning and to relate to each other. As Arendt explains in *The Human Condition*,

> The public realm, as the common world, gather us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the

> world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them.[357]

The problem with mass society, or a world understood in terms of universals, is that the world takes on transparency and one assumes that they do not need others. In contrast, to be part of a common world requires an engagement with those conditioning and conditioned elements that bring us together and organizes us so that we can appear before each other.

Arendt builds on this discussion of loss of world through a characterization of the loss of world in terms of the disappearance of a table. She writes,

> The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualisitic séance where a number of people fathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.[358]

Here the table allows us to relate to each other. To find a seat at the table would be to find a place from which one can then relate to others, presenting a unique perspective and affirming the perspectives of others at the table. Without the table there is disorientation. To be with out a table is to be without an organizing principle through which we can speak and be heard. Similarly, the goal of this project is not to call for political appearance outside of a world. Such appearance would be impossible; it would be without orientation. The goal is instead, to demonstrate the dangers of overlooking

[357] *The Human Condition*, 53.
[358] Ibid.

worlding in favor of a universal narrative of human progress, or models of essentialized identity. To consider the ways that our tables both facilitate but also limit appearance.

There is another metaphor Arendt uses to characterize the divisions that hold individuals apart so that they can appear before each other, that is the metaphor of walls and fences. In "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?" Arendt writes, "Politics deals with men, nationals of many countries, and heirs to many pasts; its laws are the positively established fences which hedge in, protect, and limit the space in which freedom is not a concept, but a living, political reality."[359] Laws, like tables allow us to relate to each other, to establish a space in which to appear. This is a claim she repeats throughout her immense body of work.[360]

Yet, if we extend and slightly amend Arendt's metaphor of the fence as allowing for a space of freedom, understood in our discussion in terms of appearance, we might say that laws, and tables, have a double nature. Tables can facilitate the appearance of some, allowing individuals to organize themselves and appear before each other. Similarly walls, can serve as barriers to construct a space that facilitates appearance. Yet, there are not an infinite seats at the table, space is limited. Similarly, walls that create a space of freedom for some also work to exclude others. But, perhaps walls and tables are to some extent interchangeable. Perhaps the fact that tables can become walls that exclude through a lack of seats, means that walls can be made horizontal and used as tables which we can use as organizing concerns in order to appear.[361]

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[359] "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?", *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), 81-82

[360] For instance, in *Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt writes, "To abolish the fences of laws between men—as tyranny does—means to take away man's liberties and to destroy freedom as a living political reality; for the space between men as it is hedged in by laws, is the living space of freedom" (466)

[361] The idea of walls and tables acting as tables and tables as walls is borrowed from Sara Ahmed's account of the work of diversity theorists presented in *On Being Included*. In terms of terms of the struggle to bring

II

The goal of this project is not to fix appearance or transcend worlding so that we can construct a universal model for appearance. Neither Arendt nor Spivak can give us such a model for political appearance; instead, their work can be read together to produce a model for *thinking* political appearance within the context of conditioning and conditioned worlds. The difference between a model for thinking political appearance and a model for political appearance is that this model offers no program for implementation. It depends upon continuous engagement with the particularities of the world in which one finds oneself, and dependent upon the continuous examination of one's own ironic reconstitution of the very walls one might attempt to transform into tables.[362]

Arendt's and Spivak's models of thought depicted in terms of a diagonal of thought and permanent parabasis offer models for thinking political appearance that resist the move from world to universality. Both models are founded upon the impossibility of escaping worlding, and based on this impossibility both open up new possibilities for approaching questions related to this move from world to universality. Arendt's diagonal provides a way to think from within the clash between past and future that transforms an account of past and future from a linear chronology to a clash of forces. In this way the diagonal is a product of a particular individual's relationship to his or her particular

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questions of diversity to the fore in institutions "Perhaps diversity workers aim to transform the wall into a table, turning the tangible object of institutional resistance into a tangible platform for institutional action."(*On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2012], 175).

[362] Sara Ahemd notes that, "getting people to the table (by not speaking about what does not get across) does not mean the wall disappears" (*On Being Included*, 175).

historical moment. Similarly with permanent parabasis one continuously desires to interrupt the master narrative that both privileges and limits the elite theorist's understanding of the world. The interruption of the master narrative of history serves to demonstrate the contingencies of universalized accounts, contextualizing attempts to collapse worlded difference through switching registers and as illustrated in terms of Spivak's account of postcoloniality as a way of being placing the emphasis of identity on how one thinks about one's orientation to the world as opposed to actually theorizing the one's position within the world.

Both permanent parabasis and the diagonal of thought emphasize the present as a particular moment through which we understand the world and interrupt master narratives. This interest in the present is carried over into Arendt's concept of natality and Spivak's description of feminine excess. Natality offers an account of each human being's ability to exceed his or her own determination. It offers a way to hold onto the fact that humans are unique beginners. Similarly, feminine excess, staged in terms of clitoral excess or the excess of inheritance from mother to child, again focuses on the present. The reason that the clitoral is cut out from the patriarchal models of inheritance is that it has no bearing on inheritance, and therefore it has no use-value. In a related but different manner the direct material connection of maternity and thus direct inheritance between mother and child exceeds the possibility of a model of inheritance according to naming. The delineation between mother and child can be blurred disrupting the discontinuity necessary for inheritance because there is a question regarding the separation. In the moment, the pregnant woman serves to disrupt models of past and future.

For Spivak the content of feminine excess makes her model limited and its utility should do no more than serve an anti-sexist agenda. It should not be taken as a case of the essential woman. Arendt's model, because of its emphasis on the essential difference of each individual does not have to worry about the same dangers of essentialization as Spivak's model. Together these two offer ways to think disruptions to inherited models of thought, by insisting on the significance (either symbolic in Spivak's case or literal in Arendt's) of that which resists the synthesis within phallogocentric order of the world or linear models of history.

To approach worlding, the political, and identity with an eye for the ways that gender is always already in operation is a feminist project. This model is feminist insofar as it suggests that traditional models for thinking the political depend on masculinist tropes and inheritance structures that determine who can and insofar as it considers the way that one of the primary ways of both making meaning and concealing the fact that such meaning is worlded is through gendering.

III

The double bind serves as my attempted model at thinking political appearance. The double bind is a set of contradictory rules. These rules, understood as part of a common world, and not understood in essential terms are the double bind between equality and distinction. The necessary impossibility of holding both equality and distinction at the same time serves as a set of checks and balances for considering plurality and political appearance. Without equality we cannot be heard as who we are,

without difference there would be nothing new to hear. In this way the two are both necessary, but our attempts to give preference to either will undo the other. To attempt to calculate equality will marginalize difference, to prioritize and theorize difference will limit equality. In this way this pair of terms can allow us to think the relationship between privilege and worlding, so as to both understand world as that which provides us with concepts, perhaps a table, around which we can act and appear, but that any table will only have a certain number of seats and will alienate those not enabled by its privileges.

What we must be aware of is that with the end of tradition, and the end of what Arendt calls the world, worlding is reduced to a universal account of the way things are. This brings us to the end of my reading of Arendt and Spivak on the double bind of Genesis and the two readings of the coming to being of Adam and Eve. One reading does not cancel out the other. Feminism must grapple with the fact that the story of Eve as a product of Adam's rib fits with a particular way of meaning making in terms of gender. This way of making meaning maintains some influence, it cannot be replaced; however it can be staged in terms of its worlding nature and become a table for expanded engagement with the significance of gendering within worlds.

IV

This dissertation has only touched upon a few of the productive possibilities of reading Arendt and Spivak's work together. Some parts of their work lend themselves to a synthesized reading more easily than others. I have attempted to read them together by

focusing on their models of temporality, their understandings of the dynamics of thinking within the context of a changing world, and their prioritization of speech, action, and appearance. Following the interests of this project has meant that I have not always followed through with the larger context of either thinker's claims. Furthermore, in light of my interest in reading these two in a manner that interrupts each other and reduces neither project to that of the other the links between the thinkers works are not always explicitly articulated.

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