# RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY:
# ANCIENT AND MODERN DIALOGUES ON INTERPRETATION

by

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For my parents

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# ABSTRACT

This dissertation intervenes in debates about the ethics and politics of interpretation by articulating a phenomenology of the interpretive process rooted in the concepts of risk, responsibility, error, and complicity. In order to consider how the interpreter incurs risks and responsibilities by participating in a conversation both with her object and with other interpreters, this dissertation explores how two modern authors, Brecht and Arendt, have interpreted and shaped the disparate legacies of two classical authors, Sophocles and Plato.

The first chapter examines how Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* defines the power of interpretation as a power of mobility, and shows how the systematic disruption of locative language connected to Oedipus poetically expresses the risks and responsibilities of the interpreter as one who is perpetually “out of order.” Turning to the modernist revolt against classical drama, the second chapter uses Brecht's *Life of Galileo* (1938-39) and his theoretical writings to explore how Brecht's resolutely anti-tragic dramaturgy actually reinstates the risks and responsibilities of the tragic attitude towards interpretation on the level of historical time rather than cultural space. The third chapter returns to antiquity to trace the beginnings of the philosophical response to tragedy in Plato's *Apology*, where Socrates embraces the plurality and indeterminacy of interpretation by consciously cultivating these aspects of his literary voice. In the fourth chapter, Socrates' philosophical affirmation of risk is revived in the thinking of Hannah Arendt, in whose later writings both the life of thought and the life of action take on a distinctly Socratic cast in their common connection to a realm of phenomenal appearance inherently bound to interpretation. This shared form of life overcomes the traditional division between thought and action by affirming interpretive risk and responsibility as essential to a life that is properly human.

This dissertation contributes to debates in classical reception studies, ancient and continental philosophy, and German and ancient Greek literature, as well as theories of tragedy and of its relationship to philosophy. Most importantly, it aims to give new impetus to conversations on the theory and practice of interpretation, the future of poststructuralism, and the future of the humanities.

# INTRODUCTION

# BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

## I. Two Turntables and a Microphone: Interpretation, Reception, and Risk

So: what is interpretation good for, anyway?

In the wake of the post-structuralist debates that have dominated scholarship in the humanities for the last twenty to thirty years in the United States, it has become a virtual non-starter to claim that there are ethical and political stakes attached to the activity of interpretation. Critics schooled in the post-structuralist mode have become extraordinarily sensitive to the many ways in which their chosen objects of study are produced by processes of interpretation that are entangled in every element of social, economic, and political history. By the very same token, furthermore, they have become perhaps even more extraordinarily sensitive to the comparable entanglements in which they themselves stand by virtue of existing within their respective authorizing institutions, disciplines, and discourses. Ethics and politics have loomed large as issues in these directions of research, in short, because these become immediate problems whenever and wherever the conditions of possibility for our actions and thoughts can no longer be taken for granted. This is as it must be.

Debates about the ethical and political stakes of interpretation in many specific areas, however, have recently grown confused and sterile – and not merely because the questions they address are inherently self-reflexive. We have reached a certain point of impasse because we lack a critical vocabulary for admitting and even affirming the perils of interpretation as a practical activity; we no longer have a common set of categories with which to describe the situation of interpretation in human life. True, most post-structuralist approaches to interpretation have explored how the ethical and political dangers that accompany the interpretive activity penetrate the entire experience of the subject as a thinking and acting being – even to the point of constituting subjectivity itself. Yet at the same time, precisely by uncovering the dangers, uncertainties, and complicities that lie in ambush for the interpreter, these critical approaches inevitably stop short of justifying or affirming interpretation itself. In short: while these modes of thinking have sharpened our awareness of the *stakes* attached to the activity of interpretation, they have proven incapable of defining and affirming the *wager* involved in every act of interpretation as something both necessary and central to human experience. We are left in a situation in which we embrace the idea that everything we know, feel, or think takes shape through a complex act of interpretation, but we simultaneously fear and flee the ethical and political web of entanglements dictated by interpretation as such. So: what *is* interpretation good for?

There can be no definitive answer to such a question, but there can be a contingent and provisional one to match the historical and institutional circumstance in which we find ourselves confronted with it now. The answer I offer here must necessarily begin with the vocabulary we use at present to define, however unsatisfactorily, what I have called the situation of interpretation in life. This, I believe, is a language generally driven by the concept of *reception*. The ascent of language, signification, and textuality as the favored categories of post-structuralist thought has led to the more or less implicit triumph of reception, viewed not only as the basic pursuit of humanistic scholars, but also as the paradigm-giving activity for individuals and groups at large who produce culture. Appropriately, the guiding metaphor for the concept of reception appears in the everyday use of language, whereby the production of speech is primarily understood as an activity of receiving, reconsidering, and rearranging something already given, of “interpreting” roughly in the same sense as an actor interprets a script or a musician interprets a score. Thus the artist, like the critic, becomes an interpreter of forms, meanings, values, and genres which preexist his interpretive activity, even as they expedite it, resist it, and stand to be transformed by its outcome. In criticism guided by post-structuralist thinkers, in fact, what has effectively replaced the Romantic category of originality, which distinguished the genius of the poet from the intelligence of the ordinary craftsman, is a kind of virtuosity in reception: godlike creation has ceded its place to the demiurgic manipulations of Lévi-Strauss' *bricoleur*. As such, it must be emphasized that the contemporary vocabulary of reception stands quite distant from the older humanist idea of the individual interpreter's relationship to tradition. Nothing that falls into the dubious hands of a 'receptor' can hope to be handled with the same attitude of preservative care that we see reflected quite splendidly in the German term *Überlieferung*. Under the post-structuralist aegis of reception, both artist and critic dissolve, jostle about, and recombine the once-venerable objects of tradition with the same energy and pungency as a working DJ rewrites the history of popular music across the surface of a turntable.

It should be noted, however, that what distinguishes reception as the characteristic mode of interpretation for our time – the specific work that gets done, as it were, by thinking of the latter in terms of the former – lies in the way reception performs a twofold *intervention*: it actively intervenes *both* in the structures of meaning and value that appear in its object *and* in the web of expectations, attitudes, and experiences that appear in its subject. Most importantly, it performs this twofold intervention in such a way as to put both subject and object at risk. What is this "being at risk"? Since much of the present project depends on a clear understanding of this condition shared by both subject and object in the process of reception, I want to turn briefly to Hans-Georg Gadamer's account of the formation of meaning in interpretive experience in *Truth and Method*. As will become clear in the sequel, my intention in doing so is very far indeed from a restoration of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Whereas Gadamer describes something analogous to this as a continuous byproduct or side-effect of the interpretive process, "being at risk" in fact not only forms part of the governing purpose of every act of interpretation, but also constitutes what I believe interpretation *qua* reception is "good for" at our present juncture.

Gadamer's account of the formation of meaning in interpretation takes shape as an exegesis of a passage from Heidegger's *Being and Time* on the necessary and productive role of 'fore-structures' – in a word, prejudices – in hermeneutic experience: "[O]ur first, last, and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves."[1] Gadamer asks what Heidegger might mean by enjoining us, apparently, to make ourselves prejudiced in the work of interpretation, but to keep these prejudices rooted in “the things themselves.” He goes on to describe how interpretation actually depends on prejudices drawn from past and present interpretive experience, working themselves out through successive 'projections' of meaning which are necessarily modified during the process of interpretation:

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[1] Martin Heidegger quoted in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 269.

> A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. […] The process that Heidegger describes is that every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. (Gadamer 269)

The account of hermeneutic understanding offered here depends on the unspoken priority of a meaning inscribed in the “thing itself” which interpretation approaches – as it were, asymptotically – through the gradual replacement of the interpreter's fore-conceptions with an accurate conception of the meaning present in the text. The hermeneutic procedure achieves understanding only insofar as the interpreter can judge between her subjective projection of meaning and its objective mode of presence in the object. More importantly, however, Gadamer allows the provisional fore-structures that operate within interpretation simply to fall away, like a snake shedding its skin, the moment they are revealed as erroneous. What if, indeed, our object refutes that particular interpretive fore-structure which contains and organizes all the others – what if, instead of asking us to shed our skin, we find ourselves compelled to shed our very existence as interpreting beings as a source of errors that obstruct understanding? And can we legitimately claim, on the side of the object, that meaning as such inheres in a univocal codification that appears at the end of the interpretive process rather than within the serial projection of fore-conceptions? Can we claim, furthermore, that meaning inheres in a truth that has emerged from error as the sculpture emerges from the marble, rather than in the happily coherent residue of errors which this particular interpretive experience has not managed to purge from us? After all, our apprehension in reading a difficult text stems from a twofold awareness. On the one hand, with regard to our subjectivity as interpreters, we are aware that the text will compel us to interpret in unaccustomed ways, will challenge our ordinary habits and modes of being as interpreters. On the other, with regard to the objectivity of the thing we interpret, we are aware that the present and future meaning of the text wholly depends on our efforts to (re)construct it as a compelling and persuasive experience *now*. In effect, our fore-conceptions are all we have to go on – and all the text has to go on as well.

Gadamer's defense of the necessity and productivity of prejudice ultimately maintains a fairly low estimate of its decisive role in the interpretive process. In the concept of reception, on the other hand, prejudice – in all its extraordinary delusion and prodigious fertility – takes the stage front and center, and submits both the subject and object of interpretation to the rigors of what I have called “being at risk.” In contrast to Gadamer's account, risk does not just describe the condition of both subject and object during the various stages of messiness and uncertainty we pass through and eventually leave behind once we form “an” interpretation. In Gadamer's description of hermeneutic experience, meaning is at stake, “in play,” we might say, only as long as the subject's fore-conceptions obstruct the full disclosure of meaning in the object. Once this meaning is disclosed to understanding and “an” interpretation precipitates from the process, the element of risk evaporates along with the apprehension of error. When we interpret in the mode of *reception*, however, risk and error are the inevitable companions of interpretation before, during, and after its process, because subject and object themselves take shape within, are even created by the process of projection. Whatever I am, and whatever my object is, actually *come into being* through the interplay of (fore-)conceptions, the music of error. “Being at risk” thus denotes the mode of subjective being deliberately and continually chosen by the interpreter, and thereby also the mode of objective being deliberately and continually imposed on the objects of interpretation. As such, within any given act of reception, risk and error are not simply stops we make on the way to meaning, but together constitute both the path and the destination. One interprets in order to gain access to the meaning of one's object – certainly. But we must also admit that interpretation is directly motivated by a spirit of serious-reckless play, by an impulse to see what one can get away with, by a desire not only to risk oneself through the object and to risk one's object through oneself, but also to take *pleasure* in such risk – even and especially to take pleasure in one's errors.

Insofar as we use reception as our model for what an interpreter does, then, “being at risk” and “being in error” name her basic condition as well as the condition of what she interprets. In this project, they form the point of departure for understanding the situation of interpretation in life, and they are what any such account must ultimately acknowledge, accept, and especially affirm as inherent in that life-situation. The experiences in which risk and error make themselves most palpably felt as part of the situation of interpretation, furthermore, chiefly arise when the object of interpretation throws the subject back on to the conditions and limits of her interpretation, when the object transforms the subject into an interpretive problem for herself. In such experiences, the subject that “receives”, that rewrites and reconstructs as she interprets, must now consciously “receive”, rewrite and reconstruct herself, all under the auspices of risk and error. The noise that comes to interfere with reception, as it were, appears in the signal and in the receiver simultaneously. Hence the guiding questions for this inquiry will be the following. First: In the process of interpreting an object, how do interpreters become problems to themselves through interaction with the object? Second: How does this experience reveal the conditions and limits within which interpretation creates meaning, and, most importantly, the condition of being-at-risk and being-in-error assumed by interpreters?

## II. The Life of Meaning: Risk, Error, Complicity, Responsibility

Before I explain how the lineages of reception I have chosen to treat in the current project are uniquely placed to provide initial answers to these questions, I must still account for the mode of life in which interpretation has a situation to begin with, as well as offer a preliminary account, to be fleshed out in the concrete discussions that follow, of what I believe interpretation *qua* reception "looks like on the ground", in the midst of this life. What is called for, then, is a phenomenology of reception from the standpoint of the living human being, focused specifically on the integral relationship between interpretation and life.

When we approach an object in order to interpret it, we do so because we feel that the object has *addressed* us in the form of a question, a question which concerns the various relations we bear to that object as a concentrate of meaning, as something that challenges us with respect to our life, but with which we nonetheless seek to live. In the radicalized vocabulary of reception I am applying here, in fact, we can say that the object of interpretation comes into being as such only by virtue of this power of address;

without it, the object may still be an object in some sense, but it does not stake a claim on our power to make sense of the world. If we view the event of this question in terms of its significance to life as such, we find it very aptly described by John Dewey in his seminal work *Art As Experience*.[2] The event of the question in life, in Dewey's language, corresponds to a distinct point in the rhythm of relation between the living being and its environment:

> The nature of experience is determined by the essential conditions of life. […] The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself, by accommodation and defense but also by conquest. […] *Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it* – either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. […] Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives. (Dewey 12f., emphasis mine)

The question posed to us by our nascent object of interpretation is always defined and motivated by the structure of concern we bring to the object, the preexisting relationship to ourselves and our environments which we have built up through a comparable process of questioning and responding in the past. It is just such a preexisting set of relations, in fact, that now itself provides the occasion for interpretation, that makes the experience of address possible and forceful for us in the first place. The event of the question not only belongs to the natural rhythm between the living being and its environment, but can actually offer a point at which the scope and pattern of this rhythm itself becomes part of the problem under consideration for the interpreter. In other words, the question is not only part of the living thing's rhythm or mode of being, but a point of decision at which other modes of being, other rhythms, even other lives become possible for it.

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[2] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

As we set about the task of interpretation, then, we formulate a *response* to the question posed by our object – on this occasion, in these circumstances, with these concerns in mind – and life itself forms the shared horizon from which both the question and its response derive their meaning. Only once the object at hand, as part of our environment, is animated – even, as it were, resurrected – by the living concerns we bring to it, does it pose its more or less formidable question. In the same way as our experience of address by the object brings that object into being, so does the character and structure of our varied interpretive responses bring us into being as well, as living beings seeking to make sense. Whereas the object is born for us in the moment it challenges our life as interpreters, we ourselves are only born into this life through responding to the object – the paradox, like it or not, reflects precisely the tangled character of the experience. The response, to return to Dewey's thinking, is a measure not only of the degree of self-reflection possessed by the living thing, but also of the degree of life it has achieved for itself in contact with its environment:

> An environment that was always and everywhere congenial to the straightaway execution of our impulsions would set a term to growth as surely as one always hostile would irritate and destroy. Impulsion forever boosted on its forward way would run its course thoughtless, and dead to emotion. For it would not have to give an account of itself in terms of the things it encounters, and hence they would not become significant objects. The only way it can become aware of its nature and its goal is by obstacles surmounted and means employed; means which are only means from the very beginning are too much one with an impulsion, on a way smoothed and oiled in advance, to permit consciousness of them. Nor without resistance from surroundings would the self become aware of itself; it would have neither feeling nor interest, neither fear nor hope, neither disappointment nor elation. Mere opposition that completely thwarts, creates irritation and rage. But resistance that calls out thought generates curiosity and solicitous care, and, when it is overcome and utilized, eventuates in elation. (Dewey 61f.)

What we perceive in the object as its initial resistance to interpretation – the relative difficulty, as it were, of the question it poses – is actually a demand for us as living beings to “give an account of ourselves in terms of” the object: to encounter ourselves within and alongside the object we encounter in the world. The greater the variety and coherence of such accounts we have at our disposal as remembered processes of interpretation, the greater the complexity of the rhythms and modes of being which crisscross the surface of individual life, the greater – in Dewey's word – our elation.

No matter how unexpected and troubling the object's question should prove to be, moreover, we should never forget that the question receives its force, its direction, even its voice, from some demonic faculty in us which, even against our will, transforms a resistance on the part of our environment into an instrument by means of which some necessary, but often unclear, task must be accomplished. In short, the object serves as a privileged medium of reflection by means of which we come to converse with ourselves in a certain way, to ask and answer across the surface of an exceedingly strange mirror, to convert the energies of this life into another life. At the end of the day, too, it may very well be a demon that conjures obscure spirits by our hands, that suavely arrests us by giving new breath to dead languages, that dictates the conditions and limits of the bizarre games of chance we play with these walking dead. But ultimately it is we and our modes of living that stand to lose or gain from playing the game, from responding to the question.

In this exchange of question and answer, then, we voluntarily initiate a *conversation* with our object, and with ourselves, in a very real and binding sense. Everyone has had the experience in which one enters into a certain conversation quite casually, with no particular aim in mind, but thanks to a whole array of tangible and intangible circumstances, the exchange ultimately proves crucial to one's entire life by the time it ends. Just as the end of this conversation reveals a goal which could not possibly have been discerned at its beginning, but in which the whole exchange is now consummated and transfigured, so does the task laid upon us by the object in our experience of address only become fully clear at the end of our interpretive process. Only then, too, is it revealed as having been accomplished by a singular and unrepeatable dialogue. The distinct character of conversation as an activity, in fact, hinges on this willing submission to the contingency and uncertainty of a genuine process – in a word, its risk, which Gadamer describes quite well:

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. […] No one knows in advance what will "come out" of a conversation. (Gadamer 385)

Dewey's  articulation of the experience of a living being is likewise punctuated by a rhythm that is immediately recognizable as conversational, a rhythm of acting and undergoing, speaking and listening:

> Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing. William James aptly compared the course of a conscious experience to the alternate flights and perchings of a bird. The flights and perchings are intimately connected with one another; they are not so many unrelated hoppings. Each resting place in experience is an undergoing in which is absorbed and taken home the consequences of prior doing, and, unless the doing is that of utter caprice or sheer routine, each doing carries in itself meaning that has been extracted and conserved. (Dewey 58)

Just as a conversation scarcely merits the name if it only serves to amplify one interlocutor and silence the other, so too does the interpretive conversation never issue in the silence of the object and the triumph of the interpreter. What both face, and both gain, through the process of the conversation is nothing less than a will to risk: we begin a conversation, after all, by submitting to the uncertainty and indeterminacy introduced by the other, whereby we end up uncovering the uncertainty and indeterminacy at the heart of the same. In a word: the noise we hear in the other is an invitation to hear noise in the same. As a being that lives only in relation to an environment, moreover, an interpreter can offer a more or less legitimate response according to the constraints of the question addressed to her, but she cannot create a mode of interpretive response that transcends all environments, that knows no conditions or limits, that answers all questions at once and takes no risks. She cannot invent a mode of response that would effectively *silence* the object as a thing that provokes us with its questions, for the silence of the object, in the end, would also mean the silence of the interpreter. The object must retain its power to respond in turn, or else the very life which the interpreter seeks to share with her object renders itself lifeless. An essential part, then, of the conversational task that is revealed at the end of – or, to speak more precisely, at a given resting-point within – an ongoing process of interpretation, lies precisely in the mutual renewal and, indeed, the mutual endangerment of life which the exchange itself effects on both sides. The invigorations and the dangers of a conversation go hand in hand.

So far, however, I have only focused on the form of life that makes itself most immediately manifest in the simple confrontation between interpreter and object. No interpreter, however, is perfectly alone with her object, since interpretation entails at a bare minimum that we are at least *with* ourselves in the activity of interpretation. Part of the force of the object's address, after all, is that it compels us to dwell in our own company and respond to ourselves – as it were, to live the possibilities of the life we happen upon as our own. Nor does every process of interpretation necessarily originate in the life of the interpreter herself, which would entail that each of us would quite literally have to reinvent the wheel – especially for interpretation *qua* reception, quite the opposite is the case. By virtue of existing at a certain point in space and time, of speaking a certain language, of sharing a certain culture, etc., the interpreter enters into a multitude of interpretive processes begun by others, takes on the imprint of their pasts, and receives the impetus of their present movements. It would be wholly meaningless, after all, to pursue meaning in the total absence of others past, present, and future to whom this meaning relates us more or less directly. What guarantees that the object does not arbitrarily fall silent, that every interpretation remains valid within constraints, is the real or potential existence of other interpretations and modes of interpretation – other interpreters, who find different questions posed by the object to their modes of life and who offer different answers. Even the most one-dimensional, summary exchange of question and answer between the object and the interpreter, between the thing that asks and the person who answers, must find itself challenged and renewed through the presence of other interpreters and their interpretations. Just as these other interpreters respond to their common object, their interpretations respond to each other, indirectly revealing the constraints under which each response takes shape and evincing other pathways of questioning and answering. In doing so, furthermore, these other responses demonstrate how the exchange between object and interpreter has already been informed by just such long-standing conversations between interpreters: they demonstrate, in other words, how a given interpretation always takes on the flavor and momentum of a certain tradition of interpretation, a pre-existing and continuing conversation, and never appears *ex nihilo*. The presence of others who are or have been in the process of interpretation, even and especially when these are invisibly inscribed into our most intimate inner experience of meaning, gives interpretation its proper historical depth above and beyond the mere duration of a single day's reading or thinking, or, for that matter, the duration of a human life.

Above all, however, the plurality of interpreters upon which the pursuit of meaning depends necessarily establishes *difference* as a possibility, even an inalienable condition, of interpretation itself. This possibility of difference between interpreters brings us back to the parallel strand at work in the activity of reception: namely, that of *error,* which is the primary form such difference takes in our experience of interpretation. The criterion of error not only allows us to discriminate between interpretations we judge to be authentic or inauthentic according to a conventional standard. More seriously, error also marks the effective disintegration of the integral relationship that interpretation is meant to create between the interpreter and his object, or even between the interpreter and himself. In order to do justice to the problem of error in interpretation and to understand its intimate relation to risk, we must leave behind Dewey's individualist and evolutionary model, which treats the individual living being more or less in isolation and which views the living being as striving to attain progressively higher levels of equilibrium between its own powers and the challenges of its environment. If interpretation represents the specific domain in which the life of the living being is augmented, enriched, and heightened, what exactly happens to this life when interpretation terminates in error? What does error mean for living beings who live and interpret as a plurality in which error is a constant possibility, and difference very often an actuality? What, above all, might error be *good* for, in the life of interpretation?

To answer these new questions, I want to turn to a provocative line of thought about life and error that appears in the very last essay authorized for publication by Michel Foucault, a tribute to his mentor Georges Canguilhem entitled “Life: Experience and Science."[3] As Foucault recounts, Canguilhem distinguished himself as an historian of science by taking the life sciences, biology and medicine, as paradigm cases for the history of science rather than the exact sciences of chemistry or physics. The focus in Canguilhem's research on sciences in which life itself represents the value that guides thought transforms the relationship between healthy and diseased processes in the organism into a central epistemological issue for science as such:

> At the end of the eighteenth century, it was thought that one could find the common element between a physiology studying the phenomena of life and a pathology devoted to the analysis of diseases, and that this element would enable one to consider the normal processes and the disease processes as a unit. […] People expected the healthy organism to provide the general framework in which these pathological phenomena took hold and assumed, for a time, their own form. It seems that this pathology, grounded in normality, characterized the whole of medical thought for a long time.
>
> But there are phenomena in the study of life which keep it separate from any knowledge that may refer to the physiochemical domains; the fact is that *it has been able to find the principle of its development only in the investigation of pathological phenomena*. It has not been possible to constitute a science of the living without taking into account, as something essential to its object, *the possibility of disease, death, monstrosity, anomaly, and error*. (Foucault 13, emphases mine)

Just as life itself by definition is capable of error, insofar as it can wander into mutation and pathology, and just as life can only be comprehended by exploring and articulating the shapes taken by its errors, so the history of science unfolds not by the continuous progress of truth but by the jagged, discontinuous succession of its errors. In no other science is the object of inquiry capable of making a "mistake" in its internal organization in the same way as the subject of inquiry is capable of committing an error in interpretation and reinterpretation. In this capacity for error, Foucault continues, "the biologist recognizes the mark of his own object – and of a type of object to which he himself belongs, since he lives and since he […] develops this nature of the living in an activity of knowledge" (Foucault 14).

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[3] Michel Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science," in: Foucault, *The Essential Foucault: Selections from The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 6-17.

By defining this unique capacity that unites life and thought, moreover, Canguilhem brilliantly discerned the mode of being distinct to the scientist and, even more provocatively, to the philosopher insofar as both of these are forms of life rooted in interpretation. Error offers the point at which the history of human thought and the history of human life find their shared horizon of intelligibility, precisely because, as Foucault finally argues, error is the conscious and deliberate condition of the mode of life we call human:

> At the center of [the] problems [concerning the specific nature of life] one finds that of error. For, at the most basic level of life, the processes of coding and decoding give way to a chance occurrence that, before becoming a disease, a deficiency, or a monstrosity, is something like a disturbance in the informative system, something like a “mistake.” In this sense, *life – and this is its radical feature – is that which is capable of error*. [*...W*]*ith man, life has led to a living being that is never completely in the right place, that is destined to “err” and to be “wrong.”* (Foucault 13, emphasis mine)

The rhythmic, harmonious striving for dynamic equilibrium envisioned by Dewey, the perfectly reciprocal conversation between life and environment, now must appear to us as a process full of blind spots and willful incoherencies that nonetheless retain a remarkable vigor, a process driven by an instinct that wills to be in error by being in the truth and wills to be in the truth by being in error. What distinguishes human life from life as such, furthermore, is that human life not only seeks to interpret and respond to life through the formation of concepts, but also possesses and actively *risks* being in the wrong about itself, making an error in its interpretations:

> [I]f one grants that the concept is the reply that life itself has given to that chance process, one must agree that error is the root of what produces human thought and its history. […] Nietzsche said that truth was the greatest lie. Canguilhem […] would perhaps say that on the huge calendar of life it is the most recent error; or, more exactly, he would say that the true/false dichotomy and the value accorded to truth constitute the most singular way of living that has been invented by a life that, from the depths of its origin, bore the potential for error within itself. (Foucault 15)

Just as life evolves through the endless proliferation of monstrosities, interpretation survives by constantly submitting itself to the recombinant logic of error. Humanity's distinguishing monstrosity on “the huge calendar of life,” for Foucault as for

Canguilhem, is his free election to embark on the adventure of error, to risk himself on the wandering ways of thought.

Where does this consideration of risk and error leave us with respect to our original line of thinking about interpretation as a process of interrogation and response? Plurality and difference, already cited as the conditions of possibility for error in interpretation, now reveal their positive fertility and vitality as forces that deepen the life of interpretation by multiplying its possibilities in conversation. The interpreter's entrance into conversation with her object now appears overlaid, redoubled, and deepened by her entrance into conversation with other interpreters, or rather her recognition that she had already been participating in that conversation all along. In the terminology which I will apply throughout this project, we can say that the *ethical* dimension of interpretation, which relates the interpreter to herself through the object, is hereby overlaid with a *political* dimension, which relates the interpreter to others in the same activity at one and the same time. Hence the immediate situation of interpretive response is likewise overlaid, redoubled, and deepened with that of interpretive *responsibility*, which names the whole range of entanglements inscribed in her own position with positions occupied by other real or possible interpreters. In a sense, interpretive responsibility is the folding-back of the conversational ethos practiced between interpreters into the immediate confrontation between interpreter and object. The responsibilities that the interpreter bears to the object itself, to himself, and to other interpreters entail that she shapes her response in the awareness that it, too, will become an object to which others will respond. Just as the giving of answers in one interpretation becomes the occasion for questions in another, so in responsible interpretation the response opens up to further interrogation rather than foreclosing on it. With her response, however, the interpreter can no more hope to silence her fellow interpreters or their posterity than she can hope to silence the artifact itself: that is the element of interpretive risk. The peculiar quality of the responsible interpretation, then, is the way it responds to its object even as it submits to response in turn.

At a bare minimum, responsibility demands a constant acknowledgment by the interpreter that she is bound to countless historical, cultural, institutional, and discursive contingencies – contingencies which, paradoxically, grant her the freedom to speak even as they resist her efforts to free herself from them in speaking. The simultaneously liberating and binding force exercised by these contingencies on the interpreter represents one way of approaching what I call interpretive *complicity*. To be sure, there are positive and negative complicities. Those who partake in an abundant meal on a joyous occasion are bound to the event and to each other by virtue of the present they share, the past they recall, the future they anticipate: their conviviality is a positive complicity, for in coming to share something that belongs not to each alone but only to all together, they create and maintain a life greater in breadth and depth than the life each individual lives and commands alone. The same is true of 'accomplices' proper, who are bound by conspiracy to commit an abominable crime: their conspiracy is a negative complicity which in equal measure creates a broader and deeper life in which they all participate and which none of them definitively possesses or controls. Whether positive or negative, each member is made complicit with all, just as each is made responsible to all. The interpreter's relationship to his object, to other interpreters, to the prehistory and posterity of his own interpretation – all of these entail complicities of both the positive and negative kinds, all of them render the interpreter both a celebrant and a criminal

Even when the interpreter practices the form of attention dictated by an awareness of interpretive responsibility, however, it must be emphasized that the constraints within which meaningful responses take shape cannot ultimately be known and articulated in their totality before the moment of response. This means that assuming responsibility for interpretation, making oneself knowingly and voluntarily complicit in conversation, entails the acceptance of a certain amount of uncertainty, indeterminacy, and unpredictability in the interpreter's relationship to both the object at hand and other interpreters. Even the responsible interpreter can never know with impunity the conversational straits into which her response and its elective complicities may lead him: she can never be fully aware of how the conditions upon which her response depends may change, or how far beyond its proper limits she may stray either in maintaining or changing a response. This is simply one way of describing the relationship between interpretive responsibility or complicity, on the one hand, and interpretive risk on the other. These are so closely bound to each other, in fact, that it may even be the interpreter's zealous effort to practice responsibility that leads him to assume ever greater and ever more insidious risks, to drive himself more deeply and more blindly into his complicities. The same path he follows into what he believes to be the truth of the object and the heart of the conversation may in fact lead him ever further away from that truth and out of the conversation.

To accept the ubiquitous risk of interpretive error, and to submit to the constant vigilance of interpretive responsibility, mean that the interpreter establishes and maintains a relationship with her own limits as a living being that interprets – hence, in the final analysis, a relationship with her own death. The relative constraints within which interpretation can remain meaningful run parallel to the constraints of life itself, both of which demand that certain conditions be fulfilled and certain limits not be crossed. Interpretation *qua* reception is one name for how this finite life remakes itself and redefines its finite meanings within and against the boundaries of what is possible for it. Reception ultimately becomes a way not only of receiving and re-creating the meaning of some object or group of objects from a past that is truly “passed,” but also of receiving and re-creating one's own present life – as if one were already “passed,” as if one already existed in the continuum of one's own posterity. For all the accusations of derivativeness and triviality that have been leveled against the various cultural and critical practices of reception in our time, furthermore, neither its proponents nor its detractors seem to perceive the chaste and profound awareness of human finitude it expresses. This is, at last, what interpretation might be “good for” in spite of – or rather precisely because of – the ethical and political problems with which it makes us live, the risks and responsibilities in which it entangles us. Interpretation unites deadly seriousness with irrepressible play because the experience of risk so central to it similarly unites intense danger and ecstatic pleasure – and these last are, after all, the best teachers of how to live and how to die.

## III. Strange Company: The Persistence(s) of the Classical

In addition to exploring how these basic conditions affect individual processes of interpretation, we must also reckon with the changing responses or overarching attitudes that interpreters in the Western tradition have formed in the face of such conditions. How has it been possible to *live with* risk and responsibility in the past, at what costs and with what gains? How are these possible responses or attitudes directly reflected in the forms of life to which they give rise? When we turn from this “subject-side” set of concerns to the “object-side” of interpretive activity, we must likewise ask how objects of interpretation sustain being-at-risk or being-in-error in interpretation. How are they in fact constituted and productively deformed in the perilous undertaking of reception, and how does reception itself effectively render the historical past as contemporary as, or even more contemporary than, the contemporaneous present?

One could scarcely hope to find another area of inquiry where all of these questions are simultaneously and vitally at play than in the burgeoning field of classical reception studies.[4] For precisely this reason, I have chosen two particular lineages of thought that are central to our understanding of interpretation in the present and which have transparent roots in Greek antiquity – namely, the tragic and the philosophical traditions. In terms of fundamental attitudes or evaluative stances that our tradition has taken up in regard to risk and responsibility, each of these traditions has developed a set of attitudes that remains strongly antithetical to the other, but also depends upon a group of concerns and problems that both hold in common. In tandem with producing various kinds of interpreting subjects, various forms of life, the virtually uninterrupted conversation about classical culture and literature that has marked Western tradition has also continually (re)produced an ensemble of objects called “classical antiquity.” What has seemed to be the spontaneous, intrinsic, and defining peculiarity of these objects, furthermore, lies in the way they are paradoxically made to assert their contemporaneity with, *and* their untimeliness within, any given present.[5] The timeless aura of “classicalness,” in other words, remains an epiphenomenon of each age's self-imposed efforts to receive, reconfigure, and respond to this particular past for itself[6] – in other words, to place that past at risk in present reception and so to make the present responsible to it. Alongside the more general question, then, of how risk and responsibility actually work in the experience of the interpreter, the present study is structured by the different ways in which ancient tragedy and philosophy have been enlisted as referees in the ongoing gamble of modern interpretive conversation.

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[4] The bibliography in this area, though quite recent, is already substantial. I can do no more here than point to some of the seminal works in the field which have directly or indirectly guided my own inquiries: Lorna Hardwick, *Reception Studies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2003); Charles A. Martindale and Richard F. Thomas, eds., *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006); James I. Porter, ed., *Classical Pasts: The Classical Traditions of Greece and Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006); Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, eds., *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Neville Morley, *Antiquity and Modernity* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

The conversational structure of these genealogies demands a conversational approach and a conversational sequence. Accordingly, in the first and third chapters respectively of this work, I take up Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, classical texts that confront similar problems of interpretation in subtly different ways, marking out the territory on which the historical and cultural antagonism between 'literary' and 'philosophical' attitudes toward risk and responsibility would eventually play itself out. In my second and fourth chapters respectively, I explore how the works of two modern German writers – namely, Bertolt Brecht's *Life of Galileo* and Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* – receive and reenact the crises of interpretation articulated in their classical forebears. Their modern solutions seek to resolve ancient problems of risk and responsibility, but the solutions, as we will see, only end up creating new and intensified risks and responsibilities. Ultimately, the question faced by both the tragic and the philosophical lineages, in antiquity as in modernity, becomes not how to eliminate error and complicity from the activity of interpretation, but how to dwell within them, even to affirm them. By situating literary and philosophical forms of reflection in a common conversation in this way, this discussion aims to suggest how these problems crossed the frontiers between genres of discourse as much as intellectual disciplines and historical contexts.

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[5] James I. Porter offers a remarkable psychodynamic reading of antiquity's contemporaneity in “Feeling Classical: Classicism and Ancient Literary Criticism,” in: Porter, *op. cit.*, 301-352.

[6] On which issue, see Porter, “What Is Classical About Classical Antiquity?”, in: Porter, *op. cit.*, 1-65.

Chapter I, “The Noise of Interpretive Travel in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*”, explores how the disruption of locative values – center and margin, native and exile, arrival and departure – not only shapes the play's poetic language and drives its dramatic action, but also articulates the condition of wandering, flight, and error that distinguishes the tragic tradition of thinking about interpretation. As an archetypal interpreter, Oedipus defines the faculty of interpretation in the first instance as a virtuoso power of mobility. As a literal and figurative traveler across boundaries, however, he violates the normative meaning of place through the very same power of mobility that he uses in the attempt to restore and protect that meaning. The effect of the tragedy, and its significance for this inquiry, depend upon the troubling revelation that Oedipus’ mobile pursuit of truth was in fact a flight into error, that his renowned wisdom depended upon ignorance of where he was, whence he came and whither he was going. The mounting contradiction between ‘where’ Oedipus is in terms of religious, political, and domestic topographies, and ‘where’ he believes himself to be, generates the distinctive irony that first marks the language of the play with what I call ironic interference, but then ultimately dissolves this language into pure, inarticulate noise. It is this intolerable noise, finally, born of the risks to which Oedipus succumbs and the responsibilities he fails to acknowledge as an interpreter, that must be forcibly driven to flight outside the ordered polarities of religious, political, and domestic spaces. In short, Oedipus' interpretive talent for constantly taking up a new position and a new perspective *in* space threatens the meaningful structure *of* space itself as a medium of interpretation. When the city of Thebes at last confronts him, the mobile interpreter of riddles, he has himself become an elusive riddle demanding interpretation – a point of rupture in their shared space and a source of noise in their shared language, foreclosing on the same interpretive conversation that he renders so desperately necessary.

Turning to the modern legacy of Oedipus' tragic challenge to interpretation, Chapter II, "Say Hello to the New: Tragic Technologies in Brecht's Epic Theater," investigates how Brecht's *Life of Galileo* (1938/39) presents a compelling modern reconfiguration of the risks and responsibilities originally introduced into the activity of interpretation by Oedipus' 'dislocated locatedness.' Contextualizing Brecht's play within the 19th- and 20th-century German reception of classical tragedy as well as Brecht's own theoretical writings on modern theater, this chapter explores how Brecht's theories of modern theater as a scientific technology of vision resonate with his Galileo's pronouncement of a "new age" rooted in the interpretive power of individual, empirical vision. Galileo's reinterpretation of nature opens up subversive new political perspectives by circumventing the highly theatricalized arena of Aristotelian discourse and appealing to the immediate authority of the senses. In a similar way, Brecht's theory and practice of theater appeals directly to the political authority of its spectator, taking aim at a bourgeois

German tradition of drama that required the spectator to subsume his perspective and powers of judgment to that of the dramatic hero through identification. While both Brecht’s Galileo and Brecht himself thus seek to replace a falsified or ideological interpretive authority with an authentic and revolutionary one, each risks ignoring the necessary role of authority in their own interpretations as a stable perspective that can be assumed by others – not unlike a dramatic persona. The complicity thus forged between the interpretive instruments of the Church and those of modern science, or the representational methods of bourgeois German theater and those of Brechtian epic theater, reconfigures the danger of spatial ambiguity to which Oedipus succumbs as a danger of temporal ambiguity. Like Galileo, the interpreter never knows ‘when’ he is, whether in the old age of exploitation or in the new age of emancipation, or what role he might come to play in either. In view of Galileo’s final capitulation to the Church, these parallels with Oedipus' drama serve to reveal the risks and responsibilities implicit in Brecht’s attempts to replace the archetype of the classical, tragic interpreter with a modern, anti-tragic model of his own. Whereas both Brecht and Galileo, like Oedipus before them, promise a certain collective emancipation through interpretation, they endanger this same emancipation by remaining blind to the risks and responsibilities inherent in the exercise of interpretive authority.

Drawing upon the full breadth of this exchange between ancients and moderns about the tragic potential of interpretation, the turn – or rather, the return – to the figure of Socrates represents a crucial point of synthesis and of departure in this genealogy. Chapter III, “A Reckless Voice of Conscience: Socrates at Risk in Plato’s *Apology*,” reclaims Plato as a participant in a conversation with tragedy about interpretation by working with Pierre Hadot’s and Michel Foucault’s research on the relationship between philosophical discourse and the philosophical way of life in antiquity. This chapter explores how Socrates presents the philosophical way of life in literary form as a fragmentation and multiplication of the voice, arguing that we can best understand the dialogic character of Socratic philosophy by recourse to the one text in Plato's oeuvre that does *not* take the form of a dialogue. Socrates' provocative and paradoxical use of his own voice in the *Apology* seeks to establish a relation of integral coherence between the subject and his voice in the interpretive practice of philosophy even as it constantly threatens their mutual dis-integration. In order to 'speak for himself' as an interpreter, the Socratic philosopher must thus constantly assume new voices and new viewpoints in the game of conversation, cultivating the endangerment of the self as a deliberate way of life. The preeminent risk inscribed within the interpretive language of philosophy, then, lies in the fact that it arrives at self-identity and coherence only by constantly returning to the condition of difference and error it sought to escape – a paradox directly comparable to Oedipus’ contradictory flight. Its primary form of responsibility, on the other hand, emerges from its appropriation of this paradox from tragedy, where it emerges in the relation of the individual to others, and its installation of the paradox at the very center of the individual's relation to himself and his way of life. Socrates and the new set of interpretive attitudes he embodies thus turn against the tragic tradition of thought on interpretation, where the interpreter’s self-confrontation under the sign of error and complicity marks the catastrophic limit of all meaning. Instead, Socrates transforms this self-confrontation into the endlessly renewable origin of dialogue, in which the language and life of the philosopher both reinforce and endanger one another. Socratic dialogue thus emerges as what I call a genre of both language and life that affirms and embraces the self-endangerment that the interpreter faces in the process of conversation.

Chapter IV, “A Strange New Form of Life: Thinking, Acting, and Endangerment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt,” examines how the legacy of Socratic self-endangerment forms a bridge between Hannah Arendt's concepts of acting and thinking by defining a truly interpretive way of life. Despite the strong distinction between acting and thinking Arendt retains throughout her work, her thought intimately connects each activity to the other by using a common figurative language of appearance and disappearance, especially in her final book, *The Life of the Mind*. Here, Arendt argues that inasmuch as the life of thought and the life of action share a common passion for appearance, each depends equally on the willing self-endangerment of the subject, who both interprets appearances and presents his or her appearance – to him- or herself and to others – to be interpreted. Affirming the web of risks and responsibilities that emerges as a result, Arendt reworks the Socratic ethos of dialogic interpretation as a modern way of life that rejoins philosophy with politics. For Arendt, the conversation we carry on about the meaning of things, and the way we make ourselves both subjects and objects of that conversation, charge our ethical and political lives with risk and place the task of interpretation at the center of both the life of thought and that of action.

The particular set of categories to which this genealogy adheres – ancient and modern, tragic and philosophical – should by no means be taken as the only valid distinctions for an inquiry of this kind, nor should the choice of case studies be taken as definitive for the questions under consideration. The necessary as opposed to the contingent elements of this project, however, lie in what can loosely be called its 'existential' approach to risk and responsibility, an approach that focuses on the interpreter's experience of herself as a finite being related to both herself and other finite beings through meaning. It bears emphasizing, however, that this 'existential' approach does not ultimately depend upon a unified, coherent, self-identical subject that remains relatively unaffected *qua* subject by the activity of interpretation. Instead, the indeterminacy and relativity built into the concepts of risk and responsibility already assume to a certain degree that a subject can only be defined as a matrix of strategic positions – or rather, to use the term that I adopt later in this project, as an ensemble of *voices*. Voice, along with the problems that grow up around it such as those of authority, identity, and impersonation, remains a persistent if “undertheorized” concept in the story I seek to tell here. Its unanticipated appearance at the very center of this project, like an uninvited guest to a party, could promise either disaster or revelation – but certainly, for a project that foregrounds the ambiguity, uncertainty, and contingency of the very same critical activity in which it participates, it would be ludicrous to turn such a guest away from the door. Every book claims to be about one thing, but its best readers usually discover that it is about something else entirely. In the case of this book, the problem of voice may, in fact, prove to be what risk and responsibility are actually 'about': the gate crasher may actually be the host. But that is something for my readers, and my own future rereading of myself, to decide. For now, I can only take my chances.

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# CHAPTER I

# THE NOISE OF INTERPRETIVE TRAVEL IN SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS*

## 1. Introduction: Are We There Yet?

*Language is [...] great for solving problems, after it creates a problem.*
– Modest Mouse, "Blame It on the Tetons"

In many respects, Oedipus' failure to recognize himself simply magnifies our own mundane, everyday failure to recognize properly those things that we see every day – the things that escape our notice precisely because they stand in the plainest sight, in the most intimate relationship to what we think we are and what we think we understand. Unfortunately, this inertia of the mundane mind, its failure to make sense again of what seems to make eminently good sense already, also plays a key structural role in the language of literary criticism – particularly for a work that has generated as much criticism as Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus,* and along such regular avenues of proliferation to boot. In the process of interpretation, we often speak a language we think we understand, or at least one we think we ourselves have invented and therefore one we fully control, but, like Oedipus himself, we all too often fail to perceive the patterns we obediently reproduce, fail to listen to the words we are actually using.

Simon Goldhill's influential reading of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*[1], though very far indeed in most respects from representing a mundane failure of any kind, ends with a statement that remains paradigmatically inaudible, as it were, in the hearing we grant to certain kinds of critical language. If we listen hard enough and long enough to it, if we overcome our deafness by saturating the ear with its sound, we find that Goldhill's language does not so much achieve the closure of his own act of reading as suggest the opening of another:

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[1] I will hereafter refer to the *Oedipus Tyrannus* solely by its conventional abbreviation, *OT*.

> In the interplays of […] arbitrary interpretation and ironic hidden truths, of insight and blindness, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* offers a paradoxical paradigm of man and his knowledge that challenges not only fifth-century or modern claims for the rigour, certainty and exhaustiveness of man's intellectual progress, but also the security of the reading process itself with its aim of finding, and delimiting, the precise, fixed and absolute sense of a text, a word. Athenian tragedy questions again and again the place and role of man in the order of things; and in its specific questioning of man's status with regard to the object and processes of knowledge and intellectual enquiry, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* instigates a critique relevant not only to the fifth-century enlightenment and its view of man's progress and achievement but also to the play's subsequent readings and readers. […] The model of Oedipus as interpreter of signs and solver of riddles, of Oedipus as the confident pursuer of knowledge through rational enquiry, of Oedipus as the searcher for insight, clarity, understanding, indeed provides a model for our institutions of criticism. It is as readers and writers that we fulfil the potential of Oedipus' paradigm of transgression.[2]

Though Goldhill's is an exceptionally perceptive treatment of the play, we hear many of these words so often in connection to the *OT* that we no longer listen to them – and this failure of the ear, no longer so mundane now, represents the locus of a particular risk. The question concerning "the place […] of man in the order of things," central to Athenian tragedy as well as the fifth-century (BCE) enlightenment in which it took root, makes itself felt in the *OT* as a question about the place of man as an interpreter – as a creature that makes sense. Against this background, as Goldhill presents it, Oedipus is nothing if not an archetypal reader of signs, a virtuoso of evidence, inference, and argument, a kind of secular soothsayer. Goldhill's implicit question about the place assigned to man the interpreter by the *OT* pales in comparison, nonetheless, to the provocation of his final statement: that when we become interpreters, we necessarily transgress against the ordered boundaries that we set out to understand – and transgress, moreover, in a degree comparable to Oedipus' own extremes. From this perspective, Oedipus' formidable power to determine the proper place and hence the true meaning of everything is suddenly made to converge with his no less formidable power to step out of place and to destroy meaning – hence the task we face in reading the play, and in assigning Oedipus himself a place and a meaning. But are we so deadened to our own critical vocabulary and our own mundane habits that we fail to hear Goldhill talking about issues of *place*, about negotiating positions or crossing boundaries in *space*, as the leading metaphors of interpretation for both Oedipus and for us?

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[2] Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1986), 221; qv. 210. Goldhill offers an excellent discussion of the *OT* in the context of the 5th-century (BCE) Athenian enlightenment, during which a whole host of thinkers systematically challenged traditional Greek ideas about nature, law, the gods, and human nature. In Section 3 of my discussion (see below), I suggest how the religious and familial vocabulary of place derived from the Archaic era (ca. 750-480 BCE) is contested in the Classical text of the *OT* by Oedipus' unique and paradoxical relationship to place: one way of thinking among many that were up for grabs during the culturally and politically tumultuous era in which Sophocles lived.

If we listen to Goldhill's words themselves on this point, and if, through this listening, we come to hear a cadence in our critical language as a whole which we had not perceived as such before, I believe we stand to win a new conception of the tragedy of Oedipus. In essence, I think we can say that the *OT* marks the point at which the vocabulary of place itself, as an instrument of interpretation, appeared as a problem in the history of interpretation. Listen now, with different ears, to Peter Euben as he suggests how the location of Oedipus' crimes directly implicates space in the categories by which we interpret political experience:

> The play suggests that in the end and for all our efforts the most carefully wrought boundaries are breached by the men most responsible for building them. […T]he outside is also inside. The wild cannot be banished for it lies, if not in our being, then in our politics. Oedipus commits patricide in the desolate place where the roads meet. There, in no man's land, between cities, he refuses to be pushed off the road and so kills his father. But the commits incest not in the wild but in the city, in his house, in his very bed. Patricide and incest, the prohibitions against which were thought to separate humans

> from beasts, are committed by this greatest of men who collapses space and time into perverse singularity.[3]

Employing a set of figures so frequently applied to this play that they almost cease to be perceptible as figures, Euben's language suggests that Oedipus, as one who definitively uncovers the place of the interpreter in the order of things, necessarily challenges the notion of place itself, dislocates the very idea of location in a way that makes dislocation central to the politics and ethics of interpretation. What Oedipus discovers for us is that the activity of interpretation only exists within the cosmic order – whatever that is – by taking up a position outside of it, a position from which virtually anything becomes the occasion for asking a question, voicing a doubt, seeing from a new angle – in a word, getting out of place. The most troubling question this particular version of Oedipus poses to us is not *Where do I belong?* but rather, *Why should I belong anywhere?*

If we ask what place Oedipus – that archetypal interpreter – occupies, we are also bound to ask what place we must occupy in order to understand him, in order to become his interpreters. This line of thinking about the *OT* leads directly out of the metacritical problem Goldhill sounds out so pregnantly in his conclusion. If the tragedy of Oedipus ultimately expresses a profound doubt about the interpreter’s secure place in the order of meaning, then we must also ask: where does the play itself place the interpretive conversation about *its* meaning, or even our conversation about meaning as such? Where does this text make us stand, what place and perspective does it make us occupy, and what object does it make us take up – if not ourselves and our own processes of interpretation? Goldhill’s reading confirms how much the *OT*’s attraction for generations of interpreters owes its force to the metacritical perspective it opens up on interpretation itself. At the same time, Goldhill only hints at how the figure of place, as it is developed through the play's poetic language, forms the unacknowledged *sine qua non* for this line of thinking about the tragedy – let alone how much the *OT*'s problematization of place may have made the very concept of metacriticism possible at all.

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[3] Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990), 103; qv. 98, 102.

If Oedipus has retained his paradigmatic value because his narrative offers a kind of Archimedean point around which an interpreter can turn in order to encounter himself, this already suggests that the meaning or structure of place in the *OT* changes depending on our position, and that such changes lead us to reflect upon our own efforts to establish, as it were, the place of place. Even when we consider Oedipus' career as an interpreter in the broadest terms, furthermore, his tragedy demonstrates the dynamic and reflexive character of place as an interpretive category. The interpretive problem Oedipus sets for himself at the beginning of the play lies in the enigma of the plague; this figurative riddle, while reiterating the literal riddle of the Sphinx and demanding a "solution" (ἔκλυσις 306, qv. 35)[4] perhaps even more urgently, eventually *turns back* its interpreter to reflect upon his own place in the first riddle as well as the utterly changed landscape of meaning he now confronts. The riddle of the plague retrospectively uncovers the intractable, or indeed, "incurable" (ἀνήκεστον 98) character of the Sphinx's riddle about man – because the riddle turns back upon the solver of riddles himself. In the language and action of the tragedy as a whole, this same movement of epistrophy (Grk: ἐπιστροφή) – a turning-around to reverse one's direction or to regard that which previously escaped one's perspective – represents the chief risk inscribed in the problem of place as it is articulated in the *OT*. Not just in spatial, but also in temporal, political, and familial terms, this symptomatic turnaround offers perhaps the neatest summary metaphor for the hermeneutic procedure that occupies the center of the drama, which hinges on reversal and inversion of every conceivable kind. Most importantly, however, the reversing move of the Oedipal epistrophy marks out a condition that has become chronic in the interpretation of the play just as in the practice of metacriticism. As Oedipus' own interpreters, we discover that once we turn around to reconsider, we can never stop turning.

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[4] My basic source for the text of the *OT* is the Oxford Classical Text: Sophocles, *Sophoclis fabulae*, ed. H. Lloyd-Jones & N.G. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). I have also consulted the editions and commentaries of R.C. Jebb (*Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments. Part I: The Oedipus Tyrannus* [Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1883]) and R.D. Dawe (*Oedipus Rex*, 2nd rev. ed. [New York: Cambridge UP, 2006]). Henceforth I will cite the Oxford text of the *OT* by line number alone.

While epistrophy presents us with the chief source of ambiguity and paradox in the *OT*'s figure of place, it represents only the representative moment of crisis in the ongoing process of interpretation in which both we and Oedipus are continuously engaged. In the uneasiness surrounding the question of *where?*,[5] in the shifting restlessness of viewpoints that pervades the *OT*, the problem of interpretive risk in its political significance always remains bound to the arbitrary power of the interpreter to *move*: to cross boundaries, take up new positions, and redefine viewpoints. The drama of Oedipus asks how the topography of the real can change its form and value as a result of this restlessness, which carries us from one viewpoint to another, which turns us around and makes us look again – and then it asks what we stand to lose or even gain in restlessly moving along this circular path. Just as one cannot turn around unless one is already in motion in a certain direction, the prerequisite to Oedipus' turnaround in the language and action of the drama lies in the restless, single-minded movement that constantly alters his place as an interpreter. This condition of simultaneous escape and pursuit, arriving and departing, coming and going constitutes the native habitat of his conspicuously rootless character, just as it does for the practicing metacritic. More than anything else, what is truly awesome and terrifying about Oedipus is just how much he can and does *move* across the literal and symbolic landscapes of the drama, how his points of arrival only coincide with new points of departure, how he comes to occupy every possible position on the board and none of them at the same time. Just as his ultimate arrival at truth in the moment of epistrophy unmasks his single-minded pursuit as a wandering in oblivion, it condemns him outright to undertake the same wandering in full awareness for the rest of his days. The discovery that should have cured and cast out (ἐλαύνειν, 98) the plague from the body of Thebes has instead only revealed the extent to which Thebes has nourished its own disease (μίασμα […] τρέφειν, 97-98; cf. 217) in the person of its king; the capture that should have triumphantly crowned the interpreter's pursuit of truth has only marked the distance from the truth he has reached in flight. The virtuoso mobility that consistently distinguishes Oedipus' interpretive attitude I will call his power of *kinesis* (κίνησις [n.], 'motion'), in which epistrophy forms the moment of crisis. The combination of flight and reversal, kinesis and epistrophy, in the figurative language of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* thus offers a point of entry to understanding how the condition of risk governs the activity of interpretation. That our pursuit of meaning may in fact put us in flight from it, that our arrival at the truth may in fact be a departure from it, that we may be all too much at home when we think we are distantly abroad: these name just a few of the risks that the narrative of Oedipus marks out for the activity of the interpreter. In the first section of my discussion here, I will investigate how the play defines Oedipus' hermeneutic perspective in the vocabulary of kinesis, how this kinesis presages and finally reaches its point of turnaround, and how this turnaround poses a risk not only in Oedipus' interpretation of his own career, but also in our interpretation of the tragedy that bears his name.

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[5] An uneasiness that becomes virtually neurotic at *OT* 924-926, where the Messenger's entrance speech is marked by a series of puns involving *pou*, a Greek particle that can mean 'where?', and Oedipus' name (Grk: Oidi*pou*s). For more on this passage, see Goldhill 217, Euben 103f., Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1981), 223, and Bernard Knox, *Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979], 99-100.

In addition to exploring the kinetic character of the *topos* (τόπος, 'place') inhabited by Oedipus as an interpreter, we must also consider how the cultural and historical topography that pre-exists the interpreter, the collective mapping and naming of the landscape in which he orients himself, defines the forms of responsibility at stake in his movement toward truth.[6] Oedipus does not invent whole-cloth the symbolic topography – literally, the ‘writing of place’ – that both authorizes and opposes his interpretive *topos*. Rather, this topography has emerged in the plural and contingent conversation of the classical Greek culture that informs Sophocles’ text, to which Oedipus’ viewpoint responds and to which, with tragic force, it is ultimately held accountable. As Jean-Pierre Vernant’s work on the Greek conceptualization of space and movement indicates, this topography is organized according to a dichotomy derived from the Archaic period: on the one hand, an immobile center that guarantees the stability and continuity of individual, familial, and collective identities; on the other hand, a dynamic periphery that oversees the uncertain and dangerous realm of contact, exchange, and transformation. In this topographic model, the polar relation between center and periphery, between ‘in here’ and ‘out there,’ generates a fundamental tension in the Greek vocabulary of place. Although the center strives toward the absolute immobility and self-sufficiency, it necessarily depends upon that which lies on its shifting and unstable margin. In interpretive terms, we might say that while the center works to stabilize the meanings of language or the boundaries of human identity, it stands in constant communication with a periphery that contests and destabilizes meaning and identity. Rather than letting it remain in the background, moreover, the poetic language of the *OT* plays on this basic tension in the Archaic vocabulary of place by its conspicuous

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[6] Because of my specialized use of the term 'responsibility,' and because of the way the question of Oedipus' moral responsibility has loomed large in the reception of the *OT*, it seems necessary at this point to prevent any misunderstanding of my treatment of Oedipus' responsibility by firmly separating it from this tradition. The present discussion does not engage the questions of whether the *OT* represents a 'tragedy of guilt' or a 'tragedy of fate,' whether Oedipus possesses a 'tragic fault' (*hamartia*) as defined by Aristotle, or comparable matters that are central to this lineage of scholarship. The enormity of the scholarship devoted to these questions and to the reception of the play along these lines may be judged by the sheer 500-page heft of Michael Lurje's exhaustive volume *Die Suche nach der Schuld: Sophokles'* Oedipus Rex, *Aristoteles'* Poetik*, und das Tragödienverständnis der Neuzeit* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2004). Aside from referring to Walter Burkert's and E.R. Dodds' definitive responses to the questions surrounding Oedipus' moral responsibility (Burkert, *Oedipus, Oracles, and Meaning: From Sophocles to Umberto Eco* [Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1991], 15-18; Dodds, "On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*," *Greece & Rome,* 2nd ser., 13:1 [April 1966], 37-49), I will simply quote John Gould's assessment of these issues in his classic essay "The Language of Oedipus" (in: *Modern Critical Views: Sophocles*, ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Chelsea House, 1990]). Out of context, the passage is doomed to sound a bit flippant, but I emphatically agree with his treatment of the question: "I have largely ignored issues of moral responsibility […]. That is because, it seems to me, that is how the play is. It has nothing to say about responsibility, almost nothing about fate, and seemingly very little about the workings of divinity. […] To have dealt with those other issues, implicit though they might be taken to be in the story of Oedipus, would be to have written another play" (220). Here (but more explicitly in Burkert) we might perceive the echo of a passage from Freud's discussion of the *OT* that is cited and discussed far less than his various expositions of the famous Oedipus complex: "Es ist zu verwundern, daß die Tragödie des Sophokles nicht vielmehr empörte Ablehnung beim Zuhörer hervorruft […]. Denn sie ist im Grunde ein unmoralisches Stück, sie hebt die sittliche Verantwortlichkeit des Menschen auf, zeigt göttliche Mächte als die Anordner des Verbrechens und die Ohnmacht der sittlichen Regungen des Menschen, die sich gegen das Verbrechen wehren." ("It is astonishing that Sophocles' tragedy has not provoked much more enraged indignation on the part of its auditors […]. For it is basically an unmoral play: it abolishes the moral responsibility of the individual, shows divine powers as the orchestrators of crime and the powerlessness of human moral feelings to guard human beings against wrongdoing.") Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke. Elfter Band [Vol. 11]: Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 343 (translation mine). This is also perhaps one of very few points on which Freud's reception of the Sophoclean Oedipus coincides with my own: it recognizes the basic absence of an *explicit* horizon in the play by which Oedipus' moral responsibility could be measured – though this is by no means the same as

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saying that there is no implicit moral horizon. Instead of then imposing on the drama models of moral responsibility which have nothing to do with either the text itself or its historical horizon, Gould chooses instead to trace out the mutual overlap and mutual contradiction between “realms of human and divine intelligibility” (221) in the play’s narrative and poetic texture. While his essay only suggests how these “realms” are figured in “the oppositions of place within the play” (*ibid.*; qv. 210) near its end, my discussion takes this and Goldhill’s similar conclusion as their points of departure. For a brilliant treatment of moral agency and responsibility in Greek tragedy, including the *OT*, that encounters text and context on their own terms, see Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Intimations of the Will in Greek Tragedy,” in: *id.* & Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 49-84; for an equally masterful rebuttal to the psychoanalytic reception of Oedipus, see Vernant, “Oedipus Without the Complex,” *op. cit.* 85-111.

failure to locate Oedipus within its polarized scheme. The implicitly Archaic topography that informs the Chorus' language in the first stasimon (463-482), for instance, yields one contradiction after another. On the one hand, the radiant, immutable center represented by the Delphic oracle leaves the Chorus wandering in interpretive uncertainty; on the other hand, the obscure, peripheral murderer they condemn stands before them in the person of their sovereign, who, as master interpreter, resides at the very center of the city's self-understanding.

In his very person, then, Oedipus represents an interpretive response that defies and confuses the terms of the conversation even as he seeks to uphold and defend these categories in his leadership of the public inquiry into the murder of Laius. While Oedipus' responsibility to Archaic topography compels him to interpret his own and others' *topoi* according to its vocabulary, his effort to redraw that topography according to his individual powers of interpretive kinesis threatens to collapse the distinction between center and periphery. After all, it is the very same mastery of the 'writing of place' that disposes him to "walk on many pathways in the wanderings of thought" at his own peril (πολλὰς […] ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις, 67). In the tragic turnaround of his desire to re-map and re-name space according to his own vocabulary, Oedipus ultimately comes to confront himself as the man from nowhere, who belongs nowhere, and who will end up nowhere, in relation to gods, city, and household alike. In a word, he succumbs to the condition of perpetual *ectopia* (Grk. ἐκτοπία = "being out-of-place, strange, eccentric, foreign") that at once nourishes and threatens responsible interpretation. The *OT* plays out its literary problematization of place, furthermore, by bringing the interpretive conversation to a head around the figure of the interpreter himself. Just as the interpreter strives to re-locate, re-connect, re-integrate each discrete sign, each disparate piece of evidence into an articulate whole, he must as part of the same process dis-locate, dis-connect, and dis-integrate his own perspective from the topography he inherits and to which he responds. The second part of my discussion here will thus examine how the *OT*, through the figure of Oedipus, reasserts Archaic topography in the same moment as it interrogates the univocal authority of its coordinate system.

Whereas the first two sections of my analysis of the *OT* will uncover how the condition of ectopia both dictates certain risks for the interpreter and entangles his responsibility in certain paradoxes, my third section will consider the broader consequences of the interpreter's ectopia for the shared language and shared sense of place that constitutes the political realm. With his restless movement from one place to another, one frame of reference to another, Oedipus' ectopia does not exhaust its implications merely in his own subjectivity, but puts at risk the common space and shared language that integrate him with others: in short, it endangers the entire substance of politics. Here we approach the uniquely tragic significance of Sophocles' play for the problem of interpretation as a political question. As an interpreter, Oedipus' triumph and tragedy alike depends on the way his language both overstates the normative vocabulary of place and undermines it at once. Ultimately, however, once the internal and external audiences of the drama are compelled to become *his* interpreters in turn, they – and we – must assign Oedipus a place and a meaning for the political community. Oedipus eludes every attempt to make sense of him because he reveals the degree to which the language of the interpreter – the language we share with him – is unwittingly complicit in the *un*making of sense. When we attempt to apply normative language to Oedipus, when we try to respond to the political challenge he poses, we find that it can only produce multiple, fragmentary, and divergent evaluations of one and the same phenomenon: like Oedipus' voice, the voice of *his* interpreter seems to contain a multitude of voices that approach from every direction and cannot be reconciled with each other.

The troubling polyvocality of Oedipus' voice challenges the common places and common language upon which politics depend, threatening the integrity of individual identities and viewpoints. Polyvocality inflects the poetic language of the *OT*, moreover, through the conspicuous multiplication and dislocation of meaning in not only Oedipus' language, but also the language of his interlocutors. From our viewpoint, the *dramatis personae* constantly mean both more and less than they intend to say: their language is rife with double and triple meanings of which they remain hopelessly unaware, even going so far as to undermine or contradict the meaning of which they are aware.[7] Of course, the basic features of this kind of language have long been noted in criticism and have come to be considered part of the characteristic tragic irony that distinguishes the play.[8] Critics typically read the ironic language as an effect of the asymmetry in knowledge possessed on the one hand by the *dramatis personae* and on the other by the external audience. In so doing, however, they implicitly privilege the more comprehensive knowledge of the latter, who already knows the outcome of the story and can read it back into the language of the play as the drama progresses. This line of thinking also implies that the tensions and paradoxes created by the tragic irony of the *OT* resolve themselves once the asymmetry in knowledge disappears and the full meaning of Oedipus' deeds come to light. What we are left with on this reading is not so much a challenge to the meaningfulness of language and the coherence of the political sphere as a fleeting sense of embarrassment at things said in temporary ignorance of their 'true' import.

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[7] See Burkert 11.

[8] Gould is also typical in this regard when he writes, "*King Oedipus* is a play whose qualities of inscrutability and of pervasive irony quickly come to complicate any critical discussion. It is a play of transformations in which things turn into other things as we watch, where meanings and implications seem to be half-glimpsed beneath the surface of the text only to vanish as we try to take them in, and where ironical resemblances and reflections abound to confuse our response" (208). Less typical is when Gould broaches the territory of my own discussion here, and suggests its reflexive or metacritical form, in arguing that Sophoclean irony is "practiced upon ourselves as audience as much as upon the characters of the play" (*ibid.*).

What if the critic interprets the *OT*'s tragic irony not as an artificial dissonance that the play ultimately resolves into consonance, but rather as a means to reflect on the irresolvable and elusive dissonance that suffuses interpretive language as such – even our own? What if we read not to congratulate ourselves for having the resources to steer clear of Oedipus' interpretive morass, but instead to see ourselves, who are *his* respondents, as perhaps even more deeply and ignorantly implicated in it than he is? To pursue such a course, which seeks not to avert Oedipus' political challenge but to meet it head-on in our own discourse and practice of interpretation, we must proceed beyond the point where we simply explain how the play's language lends itself to multiple meanings, and ask instead how the mutual interferences between these different meanings, the clash of voices within the interpreter's voice, might put our own practice of interpretation in question. If we trace the roots of this kind of polyvocal language, we find that the language of the tragedy itself becomes a *topos* of contestation that challenges univocal meanings, fragments singular identities, and multiplies places of origin. Vernant, for instance, describes the function of such language as being "not so much to establish communication between the various characters as to indicate the blockages and barriers between them and the impermeability of their minds, to locate the points of conflict."[9] In the *OT*, the voices that appear in the political realm do not rest easily within the confines of established facts and conventional values, but become echo-chambers in which every utterance is fraught with unforeseeable risks and ponderous responsibilities. Instead of achieving transparency of comprehension, the language of the play's agents renders their experiences and attitudes as something opaque and obscure to their own understanding: language dis-integrates each subject from himself. Instead of connecting subjects to each other through a shared vocabulary, their language rebounds upon its own semantic limits or opens up contradictions that ordinarily remain concealed: language dis-integrates subjects from each other. When the interpreter, like Oedipus, succumbs to the risks of his endless movement and fails to negotiate the terrain he shares with others, the dissonant voices that seethed and roiled within his language now reveal themselves outright, and meaningful speech descends to the level of abhorrent, clamorous, corrupt *noise.*[10]

This noise, which overpowers the denouement of the tragedy, represents the worst possible outcome for the interpreter who risks moving beyond the limits of a singular viewpoint and of a univocal language in order to reach the meaning of his object. Furthermore, it defines the worst possible failure of interpretive responsibility, insofar as the triumph of noise erases the lines on the map, nullifying the terms of the conversation in which the interpreter takes part and to which he could perhaps still be held accountable. Rather than answer his interlocutors, Oedipus' response simply drowns them out, leaving them with no definite place where they could meet and no meaningful language to speak with. Most importantly, however, the noise that dominates the end of the *OT* also returns its spectators or readers to the zero degree of the interpretive endeavor, the same threat of semantic disorder that Oedipus confronts and overcomes in the vertiginous music of the Sphinx or in the half-articulate din of a Thebes rocked by plague. But this time, it is not Oedipus, but we ourselves who are charged with making sense of the noise – and this time Oedipus himself, the model interpreter, is its source and origin.

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[9] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy," in: Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 42. Goldhill echoes Vernant directly when he writes: "Language, rather than being an instrument of order, becomes a network of imperfections and gaps" (211).

[10] Compare, for instance, Buxton's description of how the language of the *OT* marks the transition from partial to complete insight – or, in my terms, 'false' to 'true' interpretation – with inarticulate speech-sounds: "The same exclamation is uttered by Jokasta (*OT* 1071) and Oedipus (*OT* 1182) when they see 'how the pattern fits,' ἰού ἰού marks a sudden release of energy, when the irony of partial knowledge is instantaneously discharged. It denotes the transition from blindness to insight." R.G.A. Buxton, "Blindness and Limits: Sophokles and the Logic of Myth," in: Bloom (ed.) 110-111. The passage into noise thus simultaneously marks the revelation of truth and the dissolution of meaning.

The poetic and narrative structure of the tragedy is thus designed to foreground the mutual interference between the sense-making and sense-unmaking functions of interpretive language, which is the kind of language we share with Oedipus as much as it is the language that we use to talk about him. The play is constructed so as to allow the audience the rare and troubling privilege of simultaneously assuming a human and a super-human perspective on the interpretive meaning of speech, of perceiving that what appears true and just to the former appears as equivocal and erroneous to the latter.[11] This is why both location and dislocation, both vision and blindness, both articulate meaning and arbitary noise can appear simultaneously in the language of the *OT*, and why, as Goldhill warns us, we are destined to reproduce these interferences in our own interpretive conversation about the tragedy – or, indeed, in any interpretive conversation. By the same token, the *OT* poses a challenge to the meaning of political life by suggesting that the conversation upon which politics depends, the plurality of interpretive viewpoints responsible to a shared topography, is a game of risk constantly threatened from within by the openness of political space to multiple perspectives and the openness of political language to multiple meanings. The drama points to both the stern risks and the demanding responsibilities of political life by suggesting that interpretation may open up new and unexpected places to stand, but that these new vantage points may unmask our shared language as a chaos of internal echoes and counter-echoes, a self-confounding mass of noise – sounding, in other words, very much like the language of Oedipus.

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[11] The concept of a double perspective – one that combines both Archaic mythic thought and Classical political awareness, the religious viewpoint and the secular – is a mainstay of Jean-Pierre Vernant's powerful and influential readings of Greek tragedy, which bespeak a "gap [that] develops at the heart of the social experience [of the ancient Greeks]. It is wide enough for the oppositions between legal and political thought on the one hand and the mythical and heroic traditions on the other to stand out quite clearly. Yet it is narrow enough for the conflict in values still to be a painful one and for the clash to continue to take place." Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Historical Moment of Tragedy in Greece: Some of the Social and Psychological Conditions," in: *Myth and Tragedy*, 27. The formation and the persistence of this gap in individual and social experience creates the necessary historical and cultural preconditions for tragedy as a literary genre and as a form of awareness. The same sense of a conflict-ridden combination of viewpoints illuminates Winnington-Ingram's remarks on fate and choice in the *OT*: "The divinely appointed destiny of Oedipus comes about – and comes to light – largely through actions on his part which spring directly from his character […]. ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων: character is destiny. Yet, when, still acting characteristically, he blinds himself, the action is attributed to the influence of a *daimon* – and Heraclitus is

## 2. Station to Station: Risks of Interpretive Travel

If, as I have already suggested, what is astonishing and frightening about Oedipus is his exceptional ability to *move*, this begs the simple question: what is he moving towards? At the beginning of the drama, a simple answer presents itself: he moves towards noise. In the initial encounter between interpreter and interpretandum captured in his opening speech, Oedipus describes in calm but searching tones the confusing disarray of

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turned inside out. It needed the unwitting characteristic actions of Oedipus to bring about his fated destiny; it needed the influence of a *daimon* to explain his deliberate act. Here is that interpenetration of the divine and human worlds – Homeric, archaic, and Aeschylean – which we can describe, though not elucidate, with the blessed word 'over-determination.' It is something more than that: it is a recognition that there is a given factor in human character which is no less a part of man's destiny than those events which character may (or may not) help to mould." R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Fate in Sophocles," in: Bloom (ed.), *op. cit.*, 136.

sensations that confronts him upon entering (1-13): “the city is as filled with the smoke of burnt offerings / as it is with both songs of prayer and groans of lamentation”[12] (πόλις δ' ὁμοῦ μὲν θυμιαμάτων γέμει, / ὁμοῦ δὲ παιάνων τε καὶ στεναγμάτων 4f).[13] Swirling smoke, hopeful singing, desperate cries: the clear and the unclear, the articulate and the inarticulate mingle and interact in the mass of noise that confronts the interpreter and demands his response. The chorus describes how the women of Thebes “cry out in response to each other for their miserable sufferings” (λυγρῶν πόνων […] ἐπιστενάχουσιν 184) and how “the song of prayer rings out in concert with the groaning voice” (παιὼν δὲ λάμπει στονόεσσά τε γῆρυς ὅμαυλος 185), two figures that render the interaction of sounds within the noise in musical terms, as a kind of antiphonal singing. In its dense interweaving of sounds, the city itself now repeats in changed form that other interpretive enigma confronted by Oedipus not so long ago, the riddling music of the Sphinx, who is characterized throughout the play as a “cruel singer” (σκληρᾶς ἀοιδοῦ 36) a “bitch rhapsode” (ἡ ῥαψῳδὸς […] κύων 391) who recites “intricate, convoluted song” (ποικιλῳδὸς 130). Oedipus’ first response to the confusion makes conspicuous both the autonomy of his understanding and the boldness of his approach – in interpretive as well as physical terms – by placing upon these the seal of his own name: “not judging it right to hear of these matters from others, I have come [ἐλήλυθα] here myself – I who am called Oedipus, renowned among all men” (ἁγὼ δικαιῶν μὴ παρ' ἀγγέλων […] / ἄλλων ἀκούειν αὐτὸς ὧδ' ἐλήλυθα, / ὁ πᾶσι κλεινὸς Οἰδίπους καλούμενος 6ff). The declaration “I have come” (ἐλήλυθα), expressed with the first-person singular perfect form of ἔρχομαι (= *I come*), is given added gravity through its placement at line-end and in its sheer tetrasyllabic sprawl: the very name of Oedipus is thus made synonymous with the one who comes to hear the noise for himself. Just as he did with the riddle of the Sphinx,[14] so now with the riddle of the plague he has voluntarily come forth in order to understand and overcome the disordered music that holds Thebes in its grip.

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[12] All translations from ancient Greek into English are my own.

[13] Gould (in: Bloom [ed.] 210-211) offers a similar assessment of Oedipus’ statement upon entering the play: “His opening words, the first of the play, form a question as to the meaning of the ritual he sees before him. They are followed by a statement of other ritual sounds and smells which fill the *polis* that he cannot see, and of his concern to learn their sense.”

The emphasis laid upon Oedipus’ arrival by his self-nomination sounds out for the first time the restless, roving ubiquity, the eagerness to confront and inquire, and the courage to overcome every obstacle that distinguish his interpretive personality. But even in this brief dossier of character traits, the unmistakable mark of the figure of place begins to reveal itself: as we shall see, in both literal and figurative terms, Oedipus enjoys an uncommon and at times unsettling freedom in relation to place, a virtuoso power of kinesis. The first section of the play, up to the entrance of Teiresias at v. 300, implicitly establishes this continuous movement at the very root of Oedipus' interpretive viewpoint, thus preparing the poetic ground for the epistrophy that marks the play's crisis and makes the risks of this mobility explicit only in retrospect. Like the interpreter of the play, Oedipus himself can only realize he is pursuing the same truth that he has fled once he turns around to survey his own route. Consequently, my discussion here will first consider the poetic language of kinesis in the play's opening section 'naively,'[15] and then a second time from the retrospective or epistrophic viewpoint provided by certain later passages. In essence, the interpretive risk that is inscribed in Oedipus' elusive mobility as an interpreter is twofold. First, kinesis always risks the possibility of an abrupt turnaround that radically reconfigures the meaning of both the terminus and the route of interpretation: in seeking to reach his destination by the direct route, Oedipus realizes to his horror that his straight-line path was actually a great circle. Second, the interpreter's kinesis risks setting into motion the stable meaning of every value or concept: in seeking to assign everything to its proper place, Oedipus' tireless movement ultimately allows nothing to remain in its proper place.

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[14] The *OT* nowhere contains a text of this riddle, nor does it contain any clear indication what Sophocles believed or imagined to have been its content. A number of different versions of the riddle do, however, exist in a tradition that dates back to Sophocles’ active period or shortly thereafter. One particularly provocative version of the riddle – which, it should be stressed, is not the work of Sophocles – is inserted before the text of the play in at least two major manuscripts (**L** [Laurentian MS, 1st half 11th c., Florence], and **A** [13th c., Paris]). The riddle is given verbatim in virtually identical form by Athenaeus (*The Learned Banqueters* [Δειπνοσοφισταί] Book X, 456B), who claims to be quoting it from a lost work of Asclepiades of Tragilus called *Subjects of Tragedy* (Τραγῳδούμενα) from circa 340 B.C.E.; hence Jebb concludes that the riddle dates back to “at least the earlier part of the fourth century B.C.” Sir Richard C. Jebb, *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments. Part I: The Oedipus Tyrannus*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1914), 6. I adduce this version of the “Riddle of the Sphinx” purely for its suggestive value in relation to the language of movement and place in the *OT* proper, on the one hand, and to the figure of Oedipus as an interpreter in both the *OT* and in contemporary or near-contemporary mythology, on the other. The text reads as follows:

ΤΟ ΑΙΝΙΓΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΣΦΙΓΓΟΣ.

Ἔστι δίπουν ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ τετράπον, οὗ μία φωνή,
καὶ τρίπον· ἀλλάσσει δὲ φύην μόνον ὅσσα ἐπὶ γαῖαν
ἑρπετὰ κινεῖται ἀνὰ τ’ αἰθέρα καὶ κατὰ πόντον.
ἀλλ’ ὁπόταν πλείστοισιν ἐρειδόμενον ποσὶ βαίνῃ,
ἔνθα τάχος γυίοισιν ἀφαυρότατον πέλει αὐτοῦ.

[THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX.

There is on earth a two-footed thing that is also four-footed and three-footed, yet it has one voice; of all the crawling things that move upon the earth and through the air and across the water, it alone changes its nature. But whenever it walks supporting itself upon the greatest number of feet, that is when the speed in its limbs is most feeble.]

The exceptional power of movement that distinguishes Oedipus at the very opening of the play stands in stark contrast to the group of suppliants he encounters, who seem almost rooted in their positions of desperation in front of the royal palace and at different points around Thebes ("these seats you assume," ἕδρας τάσδε […] θοάζετε 2; "we are seated," προσήμεθα 15 and ἑζόμεσθ′ 32; "sits," θακεῖ 20). The group of youths and old men who have been dispatched to seek Oedipus' help is even described by the Priest as if they were flightless birds, the former being "not yet strong enough to take wing" (οὐδέπω μακρὰν / πτέσθαι σθένοντες 16f) and the latter "weighed down with old age" (σὺν γήρᾳ βαρεῖς 17).[16] The same sense of the dead weight and immobility imposed by the sufferings of the plague takes on a particularly ominous color in the Priest's comparison of the city to a ship beleaguered by a storm or a man drowning in the sea: "the city [...] already rocks back and forth violently, and can no longer lift up its head from the depths of the bloody surf" (πόλις […] ἄγαν / ἤδη σαλεύει κἀνακουφίσαι κάρα / βυθῶν ἔτ' οὐχ οἵα τε φοινίου σάλου 22ff; cf. 101). The series of figures that describe the helpless condition of Thebes in terms of being unable to rise, stand upright or move freely culminates in the Priest's emphatically repeated request to Oedipus to "set this city upright so that it cannot fall" (ἀσφαλείᾳ τήνδ' ἀνόρθωσον πόλιν 51; cf. 39, 46, 104). He adds force to this plea and, from our point of view, gives it a presciently ironic turn by reminding Oedipus of his previous triumph over the Sphinx (46-47) and declaring, "let us by no means remember your reign as men who stood upright at first only to fall flat later" (ἀρχῆς δὲ τῆς σῆς μηδαμῶς μεμνήμεθα / στάντες τ' ἐς ὀρθὸν καὶ πεσόντες ὕστερον 49-50).

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[15] 'Naively,' that is, keeping our interpretation of the words and events of the play as much as possible in line with that of the characters directly involved in them, and resisting whatever meaning we may see in them that derives from our superior or retrospective knowledge of their circumstances. Gould (in: Bloom [ed.] 215-216) makes an impassioned plea for this kind of reading in the exchange between Oedipus and Teiresias, which makes for a productive, if underused, method in interpreting the *OT* because it does not allow us to privilege the process of our own interpretation over that of the *dramatis personae*.

Against the plague's overpowering noise and the dull paralysis of the Theban suppliants, Oedipus asserts his acute awareness of the situation – "you have not roused me awake, as if I were someone fast asleep” (οὐχ ὕπνῳ γ' εὕδοντά μ' ἐξεγείρετε 65) – and his agile efforts, quite literally, to pursue every possible avenue toward discovering the plague’s cause – “you should know that […] I have walked on many pathways in the wanderings of thought” (ἴστε […] πολλὰς δ' ὁδοὺς ἐλθόντα φροντίδος πλάνοις 67). Far from the drowning man or flightless bird of the Priest’s language, the efficient and insuperable Oedipus has already set his sense-making mind in motion to confront the crisis. Moreover, he has set others in motion toward this end – namely, his brother-in-law Creon, who now opportunely returns from the consultation with the oracle at Delphi which Oedipus has already commanded. Creon reports that the plague is a result of the pollution[17] incurred by the city (96ff) in its failure to avenge the murder of Laius, the former king of Thebes, who was killed under mysterious circumstances while traveling back from Delphi himself (114f). Immediately upon learning of the murder (106f), Oedipus figures his own interpretive role in terms of a hunter reading the tracks of his quarry and following it to its hiding-place[18] – that is, in a figure of active pursuit: “In what part of the country are they now? Where will this indiscernible track of ancient guilt be found?” (οἳ δ' εἰσὶ ποῦ γῆς; ποῦ τόδ' εὑρεθήσεται / ἴχνος παλαιᾶς δυστέκμαρτον αἰτίας; 108f; cf. 220-221).[19] Creon’s reply develops the same metaphor and expresses the heuristic principle upon which rest both the hunting-figure itself and the interpretive pursuit for which this figure stands: “[The oracle] was saying that they were in this country [i.e. the province of Thebes]. What is sought after can be captured, but what is neglected escapes” (ἐν τῇδ' ἔφασκε γῇ. τὸ δὲ ζητούμενον / ἁλωτόν, ἐκφεύγει δὲ τἀμελούμενον 110f). Oedipus’ active and agile intellect, already on the trail, is quick to extract from Creon all the information the latter recalls about the circumstances and aftermath of the crime (112-123). Born along this path of evidence by his own interpretive momentum, Oedipus even wonders aloud why the Thebans were not equally nimble in their own pursuit when the murder came to light: “What kind of unfortunate obstacle [ἐμποδών, lit. ‘something in the way of the feet’][20] hindered you [εἶργε] from finding this out?” (κακὸν δὲ ποῖον ἐμποδὼν […] / […] εἶργε τοῦτ' ἐξειδέναι; 128f).[21] Just as he had done with the hunting-figure at 110f, Creon again picks up Oedipus’ figure of an obstructed pathway in his understated and ironic response: “The Sphinx had persuaded [προσήγετο, an especially gentle and alluring kind of coercion] us to defer these obscure matters and attend to what was right under our noses [πρὸς ποσὶν, lit., ‘at our feet’]” (ἡ […] Σφὶγξ τὸ πρὸς ποσὶν σκοπεῖν / μεθέντας ἡμᾶς τἀφανῆ προσήγετο 130f). The obstruction posed by the Sphinx, of course, was precisely what Oedipus was able to overcome through his own interpretive kinesis before he ascended the throne of

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[16] The description of the Sphinx at 508 as a "winged maiden" (πτερόεσσ' […] κόρα) proves even more provocative in this context, only to turn savagely ironic when considered in light of Oedipus' extraordinary power of movement (see next paragraph).

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[17] The concept of ritual pollution in Greek religion has been treated exhaustively by Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

[18] While my reading of the hunting-figure here remains relatively straightforward, Richard Goodkin develops a fascinating Derridean reading of the *OT*, as well as an Oedipean reading of Derrida, by articulating the complex, half-disavowed intertextual debt owed by Derrida to the *OT* in the former's widely influential concept of the *trace.* In Goodkin's hands, Oedipus embodies and enacts the hunt for an origin of writing, an original for the trace, which slowly and inevitably erodes the very origin it seeks. From this perspective, the hunting-figure employed by Sophocles becomes the central motif of the play's language and reveals its legacy in the nomenclature of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. Richard Goodkin, “Tracing the Trace: Oedipus and Derrida,” *Helios* 9:1 (Spring 1982), 15-27.

[19] Goldhill constructs a fascinating intertextual reading that pairs the famous ‘Ode to Man’ from Sophocles’ *Antigone* with Oedipus’ various poetic roles as ship’s captain, ploughman, and hunter at various points in the *OT*. All three of these roles take on paradigmatic significance for man’s power over and

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knowledge of nature in the passage from the *Antigone*, while Oedipus’ performance of each role proves both exemplary and perverse (Goldhill 205-207; qv. Knox 97-99). Goldhill does not, however, pay much attention to how each of these exemplary poetic roles involves a specific kind of mastery over space; while elaborating the function of space in each of these constellations of imagery would take me well beyond my present scope, it could prove valuable in discovering further dimensions of Oedipus’ troubled relationship to space. Compare, also, Euben's provocative riff on the verb *pelei* in the opening of the 'Ode to Man' as a bridge to Oedipus' lameness: “If nothing walks stranger than man, what man walks more strangely than Oedipus?” (102).

[20] Compare the English idiom, ‘being a stumbling block.’

[21] Oedipus uses precisely similar language in widely varying contexts: qv. 227f. in the edict, and 445f. in his vituperation of Teiresias.

Thebes: his mobile power of sense-making is such that it recognizes no obstacles and no limits.

Yet herein lies the problem Oedipus poses through the interpretive metaphor of kinesis. For it is precisely in the ambiguities surrounding Oedipus' vigorous and, indeed, admirable defiance of all limits that even this comparatively naïve reading of the drama's opening must begin to acknowledge the interpretive risks that make him complicit in the problem he seeks to overcome. These ambiguities begin to surface once the language in which Oedipus describes his own relentless interpretive pursuit and the language he applies to the murderer's transgressive flight begin – ever so subtly – to converge. Oedipus' remarkably quick first conjecture in interpreting the information Creon gives him is to suspect a conspiracy in Thebes to assassinate Laius. Nonetheless, in the poetic language he uses to describe the crime as the bold transgression of a limit set on physical movement, Oedipus necessarily implicates his own disregard for interpretive limits as a comparable transgression: "Unless some intrigue had been worked with bribes from here in Thebes, how would the robber have proceeded [ἔβη, lit. 'walked'] to such a point of daring [ἐς τόδ[ε] […] τόλμης]?" (πῶς οὖν ὁ λῃστής, εἴ τι μὴ ξὺν ἀργύρῳ / ἐπράσσετ' ἐνθένδ', ἐς τόδ' ἂν τόλμης ἔβη; 124f).[22] Later, in his long speech to the assembled Theban elders (216-275), this ambiguity emerges with even greater force when Oedipus assures the citizens that he will apply all his resources in pursuing the killer: translated literally, he says that he "will arrive at all points" ([ἐ]πὶ πάντ' ἀφίξομαι 265). In this context, Oedipus’ choice of words unintentionally evokes his own arrival at the criminal “point of daring” beyond all acceptable limits that he describes at 125. His language evinces a similar ambiguity when he assures the suppliants that he “will leave nothing untried” (πᾶν ἐμοῦ δράσοντος 145). To the Greek ear, his diction would recall an expression for criminal unscrupulousness used to great effect elsewhere in Sophoclean tragedy, not to mention classical Attic prose: πανουργέω, “to stop at nothing,” literally “to do everything,” i.e. even things that are strictly forbidden (see Sophocles, *Antigone* 74).[23] Even at this early point in the drama, these and other crucial ambiguities that begin to appear in the language of kinesis provide a clear index of Oedipus’ interpretive risks. The agile mobility so central to his interpretive method, and so incomparably valuable to both the king himself and his city, may make him indistinguishable from the criminal he is hunting down and even render him complicit in the latter’s crimes. After all, both hunter and hunted are *transgressors* in the etymological sense: each of them boldly ‘moves across’ boundaries that are set up to contain and control movement, or to distinguish one meaning of a word from another. Just as Oedipus does not know and cannot control the meanings of his own language, he does not know and cannot control the kinesis of his interpreting mind either. Oedipus’ risk, in both literal and figurative senses, lies in the fact that he can never be sure where interpretation will take him – nor what it will make him leave behind. In the last analysis, the interpreter can determine neither his point of departure nor his destination: his undertaking has as much to do with the truth he is attempting to escape as it does with the truth he pursues.

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[22] Although elaborating this point further would take me well beyond my present scope, it is worth noting that at the end of the tragedy, the Chorus characterizes the cause of Oedipus' fall as both a force of madness that "walked toward" (i.e. overtook) him (τίς σ', ὦ τλῆμον, / προσέβη μανία; 1299f) and as a hostile spirit (*daimōn*) that leaps "beyond the utmost limits" to pounce on Oedipus' life (τίς ὁ πηδήσας / μείζονα δαίμων τῶν μακίστων / πρὸς σῇ δυσδαίμονι μοίρᾳ; 1300ff). The mirror-image symmetry of these images, which appear very late in the play, with those in 124f at the very beginning of the play, is unmistakable.

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[23] In his note on *OT* 145 (31, 145n.), Jebb tellingly cites a passage (39a) from Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*, in which Socrates explicitly associates ‘doing’ or ‘saying all’ with a shameless or criminal lack of scruple: “It is often obvious in battle that one could escape death by throwing away one’s weapons and by turning to supplicate one’s pursuers, and there are many ways to avoid death in every kind of danger *if one will do or say anything* [ἐάν τις τολμᾷ πᾶν ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν] to avoid it. It is not difficult to avoid death, gentlemen; it is much more difficult to avoid wickedness, for it runs faster than death.” Plato, *Apology*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in: *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 34. Could Socrates' choice of words here, as with so many other aspects of the *Apology*, adapt Oedipus' language or the language of tragedy more generally with the ironic intent of casting his auditors, rather than himself, as the tragic hero?

As we discover much later in the drama, Oedipus’ career of constant, restless kinesis, which began even before his defeat of the Sphinx, provides a paradigmatic instance of how interpretation allows the interpreter both to pursue and to flee from truth by the same means. In the long monologue he delivers to Jocasta relating the story of how he came to Thebes and what happened during the journey (771-833), his language dramatizes his efforts to interpret the riddle of his own origins in terms of aggress and regress, approach and retreat, pushing through and falling back – the very same terms he then applies to his murderous encounter with Laius in the Theban countryside. Oedipus relates how he grew up in Corinth and enjoyed a place of preeminence among the citizens there “before a chance event fell upon me” (πρίν μοι τύχη / τοιάδ' ἐπέστη 776f). Using a verb (ἐφίστημι) which, as Jebb notes, is “often used of enemies suddenly coming upon one” (Jebb 106-107, 776n.), Oedipus thus describes in terms of a physical attack the unnerving experience in which a drunken companion happened to accuse him of being a “fabricated” (πλαστὸς 780) son to Polybus, Oedipus’ putative father. In language we already recognize from the plague-induced torpor of Thebes described by the Priest, Oedipus tells how he was “heavily burdened” (βαρυνθεὶς 781) by this accusation. He reacts to this potentially paralyzing blow, however, with aggression and pursuit of his own: he can “scarcely hold himself back” (μόλις κατέσχον 782) before “approaching” (ἰὼν πέλας, lit. “coming near to”; 782) his parents to demand enlightenment. Polybus and Merope are subsequently enraged at “the one who shot forth this word” (τῷ μεθέντι τὸν λόγον 784), a phrase that again uses a verb (μεθίημι) typically applied to the release of an arrow or the throwing of a stone in combat.[24]

Though Oedipus is temporarily satisfied with his parents' action, the thought continues to "irritate" him (ἔκνιζέ , also 'to prick, goad, provoke'; 786), not least of all because the rumor, like an enemy preparing a future ambush, "crept around a great deal in secret" (ὑφεῖρπε γὰρ πολύ 786).[25] His interpretive pursuit compels him to go to Delphi without his parents' knowledge ("I journeyed in secret," λάθρᾳ […] πορεύομαι 787) and to ask Apollo's oracle about his parentage, whereupon the god abruptly repels his approach, "[sending] me away deprived of the answers for which I came" (ὧν μὲν ἱκόμην / ἄτιμον ἐξέπεμψεν 788-789). Rather than resolving the interpretive noise generated by hearing the drunkard's accusation, as Oedipus had hoped, Apollo redoubles its impact by forcing Oedipus to "listen" ([ἐ]πακούσας 794) yet again to the terrifying and confusing prophecies about the abominable crimes that still lie in his future (789-793). Although he continues on the same path away from Corinth and toward Thebes, Oedipus' former strategy of attack and pursuit now quite suddenly turns to one of retreat and flight: in order to avoid fulfilling the dreadful oracles he has heard, he resolves never to return home, orienting himself solely by his power to interpret his environment and move within it accordingly: "I fled [ἔφευγον] from the land of Corinth, judging its position from then on by the stars" (τὴν Κορινθίαν / ἄστροις τὸ λοιπὸν τεκμαρούμενος χθόνα / ἔφευγον 794ff). His continuing effort to reach the truth about his parentage through interpretation now cannot be separated from his effort to evade the fulfillment of

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[24] Jebb similarly compares the drunken insult to "a random missile" (Jebb 107, 784n.).

[25] As Dawe notes (139, 786n.), this densely elliptical phrase could also mean something like "it crept under [sc. 'my skin'] a great deal."

Apollo’s oracles, which directly concern his relationship to his parents: even before he begins the inquiry that drives the dramatic plot, Oedipus is both pursuer of, and fugitive from, himself.

We have seen how what I called Oedipus’ virtuoso mobility, driven by his indefatigable will to interpret, does not exist in a vacuum, but rather results from his no less extraordinary talent for offering and overcoming resistance, by either physical or intellectual means. Once he enters the vicinity of Thebes, however, he narrates how this talent was put to a very literal and, indeed, violent test. The circumstances of this test demonstrate how the same deliberate drive of interpretive pursuit that took Oedipus to Delphi has all too easily combined itself with the arbitrary drive of flight from Corinth:

τριπλῆς
ὅτ' ἦ κελεύθου τῆσδ' ὁδοιπορῶν πέλας,
ἐνταῦθά μοι κῆρύξ τε κἀπὶ πωλικῆς
ἀνὴρ ἀπήνης ἐμβεβώς, οἷον σὺ φῄς,
ξυνηντίαζον: κἀξ ὁδοῦ μ' ὅ θ' ἡγεμὼν
αὐτός θ' ὁ πρέσβυς πρὸς βίαν ἠλαυνέτην.
κἀγὼ τὸν ἐκτρέποντα, τὸν τροχηλάτην,
παίω δι' ὀργῆς: καί μ' ὁ πρέσβυς ὡς ὁρᾷ,
ὄχου παραστείχοντα τηρήσας, μέσον
κάρα διπλοῖς κέντροισί μου καθίκετο.
οὐ μὴν ἴσην γ' ἔτισεν, ἀλλὰ συντόμως
σκήπτρῳ τυπεὶς ἐκ τῆσδε χειρὸς ὕπτιος
μέσης ἀπήνης εὐθὺς ἐκκυλίνδεται:
κτείνω δὲ τοὺς ξύμπαντας.

> When in my journeying [ὁδοιπορῶν] I was close to that intersection of three roads [which Jocasta has already mentioned as the scene of Laius’ murder], there I encountered [ξυνηντίαζον] a herald and a man mounted upon a horse-drawn carriage, just as you described; the leader and the old man himself tried to drive [ἠλαυνέτην] me off the road by force. The one who was trying to turn me aside [τὸν ἐκτρέποντα], the charioteer, I struck out of anger; when the old man saw this, he kept a lookout as I was passing alongside [παραστείχοντα] the carriage, and then came down hard [καθίκετο] on the crown of my head with his double goad. Yet he was paid back with interest:[26] with a summary blow

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[26] This is Jebb’s turn of phrase, but is still as close to perfect as an English translation can get at rendering οὐ μὴν ἴσην γ' ἔτισεν (lit. “he was not compensated in equal measure”) with the proper tone (Jebb 111, trans.). For as alien a language as ancient Greek is, even the distance of two and a half millennia cannot completely efface the grim braggadocio that suffuses Oedipus’ anecdote here, nor the shudder one must feel at the chilling nonchalance of 813.

> from the staff held in this very hand, he rolled [ἐκκυλίνδεται] straight out of the carriage and flat on his back [ὕπτιος]. And then I killed them all.

The implicit and metaphorical hostility that suffused Oedipus’ language in describing the events that led to his departure from Corinth now appears in the context of explicit and literal combat – the murder of the man he later discovers to be his father, Laius. In the verb meaning “I met with, encountered” (ξυνηντίαζον 804), the confrontation is represented as hostile even before it becomes hostile in fact. Once this happens, the passage’s verbs vividly capture the highly animated and physical clash between the opponents: “drive hard” (ἠλαυνέτην 805), “turn aside” or “push out of the way” (ἐκτρέποντα 806), “come down hard” (καθίκετο 809) “roll out flat on one’s back” (ὕπτιος […] ἐκκυλίνδεται 811f). Despite the fact that it shares with the preceding narrative a common language derived from hostile encounter, what is it that makes this passage so brusque and unsettling in comparison – what makes us abhor rather than admire Oedipus’ inexorable forward drive at this moment?

I propose that the language of confrontation in this passage is distinctly unlike that of the preceding passage when judged according to the opposition of flight and pursuit. Since Oedipus never expresses any specific motivation on his part to travel to Thebes that would justify particular haste or persistence – the way that, for instance, his journey to Delphi did – his aggression here seems all the more arbitrary. By his own admission, Thebes is simply a place other than Corinth where, in the absence of his parents, he believes he can safely evade the fulfillment of the Delphic oracle (796f) – a place where he can exist indefinitely in perpetual flight. The term here translated as “journeying” (ὁδοιπορῶν = walking, wayfaring, lit. ‘making one’s way on the road’) conveys just this tone of arbitrary perambulation, and acquires an even more sinister cast by recalling the Chorus' testimony that the regicide was carried out by "highwaymen" (ὁδοιπόρων 292) – a genitive noun that differs only in its accent from the verb form that Oedipus uses to describe his travels. Furthermore, Oedipus never offers any reason external to the moment of confrontation that would justify such a violent assertion of his own right-of-way other than his implicit eagerness to flee Corinth. While his assault, and then his wholesale slaughter, of Laius and his retinue could have been acquitted under contemporary Athenian law as self-defense[27] – the driver does, after all, provoke him first (804f) – his narrative indicates that his primary motivation for going to such extremes was the fact that his victims simply refused to get out of his way. Jonathan Lear artfully assimilates Oedipus' parricide on the highway to his encounter with Teiresias precisely by means of the figure of the obstructed path: "Laius blocked [Oedipus'] physical path to Thebes, Tiresias blocks his mental path to a conclusion, and in each case Oedipus strikes a retaliatory blow." Even more provocatively, Lear goes so far as to suggest that the scene with Tiresias symbolically repeats the murder of Laius: both figures obstruct Oedipus' fugitive mobility, so they become subject to his murderous pursuit.[28]

Even this neat symmetry of flight and pursuit, however, does not quite reach the source of the real horror in this brief narrative: this can only be understood when we contrast the role of Oedipus' will to interpret in his departure from Corinth with its role here in the confrontation with Laius. And here we are brought up short by the fact that the cool reportage and self-assured brutality that mark Oedipus' narrative tone indicate that he quite literally never gave his actions a second thought: he never paused once to make sense of them. Unlike the symbolic aggression he suffers at the hands of the Corinthian drunkard, which becomes the occasion for a fairly ambitious hermeneutic expedition, Oedipus has been completely unconcerned about the possible larger significance of his own literal aggression – it has simply never presented itself as a point of departure for his interpretive perambulations. Just as Oedipus' interpretive pursuit was motivated by a will to approach and to know, this will becomes inseparably combined with a will to ignore and to evade: his mobility serves flight and pursuit in equal measure. As Lear writes, Oedipus characteristically "is under so much pressure to get to his conclusion that there is no time to grasp the full meaning of what he is doing" (44). Both the drive to interpret and the drive *not* to interpret are equally served by the ability to overcome resistance and, above all, to remain in continuous motion.

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[27] This not unimportant point has been acknowledged in scholarship since at least C.M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), 164-165.

[28] Jonathan Lear, "Knowingness and Abandonment: An Oedipus for Our Time," in: *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998), 44.

Once we account for the broader context that prompts Oedipus' narrative of pursuit and flight here, however, it becomes clear that the primary significance of his anecdote lies in the interpretive 'second thoughts' that he is now forced to apply to it, and in the risks that those second thoughts suddenly uncover in his interpretive enterprise. As we shall soon see, in order to proceed beyond the point he has reached, Oedipus' kinesis must now turn around, reflect upon itself, and reverse its route, making the object of his pursuit converge with that of his flight. In an effort to refute Teiresias' troubling prophecies about Oedipus' crimes, Jocasta has been relating how comparable prophecies given to Laius – to the effect that he would be murdered by his own son – were never fulfilled, since he was killed by highwaymen "at a place where three roads meet" (ἐν τριπλαῖς ἁμαξιτοῖς 716). She therefore advises Oedipus to disregard Teiresias' statements, saying "These are the sorts of things that prophetic statements set forth [διώρισαν, ‘to distinguish, determine, define,’ lit. ‘to separate by drawing boundaries’] – but you should take no heed [ἐντρέπου, lit. ‘to turn towards’] whatsoever of these things” (τοιαῦτα φῆμαι μαντικαὶ διώρισαν, / ὧν ἐντρέπου σὺ μηδέν 723f).[29] In figurative terms, Jocasta tells Oedipus not only to disregard boundaries – something he has already made a career of, in moral, geographical, and hermeneutic terms – but also not to *turn towards* the interpretive statements that have hampered the momentum of his inquiry the most. Nonetheless, her offhand mention of the *place* where Laius was killed has, ironically and quite unforeseeably, delivered a shock to her husband’s momentum – it has compelled him to ‘epistrophize,’ to *turn around* so as to confront in a new light the literal and figurative terrain he has passed over. The force of this shock has shifted a marginal and near-forgotten past experience to the very center of Oedipus’ attention and anxiety, where its bare outlines have suddenly been filled with the horrendous possibilities of meaning and consequence that he dwells on after completing his narrative (813-833). The identification of the place where the crime was committed, furthermore, has made Oedipus’ experience alter *its* place in the context of his interpretation, just as he has constantly altered his own place and his own context all along – by crossing boundaries, overcoming resistances, and solving riddles. The risks of Oedipus’ incessant motion, in a very real sense, have started to come home to him – and they do so by enacting a dramatic reversal in his interpretive direction.

Considering the subjective effect of the shift in meaning Oedipus experiences, we should not be surprised that he chooses to express the immediate effect of his recognition as an intense vertigo that dislodges every object of sense and thought from its place and sets it in headlong motion: “while I was listening to you, my wife, what a wandering of the soul [ψυχῆς πλάνημα] and a stirring-up of the mind [ἀνακίνησις φρενῶν] just now took hold of me!” (οἷόν μ' ἀκούσαντ' ἀρτίως ἔχει, γύναι, / ψυχῆς πλάνημα κἀνακίνησις φρενῶν 726f). The “wandering of the soul” that Oedipus experiences here directly recalls the “wanderings of thought” he undertook on behalf of the plague-ridden city (φροντίδος πλάνοις 67), not least of all because both words for “wandering” share a common root (πλάνημα and πλάνοις [n.] > πλανάω [v.] = to wander, stray, err). Whereas his previous wandering (at 67) had an active character, the same wandering now (at 726) assumes a passive character (μ' […] ἔχει 726), almost as if Oedipus can no longer control his power to move himself or others towards the truth through interpretation – as if his kinesis itself had suddenly turned around to confront him as a powerful and autonomous being, a hostile *daimon* that has done the moving and controlling all along (qv. 1299-1302). Appropriately, Jocasta’s reaction to Oedipus’ outburst again describes this abrupt and unsettling turnaround with an epistrophic figure. Her somewhat convoluted question translates literally as “having been turned around [ὑποστραφεὶς] by what source of anxiety do you say this?” (ποίας μερίμνης τοῦθ' ὑποστραφεὶς λέγεις; 728). The further progress of the inquiry after this point in the play repeats, in varied forms, the epistrophic reversal he suffers here – the first crucial ‘turning point’ in Oedipus’ perambulations.

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[29] Jocasta uses precisely the same verb, and nearly the same phrasing, later in the play when Oedipus is on the verge of discovering all and she is vainly trying to dissuade him: “Take no heed of anything” (μηδὲν ἐντραπῇς 1056; lit. “turn towards nothing”; ἐντραπῇς [subj.] > ἐντρέπω, ‘to turn towards’).

Nonetheless, the epistrophy that Oedipus experiences would only be of limited interest if it did not also implicate the experience of the reader and/or spectator in the risks it reveals – that is, if it did not directly pose a challenge to the direction and meaning of our own interpretive kinesis in making sense of the play. This challenge only becomes clear, in fact, when we interpret epistrophically, re-opening the question of kinesis in the play’s opening section from the vantage point of its crisis and discovering how the risk of turning around is inscribed in Oedipus’ interpretive mobility – and in our own – from its very beginnings. Without belaboring the passages already discussed, we can say that there are two immediately identifiable levels on which, for both Oedipus and the reader, kinesis already contains the risk of epistrophy in the first portion of the play: one might be called structural or macroscopic, and the other semantic or microscopic.

On the semantic level, one of Oedipus’ responses to Creon provides a particularly striking example of how, even in the course of a single utterance, the structure and meaning of Oedipus’ own language move, shift, and turn back upon themselves. From the viewpoint of the reader/spectator, Oedipus’ reply performs an ingenious combination of kinesis and epistrophy, embodying in the semantic movement of its language both the virtues and the risks of Oedipus’ interpretive mobility. When Creon asks whether he should report the message from Delphi in public rather than in the privacy of the palace, Oedipus replies: “Give your report before all these men, for I bear the sorrow more on their behalf than I do for my own soul” (ἐς πάντας αὔδα· τῶνδε γὰϱ πλέον φέϱω / τὸ πένθος ἢ καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς πέϱι 93f). My admittedly flat translation does not capture the real figurative thrust of the statement, which inheres in its syntax rather than its diction or imagery. The sequence of words in recitation necessitates that an auditor would initially understand τῶνδε γὰϱ πλέον φέϱω / τὸ πένθος to mean “I bear more sorrow than they,” i.e. that Oedipus’ sufferings, as the unknowing murderer of his father and defiler of his mother, exceed even those imposed on plague-ridden Thebes. Upon hearing the rest of the statement, the genitive τῶνδε, originally understood as a genitive of comparison (“than they”), would consequently shift its meaning to an objective genitive (“for them” or “on their behalf”); likewise, πλέον (“more”) shifts from an adjective modifying τὸ πένθος (“more sorrow”) to an adverb modifying φέρω (“I bear it more for this than for that reason”).[30] The auditor’s initial interpretation of the statement – an entirely adequate one, given the semantic material and syntactic structure already communicated – yields to another which is diametrically opposed in meaning. This second interpretation, based on the complete communication, demonstrates that the initial interpretation was quite literally headed in the wrong direction, that it was actually in flight from the meaning it pursued. The turnabout or epistrophy that the auditor is compelled to perform in order to reach the intended meaning, however, carries with it the ironic awareness that the initial interpretation – that Oedipus is describing the greater burden imposed by his own crimes – is, in fact, more true than the second, intended meaning, which is as good as a red herring in the long view. Unlike the more straightforward tragic irony that blankets the *OT*, this kind of "enunciatory irony," made possible by the syntactic and semantic flexibility of ancient Greek on the one hand and the temporally-bound character of dramatic performance on the other, has only sporadically been recognized as a major factor in the play's poetic and dramatic effects.[31] It depends on the fact that auditors do not establish the meaning of a given statement only at its end, but are rather engaged in interpretation during the entire process of utterance – that the mind of the interpreter, like Oedipus, is constantly in motion.[32] By the same token, the reader/auditor of the play is compelled by syntactic figures such as these to perform the same interpretive movements as Oedipus himself, who simultaneously pursues and flees from the truth, and whose drama is enacted as a series of abrupt and unforeseeable turnabouts in meaning. The risk of epistrophy that we incur by interpreting Oedipus, like the risk Oedipus incurs by interpreting the plague, is that the momentum built up by our own interpretive language may actually rebound upon its own limits, revealing not the meaning of its object, but the degree to which our own language has led us astray from that meaning.

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[30] A philological note. I read the close proximity of πλέον [‘more’] and τῶνδε [initially: ‘than they’] as immediately suggesting to the auditor a comparative phrase rather than the more remote possibility of an adverb and an objective genitive. After all, the auditor only hears ἢ, the alternate particle of comparison (which excludes the possibility of a comparison with the genitive; cf. Smyth 1433), several words after this initial interpretation has already been established, i.e. in the middle of the next verse and well after the main verb φέρω (‘I bear’). It is worth noting that the major commentators by and large only admit the possibility of this initial, ‘aberrant’ reading of 93-94 negatively, i.e. by explicitly seeking to steer their readers away from it and toward the final, ‘true’ reading I identify here. Jebb reads πλέον as an adverb and τῶνδε as an objective genitive with τὸ πένθος (= “sorrow for these people”), consequently translating these lines as “The sorrow which I bear is *for these* more than for mine own life.” (The scholiast Jebb cites also apparently felt the need to gloss these difficult lines: περὶ τούτων πλέον ἀγωνίζομαι ἢ περὶ τῆς ἐμαυτοῦ ψυχῆς [“I exert myself [*sic*] for these people more than for my own soul”].) Jebb’s reading thus elides what I am proposing as the initial or ‘false’ interpretation and cleaves firmly to the final or ‘true’ one. Dawe, probably following Jebb, takes the objective genitive for granted in his note and translates similarly: “The sorrow I feel for these people weighs more with me than where my own life is concerned.” Dawe does, however, sense a shift in syntax here, but locates the crucial turn at the very end of 94, i.e. after πέρι (‘for’): “When we reach this last word a slight anacolouthon becomes noticeable, for τῶνδε (93) is governed by τὸ πένθος [‘sorrow’], but τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς [‘my own soul’] by πέρι, and πένθος is not exactly the feeling that Oedipus would have for his own life.” While Dawe may be right about Oedipus’ diction, the conclusion he ultimately draws, however, proves unsatisfying: “More than Aeschylus or Euripides, Sophocles likes to mirror in his own verse the imprecisions of real speech.” Nonetheless, and unlike Jebb, Dawe does register some of the ironic undertoe in the line: “In reality Oedipus’ own life *is* concerned, and threatened by more than just the plague.” The initial, ‘aberrant’ reading of these lines that I develop here is not intended to supplant the final, ‘orthodox’ reading formulated by the commentators; rather, it is designed to supplement the latter by demonstrating how the enunciatory character of the Sophoclean text unlocks additional, highly resonant layers of meaning that a more straightforward, ‘problem-oriented’ philological treatment can overlook.

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[31] Segal's brilliant reading of *OT* 73f is comparable, though not identical, in its method (Segal 229-230).

[32] In comparison to the auditor of the performed drama, the reader of Sophocles' dramatic text – especially the contemporary reader whose native language is not ancient Greek – has a decisive disadvantage in perceiving this kind of semantic shift. John Gould is one of the few critics to acknowledge the differences in properly literary experience between the auditor and the reader of the *OT*: "It is a play of which the theatergoer's experience is very different from that of the reader of the play-text. For the latter, it seems all too easy to restructure the play in the memory according to a logical or chronological sequence which is quite different from the one Sophocles has given it, and then to draw inferences from the remembered structure that are quite alien to the play as Sophocles wrote it for performance." Gould, in: Bloom (ed.) 207-208. What Gould claims for the play as a whole is equally true for its constituent parts: the sense we tend to make as *readers* of Sophocles' individual words in sequence, and the syntactic structures in which they are placed, departs considerably from the sense we tend to make of the same words as *listeners*. I believe this is mostly because the traditional method of reading a Greek text privileges the visual and conceptual image of the complete sentence, grasped in its syntactic and semantic entirety, over the partial or perspectival interpretations which inevitably develop in the process of reading, but which more often exert their proper effect only in the experience of listening. This idea bears all the more force in the interpretation of the *OT*, if not Sophoclean tragedy in general, in which so much of the poetry depends upon bold and unsettling enjambments, double or triple meanings, and ambiguous syntax – all of which are already mainstays of the scholarly tradition, and all of which depend to some degree on temporal and aural sequence. With a poet of such redoubtable magnitude as Sophocles, and in a drama where very little actually happens but a great number of things change their meaning, is it not worth considering that the gaps, ambiguities, and shifts in meaning we perceive in the text might not merely be a concession to colloquial realism – a dubious contention amid the high artifice of Greek tragedy – but rather an integral part of the text's design as an aural and temporal experience, and not just a visual one? — I would like to acknowledge the extraordinarily fertile and provocative conversations I have shared with Nicholas Theisen which have led to this and other insights on the text of the *OT*; I can scarcely take credit for them alone.

On the macroscopic level of the play's overall structure, Oedipus quite literally identifies the inquiry into Laius' murder as an epistrophy at its very inception, but not without unwittingly putting his finger on the risks that accompany his subsequent moves toward the truth. Once Creon admits that the Thebans had neglected the prosecution of Laius' murderer because of their more immediate concern with the Sphinx (130f), Oedipus says he will open the inquiry afresh: "Then I will bring these same things [sc. the "obscure matters" Creon mentions at 131] to light all over again from the beginning [ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς αὖθις]. Most worthily has Phoebus Apollo, and worthily have you insisted upon this regard [ἐπιστροφήν = *epistrophē*, attention, respect, regard; lit. 'turning-around, twisting'] for the deceased" (ἀλλ' ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς αὖθις αὔτ' ἐγὼ φανῶ. / ἐπαξίως γὰρ Φοῖβος, ἀξίως δὲ σὺ / πρὸ τοῦ θανόντος τήνδ' ἔθεσθ' ἐπιστροφήν 132ff). For Oedipus, on the one hand, this statement means that the kinesis of his inquiry, which proceeds toward the truth and the future deliverance of the city, paradoxically depends upon a recursive epistrophy that recedes ever more deeply into the obscure distances of the past. Hermeneutic progress and regress can no longer be distinguished in this circular path, forged equally of kinesis and epistrophy. From this viewpoint, Oedipus' travels unfold as if he keeps one foot in continuous motion and the other firmly fixed: the end and the beginning of the interpreter's path coincide, with horrible precision. For the reader/spectator of the play, on the other hand, this same statement proves to be prophetic insofar as we try to approach, understand, and overcome Oedipus himself through our own interpretive moves, and incur the same risks along the way. He is a destination that we reach only when, like him, we remain in continuous motion: beginning from the beginning over and over again, constantly moving forward in false confidence and turning around again to reconsider in fear and doubt. The interpreter never arrives, and he never departs: he only wanders.

## 3. In A Lonely Place: Interpretive Responsibility and the Crisis of Topography

Oedipus' wandering from place to place, however, is no ordinary wandering. His impetus is so strong, the various points he connects so far-flung, and the interpretive leaps by which he moves from one to the next so bold that he draws the stable mapping of place itself into the undertow of his interpretive kinesis. As Charles Segal's work has shown, Oedipus blurs the boundaries that separate the human from the divine, on the one hand, and ordered, civilized space from disordered, savage wilderness, on the other.[33] As opposed to the collective topography inherited from the Archaic age that reflects these distinctions, Oedipus' remapping of place finds its mobile center in the individual interpreter, whose concern is not so much his static location as his kinetic destination. By examining how the traditional mapping of place inherited from the Archaic age informs the *OT,* we can thus begin to appreciate how Oedipus' interpretive kinesis accomplishes a destabilization of place and space even as he struggles to reassert traditional topographic categories through his interpretive thinking. In the language of the first stasimon (463-512), for instance, the relationship of interpretive responsibility between Archaic topography and the kinesis of Oedipus plays itself out in the ambiguities and ironies that undermine the Chorus' vocabulary of place from within. As the Chorus applies the normative Archaic terms to map the symbolic location of the solitary and outcast criminal, they fail to recognize this same criminal in the central and authoritative figure of Oedipus. Through his kinetic crossing and recrossing of the spatial boundaries that distinguish human from divine, native from alien, and human citizen from solitary animal, Oedipus' tacit role as the true object of the Chorus' discourse does more than reveal the tensions and ambiguities inscribed within the Archaic vocabulary. More importantly, it indicates how the kinetic subject of Sophocles' 5th century enlightenment, so perfectly embodied by Oedipus, first makes itself complicit in, and then tragically succumbs to, the very same contradictions it reveals with such clarity.[34] For all his power to change places, Oedipus remains perennially out of place: he defines ectopia as the native habitat of the interpreter. While the terms of the Archaic topography eventually reassert their authoritative claim on the meaning of place by condemning him, the audience must still confront Oedipus himself, *qua* interpreter, as the embodied riddle of politics and place in the *polis* – a riddle that evades every response.

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[33] Segal *passim*. Compare, however, the predominantly vertical orientation of Segal's spatial taxonomy ("Man is threatened by the beast world pushing up from below, but he is also illuminated by the radiance of the Olympian gods above" [3]; qv. 227) – probably under the influence of Freud's topographic model of the psychoanalytic subject – as opposed to the mainly horizontal orientation of the topography I investigate in this section. Despite these and other differences of varying importance, my debts to structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to classical literature, such as those of Segal and Jean-Pierre Vernant in particular, should be clear enough in the present discussion.

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[34] While it lies outside the scope of the present discussion to offer a broader, culturally- and historically-oriented analysis of how the *OT* might in part reflect contemporary anxieties about the denaturing of Archaic topography, I need only refer the interested reader to the meticulous and pioneering historical research of Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Clisthène l'Athénien: essai sur la représentation de l'espace et du temps dans la pensée politique grecque de la fin du VIe siècle à la mort de Platon* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964), of which the most recent English translation is *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An Essay on the Representation of Space and Time in Greek Political Thought from the End of the Sixth Century to the Death of Plato*, trans. David Ames Curtis (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996); see esp. 9-17, 81-97. Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet explore how the political reforms at Athens at the end of the 6th century BCE led to a wholesale reconceptualization of space and time that emerged in tandem with the intellectual florescence of 5th century Athens.

In order to understand how Oedipus' kinetic vocabulary of place defines itself in response to a normative vocabulary in the *OT*, we must first articulate the nature of this normative vocabulary in its historically- and culturally-bound character. In other words, we must ask what specific experience of movement and space informs the tragedy, what meaningful structure this experience has, and how Oedipus' kinesis foregrounds the tensions and ambiguities at work within it. The structure of topographic experience in the Archaic age forms the subject of Jean-Pierre Vernant's 1963 essay "Hestia-Hermes: The Religious Expression of Space and Movement in Ancient Greece."[35] Vernant takes as his point of departure the pairing of Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, and Hermes, the messenger-god, on the base of Pheidias' statue of Zeus at Olympia, on which the twelve Olympian gods are depicted in such pairs (157). To Vernant, the Hestia-Hermes combination presents the only pairing for which there is no ready explanation in the logic of Greek myth. Rather than dismissing their joint representation as an idiosyncrasy of Pheidias' work, Vernant suggests that "the two powers are present in the same places and carry out their complementary activities side by side. [… O]ne could say that Hermes and Hestia are 'neighbors'" (158). Vernant goes on to argue that the Hermes-Hestia polarity expressed the Archaic experience of space and movement in the anthropomorphic terms of Greek religion. As Vernant writes:

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[35] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Hestia-Hermes: The Religious Expression of Space and Movement in Ancient Greece," in: *id.*, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, trans. Janet Lloyd with Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 157-196. This essay is an English translation of "Hestia-Hermes: Sur l'expression religieuse de l'espace et du movement chez les Grecs," *L'Homme: Revue française d'anthropologie* 3 (1963), 12-50, which was republished in *id.*, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1965).

> To Hestia belongs the world of the interior, the enclosed, the stable, the retreat of the human group within itself; to Hermes, the outside world, opportunity, movement, interchange with others. It could be said that, by virtue of their polarity, the Hermes-Hestia couple represents the marked tension in the Archaic conception of space: space requires a center, a nodal point, with a special value, from which all directions, all qualitatively different, may be channeled and defined; yet, at the same time, space is the medium of movement, implying the possibility of transition and passage from any point to another (161).

Thus the Archaic experience of space was organized in gendered and polarized terms, in which a static, immobile center associated with the feminine Hestia was contrasted with a dynamic, mobile periphery associated with the masculine Hermes (163-164). The experience of movement was accordingly defined in terms of its centrifugal or centripetal character, what we might call its respectively Hermic or Hestic tendency. Vernant's exposition of this polarity in Archaic religious thought, furthermore, establishes the points of tension and ambiguity that are exploited so effectively in the figure of Oedipus.

Drawing on a wide range of literary, archaeological, and anthropological evidence, Vernant articulates the rich and far-reaching image of Hestia in the Archaic religious imagination, expressed in forms ranging from the gender-based division of labor in Greek domestic life to the architecture of the Greek household itself. Hestia's tangible embodiment, the circular household hearth, "is the navel that ties the house to the earth. It is the symbol and pledge of fixity, immutability, and permanence […], the node and starting point of the orientation and arrangement of human space" (158-159). Just as the physical space of the household was centered on the hearth as a kind of immovable axis, so the affective, economic, and religious connections between members of the same household found their figurative axis in the warmth provided by the hearth, the sustenance shared in common around its edges, and the connection it created to the realm of the divine. Wherever a member of the household might travel, his life and person were bound to this hearth and those who shared it with him: the common hearth thus embodied the set of specific and indissoluble bonds that separated and distinguished the family group from the outside world. As Vernant writes, “Hestia thus expresses – by pushing it to its limits – the [household’s] tendency toward self-isolation and withdrawal, as though the ideal for the family should be complete self-sufficiency, which means total economic self-sufficiency and strict endogamy in marriage” (165).[36] While this latter ideal was, of course, never attained in cultural reality, Vernant details how the Hestic attraction to the economic and affective autonomy of the family unit left its distinct mark on Archaic rituals of marriage, naming, and patrimony. The firm distinction thus created between insiders and outsiders by the rituals centered on the Hestic hearth imbued the Greek vocabulary of domestic relations with strong connections to the interior space of the *oikos* (οἶκος, ‘household,’ also ‘the members of a household’) and the hearth itself.[37] As part of the same delineating function, however, Hestia also presided over the rituals of guest-friendship or *xenia* (ξένια) whereby outsiders could be integrated into the community of the hearth to share in its sustenance, its affections, and its connection to the divine. “The center symbolized by Hestia, therefore, not only defines a closed and isolated world but also presupposes, as a corollary, other, analogous centers. Through the exchange of goods and the movement of people – women, heralds, ambassadors, guests, and table companions – a network of ‘alliances’ is built up among domestic groups” (174). Both as the divine custodian of insider-outsider relations and as the central architectural feature of the family dwelling, Hestia thus exerted a centripetal, stabilizing, and ultimately conservative force within the clan-based social organization of the Archaic age.

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[36] The significance of this ‘endogamous ideal’ in relation to the Oedipus myth should speak for itself.

[37] Inmates of the household are called *sunontes* (συνόντες, “those who live together, associate with one another, or are joined together”), *sunoikoi* (σύνοικοι, “those who share a dwelling”), or *sunestioi* (συνέστιοι, “those who share a hearth”); the blanket term for these relations, but also for the strongest and closest affective relations with non-household members, is *philoi* (φίλοι, “relatives, friends, loved ones”). Outsiders to the household can be referred to either as *xenoi* (ξένοι, “guests, strangers, foreigners”), in a neutral or positive light, or in a negative light as *echthroi* (ἐχθροί “hated or hateful ones, enemies”).

Whereas Hestia, as goddess of the domestic interior, embodied the permanence of the family unit and its centeredness in a specific place and specific relationships, the god Hermes performed the complementary function for the space either liminal or exterior to the household and the activities proper to these areas. Against the stability and centrality of the Hestic hearth, Hermes presided over a dynamic periphery characterized by mobility, contact, exchange, and transformation. By virtue of this basic character trait, he was the multifarious patron deity of messengers, thieves, travelers, crossroads, and thresholds, and accompanied the souls of the recently deceased into the underworld (Vernant 159-161). As Vernant describes him, Hermes' entire character consists in crossing-over, passing-beyond, becoming-other:

> Nothing about [Hermes] is settled, stable, permanent, restricted, or definite. He represents, in space and in the human world, movement and flow, mutation and transition, contact among foreign elements. In the house, his place is at the door, protecting the threshold, repelling thieves because he is himself the thief […] for whom no lock, no barricade, no frontier exists. […] In mingling with humanity, Hermes remains at once elusive and ubiquitous. He makes an abrupt appearance where least expected, only to disappear again immediately. […] He wears the helmet of Hades, which grants the wearer invisibility, and winged sandals that do away with distance. He carries a magic wand that transforms all he touches. He is the unpredictable, the uncontrollable (160).

As a deity of contingency and interchange, the domain of Hermes encompassed all the enterprises that required human beings to leave the safe and stable enclosure of the household, to depart from the secure warmth and familiar company of the Hestic hearth, and move beyond the threshold. It was for this reason that in the Archaic cultural imagination, the Hestic *oikos* possessed an essentially feminine character, while the mobile and aggressive aspect of the Hermic beyond had a masculine one:

> In Greek, the domestic sphere, the enclosed space that is roofed over (protected), has a feminine connotation; the exterior, the open air, has a masculine one. The woman's domain is the house. That is her place, and, as a rule, she should not leave it. In contrast, in the *oikos*, the man represents the centrifugal element. It is for him to leave the reassuring enclosure of the home, to confront the fatigues

> and dangers of the outside world, to brave the unknown, to establish contact with the outside, to enter into negotiations with strangers. Whether he is engaged in work, war, trade, social contracts, or public life, whether he is in the country or the *agora*, on sea or on land, man's activities are oriented towards the outside (163-164).

The stable center and the mobile periphery were thus made symbolically dependent upon each other, just as male and female members of the family performed mutually opposed roles that nonetheless supported each other. The polarized concept of Archaic space was thus reflected and reinforced not only in the gender roles of practical life, but in the imaginary pairing of Hestia and Hermes. These deities "fulfill their functions as a couple: the existence of the one implies that of the other. […] Furthermore, their very complementarity implies a contradiction or internal tension in each of them that gives their characters as gods a fundamental ambiguity" (174). Pheidias' pairing, then, represents a fragile harmony maintained against a background of tense antagonism: only by expressing contradictory tendencies in the experience of space, by moving in diametrically opposite directions, can Hestia and Hermes work towards a common purpose.

How is the Archaic topography of center and periphery deployed in the text of the *OT*, and how might its deployment reflect the tensions and ambiguities in its structure that are suggested by Vernant's historical analysis? In the first stasimon (463-482), the chorus of Theban elders contemplates the identity and whereabouts of the murderer in language that directly evokes the topography of Archaic religion and culture. Although the Chorus is far from ready to embrace the idea, however, Teiresias' accusations in the preceding episode (300-462) have opened up the possibility that Oedipus, who occupies the central position of political power and interpretive skill in all of Thebes, has committed crimes that render him outcast from civilized humanity. In the range of associations the chorus seeks to create between the realm peripheral to the *polis* and the outcast murderer, their application of Archaic spatial categories unwittingly generates a cluster of paradoxes focused on Oedipus himself. Despite his symbolic place at the center of the city, as “the holder of the community’s secular power and the representative of its norms and laws,”[38] he is in fact the outcast and fugitive murderer they condemn. The passage thus not only offers us a point of entry for exploring how the *OT* invokes Archaic spatial categories only to destabilize them, but also begins to reveal some of the ironies surrounding Oedipus’ interpretive ectopia. In the public forum before the royal household, the Chorus begins to sing:

τίς ὅντιν' ἁ θεσπιέπει-
α Δελφὶς ᾗδε πέτρα
ἄρρητ' ἀρρήτων τελέσαν-
τα φοινίαισι χερσίν;
ὥρα νιν ἀελλάδων
ἵππων σθεναρώτερον
φυγᾷ πόδα νωμᾶν.
ἔνοπλος γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἐπενθρῴσκει
πυρὶ καὶ στεροπαῖς ὁ Διὸς γενέτας,
δειναὶ δ' ἅμ' ἕπονται
Κῆρες ἀναπλάκητοι.

ἔλαμψε γὰρ τοῦ νιφόεν-
τος ἀρτίως φανεῖσα
φήμα Παρνασοῦ τὸν ἄδη-
λον ἄνδρα πάντ' ἰχνεύειν.
φοιτᾷ γὰρ ὑπ' ἀγρίαν
ὕλαν ἀνά τ' ἄντρα καὶ
πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος
μέλεος μελέῳ ποδὶ χηρεύων,
τὰ μεσόμφαλα γᾶς ἀπονοσφίζων
μαντεῖα: τὰ δ' ἀεὶ
ζῶντα περιποτᾶται. (463-482)

> Who is this man, whom the oracular stone of Delphi knew to have committed utterly unspeakable acts with his murderous hands? It is time for him to ply a foot in flight that is mightier than storm-swift horses. Fully armed, the offspring of Zeus [sc. Apollo] leaps upon him with fire and lightning-bolt, and along with him follow the terrible unerring Furies.

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[38] Gould, in: Bloom (ed.) 211.

> Just now, there shone forth the manifest voice from snowy Parnassus, that we must by all means hunt down the unknown man. For he has his haunts among the savage woods and in the caves like a bull of the rocks, a miserable exile with a miserable path to tread, keeping himself far from the oracular navel of the world; he hovers about those things which live forever.

Given the traditional role of the tragic chorus as a kind of deliberative body that communicates the significance of dramatic events for the collectives that exist both inside and outside the world of the drama,[39] what should strike us immediately about this passage is the way its main accent falls on places and figures which are far removed from the centralized and collective milieu of *polis* life. First, however, we must consider the figurative language through which the Chorus defines the center and the periphery of this landscape against each other, and the values and functions they attach to each. The "Delphic stone" (Δελφὶς […] πέτρα 464) that stands at the "navel of the earth" (τὰ μεσόμφαλα γᾶς […] μαντεῖα 480f.; cf. 899) and "speaks oracles" (θεσπιέπεια 463f.) marks the definitive center of the space described by the Chorus. This smooth, round stone, often referred to as the *omphalos gēs* ("navel of the world") and strongly associated with Hestia, marked the traditional seat or hearth of Apollo, the god of prophecy, at Delphi, which was thought to be located at the center of the earth. Like the umbilical cord between mother and child, this stone served as a point of connection between the human and divine worlds, transmitting divine knowledge to mortals through the institution of the Delphic oracle (Vernant 178-180). Although this divine hearth occupies an immovable center far removed from the city of Thebes (cf. 69-75), it is nonetheless central to the collective well-being of the city. In contrast to the distant fixity of the oracle that knows the "utterly unspeakable things" (ἄρρητ' ἀρρήτων 465) committed by the murderer’s “bloody hands” (φοινίαισι χερσίν 466), the chorus shifts abruptly to suggesting the latter apply not his hands, but his feet, to swift flight from the Theban territory that his blood-guilt has contaminated (468; qv. 100, 110) – the immediate urgency of which command is heightened by ὥρα, “it is time” (467). The next four lines expand the imagery of the murderer’s flight to include an armed attack by Apollo himself (ὁ Διὸς γενέτας 470; qv. 1300-1302) and continuous pursuit by the terrifying Furies, who never “come short” or “go astray” (both are connotations of ἀναπλάκητοι 472). Each element of the strophe’s figurative language thus seeks to contrast the akinetic fixity of the Delphic *topos* with the kinetic and peripheral condition of Laius’ murderer.

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[39] The most recent focused treatment of the chorus in Sophocles' tragedies is Cynthia P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus: A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City: U. of Iowa Press, 1987); an older study of the same subject is R.W.B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

The question concerning the murderer’s identity, however, which the chorus indirectly addresses to the oracle – “who is it?” (τίς;, 463) – complicates this dichotomy by indicating how the oracle’s omission and the murderer’s presumed efforts to remain unknown have conspired to the same result. While his deeds are “utterly unspeakable” (465) by virtue of the piety that conceals their enormity in silence, his identity remains “unspeakable” for quite another reason – namely, the oracle’s reticence in revealing it. On this crucial point, the transmission of divine knowledge to human beings through the prophetic hearth at Delphi has failed, as the Chorus themselves have already complained (278f). The binding, centering, and stabilizing power of the Hestic center has only given rise to more Hermic uncertainties, imperfectly carrying out its role of connecting men with divine knowledge and allowing the transgressor to escape detection – as if the gods who now pursue him simultaneously conspire against their own laws to let him escape. From the human point of view, the divine center that organizes space, and that defines the identities of those who move and interact within that space, has abdicated from its ordering and stabilizing role.[40] In this abdication, moreover, the crucial ambiguity developed in the stasimon as a whole takes root. As we shall see, the distinction between the immutable center and the uncertain periphery begins to collapse as both perpetuate the same interpretive uncertainty.

The antistrophe begins by recalling both the *omphalos* that opened the strophe and the motif of flight and pursuit associated with the murderer, but in either case these motifs are marked by some significant differences. In a pregnant synesthesia, the chorus describes how the divine voice (φήμα, 475) of Apollo's oracle "has just now flashed forth from snowy [Mount] Parnassus" (ἔλαμψε […] τοῦ νιφόεντος ἀρτίως […] Παρνασοῦ, 473-475). The object of the god's communication could not be more different in character from the radiant clarity or monumental immobility of the mountain peak: Apollo commands the city to "hunt after" or "get on the track of" (ἰχνεύειν, 476) the "obscure" or "unknown man" (τὸν ἄδηλον ἄνδρα, 475f.), now a fugitive. The term *ichneuein* (ἰχνεύειν) directly recalls Oedipus' earlier reference to the "indiscernible tracks" (ἴχνος δυστέκμαρτον, 108-109; qv. 220-221) of Laius' murder, thus grafting the divine pursuit of the murderer (469-472) on to the hunting imagery associated earlier with the public inquiry: both god and man now hunt down the murderer as they would a wild animal. Similarly, the keen sense of vision necessary to find and interpret the "track" of the hunter's quarry, at both 108-109 and 475, will be tested by the visually obscure fugitive.[41] In addition to the contrast already drawn between the immobile stone at Delphi and the desperate haste of the murderer, another contrast that applies the Archaic topography – though by no means unproblematically – is drawn here between the interpretive transparency of the Delphic center and the source of obscurity or interpretive uncertainty that lies on its periphery. We will have reason to return to this ambiguity again in a moment.

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[40] Bushnell, on the other hand, sees the oracle's action not as an abdication from its proper role but as the perpetuation of this role, which is to confront the interpreter not with meaningful speech, but with silence. Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Prophesying Tragedy: Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988), 67-69.

If we compare the strophe with the antistrophe at this point, we will note that the focus on the precise manner of the murderer’s flight from Thebes in the strophe (466-468) has shifted, in the parallel verses of the antistrophe, to an evocative description of his movements in the Theban countryside prior to his flight (476-478): the murderer’s rapid, unidirectional line of flight (φυγᾷ, 468), which emphatically leads away from the *polis*, has been replaced by an evocation of the less urgent, more perambulatory, and certainly more furtive wandering implied in φοιτᾷ (“haunts,” “frequents,” “moves about in,” 477). This term aptly describes the murderer’s presumed movements while hiding in the countryside surrounding the *polis,* movements which, especially in the wake of ἰχνεύειν at 475, indeed appear similar to those of a wild game animal in a habitat consisting of “savage forest” and “caves” (ἀγρίαν ὕλαν […] ἄντρα, 476f.). “Savage” (ἀγρίαν), moreover, is a highly freighted term with which to characterize the criminal’s country haunts, as it designates the realm of wild beasts, brute violence, and untamed nature that is excluded from, and spatially peripheral to, the civilized and law-abiding existence of human beings in the *polis* (Segal 1, 32-33). The murderer thus becomes a monstrous and solitary “bull of the rocks” (πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος, 478), existing beyond the spatial and political center that defines the human. Just as his hideouts in the “savage forest” and the “caves” locate him in a realm opposed to the lawful and civilized *topos* of Thebes, so now the fact that he “holds himself aloof” or “keeps himself far” (ἀπονοσφίζων, 480) from the divine and omniscient *topos* of Delphi locates him physically and spiritually on the periphery of the god’s authority as well. His separation from Delphi, however, does not prevent him from remaining in orbit around it: in his wanderings, he “hovers about” (περιποτᾶται, 482) the imperishable *topos* of the oracle, just as in his separation from Thebes he remains in the city’s orbit through the hardship of exile and loss (479). Thus, even as his centrifugal tendency drives him away from the Delphic and Theban centers, his movements exhibit a certain centripetal tendency as well; the paradoxical combination of both these tendencies is what keeps him endlessly turning around the center, ‘hovering about’ on their periphery.

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[41] Like ἀσαφής, another favorite word of Sophocles, ἄδηλον primarily signifies lack of visual clarity.

The paradoxical character of the murderer’s movement becomes even clearer when we compare the “foot […] that is mightier than storm-swift horses” that serves as his instrument of flight in the strophe, with the “care-worn” or “miserable foot” (μελέῳ ποδὶ 479) with which he wanders the countryside “in exile” (χηρεύων, also “in a state of bereavement,” 479) here in the antistrophe. Both the swift foot that flees the center and the stumbling foot that longs to return to it, both a creature with more freedom of movement than the strongest beasts and a creature vexed and hindered by anxious suffering: not only does the murderer possess extreme mobility and pathetic frailty alike, but he also partakes in the contradictory tendencies of both Hermes and Hestia. Turning back further, we can perceive a related ambiguity in the brilliance and clarity of the divine voice issuing from Parnassus (473), which seems patently at odds with the glaring omission that prompts the Chorus’ question (464f). The image of Apollo’s clarion-voiced commandment issuing from the mountaintop also stands at odds with the impenetrable obscurity of the prophecies just delivered by Teiresias in the preceding episode (see esp. 408-428, 447-462), which derive just as directly from Apollo himself (284ff). Even Oedipus, the proven master of riddles, has declared that Teiresias’ speech is “puzzling and unclear” (αἰνικτὰ κἀσαφῆ, 439). In either case, the meaning of the divine voice consistently proves to be as duplicitous and elusive as the identity of the murderer: the hearth of the god and the outlands of the criminal are implicated in the same impenetrability, the same resistance to interpretation. In making center and periphery resemble each other, this shared resistance renders illegible the topography they map out between them.

It is no accident, furthermore, that these ambiguities emerge simultaneously within poetic figures of movement, on the one hand, and of interpretation on the other: Oedipus’ interpretive kinesis maps out the new topography on which these two figures combine and interact. Unlike the Chorus, we know that the godlike, brilliant king and the monstrous, suffering “bull of the rocks” are one and the same: as Oedipus circulates between center and periphery, he blurs the boundaries between them. Taking his own human and mobile mind as a source of prophecy (393-398), Oedipus now traces his broad circumference around that other prophetic center at Delphi, the immobile center of the world and the divine origin of truth. Each forms a center located at the other’s periphery; each pursues the truth at its own center, but also flees the truth at its periphery. In essence, Oedipus has elevated the shifting, kinetic uncertainty of the periphery to a new center and a dangerous source of authority: his center is nowhere and everywhere at once.

In the second half of the stasimon (483-512), the Chorus reacts to the uncertainties inspired in them by hearing the heated exchange between Oedipus and Teiresias. They now find themselves forced to choose between the truth of the Delphic hearth and that of Oedipus' kinetic mind – each with mutually incommensurable but equally convincing claims to authority, each inhabiting a topographic order with a center that relegates the other to the periphery. The Chorus' language registers the uncertainty of the choice they face through its vacillation between figures of intense agitation and those of total paralysis. In contrast to the first half of their song, the second strophe is sung by a collective that is no longer sure where anything stands or what anything means:

δεινά με νῦν, δεινὰ ταράσσει
σοφὸς οἰωνοθέτας
οὔτε δοκοῦντ' οὔτ' ἀποφάσκονθ',
ὅ τι λέξω δ' ἀπορῶ.
πέτομαι δ' ἐλπίσιν οὔτ', ἐν-
θάδ' ὁρῶν οὔτ' ὀπίσω. (483-488)

> Dreadfully, how dreadfully does the wise bird-augur stir up my soul [ταράσσει, also 'to move, trouble, shake'], I who can neither confirm nor deny [sc. what he has said]. As for what I should say [λέξω, i.e. confirm as true], I am utterly at a loss [ἀπορῶ, 'to be without means or resource,' lit. 'to have no path']. My soul takes wing [πέτομαι, 'to fly,' here: 'to be on the wing, flutter'] in forebodings, neither seeing what is present [ἐνθάδ[ε], lit. 'right here' or 'right now'] nor what is to come [ὀπίσω = 'what is behind us,' thus 'what has yet to be seen or known'].

The exchange between Teiresias and Oedipus has unsettled the Chorus' belief, not merely in their king, in Apollo's prophet, or in the public inquiry, but more importantly in the simple and inviolable boundaries that define the *place* they inhabit as deliberating citizens, or as receivers of divine revelation – in a word: as interpreters. Teiresias' words have stirred them up, their minds take flight like birds in countless directions – yet at the same time, they do not know where they are, where they should go, or whom they should follow. Just as their overburdening of topographic terms in the first half of the stasimon implied a certain uncertainty about their viability – a fear that revealed the ambiguities in these terms even as it sought to conceal them – so now their uncertainty about place comes to speech in its own right. All at once, the lines on the map have been erased, and neither god, nor man, nor city is spared the repercussions.

In Thebes' situation, there is certainly reason enough to declare, as the Chorus does in the pithy phrase that closes the second stasimon, that "divine things are going astray" (ἔϱϱει δὲ τὰ θεῖα 910). The immutable dwelling-places of the gods, along with the divine dominion over nature and man to which these places gave concrete expression in space, have quite literally begun to wander away from their rightful places and out of their proper roles.[42] Furthermore, and despite his virtuoso mobility in pursuit of – and in flight from – the truth, Oedipus' struggle against the political and religious erosion of space must proceed from willful oblivion to his own moral and physical location. This, above all, is the significance of the locative terms in Teiresias' accusation against Oedipus: "You have sight, and yet you do not see *where* you stand in evil, nor *where* you dwell, nor *with whom* you live" (emphasis mine; σὺ καὶ δέδοϱκας κοὐ βλέπεις ἵν' εἶ κακοῦ, / οὐδ' ἔνθα ναίεις, οὐδ' ὅτων οἰκεῖς μέτα 413f, qv. 366f). For as much as the newfound intellectual mobility of 5th century Athens had opened up new and unimagined pathways to knowledge and action, Oedipus' fate demonstrates that such extreme mobility blurs the map that would have served as a guide to these new roads, breaking the links between the center and periphery of space, on the one hand, and truth and error in interpretation, on the other. The interpretive traveler could go virtually anywhere, but only on the condition that, like Oedipus, he would never know for sure where he stood.

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[42] See Burkert 22-24 for an excellent reading of this passage and its context.

## 4. The Plague of Voices: From Confronting Noise to Becoming Noise

In the first part of my discussion here, I explained how the kinetic nature of Oedipus' interpretive method exposes him to certain risks as an agent of interpretation. From this perspective, Oedipus' relationship to the object of his inquiry can be adequately characterized as both a dogged pursuit after the truth – discovering his parentage, solving the Sphinx's riddle, bringing Laius' killer to justice – and a headlong flight away from it – evading the Delphic oracle, living in exile from Corinth, ignoring or concealing his murderous past. The risk of this kinetic method that fuses pursuit and flight lies in the possibility of epistrophy – that is, that the straight-line path of kinesis might, in fact, be a subtle curve, eventually turning the interpreter around to confront both the terminus of his pursuit and the origin of his flight in one and the same truth. What this risk of epistrophy reveals more generally about the condition of interpretation is the fact that the path of the interpreter is equally determined by the truth that he pursues as it is by the truth that he flees. In the extreme case of Oedipus, these two truths converge into one, collapsing the entire kinetic logic of origin, journey, and destination into a single entity: the person of the interpreter himself. In the second part of my discussion, I explored how this disturbing convergence of points within Oedipus' kinesis, when understood in its cultural and historical context, results from his responsibility to Archaic topography, with all its inherent tensions and contradictions. The figure of Oedipus thus forces not only a confrontation with the ambiguities in the structure of Greek political space, but also an interrogation of space itself as a fundamental category of interpretive experience. Just as the experience of epistrophy made the origin and destination of Oedipus' kinesis converge with one another, so does his embattled responsibility to Archaic topography force the center of space to converge with its periphery.

What remains for us to consider, then, in the present reading of the play, is the final significance of these convergences between mutually exclusive points in space or mutually exclusive value-categories for the activity of interpretation. What does Oedipus' situation mean – finding himself at home when he thinks he is distantly abroad, standing at the very center of Theban society when he deserves to be ejected beyond its borders – what set of conditions does this unique spatial predicament reveal within the activity of interpretation in general? I believe the hermeneutic significance of these convergences lies in their direct effect on the language of the interpreter. That is to say, they constantly displace the stable frame of reference within which the spatial and evaluative categories at work in Oedipus' language are able to possess a univocal meaning. The result of this continuous displacement is poetically expressed as the multiplication and dislocation of the places from which Oedipus' voice, the voice of the interpreter, issues. In effect, his voice comes to contain a contradictory multitude of voices that proceed not from Oedipus' immediately present self, but from every imaginable point and direction at once. Part of the force of his tragic realization, then, derives from this brutal awakening to the polyvocal nature of his own language – the degree to which the truth it has tried to reach is criss-crossed by paths of error that lead elsewhere. On the one hand, his speech possesses a meaning that he knows and intends, such that his voice issues from the place where he believes himself to be; on the other hand, the same speech also possesses a meaning that he neither knows nor intends, such that his voice issues from somewhere else – the place where he actually is. The language of Oedipus thus demonstrates how the speech of the interpreter exists in a sort of twilight between the singular, articulate character of ordinary speech and the multiple, disarticulate character of pure noise. The closer Oedipus comes to revealing the duplicities of his own speech and discovering where he actually is, the more his speech approximates and finally arrives at the extreme limit of noise. It remains for us, Oedipus' interpreters, to confront this same noise that now seems to issue not just from Oedipus, but also from the language of interpretation in general – that is, our own language.

The choral *parodos* (entrance-song) provides a convenient point of entry for considering how the destabilization of place is linked to the multiplication and dislocation of the interpreter's voice in the *OT*. The Chorus, still unaware of Creon's recent return from Delphi with the oracle's response (78-150), enters the theater full of forebodings about the god's reply and addresses a song of entreaty to the "immortal voice" (ἄμβροτε Φάμα, 158) of the oracle. In Sophocles' hands, moreover, the ritualistic circumlocutions that mark the Chorus' language become so many points through which to reflect upon the paradoxical dislocations to which even the divine voice of the oracle, the bringer of truth and salvation, is subject:

> ὦ Διὸς ἁδυεπὲς φάτι, τίς ποτε τᾶς πολυχρύσου
> Πυθῶνος ἀγλαὰς ἔβας
> Θήβας; ἐκτέταμαι φοβερὰν φρένα δείματι πάλλων,
> ἰήιε Δάλιε Παιάν,
> ἀμφὶ σοὶ ἁζόμενος· (151-155)

> O sweetly-speaking voice from Zeus, who are you who have traveled [ἔβας, lit. 'walked'] from Pytho [i.e. Delphi], with all its gold, to shining Thebes? I am on the rack, making my own anxious heart tremble in terror, O Delian healer to whom we cry out, with dreadful reverence for you.

Although the Chorus is clearly addressing Apollo in his function as the god of the Delphic oracle, they immediately invoke the belief that Apollo's prophecies issued from the omniscient awareness of Zeus, for whom Apollo simply served as a mouthpiece. Apollo's prophetic voice thus comes from elsewhere – it is "from Zeus" or "of Zeus" (Διὸς, 151) as the Chorus says – rather than properly originating with Apollo himself (Jebb 31, 151n.). A similar dislocation or multiplication of the origin of speech appears when the Chorus invokes Apollo not as the god of prophecy who dwells at Delphi, but rather as the god of healing who comes from the island of Delos. While Delos claimed to be the birthplace of the god, Delphi claimed to be his adopted home – hence the god originates in more than one place at once.[44] In syntax that strangely anticipates the Chorus' opening question in the first stasimon (463-466) about the identity of Laius' killer ("who is that man?"), the Chorus here asks the oracular voice of Apollo, "who are you?" – that is, what the content of the oracle's reply is, whether favorable or unfavorable to Thebes, and what demands it will make on the city in terms of expiatory prayer and sacrifice (155f). In poetic terms, however, the Chorus asks this question as it would of a stranger who comes from elsewhere: if we follow the figure exactly, we see that the voice (φάτις) of the god is figured as a person of indeterminate identity who has traveled (τίς

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[44] Gould notes a similar status for both the Dionysus of Euripides' *Bacchae*, who is native to Thebes, Lydia, and Thrace all at once, and Apollo in the same play, who comes from both Delos and Lykia: "Gods such as Apollo and Dionysus are always both (and simultaneously) 'of the place' and 'from elsewhere,' and this double-sidedness is not merely asserted in myths of arrival and return, but also enacted in ritual, in the processions which escort the god 'back' to the sanctuary where he lives and has power" (Gould 222; qv. Jebb 32, 154n. and Burkert 21). While Gould capitalizes upon these divine duplicities to confirm what he sees as Oedipus' quasi-divine, exceptional status, they are equally strong evidence for how the play compares the divine or oracular voice with the voice of the human interpreter: while the former remains elusive in origin and obscure in meaning, the latter seems to issue from a definite origin and possess a clear meaning – until, that is, Oedipus actually begins to ask questions about his origins and about the meaning of his strange career. Oedipus ends up being a kind of "man from nowhere" precisely because he is a native of too many places – like the god Apollo whom he seeks, in some measure, to supplant. Yet *quid licet Iovi non licet bovi*.

[…] ἔβας) from Delphi to Thebes. The Chorus' circumlocutions thus tacitly acknowledge that the voice of revelation, even when it issues from the very person of divinity, always comes from elsewhere, from an unclear point of origin, and has to travel far in order to reach the place – let alone the awareness – that men inhabit. Whatever grim hermeneutic skepticism this figurative language might inspire in and of themselves, we are inevitably brought up short by the further realization that just like the itinerant voice of the god, Oedipus himself is a person of uncertain origins who has lately traveled from Delphi to Thebes and whose import for the city remains ambiguous. The Chorus could just as easily be addressing their king here as the "sweetly-speaking voice of Zeus" (151): the mobile and dislocated character of the divine voice, which forms the object of interpretation, corresponds to precisely the same qualities in Oedipus, the subject of interpretation. Both the voice that communicates the truth and the one who receives this voice are, in a word, out of place.

The dislocated quality that the Chorus identifies in both the voice of Apollo and the person of Oedipus comes to infect the Chorus' language itself in the antistrophe, where its collective voice suffers a multiplication of its origins and a diffusion of its meanings. Instead of originating in one speaker and communicating one meaning, the Chorus' language seems to come from at least two different origins – like Oedipus or Apollo – and proceed along at least two different pathways at once. The resulting polysemy or, more precisely, polyphony of their language makes itself manifest only in our awareness as readers or spectators, and escapes the notice of the Chorus itself entirely. In its direct appeal to the gods for release from the plague, the Chorus uses an unorthodox phrase that exhibits precisely this kind of polyphony: "If ever before, when a previous calamity had risen up and was looming over the city, *you made foreign the fire of misery* [ἠνύσατ' ἐκτοπίαν φλόγα πήματος – emphasis mine in trans.], so come now as well [sc. and do the same]" (εἴ ποτε καὶ προτέρας ἄτας ὑπερορνυμένας πόλει / ἠνύσατ' ἐκτοπίαν φλόγα πήματος, ἔλθετε καὶ νῦν 165ff). The Chorus asks the gods to "render the fire foreign" or "make the fire out-of-place" (167), meaning simply that they should drive the plague out of the city.[45] Accordingly, the major commentators and translators of this line read ἐκτοπίαν (ἐκτόπιος [*ectopios*], 'foreign, from elsewhere,' lit. 'out of place') as a final predicate, i.e. they render the line as "bring it about (so that) the fire (becomes) out-of-place." The considerable semantic breadth of ἀνύω ("to bring about, render, change into, bring to completion or fulfillment" > ἠνύσατ[ε] 167), however, makes another, quite distinct version possible, which expresses a contradictory meaning through precisely the same sequence of words. Roughly translated, this reading would come through as "bring this fire from elsewhere to its completion (or fulfillment)," i.e. expedite the progress of the fire so that it consumes everything.[46] On the former reading, the Chorus is asking the gods to drive the plague-fire out of the city (ἐκτοπίαν); on the latter reading, it asks them to fan the flames of the plague, which has invaded the city from elsewhere (ἐκτοπίαν). Of course, the Chorus is ignorant of the fact that Oedipus, who is both a native Theban and a foreign overlord, is himself the primary cause of the plague as well as the eventual instrument of divine salvation from its destructive grip. By virtue of Oedipus' own ectopic dislocation, which conflates distinct places and multiplies points of origin, the Chorus' appeal to the gods for release from the plague thus appears to speak in more than one voice, or from more than one frame of reference, at the same time. If, furthermore, Oedipus is both the physician that ministers to the ravages of the plague and the primary agent of its epidemic spread, then we should likewise note that the disease he causes and the cure he applies are identical. Both the poison and the antidote, as it were, are to be found in the interpreter's capacity to set words and places perilously into motion, to multiply the voices that resound within speech.[47]

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[45] Jebb notes that this is "a rare use of ἀνύω like ποιεῖν [to make]" (34, 166n.).

[46] In this alternate reading, the adjective ἐκτοπίαν is a static modifier rather than a final predicate, i.e. an 'out-of-place fire,' rather than a 'fire that is made to be out-of-place.'

I would like to propose polyphony, then, as a concept that not only is more suggestive and more inclusive than tragic irony in describing the poetic texture of Sophocles' language in the *OT*, but also directly acknowledges the interrogations of place and the indeterminacies of origin that are so pivotal in the play's structure. Investigating the polyphonic aspect of Oedipus' speech in particular leads us to broader reflections on the multiple voices and points of origin that resonate in the language of interpretation as such, beyond the immediate awareness of the one who speaks it. If, like Oedipus, the interpreter unknowingly exists in many different places at once, his voice necessarily proceeds from many different directions and intersects with itself at many different points. In this light, passages such as the edict against the killer of Laius (216-275), in which critics have so often and so productively perceived one tragic irony after another in the way Oedipus applies the terminology of native and foreign, now become objectlessons in the multiplicity and indeterminacy of origin that criss-cross the voice of the interpreter:

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[47] The preceding statements serve as ample evidence that I do not entirely share in the scholarly consensus that views the plague as merely a red herring that sets the plot in motion initially only to be disposed of as more central issues come to light. Gould, for instance, describes a great turning, both in the play's overall structure and in its range of interest, away from the question of curing the plague and toward the question of Oedipus' identity; "The issues of the *polis*, of Thebes and its plague, gradually fade over and dissolve until by the end of the play they are quite lost sight of." Gould, in: Bloom [ed.] 217. I am convinced that, even though the plague does not remain an explicit motif beyond the first third or so of the drama, the poetic language in which the plague is described does pervade the entire text, making the plague an implicit, if not explicit presence throughout. However, since my interests inevitably lie elsewhere, I cannot argue this point in full here.

αἰτεῖς· ἃ δ' αἰτεῖς, τἄμ' ἐὰν θέλῃς ἔπη
κλύων δέχεσθαι τῇ νόσῳ θ' ὑπηρετεῖν,
ἀλκὴν λάβοις ἂν κἀνακούφισιν κακῶν·
ἁγὼ ξένος μὲν τοῦ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐξερῶ,
ξένος δὲ τοῦ πραχθέντος· οὐ γὰρ ἂν μακρὰν
ἴχνευον αὐτό, μὴ οὐκ ἔχων τι σύμβολον.
νῦν δ', ὕστερος γὰρ ἀστὸς εἰς ἀστοὺς τελῶ,
ὑμῖν προφωνῶ πᾶσι Καδμείοις τάδε· (216-223)

> You pray; and regarding those things for which you pray – if you prove willing to receive my words and minister to your disease [τῇ νόσῳ (…) ὑπηρετεῖν, also ‘to acquiesce in, submit to, or humor your disease’] – you may find deliverance and relief from your sufferings. I will proclaim this much, being a stranger to the report (sc. of the murder) [ξένος (…) τοῦ λόγου τοῦδ(ε)] as I have been a stranger to the deed itself [ξένος (…) τοῦ πραχθέντος], for I would not have had to go far in order to track it down [ἴχνευον] if I possessed any clue [σύμβολον]. But as things now stand, since it was only later that I was counted as a citizen among fellow-citizens [ὕστερος (…) ἀστὸς εἰς ἀστοὺς τελῶ], I do thus proclaim these things before all of you Cadmeans [i.e. Thebans].

This passage opens Oedipus’ public address directly after the choral parodos, a text which, as we have just seen, is already fraught with the problems of location and affiliation that now directly threaten the logic of Oedipus’ own language here. Commentators have long pointed out the sharp irony in 219f, where Oedipus claims to be as much a *xenos* (which means ‘stranger’ or ‘foreigner,’ but also ‘guest-friend’) to the accounts of Laius’ murder, which he has just heard for the first time, as he is to the bloody deed itself. The basis of the irony here, of course, is the fact that Oedipus is actually no ‘stranger’ to the murder at all, but committed it himself.[48] All the same, this summary reading does not quite exhaust the ambiguities set loose by Oedipus’ self-application of the term *xenos*, which resonates somewhat more deeply in light of the multiple places Oedipus inhabits and the multiple origins from which he derives. From one point of view, Oedipus is a *xenos* in every sense: he came to Thebes as a stranger and a foreigner, and thereafter was not only accepted as a ‘guest-friend’ of the city in his repatriation (222), but also elevated to the status of *tyrannos* (king) in recognition of his triumph over the Sphinx. At the same time, he is not a *xenos* at all: he is a member of the Theban royal family and the heir of the autochthonous Labdacid line. Through this oblique and unwitting reference to his status as a ‘naturalized native,’ as it were, Oedipus’ twice-repeated claim (ξένος […] ξένος 219f) to the figurative status of *xenos* in relation to Laius’ murder achieves a multiple voicing of this term – not only revealing the multiplicity and indeterminacy of Oedipus’ own origins, but infecting the term itself with a kind of irresolvable internal polyphony.[49]

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[48] Dawe remarks simply, “The whole passage is thick with dramatic irony. He was not a stranger to the events or to what was said about them” (95, 222n.).

It should come as no surprise, then, that Oedipus unknowingly betrays his status as carrier of this infectious polyphony at the very beginning of his proclamation, in the equally ambiguous wording of 216f. The grammatical parallelism between the infinitives “to receive my words” (τἄμ' […] ἔπη κλύων δέχεσθαι) and “to minister to your disease” (τῇ νόσῳ […] ὑπηρετεῖν), which superficially implies a close correlation, if not an equivalence, between heeding Oedipus’ command and curing the plague, is sharply undercut by the ambiguity of ὑπηρετεῖν, which means ‘to minister to, care for’ in the sense of ‘to acquiesce in, submit to, or humor.’[50] The idea of curing the city’s disease is thus rendered inseparable from the idea of submitting to the will of the plague as a servant submits to his master. As with the grammatical polyphony of the “foreign fire”

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[49] A further point: none of the commentators or scholars of whose work I am aware notes that σύμβολον, the word Oedipus uses in this passage for “clue,” is also a term appearing in Aristophanes for a permit to reside given to aliens living within the limits of Attica (*LSJ* sub σύμβολον).

[50] It is a telling moment for many scholars’ treatment of the text of the *OT* when the ambiguity of ὑπηρετεῖν prompts Dawe to sense textual corruption right away, but then, failing that, to domesticate the duplicity of the line by comparison to contemporary English idiom: “At first sight ὑπηρετεῖν seems to give the reverse of the sense required, but the text is sound. […] So in English when we say that quinine is good for malaria, what we mean is that it is *bad* for malaria but *good* for the patient” (94, 217n.). This exegesis of idiom does not resolve the slipperiness of the diction in this context.

(167), the more strictly semantic polyphony of ὑπηρετεῖν suggests that the salvation from the plague that Oedipus promises is identical with an intensification of its effects. The ambiguity of this term, moreover, also twists around into its opposite the reassuring parallelism Oedipus wants to establish between the proclamation he speaks against the polluting killer and the cure that the city needs against the plague. Instead, Oedipus' words, which multiply and disseminate their own meanings as readily as a virus duplicates and spreads in a vulnerable host, implicitly betray their role as agents of infection.[51] This role becomes quite explicit towards the end of Oedipus' edict, where he solemnly calls down all the sufferings of the plague on the heads of those who continue to conceal the identity of the murderer. His words here are quite literally intended to cure and to infect at the same time: “And for those who do not obey these commands, I pray that the gods send them neither crops from their tilled land nor children from their women, but rather that they be ruined by their current condition, or by one even more hateful than this” (καὶ ταῦτα τοῖς μὴ δρῶσιν εὔχομαι θεοὺς / μήτ' ἄροτον αὐτοῖς γῆς ἀνιέναι τινὰ / μήτ' οὖν γυναικῶν παῖδας, ἀλλὰ τῷ πότμῳ / τῷ νῦν φθερεῖσθαι κἄτι τοῦδ' ἐχθίονι 269-272). It is ultimately immaterial whether the people of Thebes obey or disobey Oedipus' edict, since the polyphony of Oedipus' language entails that they 'submit to' the plague either way.

So far I have tried to understand the multiple meanings of the *OT*'s language as issuing from multiple voices that are simultaneously present in a single utterance as a result of Oedipus' mobile and dislocated condition. These voices originate in different viewpoints, conflict with or openly contradict each other, and ultimately work to multiply or diffuse the identity of the speaker: the interpreter’s language, in short, unwittingly transforms him into a dispersed and contentious multitude. The fragmentation, dissemination, and contradiction of voices that we hear inside Oedipus’ voice, however, presses ever harder at the bounds of sense as the drama’s net of revelations begins to close around him. After Teiresias, for instance, brings his accusations against the king, he discharges his frustration and powerlessness in four incredibly dense and obscure verses that take the measure not only of Oedipus’ tragic destiny in general, but the destiny of Oedipus’ all-too-mobile, all-too-meaningful voice in particular:

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[51] In the wider context of the *parodos*, too, it is worth noting the Chorus' “horror at the terrifying and uncanny *speed*, like that of a fire borne before the wind or like the sudden flight of a flock of migrating birds, with which the sickness spreads and the deaths become too numerous to count” (Gould, in: Bloom [ed.] 211). The plague's considerable power of movement, as represented in the Chorus' awestruck language, is directly reminiscent of Oedipus' own strange powers.

> βοῆς δὲ τῆς σῆς ποῖος οὐκ ἔσται λιμήν,
> ποῖος Κιθαιρὼν οὐχὶ σύμφωνος τάχα,
> ὅταν καταίσθῃ τὸν ὑμέναιον, ὃν δόμοις
> ἄνορμον εἰσέπλευσας, εὐπλοίας τυχών; (420-423)

> And what place will not be a harbor [λιμήν] to your cry [βοή], what part of Cithaeron will not soon sound in unison [σύμφωνος] with it, when you learn the meaning [καταίσθῃ] of the bridal hymn [ὑμέναιος] in which, within that house, you found no refuge [ἄνορμον εἰσέπλευσας, approx. ‘you sailed into a place without a harbor’] after such a fair voyage?

Teiresias’ four verses develop two figurative complexes in parallel. The first cluster of images depicts different registers of the human voice: the prophet imagines, on the one hand, the inarticulate voice of Oedipus’ shout or cry (βοή 420) upon discovering his origins, and, on the other hand, the articulate musical voice of the choral song (σύμφωνος 421) with which Mount Cithaeron figuratively echoes Oedipus’ shout, along with that of the bridal hymn (ὑμέναιος 422) that accompanied Oedipus’ perverse marriage to his mother Jocasta. These two registers of the voice, furthermore, are represented as moving within two specific and mutually exclusive spaces. Teiresias depicts Mount Cithaeron and the wilderness beyond as a welcoming space of “harbor” or “refuge” (λιμήν 420) for Oedipus’ roving cry; this cry, however, is motivated by

Oedipus’ horror at “fully perceiving” or “recognizing” (καταίσθῃ 422) the meaning of the hymn that accompanied his entrance into a very different space, that of the royal palace (δόμοις 422), which is paradoxically rendered as a place that offers him no refuge (ἄνορμον 423). This imagery of harbor or refuge provides the point of overlap between the first and the second major cluster of images, which depict Oedipus’ past and future peregrinations alike in terms of a ship sailing into harbor (εἰσέπλευσας, εὐπλοίας 423) – all the more baffling, since the places in question are all on land.[52] The tone of bitter irony that blankets the entire passage reaches its height in the mention of the “fair voyage” (εὐπλοίας 423, lit. ‘favorable sailing’) that sped Oedipus on his way into disaster. So much for analysis: what are we to make of this extraordinary statement – itself a masterpiece of intricate and enigmatic counterpoint between voices and places – in relation to Oedipus’ own voice and place?

In the context of polyphony, it is vital to see that Teiresias’ words form associations, on the one hand, between inarticulate vocal sound and the exterior space of uncivilized wilderness, and, on the other hand, between the articulate voices of the wedding song and the interior space of the Theban royal household.[53] Oedipus goes inside to the sound of music, and goes outside to the sound of noise – yet both he and his noisy cry find their proper home and safe haven in the wilderness, while the domestic space is his real wilderness, full of danger and horror. Oedipus’ cry of horror, furthermore is not merely a reaction to discovering the truth of his marriage: the inarticulate cry *is* the true meaning of the seemingly articulate wedding-song. In spatial terms, we could say that when Teiresias imagines Oedipus' flight into the wilderness of Cithaeron, it is simply as a repetition of the latter's entrance into the royal household, but this time in full awareness of its true significance. In effect, the boundaries separating song, speech, and cry of horror for Oedipus become as indistinct and as easy to transgress as those separating household, city, and wilderness. Just as Oedipus' proper place seems to be both everywhere and nowhere, so his voice seems to occupy every point on the whole range of sonic possibilities simultaneously.[54] What we hear, then, when we listen to the voice of Oedipus is the mutual complicity of sense and senselessness, the inside and the outside, the saving cure and the wasting plague, that governs the language of interpretation. In his fall, we come to recognize that the truth the interpreter speaks in order to resolve the noise of his object – like Oedipus speaking the solution to the Sphinx's riddle – is so full of conflicting voices, and speaks from so many different places, that it comes dangerously close to becoming noise itself.

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[52] Although it should be noted, as Goldhill does, that “the imagery of disastrous sailing has a specific sexual connotation” in this passage: “The inescapability of Oedipus’ cursed journey back to his mother is ironically heightened by the use of the language of control over the sea. […] Jocasta is a ‘harbour’ to and from which Oedipus has sailed. The imagery of control and order in travelling is turned to the expression of an overdetermined arrival in the place of departure” (Goldhill 206-207).

[53] Segal discusses similar verbal associations in the context of tragedy as a whole: “The language of tragedy presents the violation of linguistic norms: ambiguity, confusion, screams of agony, roars of pain, the incoherence of terror or madness. Logical argument fails. […] Civilized discourse gives way suddenly to curse or bellow, to horrendous cries or ominous silences” (53; for spatial significance, qv. 38).

This risk – the challenge of overcoming noise without becoming noise, of being out-of-place without turning against place altogether – is the one to which Oedipus tragically succumbs. Once the truth has been revealed at last, the poetry of the drama fuses Oedipus' multifarious voice with his multidirectional power of movement to reveal the truth of his character: a single impetus toward transgression against which no spatial boundary nor verbal distinction can hold firm. After Jocasta disappears into the innermost chamber of the house to kill herself, the Second Messenger describes how Oedipus' frenzy expresses itself as both a transgression of space and a confusion of the voice:

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[54] In a different vein, Gould describes Oedipus' alienated self-awareness at this point quite eloquently, though his viewpoint is more psychologically interested than mine: Oedipus' "vision of himself is as a being from another world of discourse than the now familiar political world of Thebes or Corinth. Here is one who speaks a new language of abstraction and metaphor, a child of nature to whom the concerns of human society are less than real. […] Oedipus, for all his conviction of belonging, and of mastery of political power and social observance, is an alien, he does not belong and his not belonging is figured in the contradictions of his human relationships." Gould, in: Bloom (ed.) 218, 221; qv. 222. In the context of the present discussion, of course, the relations in which Oedipus "does not belong" are spatial rather than interpersonal, but the point holds equally in both contexts.

> χὤπως μὲν ἐκ τῶνδ' οὐκέτ' οἶδ' ἀπόλλυται·
> βοῶν γὰρ εἰσέπαισεν Οἰδίπους, ὑφ' οὗ
> οὐκ ἦν τὸ κείνης ἐκθεάσασθαι κακόν,
> ἀλλ' εἰς ἐκεῖνον περιπολοῦντ' ἐλεύσσομεν.
> φοιτᾷ γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἔγχος ἐξαιτῶν πορεῖν,
> γυναῖκά τ' οὐ γυναῖκα, μητρῴαν δ' ὅπου
> κίχοι διπλῆν ἄρουραν οὗ τε καὶ τέκνων. (1251-1257)

> And how she perished after these things happened [sc. Jocasta's disappearance into the inner chamber] I no longer know. For Oedipus burst in [εἰσέπαισεν, lit. 'struck inwards'] shouting [βοῶν > βοάω [v.], 'to cry, shout' > βοή [n.], 'cry, shout' 420], and did not allow us to watch her misfortune through to the end [τὸ κείνης ἐκθεάσασθαι κακόν]: but as he rushed around [περιπολοῦντ(α)], our eyes were set steadily on him. He rushed to and fro [φοιτᾷ], asking us to give him a sword, asking where he could find [πορεῖν, lit. 'make or find a path to'] the wife who was no wife [γυναῖκά τ' οὐ γυναῖκα], but a mother whose womb had borne both him and his children.

Oedipus' initial, violent irruption into the space of the household (εἰσέπαισεν 1252) precedes an uncontrolled frenzy of physical movement (περιπολοῦντ(α) 1254, φοιτᾷ 1255) and overpowering speech (βοῶν 1252), both of which are so powerfully distracting that they draw away all attention from Jocasta's actions and then obscure what transpires with Jocasta in the inner chamber. A moment later, both the spatial and the vocal elements of Oedipus' transgressive fury escalate even further: "Screaming with awesome force […] he drove himself hard against the double doors [sc. of the bedroom], tearing the bolts from their sockets so that the doors broke inwards, and rushed into the chamber" (δεινὸν δ' ἀύσας […] / πύλαις διπλαῖς ἐνήλατ', ἐκ δὲ πυθμένων / ἔκλινε κοῖλα κλῇθρα κἀμπίπτει στέγῃ 1260-1262). Oedipus' articulate language – or what remains of it – now begins to surrender itself explicitly to the multitude of voices that have implicitly appeared within it through the entire play: his language bends back upon itself in paradoxes, or dissolves into pure animalistic sound. When he finally finds his “wife that is no wife” (γυναῖκά τ' οὐ γυναῖκα 1256) hung by the neck,[55] he “bellows terribly” (δεινὰ βρυχηθεὶς 1265), now transforming himself in fact into the “bull of the rocks” (πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος 478) of the first stasimon – but one that stalks the inner halls of the royal palace, not the open wilderness.

In the very moment when he has fulfilled Teiresias’ obscure prophecy, furthermore, Oedipus’ last coherent statement before blinding himself responds to Teiresias’ enigmatic anticipation of the future with an equally enigmatic interpretation of his own past crimes[56] – the meaning of which now stands forth in words which themselves defy meaning. As the intense convolution of his language approaches the outer limits of sense, verging on sheer noise, he turns all the violence of his transgressions against himself:

> αὐδῶν τοιαῦθ', ὁθούνεκ' οὐκ ὄψοιντό νιν
> οὔθ' οἷ' ἔπασχεν οὔθ' ὁποῖ' ἔδρα κακά,
> ἀλλ' ἐν σκότῳ τὸ λοιπὸν οὓς μὲν οὐκ ἔδει
> ὀψοίαθ', οὓς δ' ἔχρῃζεν οὐ γνωσοίατο.
> τοιαῦτ' ἐφυμνῶν πολλάκις τε κοὐχ ἅπαξ
> ἤρασσ' ἐπαίρων βλέφαρα. (1271-1276)

> He shouted words like these: “No more shall you [sc. Oedipus’ eyes] behold such horrors as I was suffering and working! Long enough have you looked on those whom you ought never to have seen, failed in knowledge of those whom I yearned to know – henceforth you shall be dark!” To such dire

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[55] One of several self-negating phrases used by Oedipus in this section of the play; others are to be found at 1405-1407 and 1214 (qv. Goldhill 215).

[56] Bushnell offers a provocative political reading of the Oedipus-Teiresias axis in the *OT*, with particular attention to how Oedipus shapes his own secular, political, and individual discourse of ‘prophecy’ in reaction to the collective and religious discourse of Teiresias, reading Oedipus’ position as one caught between “the defiance of [prophetic] authority and the appropriation of that authority in the city or state, through the power of interpretation.” (11). While I have examined Oedipus’ interpretive responsibility through the failure of traditional topographic vocabulary to locate him within an Archaic terrain, Bushnell’s reading can be understood as directed toward other, related dimensions of Oedipus’ responsibility to prophetic discourse – or, as she puts it, “Oedipus’ entire life is an answer to oracular prediction” (67).

> refrain [ἐφυμνῶν, lit. ‘hymning, accompanying with song’], not once alone but often he struck his eyes with lifted hand.[57]

Oedipus’ perverse “singing” (ἐφυμνῶν 1275) in these verses repeats and reconfigures the uncanny “bridal hymn” (ὑμέναιον 422) of Teiresias’ prophecy: whereas in the former case, he had transgressed the threshold and the sanctity of the house to the accompaniment of song, in the latter case, he transgresses against his own body to a similar accompaniment. The many voices contained in Oedipus’ voice reach their highest intensity of both sound and sense in this passage – so intense, in fact, that the Second Messenger can only conclude his narrative by heaping one term for extreme suffering on top of another in the attempt to capture the plenitude of horrors that have now taken possession of the Labdacids: “The ancient happiness they possessed before was true happiness indeed; but now, today – lamentation, ruin, death, shame – of all the evils that have names, nothing, nothing is lacking” (ὁ πρὶν παλαιὸς δ' ὄλβος ἦν πάροιθε μὲν / ὄλβος δικαίως· νῦν δὲ τῇδε θἠμέρᾳ / στεναγμός, ἄτη, θάνατος, αἰσχύνη, κακῶν / ὅσ' ἐστὶ πάντων ὀνόματ', οὐδέν ἐστ' ἀπόν 1282-1285). The Messenger points to the total indeterminacy of words, the speechlessness of speech itself, as it were, that faces one who attempts to describe Oedipus’ crimes. Across the gap created by Oedipus’ realizations, his previous “blessedness” (ὄλβος 1282) and his present “ruin” (ἄτη 1284) now confront each other as contradictory synonyms for the same destiny: nothing about him has changed in the course of the play, after all, except the degree of self-understanding he has gained through interpretation. The voice that speaks either of these terms refers to the same object as the voice that speaks the other, but neither term and neither voice can be logically reconciled with the other. As a result, Oedipus’ own polyphony has infected the very language in which the people of Thebes must make sense of his fate: he has erased all distinctions and crossed all boundaries.

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[57] For this passage, I have reproduced Jebb’s English translation with modernized diction and emendations (Jebb 167).

At this outermost limit, Oedipus has become the noise and chaos he originally set out to conquer. His constant and far-reaching mobility has been unmasked, only to reveal that he has returned to the place from whence he began; his place at the center of household, city, and human civilization has been unmasked, only to reveal that he has placed himself at the periphery of each; the razor-sharp language of interpretation with which he sought a cure for the city’s disease has been unmasked, only to reveal that its unwitting equivocations and misrepresentations have infected the meaningfulness of language itself with an incurable sickness. Oedipus himself, the archetypal interpreter, has now become the archetypal interpretive problem. The Chorus now confronts him as he once confronted the Sphinx: “Alas, alas, miserable one – I cannot even look at you, though there are so many things I would like to ask, so many things I would like to find out, so many things I would like to look at more closely – oh, how you fill me with shuddering!” (φεῦ φεῦ, δύστην', ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἐσιδεῖν / δύναμαί σ', ἐθέλων πόλλ' ἀνεϱέσθαι, / πολλὰ πυθέσθαι, πολλὰ δ' ἀθϱῆσαι· / τοίαν φϱίκην παϱέχεις μοι 1303-1306). The only answer Oedipus can offer he expresses in language that remains almost completely dessicated of meaning, but rather, like the Messenger’s summation at 1282-1285, exerts its force purely through redundant qualifiers and a surfeit of endlessly repeated vocalic sounds. In essence, it is language that resists interpretation above the level of noise: just as the short *o* and the *on* phoneme dominate *iō skotou / nephos emon apotropon, epiplomenon aphaton, / adamaton te kai dusouriston* <*on*> (“O my cloud of darkness, hideous, unspeakable, inexorably approaching – inconquerable and sped on by an ill wind,” 1313ff) to the point of monotony, so the long *a* renders *ō kaka kaka telōn ema tad’ ema pathea* (“O bringing my evils, these evil sufferings to fulfillment”) almost completely devoid of articulation or meaning. But Oedipus’ frightful and deafening gibberish makes a point about the language of the interpreter that his eloquence in the rest of the play could only conceal and evade: that this language is full of noise, full of truths and errors that cannot be separated, full of clashing voices that approach from every direction and depart just as readily to every corner of the earth. Oedipus himself puts it best, as he stumbles into the light of day as a blind man for the first time:

> αἰαῖ αἰαῖ, δύστανος ἐγώ,
> ποῖ γᾶς φέρομαι τλάμων; πᾷ μοι
> φθογγὰ διαπωτᾶται φοράδαν;
> ἰὼ δαῖμον, ἵν' ἐξήλου. (1308-1311)

> Alas, alas, how miserable I am, where on earth am I being carried in my misery? Where is my voice being swept away to, born on the wings of the air? O my spirit, how far you sprang forth![58]

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[58] Bushnell sees a similar logic at work in this passage: “His very voice seems ‘disembodied,’ not his own, in the initial moments of his pain” (83; qv. Segal 242). Yet she ultimately develops the point in the opposite direction, in which the fragmentation of Oedipus’ identity implicit in such ‘disembodiment’ is saved by a heroic turn: “*Oedipus the King* celebrates the power of human speech to represent a self, even in such a defeat. […] For Oedipus, as for Antigone, even in disaster the human voice achieves a dramatic or apostrophic significance without power to command” (85).

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# CHAPTER II

# SAY HELLO TO THE NEW:
TRAGIC TECHNOLOGIES IN BRECHT'S EPIC THEATER

## 1. Dawn, Twilight and Apocalypse: The Theater of the New Age as a Technology of Vision

As we have just seen, Oedipus raises the question of “where” in relation to both the subject and object of interpretation, and answers it – tragically – by showing how “nowhere” and “everywhere” can collapse into a singularity by the very same interpretive process that was intended to reestablish their differences. Particularly in the modern world, however, the legacy of Oedipus in the experience of interpretation comprehends not only our understanding of space as mediated by culture, but also our understanding of time as mediated by history. If the concept of modernity always depends on some sort of 'now' counterposed to some sort of 'then', then we are continually faced by the nagging question about the 'now-ness’ to which we lay claim when we make the boast of 'being modern' in our interpretive attitudes and methods. When exactly does this *now* arrive? We might pose the question somewhat wryly by invoking the adolescent impatience expressed in the title of a song by The Smiths: “How Soon Is Now?” And what, for that matter, is the 'then-ness' that forms the counterweight to the modern 'now,' and thus stubbornly persists alongside and within it? And could Greek antiquity, by offering one of the most powerful sources of 'then-ness' in the West, remain uncomfortably contemporary, even in the midst of modernity? These latter questions can be posed, as it were, by standing Morrissey on his head so that he asks: “How *Then* Is Now?”

These questions are charged by a recognizably tragic ambiguity that not only translates Oedipus' interpretive problem from one of space to one of time, but also makes him into our contemporary instead of our (dubious) ancestor. Despite the promise of progress, the new age in which we allegedly dwell constantly threatens to collapse into the old, and the old constantly threatens to reclaim the new – just as Oedipus made the center of the city interchangeable with its savage margins. The high stakes attached to an interpretive slippage of this kind, furthermore, appear quite clearly in historical and political experiences that have become virtually everyday and certainly carry a tragic sting in their tail: namely, those moments in which the promises of modernity, of freedom and enlightenment, reap their harvest in the trembling submission to force and the voluntary embrace of delusion. All the more fitting, then, that in the effort to define the new age of modernity and the interpretive outlook appropriate to it, our major antagonist *and* accomplice in the task should be a phenomenon that appears at once historically remote from, and philosophically contemporary with, modern consciousness on both these fronts: namely, the classical tragedy of Oedipus.

So: enter, stage right, our modern Oedipus. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) never needed to persuade himself that he lived in a new age – for better or for worse: a pair of decimating world wars, a spiral of economic chaos, and the upheaval of intellectual tradition are not, after all, everyday occurrences in an epoch of stability. What Brecht needed was a way to convince himself, and anyone else who made it out the other end, that this new age could survive the revenge of the old. That peculiar speech-act, the declaration of a new age – whatever this new age promises, and whatever obstacles stand in its way – is perhaps the only index common to all the manifestations of the modern outlook in politics, science, and the arts. Brecht's modernism was no exception, but he put this new age, such as it was, to work in the theater. It could be argued, in fact, that the *gestus* (gesture),[1] the fundamental building-block of acting in Brechtian theater, owed its shifting, self-interrupting rhythms to the heavy off-beat that marks the onset of the new age in the tempo of historical time. The technique of the *gestus* isolates and defines the individual attitudes that form, as it were, the molecular chain of a specific action in time, and separates them with an interruptive gap that allows the spectator to reflect on the determinate character of each atomic unit. In the same way that the *gestus* interrupts the temporality of dramatic performance, the proclamation of a new age interrupts the continuity of historical time: each is calculated to exert a powerful collective shock that prompts the reconsideration of received verities. The performance of either act articulates attitudes, reveals purposes, presents instruments – and above all, it invigorates. "Es ist bekannt," writes Brecht in his "Anmerkungen zu »Leben des Galilei«" from 1939:

> wie vorteilhaft die Überzeugung, an der Schwelle einer neuen Zeit zu stehen, die Menschen beeinflussen kann. Ihre Umgebung erscheint ihnen da als noch ganz unfertig, erfreulichster Verbesserungen fähig, voll von ungeahnten und geahnten Möglichkeiten, als fügsamer Rohstoff in ihrer Hand. Sie selbst kommen sich vor wie am Morgen, ausgeruht, kräftig, erfindungsreich. Bisheriger Glaube wird als Aberglaube behandelt, was gestern noch als selbstverständlich erschien, wird neuem

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[1] I owe the analogy of atomic bonds to Eric Bentley's comparable formulation in describing the gestic structure of scenes in Brechtian drama: Eric Bentley, *The Brecht Commentaries: 1943-1980* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), 35. For an approachable introductory discussion of the concept of *gestus* in Brecht's theater, see Peter Brooker, "Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre," in: Peter Thomson & Glendyr Sacks, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1994), 195-196, as well as Brooker's *Bertolt Brecht: Dialectics, Poetry, Politics* (New York: Croom Helm, 1988), 42-61; also Marc Silberman, "Brecht's *Gestus* or Staging Contradictions," in: *The Brecht Yearbook / Das Brecht-Jahrbuch* 31 (Pittsburgh: The International Brecht Society, 2006), 319-335. For discussion more specifically in the context of reception theory, see Gerold Koller, *Der mitspielende Zuschauer. Theorie und Praxis im Schaffen Brechts* (München: Artemis Verlag, 1979), 27-30.

> Studium unterworfen. Wir sind beherrscht worden, sagen die Menschen, aber nun werden wir herrschen.[2]

> It is well known how profitably the belief that one stands on the threshold of a new era can influence human beings. Their environment appears to them as still quite unfinished, capable of the most encouraging improvements, full of possibilities both unimagined and imagined, as a malleable raw material in their hands. They appear to themselves as they do in the morning, well-rested, strong, rich in invention. Received belief is treated as superstition: what even yesterday seemed self-evident is subjected to renewed scrutiny. We have been mastered, human beings say, but now we will be the masters.

For as much as the attitude of the new age depends on clarity of final purpose and resourcefulness of instrumentation, it cannot do without the keen vision of the re-interpreter – the innovative scientist, engineer, craftsman, or poet whose eye responds in equal measure to what was and is, and what can be. The power of this re-interpreter, as Brecht describes it here, is to seize upon the world as it suddenly *appears* to him – namely, under a striking guise, from an untried perspective, and amenable to a novel response. Most of all, this response, which culminates in active intervention, aspires to the freedom that comes with liberating oneself from the mastery of others, and with achieving mastery for oneself. In short, the political liberation promised by the new age begins with the liberation of vision in the gaze of the re-interpreter.

Even when we define the new age that formed Brecht’s historical context in the narrowest terms, it still encompasses not only the interwar Germany of the Weimar Republic and the divided Germany of the postwar era, but also the wider international sphere of his wartime exile in northern Europe and California. Once we consider the scope of Brecht’s achievement in itself as well as its wider influence, however, even this immediate context begins to reveal itself as a microcosm for the tensions and crises of modern Western literature in the most general terms: Brecht’s new age, in many ways, is still the one we are struggling to begin in earnest. Brecht’s critical reflection on the form and function of modern theater first took shape in the contradictory atmosphere of the interwar Weimar Republic,[3] a period best characterized by the volatile interplay of economic forces, tense and unlikely political coalitions between groups with opposed interests, and the precipitous rise of a consumer culture saturated by new technologies and new media. The accelerating modernization and rationalization of production in post-WWI Germany, along with the economic and psychological instability of its attendant circumstances, placed increased pressure on a populace already wracked by the horrors of the first modern war, and, in response, it sought out new means of distraction, intoxication, and escape. As part of the nascent entertainment industry which grew up around these demands, the commodification of theater meant at once the expansion of its audience to mass proportions and the need to counter the intense competition offered by the exciting new stimulations of radio, phonograph, and cinema. The more theater took on the function of an escape from the production process for its consumers, however, the more it was forced to confront its own increasingly contradictory and circumscribed position, as both art and commodity at once, within that same process.[4] These issues

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[2] Bertolt Brecht, “Anmerkungen zu »Leben des Galilei«,” in: *Materialien zu Brechts ›Leben des*

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*Galilei‹*, ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), 7. All translations are mine.

[3] My treatment of the historical context for Brecht's epic theater is largely indebted to two surveys: Eve Rosenhaft's "Brecht's Germany: 1898-1933", which gives a brief but detailed overview of the political and economic situation in Germany up to and including the rise of Hitler; and Peter Thomson's "Brecht's lives", which discusses the decisive moments and milieus of Brecht's career (Thomson and Sacks, 3-21 and 22-39 respectively). For an extraordinarily detailed assessment of the German historical context centered on Brecht, see Jörg-Wilhelm Joost, Klaus-Detlef Müller, and Michael Voges, *Bertolt Brecht. Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Klaus-Detlef Müller (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1985), 23-71. For a less comprehensive, but more in-depth viewpoint on one of Brecht's formative Weimar-era milieus with an emphasis on its social history and material culture, see Wolf von Eckardt and Sander L. Gilman, *Bertolt Brecht's Berlin: A Scrapbook of the Twenties* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993).

[4] From a leftist perspective, the most influential contemporary reflection on this problem is, of course, Walter Benjamin's seminal essay from 1934, "Der Autor als Produzent," in: Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1966), 95-116; English trans.: "The Author as Producer," in: Benjamin, *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 220-238. Benjamin's treatment of artistic and cultural institutions like the theater as parts of the broader apparatus of social production helps him articulate the position of the radical author as one who recognizes his activity as production, and who therefore does not merely supply the productive apparatus, but through forging a dialectical relation with it, achieves its *Umfunktioneriung* ("functional transformation," a word Benjamin

loomed large for the leftist avant-garde, to which Brecht belonged since his effective conversion to Marxism circa 1926 through the influence of his friends Karl Korsch and Walter Benjamin, and particularly through the readings in the Marxist classics suggested to him by Elisabeth Hauptmann.[5] For Brecht, the question of the political function of theater, which rested upon its capacity to represent truthfully and to criticize meaningfully the ensemble of socioeconomic relations, if not to provoke revolutionary action directly, added an even more vexed and uncertain element to the mix. While the contemporary theater frequently criticized the intolerable social and economic conditions created by the ever-accelerating pace of capitalism, its aesthetic orientation – with its emphasis on a bourgeois-individualist worldview[6] and the traditional classical unities of form – could not grant insight into the increasingly impersonal, fragmented, and often global systems of commerce that decided the fates of its characters. From the perspective of the avant-garde, the revolutionary indignation this theater sought to provoke was dissipated all too soon into emotional intoxication, and its increasingly sophisticated methods of illusion and suggestion often merely reproduced the theater's function as an escape from, rather than a reckoning with, urgent political and economic realities, chief among which was the increasing power of fascist ideology and its agents. Brecht's first reflections on the nature and function of theater in the new age of modernity thus sought

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borrows from Brecht [Tiedemann 104, Demetz 228]). As the preeminent model of an author who has maintained this dialectical relation and transformed a cultural apparatus of production, Benjamin describes the work of Brecht's epic theater (Tiedemann 110-116, Demetz 233-238). For more on the Brecht-Benjamin relationship, see also David C. Durst, *Weimar Modernism: Philosophy, Politics, and Culture in Germany 1918-1933* (New York: Lexington Books, 2004), Ch. 5, 181-208, and Erdmut Wizisla, *Benjamin und Brecht: die Geschichte einer Freundschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

[5] See Joost, Müller & Voges, 204-208; also Douglas Kellner, "Brecht's Marxist Aesthetic: The Korsch Connection," in: *Bertolt Brecht: Political Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. Betty Nance Weber & Hubert Heinen (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980), 29-42.

[6] Darko Suvin provides a dense but helpful exposition of the individualist tradition in German drama, in Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond: Soundings in Modern Dramaturgy* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 19-74.

to respond directly to the entire Western landscape of artistic investments and entanglements as it emerged in Weimar: the truth-status of aesthetic experience in the theater, when its distinct forms of representation and perception are viewed from a political and economic angle; the productive function of theater, within a solipsistic economic process that reproduces its forms by consuming its own products; the political and ideological power of the theater, insofar as it can either provoke or silence criticism through ever more virtuosic manipulations of the senses, the emotions, and the reasoning mind; and lastly, the ethical implications of theatrical pleasure, working as either a stimulant or a narcotic, transforming its spectators into either active, sovereign subjects or passive, debased objects.[7] Aesthetics, economics, politics, and ethics: each of these battlefields of modernity fell into the purview of Brecht's theater, and each one demanded the vigilant and unprejudiced vision of the re-interpreter to negotiate the rhythms of conflict.

Given this slippery terrain, however, even the most resolute exponent of the new age is not preserved from peril, and Brecht knew as well as anybody the risks that come with inscribing one's own vision within the re-interpreter's gaze – particularly when the representatives of the old age, unwilling to cede their place, assume the outward trappings of innovation to reclaim vision for their own political purposes. Brecht takes up the most pregnant instance of this kind of masquerade in his own era: Hitler, he writes, had likewise proclaimed a new age, and had thereby beguiled the ranks of German workers whose own new age had yet to get properly underway and would be effectively derailed by the triumph of fascism (Brecht 1963, 7). For Brecht, then, the investment of the new age in the power of reinterpretation is apocalyptic (> Grk.: *apokalypto* = to uncover, reveal) in more than one sense. The re-interpreter tears down the protective veils and pretenses upon which the old age depended, looks upon the world with fresh eyes, and sets forth his or her principles as a revelatory response to an old age whose power to conceal and suppress that revelation has been overcome. But re-interpretation can just as easily serve the subtle purposes of this old age, which takes its grim vengeance in a second apocalypse: a dreadful, unanticipated revelation in which the new age lifts its mask and reveals itself as a perpetuation of the old. In a prose-poem also composed in 1939, "Parade des alten Neuen" ("Procession of the Old New") – part of a group of poems composed in anticipation of the outbreak of the Second World War, and appropriately entitled "Visionen" ("Visions") – Brecht figures the risks peculiar to life in a self-consciously new age in a succession of images that are apocalyptic in both of these senses at once:

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[7] For an account that focuses on Brecht's development during the Weimar period of the motifs and concepts that would come to dominate his later theoretical work, see Werner Hecht, *Brechts Weg zum epischen Theater. Beitrag zur Entwicklung des epischen Theaters 1918 bis 1933* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1962).

> Ich stand auf einem Hügel, da sah ich das Alte herankommen, aber es kam als das Neue.
>
> Es kroch heran auf neuen Krücken, die man nirgends je gesehen hatte, und stank nach neuen Dünsten der Verwesung, die man nirgends je gerochen hatte.
>
> Der Stein rollte vorbei als die neueste Erfindung, und die Raubschreie der Gorillas, die sich die Brustkästen trommelten, gaben sich als die neuesten Kompositionen.
>
> Allenthalben sah man geöffnete Gräber, die leer waren, als das Neue sich auf die Hauptstadt zu bewegte.
>
> Ringsum standen solche, die Schrecken einflößten und schrien: Hier kommt das Neue, das ist alles neu, begrüßt das Neue, seid neu wie wir! Und wer hörte, hörte nur ihr Geschrei, doch wer sah, sah solche, die nicht schrien.
>
> So schritt das Alte einher, verkleidet als das Neue, aber in seinem Triumphzug führte es das Neue mit sich und es wurde vorgeführt als das Alte.
>
> Das Neue ging gefesselt und in Lumpen, sie entblößten die blühenden Glieder.
>
> Und der Zug bewegte sich in der Nacht, aber es war eine Brandröte am Himmel, die wurde angesehen wie eine Morgenröte. Und das Geschrei: Hier kommt das Neue, das ist alles neu, begrüßt das Neue, seid neu wie wir! wäre noch hörbarer gewesen, wenn nicht ein Geschützdonner alles übertönt hätte.[8]

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[8] Bertolt Brecht, "Parade des alten Neuen," *Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden. Bd. 3: Gedichte 1* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 364. Hereafter, all of Brecht's works that appear in this edition will be cited by title, followed by the abbreviation AW and the respective volume and page number(s) of the work in this edition: e.g. "Parade des alten Neuen," AW 3:364.

> I stood upon a hill, and there I saw the Old approaching, but it came as the New.
>
> It crawled hither on new crutches that no one had ever seen before, and stank with new fumes of putrefaction that no one had ever smelled before.
>
> The stone was rolled past touted as the newest invention, and the predatory howls of the gorillas, drumming on their chests, were presented as the newest musical compositions.
>
> Everywhere open graves could be seen, which were empty, as the New moved towards the capital city.
>
> All around, people were standing filled with terror, and they screamed: *Here comes the New, it's all New, say hello to the New, be New like us!* And whoever listened heard only their screams, but whoever looked around saw only people who were not screaming.
>
> So the Old paraded past, disguised as the New, but in its triumphal procession it led the New along with it and it was presented as the Old.
>
> The New went forth shackled and in rags, they exposed its supple young limbs.
>
> And the parade took place at night, but there was a light of fire in the sky which was looked at as if it were the light of early dawn. And the cry: *Here comes the New, it's all New, say hello to the New, be New like us!* would have been more clearly audible, if the thunder of cannons had not drowned out everything else.

The perils of political life in the new era, which can often confuse the progressive with the primitive, the liberator with the conqueror, or new freedom with renewed slavery, demand that a rare keenness of vision accompany the work of reinterpretation. The poet-prophet, whose status as spectator to the triumphal march of history makes him just like the rest of us in one way, distinguishes himself from us precisely in the penetrating quality of his interpreting gaze. The risks of the new age, the optical illusions of its political life, only reveal their nature by being figured in a series of apocalyptic images such as these, the primary effect of which relies on their manifest and grotesque ambiguity – the twilight, as it were, in which truth and falsehood, hope and warning, intermingle. Whether the illusions of the new era succeed or fail, its progress inescapably depends on this kind of optically-centered theater. Not only in the rhetoric and the imagery that the new era invokes, but even in its preferred form of political action – revolution – it always makes for quite a show. The question is whether the adherents of the new age know what they are getting into when they willingly become spectators to and participants in this theater: whether, like the poet-prophet on his hill, they can unmask the real agents behind the *dramatis personae* and respond to them. This task of the new age, which Brecht took up not only as a lyric poet, but all the more so as a politically-minded playwright, demanded that theater offer much more than new spectacles, new stimulations for the eye. Brechtian theater sought instead to offer its spectators new techniques and new technologies of seeing that would train them in the kinds of reinterpretation that the political life of the new age would require of them on a daily basis – for better and for worse.

The approach to Brecht's *oeuvre* suggested by this line of thought realigns somewhat the genre-based approach established in both German and English scholarship. During the decades following the Second World War, scholarship in English was also relatively slow to reckon with the practical and historical field within which Brecht's work was constantly developing and responding to new problems and contexts, but now the historicist approach has become more or less status quo.[9] Unlike much work in either tradition of scholarship, however, the line of thinking I suggest here reasserts the intertextual and multigeneric character of Brecht's literary production at any given historical moment by pointing out common concerns as they are elaborated differently in Brecht's poetry, essays, and theoretical writings.[10] To distinguish rigidly between the poet and the dramatist, the theorist and the journalist, or the propagandist and the aesthete at a given moment in Brecht's career, let alone in his corpus, reflects the prejudices of criticism in general, and of the individual critic in particular, more than the formidable and unreconstructed intellectual promiscuity of Brecht himself. Let us not forget, after all, that in Brecht we are dealing with a truly monumental pervert. Scholarship in English, for instance, has really only just begun to clear away the critical prejudice that still exists against Brecht's theoretical writings and which was *de rigeur* for the pre-historicist reception.[11] His plays were typically read as timeless (read: apolitical) masterpieces at the cost of understanding their concrete historical and political roots as much as their theoretical justifications. To read Brecht in historical context, but to persist in the prejudice against his theoretical armature, as Peter Brooker argues, "is simply to read Brecht in terms of one favoured aesthetic ideology rather than another, and to compromise his art and ideas […].  If we are to approach his ideas more constructively, we need to understand how they emerged and changed in particular artistic and social circumstances" (Thomson & Sacks 185). In English scholarship, progress towards scholarly reckoning with Brecht's theoretical work in its historical and political context has just gotten on its feet with John J. White's *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*.[12] White offers the most ambitious and complete treatment of Brecht's dramatic theory in English scholarship, with a strong focus on the textual history of Brecht's major theoretical statements. It lies beyond the scope even of White's expansive volume, however, to define all the major intertexual and intergeneric connections between Brecht's drama and his theory: these must be approached as singular moments and convergences. If the history and politics of the West in the 20th century offer the prime intertext for the whole of Brecht's work, as Brooker, White, and many others suggest, this relationship was negotiated along paths that ran through a number of different genres and texts simultaneously, paths that often converged and diverged without any prudish regard for generic distinctions. For the critic of Brecht, the multitude of such interconnected pathways means that the generic and literary characteristics of individual texts can potentially provide surfaces of mutual reflection and critique. Not only does Brecht's theoretical corpus reflect critically on the virtues and limits of his dramatic corpus, but his plays themselves reflect critically on the virtues and limits of his theoretical ambitions.

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[9] Ernst Schuhmacher sets the tone for many subsequent readings of Brecht's plays when he writes about the changing meaning of *Leben des Galilei* (hereafter *LdG*) as Brecht revised it in the face of contemporary events: "Brecht bediente sich zur Verfremdung aktualer Geschehnisse – der mangelnden Verantwortung der Wissenschaft gegenüber der Gesellschaft, des komplizierten Ausbruchs einer neuen Zeit, der widerspruchsvollen Durchsetzung der Vernunft – , also zur »Historisierung«, der Historie. Im Leben Galileis fand er eine analoge »Situation mit Modellcharakter« für das aktuale Geschehen." ("In order to alienate contemporary events – the failure of social responsibility on the part of science, the complicated inception of a new age, the contradictory achievement of reason – in a word, in order to 'historicize' them, Brecht made use of history. In the life of Galileo he found a 'paradigmatic situation' that offered an analogy to contemporary events.") Schuhmacher, "Form und Einfühlung," in Brecht, *Materialien*, ed. Hecht, 154; see also id., "Verfremdung durch Historisierung in Brechts »Leben des Galilei«" and "Stoff und Form in »Leben des Galilei«" both in: Schuhmacher, *Brecht. Theater und Gesellschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Einundzwanzig Aufsätze* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1975), 191-200 and 201-241 respectively. Reinhold Grimm's much more recent reading (1998) follows the same basic historicist line in reading *LdG*, but complicates it somewhat by suggesting its structural resemblances to the twofold form of the Baroque emblem. Like Schuhmacher, Grimm explains the differences in tone and attitude between the three different versions of the play as reinterpretations of its content in light of a changing historical context: "No doubt, this contradictoriness, this total reversal, these two blatantly opposite meanings were possible only because Brecht's whole 'Schauspiel' amounts to a gigantic *pictura* for which he provided a *subscriptio* appropriate to the circumstances at hand. Only then does it become clear why the playwright was able to revise his drama and its message so rapidly and so radically. What was changed was not the representation, which he scarcely needed to touch, but merely the interpretation." Reinhold Grimm, "A Couple of Notes on Two Brechtian Plays: *Leben des Galilei* and *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*," in: Walter Delabar & Jörg Döring, eds., *Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)* (Berlin: Weidler, 1998), 191.

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[10] This is not to say that Brecht's theoretical writings have always been strictly compartmentalized from his dramatic works. Arrigo Subiotto, for instance, offers a brief, clear, and rich historical survey of Brecht's developing theories of theater in the context of his plays and the attendant historical and biographical circumstances: Arrigo Subiotto, "Epic Theatre: A Theatre for the Scientific Age," in: *Critical Essays on Bertolt Brecht*, ed. Siegfried Mews (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1989). Subiotto's piece, however, does remain strictly on the level of a broad survey, and does not offer specific intertextual and intergeneric readings between theoretical and literary texts.

[11] It could be argued, perhaps uncharitably, that earlier scholarship in German proceeded to the other extreme, where historical and theoretical concerns sometimes jointly obstruct close reading. From this perspective, Ernst Schuhmacher's voluminous *Drama und Geschichte. Bertolt Brechts „Leben des Galilei" und andere Stücke* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968), for instance, while exemplary and exhaustive in its treatment of the relationship between dramatic form and historical content in *Leben des Galilei*, seems to offer valuable scaffolding to support a close literary reading rather than articulating such a reading independently.

Reading the thematics of theater, visual technology, and the politics of the new age not only uncovers some of the intergeneric forms of reflection within Brecht's corpus, but also necessarily places one text in particular at the focal point of such transactions between drama and dramatic theory. This text happens to be a drama, and happens to be a masterpiece: *Leben des Galilei* (1938/39).[13] The penetrating gaze of Brecht's Galileo, through the bold appropriation and application of a visual technology, actually does begin a new era – the epoch of modern empirical science – by formulating an innovative interpretive response to the natural universe. When Galileo delivers his virtuosic early-morning monologue in the first scene – itself practically a play within the play – he has yet to receive word of the technological innovation that will reconstitute the visible universe as the theater in which both his interpretive career and that of the new age will unfold: the telescope. Nonetheless, the tremendous promise of this age appears in his visionary paean as the desideratum towards which the whole civilized world already inclines. He celebrates the incipient liberation of Europe from its spatial and temporal captivity to ancient tradition, and, in a last great crescendo, recites an aubade for the 17th as much as for the 20th century: " 'O früher Morgen des Beginnens! / O Hauch des Windes, der / Von neuen Küsten kommt!' " (*LdG* AW 2:12; "O early morning of beginning! / O breath of wind, that / Comes from new shores!") In poetic form and dramatic situation, Galileo's outburst captures precisely the re-interpreter's mood of hope and eager expectation at the dawn of the new age: "ausgeruht, kräftig, erfindungsreich" ("well-rested, strong, rich in invention"). But it also serves a discreet historicizing function that stays true to Brecht's position as apocalyptic prophet, insofar as the 17th-century moment of Galileo's utterance provides a strategic cipher for the 20th-century moment of its performance. All that is still needed in either context, it seems, is the instrument of vision, the technology of reinterpretation, with which the new age can begin in earnest. For the spectator, the historical case-study of Galileo himself in the drama provides the telescope through which the possibilities and dangers of the 20th century can at last appear clearly: the theater itself provides the instrument of vision with which Brecht's new age can begin.

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[12] John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004).

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[13] The play exists in three distinct versions: the first "dänische Fassung" ("Danish version") was written during Brecht's exile in Denmark during 1938-1939 and premiered in Zürich on 9 September 1943. The second "amerikanische Fassung" ("American version") represented an extensive revision and translation into English of the Danish version completed in collaboration with stage and screen actor Charles Laughton during Brecht's Hollywood exile in 1944-1945, and premiered in Beverly Hills, California on 30 July 1947, and then in New York City on 7 December 1947. The third, "Berliner Fassung" ("Berlin version"), which Brecht worked on from his return to Germany (DDR) in 1948 until his death in 1956, offered yet another revision – this time of the original German text in light of the English version produced with Laughton – and premiered in Köln on 16 April 1955, and then in Berlin on 15 January 1957, after Brecht's death, under the direction of Erich Engel. While there are no major differences of event or substance between the three versions, what differs greatly between them is Brecht's tone and implicit evaluation of Galileo's ultimate recantation – differences which scholars have rightly understood as indicative Brecht's changing attitude towards the story against the stormy and contradictory historical background of the years 1938-1956. The Danish version, written with Hitler's rise and imminent military aggression in mind, represents Galileo as a cunning survivalist and anti-fascist revolutionary who recants in order to protect the future of his research, but accuses himself nonetheless of having failed to offer proper resistance to his opponents and a heroic figure for like-minded contemporaries. Two contemporary intertexts that help contextualize these aspects of the Danish version are Brecht's "Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit" ("Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth," 1934/35; AW 6:171-186), and "Rede über die Widerstandskraft der Vernunft" ("Speech on the Oppositional Power of Reason," 1937; AW 6:281-284). The American version evaluates Galileo's recantation in the context of the American atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and the abdication from responsibility on the part of the scientists who contributed to nuclear arms research; its emphasis falls more decidedly on Galileo's self-condemnation for abdicating from the social responsibility of the individual scientist, and ends with a tone of prophetic warning for a human world that may be consumed instead of renewed by the discoveries of science. The third version combines the points of emphasis from the prior two versions in the context of a postwar world now rapidly turning towards the Cold War era: its definitive events for Brecht's thinking included the inception of Soviet nuclear arms research, the Rosenberg trials, and the Korean war (Stefan Hauck, "Anmerkungen zu *Leben des Galilei.* Entstehung," AW 2:679-686; for a more detailed account, see Werner Mittenzwei, *Bertolt Brecht. Von der „Maßnahme" zu „Leben des Galilei"* [Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1962], 253-346). My discussion is founded upon the Berlin version printed in AW 2:7-109, which contains the "*Ausgabe letzter Hand*": the final revision of the play Brecht was able to make before his death.

The tone of high optimism in Galileo's verses takes on a decidedly different meaning, however, and enters the apocalyptic twilight of reinterpretation, when we consider both the subsequent course of the drama and the Galilean claims of Brecht's theoretical writings on theater. Along both these paths, the theater of the new age finds in Galileo's verses a spontaneous and self-confident prelude to a drama defined by compromises, confrontations, and ultimately dire risks that come to stand in the way of the free-ranging will to reinterpret. The instrument of vision with which the new age begins in earnest must come to Galileo, the preeminent visionary of that age, from elsewhere and from others – for whom it is not an epochal innovation so much as an amusing novelty. Because Galileo assumes the role of the telescope's inventor, and is publicly lauded for his "achievement" in a ceremony of the utmost theatricality, the authority that validates the interpretive work of his new age rests on a decidedly theatrical impersonation. Once he puts the telescope to work, Galileo's immediate and passionate response to the visible universe, which was eagerly anticipated in the lyric coda to his monologue, is drawn ever closer into a reckoning with not only the traditional, textually-based authority of the Church, but also the novel authority of technologically-enhanced vision, upon which both Galilean science and Brechtian theater depend in equal measure. As in the delicate and electrified confrontation at a masquerade ball between Galileo and Cardinal Barberini, the champion of the new age walks the razor's edge between dawn and twilight, between spiritual and sensory revelation, in a struggle to establish and maintain interpretive authority that unfolds as a game of risk:

> GALILEI [...] »Wer aber das Korn zurückhält, dem wird das Volk fluchen.« Sprüche Salomonis.
> BARBERINI »Der Weise verbirget sein Wissen.« Sprüche Salomonis.
> GALILEI »Wo da Ochsen sind, da ist der Stall unrein. Aber viel Gewinn ist durch die Stärke des Ochsen.«
> BARBERINI »Der seine Vernunft im Zaum hält, ist besser als der eine Stadt nimmt.«
> GALILEI »Des Geist aber gebrochen ist, dem verdorren die Gebeine.« *Pause.* »Schreiet die Wahrheit nicht laut?«
> BARBERINI »Kann man den Fuß setzen auf glühende Kohle, und der Fuß verbrennt nicht?« (*LdG* AW 2:56-57)
>
> GALILEO […] "The people curse the man who holds back grain." Proverbs.
> BARBERINI "The wise man conceals his knowledge." Proverbs.
> GALILEO "Where there are oxen, the stall is unclean. But great abundance is won through the strength of the ox."
> BARBERINI "He who reins in his reason is better than he who captures a city."
> GALILEO "The breaking of a man's spirit dries out his bones." *Pause.* "Does the truth not cry out loud?"
> BARBERINI "Can one walk on glowing coals and not burn one's feet?"

This highly-coded exchange of biblical citations enacts an interpretive *agōn*, which, on either side of the conversation, invokes the same text to authorize two mutually incommensurable viewpoints: Galileo, who favors full-scale assent to his revolutionary findings as established scientific truth, and the Cardinal, who favors the treatment of Galileo’s findings as convenient hypotheses so as to circumvent their politically- and theologically-freighted implications for the status quo. More importantly, the literary medium of this perspectival *agon* – the practice of citation itself – possesses an undeniably theatrical quality, and not only because it forms a scene in a play by Brecht. Within the work of interpretation, the establishment of interpretive authority implicitly demands that the interpreter assume a foreign viewpoint, speak in a foreign voice, appear in a foreign guise – not unlike someone who assumes a dramatic role. This viewpoint and this voice, here provided by the text of Scripture, legitimate interpretive claims according to, and integrate those claims within, a preexisting paradigm. In other words, the invocation of authority has the effect of both bestowing value upon the invoker’s claims, and of reproducing the value of the authority thus invoked. Authority produces the value of a given interpretation, just as interpretation reproduces the value of authority; each does so according to the demands of a calculated and persuasive impersonation – indeed, a *trans*personation – which, in the last analysis, follows a theatrical logic.

According to this model, both Galileo’s telescope and the Cardinal’s Bible, as authorizing instruments of interpretation, work to subsume the immediate present-tense of the interpreter’s work in his study or laboratory to the voices, viewpoints, and values of others. Absent, deceased, or revered, these others provide a repertoire of established *dramatis personae* that legitimate the performance of interpretation in the present moment. Citation, as the zero degree of textual authority, already resurrects the dead, makes the absent present, *replaces* the false or opaque present with an authentic and transparent past: its medium of reference is made of discourse and human, historical time. In a similar way, telescopy, as the zero degree of empirical authority, brings distant objects into the most intimate proximity, makes what was previously invisible or barely visible manifestly visible, *replaces* the immediate purview of natural human vision with a greatly expanded and enriched panorama: its medium of reference is made of sense and natural, ahistorical space. Both these mediating technologies enact a strategic displacement of the "here and now" and their at least partial and temporary replacement with a "there and then."[14] They compel the present to impersonate the past, or the distant to impersonate the proximate, theatrically: they force it, in short, to put on an apocalyptic mask that imposes definite interpretive risks. Even the most radically innovative source of authority must at last exert a conservative and institutionalizing force – precisely because the interpretation it authorizes is performed in terms of definite theatrical roles and carefully scripted exchanges. If the exponents of a new age seek to establish a new authority, as Galileo so ardently desires to do, they do so quite literally at the risk of reinstating and reproducing the authority of the age just past – the risk of performing, all over again, the same scenes of oppression. Which, it's worth adding, is precisely the risk Galileo assumes when he plays the high-stakes game of biblical citation with the Cardinal in this passage – and, even more insidiously, when he gives voice to the surging desire of the new age with that other citation, from lyric poetry, with which I began here. The fact that the poem Galileo cites at that point invokes a passage from Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*, furthermore, and approximates very closely a poem by Brecht himself, only tacitly underlines the bonds of reciprocity, if not complicity, with authority into which the interpreter must enter – no matter how innovative, how conscious, or how willing he might be.[15] However they might be constituted, these are, after all, the powerful and intimate bonds between an actor and his role.

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[14] From this perspective, it would make for a fascinating reading of Brecht's play to approach Galileo's work of re-interpretation in the play as an attempt to escape from history and discourse, which here exert a differentiating and disseminating force, and to take refuge in the immediate, apparent unities of

Galileo's authorizing citation finds reciprocation in Brecht's theoretical reflections on drama, which are deeply informed by a specific reception of Galilean empirical science. If, as I have claimed, Brechtian theater embodies a technology of seeing designed for the new age of modernity, it can claim this function, at least in part, because it strategically invokes the authority of Galilean science. We have just seen how the specific textual and empirical games of interpretation Galileo chooses to play simultaneously establish and endanger the interpretive authority of his new age in the drama. In a similar way, Brecht's articulation of modern theater in his "Kleines Organon für das Theater" ("Little Organon for the Theater") turns significantly to Galileo at a crucial moment to authorize alienation – one of the central concepts of Brechtian theater – as a specifically visual technique of re-interpretation:

> Das lange nicht Geänderte nämlich scheint unänderbar. Allenthalben treffen wir auf etwas, das zu selbstverständlich ist, als daß wir uns bemühen müßten, es zu verstehen. Was sie miteinander erleben, scheint den Menschen das gegebene menschliche Erleben. Das Kind, lebend in einer Welt der Greise, lernt, wie es dort zugeht. Wie die Dinge eben laufen, so werden sie ihm geläufig. … Damit all dies viele Gegebene ihm als ebensoviel Zweifelhaftes erscheinen könnte, müßte er jenen fremden Blick entwickeln, mit dem der große Galilei einen ins Pendeln gekommenen Kronleuchter betrachtete. Den verwunderten diese Schwingungen, als hätte er sie so nicht erwartet und verstünde es nicht von ihnen, wodurch er dann auf die Gesetzmäßigkeiten kam. Diesen Blick, so schwierig wie produktiv, muß das Theater mit seinen Abbildungen des menschlichen Zusammenlebens provozieren. Es muß sein Publikum wundern machen, und dies geschieht vermittels einer Technik der Verfremdungen des Vertrauten (AW 6:536f., §44).

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space and sense. Unfortuantely, such a reading would take me far beyond the limits of the present discussion.

[15] Though the reference to Bacon (Jan Knopf, "Anmerkungen," AW 4:548) fits the historical moment of the scene, the resonance with Brecht's later poem from 1945, "O Lust des Beginnens!", is unmistakable, and compels us to read the passage through the lens of a truly unique intertextual anachronism: Galileo tacitly invokes Bacon, and Brecht invokes both his own Galileo and Bacon again in his verses from several years later: "O Lust des Beginnens! O früher Morgen! / Erstes Gras, wenn vergessen scheint / Was grün ist!" (AW 4:383).

> That which has not been changed for a long time appears unchangeable. On every side we encounter something that is too obvious for us to take the trouble to understand it. What human beings experience with each other appears to them to be human experience as such, as it is given. The child, living in a world of old people, learns what goes on there. For him, the way this world just happens to go [*wie die Dinge eben laufen*] becomes, for him, the way of the world [*geläufig*]. … So that all these 'givens' might appear to him as just so much to question and to doubt, he would have to develop that alien gaze with which the great Galileo observed a swinging lantern. The swinging astonished him, as if he had not expected it to be thus and did not understand how he might then grasp the law that governed its regular movements. It is this gaze, as difficult as it is productive, that the theater must provoke with its representations of human life in society. The theater must make its audience feel astonishment, and this occurs by means of a technique [*Technik*] of alienation from the familiar.

Brechtian alienation trains the spectator of modern theater to assume and perform the role of a Galilean scientist in order to accede to the truth – not of nature, but of society – and thereby to become that representative character of the new age: the re-interpreter. The object of this training lies in the gaze. The spectator's success in inscribing his gaze within a Galilean perspective, and his attitude within a Galilean sense of astonishment and curiosity, authorizes his innovative response according to the historical-material truth of human society grasped by this perspective. Ultimately, the access to this truth through interpretation is not an end in itself, but its relative value must be measured according to its usefulness as an instrument of political intervention and transformation, as a multiplier of effective force. No matter how transformative the technique of alienation may at last prove as a political instrument in the contemporary age, however, its operation depends on the spectator's identification with an exemplary and authoritative perspective, here figured as that of a scientist from four centuries ago. Wherever the would-be re-interpreter – Galileo, Brecht, *et al*. – may turn, he finds he must establish precedents, forebears, and analogies, all of which threaten to absorb or dissolve the impulse to "begin again" which was his point of departure. He cannot, in other words, start his performance without obeying the actor's first mandate, that of "getting into character" – and a great deal depends upon both the role he selects from the available repertoire and what he accomplishes with it. The risk of complicity in error that governs the relationship of identification between the individual interpreter and his elected authority likewise governs the relationship between actor and character, and that between spectator and spectacle: in Brecht's thinking, they are all equally relationships of dramatic imitation, of *mimēsis*. It is this last concept, moreover, that establishes the common ground upon which Brecht's theories of theater and his *Leben des Galilei* enter into dialogue with one another on the risks and responsibilities of interpretation.

By invoking the concept of *mimēsis*, not only have I resurrected the specter of Aristotle[16] that haunts Brecht's entire dramatic achievement, but I have also reached the effective point of departure for the present inquiry. Before we undertake the intertextual and multigeneric reading just promised, which will examine the mutual complicity of Brechtian and Galilean technologies of interpretation as well as the risks given in such complicity, we must split the difference, as it were, between these two figures by examining the single authority to which both of their viewpoints *respond*, explicitly and antagonistically, but also to which they are thereby both made implicitly *responsible*.[17] Namely, this is the classical authority of Aristotle, reconstructed and invested as such by the medieval Catholic Church in Brecht's play, on the one hand, and by the bourgeois

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[16] One of a large number of prominent undead that knock about in the inner recesses of Brecht's writing and thinking; I could just as easily have chosen Francis Bacon (see Ralph J. Ley, "Francis Bacon, *Galileo*, and the Brechtian Theater," in: *Essays on Brecht: Theater and Politics*, ed. Siegfried Mews & Herbert Knust [Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1974], 174-189; and Reinhold Grimm, "Vom Novum Organum zum Kleinen Organon. Gedanken zur Verfremdung," in: *Das Ärgernis Brecht*, ed. Willy Jäggi & Hans Oesch [Stuttgart: Basilius Presse Basel, 1961], 45-70), Émile Zola and Henrik Ibsen (see Reinhold Grimm, "Naturalism and Epic Drama," in Mews & Knust 1974, 3-27), or even Walter Benjamin in the years that Brecht survived him (see: Durst 181-208; Mi-Ae Yun, *Walter Benjamin als Zeitgenosse Bertolt Brechts. Eine paradoxe Beziehung zwischen Nähe und Ferne* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000]; and, for the most recent and complete treatment, Wizisla *op. cit.*) – were it not for the central importance enjoyed by the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the German tradition of thought on identification in the theater, which is one of my major concerns here.

German dramatic tradition in Brecht's theoretical writings on the other – more specifically, by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's highly influential reception of the *Poetics* in the late 18th century.[18] For Brecht, the chief consequence of Lessing's reception of Aristotle for German dramaturgy was the ascendancy of emotional identification as the technique that allowed the classical principle of *mimēsis* to be utilized as a politically effective instrument in the service of bourgeois ideology. In the venerable name of antiquity, it legitimated a "brotherhood of man" by paradoxically persuading the spectator not to cling to his own concrete and limited historical perspective, but to impersonate the dramatic hero as the authoritative exemplar of "universal humanity." For Brecht's Galileo, the chief consequence of the medieval Church's Aristotelianism for the development of modern empirical science is similar: the Church's institutional and discursive forms reproduce the authority of a textual tradition through a system of theatrical identifications and impersonations that follow a mimetic logic. Again, in the venerable name of antiquity, the Church in the play legitimates a textual discourse originally based on concrete sensory observations by paradoxically persuading its adherents not to account for the re-visions suggested by the evidence of their own eyes, but to uphold the universal and transcendent authority of their textual tradition through ever more virtuosic theater. As we shall see, the principled revolt against these mimetic

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[17] The response does not liberate the respondent from the question he is asked: on the contrary, it subjects him, at least in part, to the viewpoint from which the question issues. The only answer that frees us entirely from the question is silence.

[18] Angela Curran's recent scholarly treatment of Brecht's relationship to Aristotle suggests similiarities and differences in the conceptual architecture of either figure's dramaturgy, but neglects the centuries-long tradition of interpretation and reception in dramatic theory, not to mention traditions of practical performance, that decided the meaning of the Aristotelian precepts for German drama, and to which Brecht's theory and practice critically responds. Angela Curran, "Brecht's Criticisms of Aristotle's Aesthetics of Tragedy," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59:2 (Spring 2001), 167-184. My treatment of Lessing, one of the main sources for the German tradition of reception so crucial for understanding Brecht, aims at giving more historical depth-of-field to the Brecht-Aristotle relationship by

Aristotelianisms by both the fictional Galileo and the historical Brecht only consolidates the responsibility of either figure's vision of the "new age" to the ancient horizon of Aristotle, and through Aristotle in turn to a classical tradition of tragedy suddenly rendered uncomfortably contemporary. In short, the call to arms against the paradoxes of interpretive authority, like Oedipus' crusade on behalf of Thebes, only ends up renewing those paradoxes by redrawing the boundaries of their risks and responsibilities.

In either case, the paradoxes derive from the peculiarly stereoscopic viewpoint[19] imposed by the interpreter's responsibility to authority: in the work of interpretation, one can never quite wholly see from one's own viewpoint, nor wholly from that of the authority one invokes. The stereoscopic image formed equally by both cannot ultimately be decomposed into what belongs to one and what belongs to the other with any degree of certainty. The re-interpreter, like the dramatic actor, can never be entirely here or entirely there, now or then, alive or dead, himself or another. In short, he must approach us with the greeting of Teiresias in Sophocles' *Antigone*: ἥκομεν κοινὴν ὁδὸν / δύ' ἐξ ἑνὸς βλέποντε: τοῖς τυφλοῖσι γὰϱ / αὕτη κέλευθος ἐκ πϱοηγητοῦ πέλει. (Soph. *Ant.* 988-990;[20] "We have come on a shared path / two gazing from the eyes of one: after all, for the blind / such is the path one must tread, following a guide.") In more Brechtian terms, we might say that at best, the modern Teiresias can only pronounce the dawn of a new era from behind the ambiguous and complicit mask of the apocalypse.

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seeing both figures as participants in a conversation that reaches a decisive moment in 18th-century Germany.

[19] The concept of stereoscopy – though not going under that name – is already active in much scholarship on Brecht; see, for instance, Brooker's assessment of the effects of alienation: "The repertoire of estranging effects […] aim to produce *a double perspective on events and actions so as at once to show their present contradictory nature and their historical cause or social motivation*. In a frequent image, this would be like following the course of a river and staying above it, remaining both inside and above the stream" (Thomson & Sacks 191, emphasis mine).

[20] Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Mark Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

## 2. Aristotle's Spectacles, Part 1: Imitation, Authority, and Complicity in Brecht's *Leben des Galilei*

Ich entstehe in der Form einer Antwort.[21]
*I come into being in the form of an answer.*

– Brecht

When Galileo encounters the Scholastic professors of the University of Padua in Scene 4 of *Leben des Galilei*, the resulting dialogue between their interpretive perspectives gradually reveals the relationship of stereoscopy that these perspectives share on at least two different levels. Like the two eyes necessary for stereoscopic vision, each presents a distinct viewpoint on a common interpretive object – the natural universe – and, on the basis of its viewpoint, can make a limited claim to perceive that object clearly and thus grasp its truth. As the dialogue plays the truth-claims of one eye, as it were, against those of the other, it also brings to light a second and more subtle form of stereoscopy: the duality of viewpoint inherent to each individual perspective by virtue of its more or less implicit invocation of an interpretive authority. The interpretive tension between the empirical-inductive and the Scholastic-deductive viewpoints, embodied by Galileo and the professors respectively, is heightened and complemented by the theatrical tension between the individual interpreter on either side and the authority he literally impersonates – the tension of difference, as I have argued, between the actor and his role. By the end of the scene, this multi-leveled conversation – between the authority of sense and the authority of discourse, between the immediate, individual interpreter and the mediating persona of authority – brings the theater itself to the flash-point of self-reflection on the authority of its *own* interpretations: the imitations of reality it presents in performance. The scene is able to interrogate the interpretive authority of dramatic

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[21] Brecht, "Über die Person [1930/31]" in: *Werke: grosse kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe. Bd. 21: Schriften 1*. ed. Werner Hecht (Berlin: Aufbau, 1988-2000; this volume 1995), 404.

*mimēsis*, furthermore, precisely because the interlocutors themselves present their interpretive responses as impersonation, as theater. As the interpretation that each performs frustrates the other by calling attention to the limitations of its dramatic *mimēsis*, the theater of *mimēsis* in which the spectator sits is called into question by the same stroke. Likewise, while each interlocutor initially seeks to secure the unilateral hegemony of monologue, each is quickly driven back into the defensive strategies and countermaneuvers of dialogue. In the same way, the spectator's potential assent to the monologic authority of dramatic representation is constantly undermined, rather than being reinforced, by the genuinely dialogic structure of that representation: the spectator, in short, has no choice but to assume responsibility as a participant in the conversation.

Galileo begins his own performance, and establishes his own authority, with a monologue:

> GALILEI *am Fernrohr:* Wie Eure Hoheit zweifellos wissen, sind wir Astronomen seit einiger Zeit mit unseren Berechnungen in große Schwierigkeiten gekommen. Wir benützen dafür ein sehr altes System, das sich in Übereinstimmung mit der Philosophie, aber leider nicht mit den Fakten zu befinden scheint. Nach diesem alten System, dem ptolemäischen, werden die Bewegungen der Gestirne als äußerst verwickelt angenommen. Der Planet Venus zum Beispiel soll eine Bewegung von dieser Art vollführen. *Er zeichnet auf eine Tafel die epizyklische Bahn der Venus nach der ptolemäischen Annahme.* Aber selbst solche schwierigen Bewegungen annehmend, sind wir nicht in der Lage, die Stellung der Gestirne richtig vorauszuberechnen. Wir finden sie nicht an den Orten, wo sie eigentlich sein müßten. Dazu kommen solche Gestirnbewegungen, für welche das ptolemäische System überhaupt keine Erklärung hat. Bewegungen dieser Art scheinen mir einige von mir neu entdeckte kleine Sterne um den Planeten Jupiter zu vollführen. Ist es den Herren angenehm, mit einer Besichtigung der Jupitertrabanten zu beginnen, der Mediceischen Gestirne? (*LdG* 2:39)
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> GALILEO *at the telescope:* As Your Highness doubtless knows, we astronomers have for some time encountered great difficulties with our calculations. For these, we use a very old system that seems to be consistent with our philosophy, but not, unfortunately, with the facts themselves. According to this old system, the Ptolemaic system, we assume that the movements of the heavenly bodies are extremely complicated. The planet Venus, for example, is supposed to follow a movement of this kind. *On a board, he draws the epicyclical orbit of Venus according to the Ptolemaic conception.* But even when we assume such difficult orbits, we are still not capable of correctly predicting the position of the heavenly bodies with our calculations. We do not find them in the places where they would actually have to be. In addition, there are a number of movements for which the Ptolemaic system has no explanation at all. Movements of this kind appear to me to be conducted by some small bodies that I have recently discovered around the planet Jupiter. Does it please your lordships to begin with a viewing of the satellites of Jupiter, the Medicean Stars?

Galileo's interpretation clearly distinguishes between the categories of philosophical proposition, observable empirical fact, and the Ptolemaic system that is designed to reconcile the two through quantitative calculations that demonstrate the subservience of the fact to the proposition. His contention, furthermore, is that the Ptolemaic system performs this function neither elegantly – "We assume that the movements of the heavenly bodies are extremely complicated" – nor adequately – "We do not find [heavenly bodies] in the places where they would actually have to be" – nor exhaustively – "There are a number of movements for which the Ptolemaic system has no explanation at all." From Galileo's perspective, there is no question of whether the Ptolemaic system remains accountable to the propositions of Aristotelian philosophy; the question of real concern to him lies in its accountability to observable empirical facts. His argument accordingly unfolds with as much concern for logical as for sensory transparency; he pursues this transparency at one point by his visual representation of the orbit of Venus to his audience, and then, moving from visual representation to visual reality, he seeks to consolidate its effect through his invitation to view the bodies in question through the telescope. In short, the theater in which Galileo attempts to perform his interpretation assumes and establishes the authority of sensory facts as primary and the authority of explanatory schemes as secondary. From Galileo's perspective, new sensory facts, which emerge with the application of new interpretive technologies – here, the telescope – demand new explanations: above all, what and how one *sees* decides what and how one interprets. The instrument of interpretation, furthermore, already informs the content of interpretation because it establishes the domain and the persona in which the interpreter claims authority. Galileo thus im-personates the combination of sensing eye and reasoning mind which are united in a subject who simply desires to understand what he sees before him.

For as smoothly and unobtrusively as Galileo performs this prologue to his interpretive drama, however, the response of the professors to his request abruptly interrupts its dramatic flow and turns it aside into quite another channel. The slight, jarring short circuit of mis-understanding from which the exchange now unfolds, and in which its effects find their constant source, reveals the relative limits within which each perspective can draw on its distinct authority to perform a persuasive and involving drama.

> DER PHILOSOPH […] Ich fürchte, das alles ist nicht ganz so einfach. Herr Galilei, bevor wir Ihr berühmtes Rohr applizieren, möchten wir um das Vergnügen eines Disputs bitten. Thema: Können solche Planeten existieren?
> DER MATHEMATIKER Eines formalen Disputs.
> GALILEI Ich dachte mir, Sie schauen einfach durch das Fernrohr und überzeugen sich?
> DER MATHEMATIKER […] Es ist Ihnen natürlich bekannt, daß nach der Ansicht der Alten Sterne nicht möglich sind, die um einen anderen Mittelpunkt als die Erde kreisen, noch solche Sterne, die im Himmel keine Stütze haben?
> GALILEI Ja.
> DER PHILOSOPH Und, ganz absehend von der Möglichkeit solcher Sterne, die der Mathematiker *er verbeugt sich gegen den Mathematiker* zu bezweifeln scheint, möchte ich in aller Bescheidenheit als Philosoph die Frage aufwerfen: sind solche Sterne nötig? […]
> GALILEI Wie, wenn Eure Hoheit die sowohl unmöglichen als auch unnötigen Sterne nun durch dieses Fernrohr wahrnehmen würden? (*LdG* 2:39)
>
> THE PHILOSOPHER […] I fear it's not all quite that simple. Mr. Galilei, before we administer your famous tube, we would like to request the pleasure of a disputation. Topic: Can such planets exist?
> THE MATHEMATICIAN A formal disputation.
> GALILEO I just thought you could simply take a look through the telescope and would be convinced?
> THE MATHEMATICIAN […] You are of course aware that according to the view of the ancients, heavenly bodies that orbit around some other center than the earth are not possible, nor are bodies that have no support in the heavens?
> GALILEO Yes.
> THE PHILOSOPHER And furthermore, quite apart from the possibility that such stars exist, which the mathematician *he bows to the mathematician* appears to doubt, I, as a philosopher and in all modesty, would like to pose the question: are such bodies necessary?

Delicately but no less effectively turning aside Galileo's request to look through the telescope, the professors request instead that Galileo submit to a disputation, the theatrical and rhetorical spectacle of intellectual *agōn* by means of which intellectual questions were decided in the medieval tradition of Scholastic philosophy. Within the context of the three categories outlined by Galileo's introduction, the disputation represents a mode of inquiry with an interpretive orientation diametrically opposed to Galileo's in both form and content. Its form follows the strictly defined logical coherence of a system of philosophical propositions, not the sensory coherence of empirical facts; its content depends upon the mutual confrontation of virtuosic arguments formulated by the two opponents, not through the mutual confrontation of empirical facts and explanatory schemes. Given these constraints, the two topics the professors propose for the debate, the *possibility* and the *necessity* of the existence of the stars in question, are in full accordance with their interpretive dramaturgy:[22] they do not refer at all to the question of whether the stars *can* or *must* exist in the world of empirical facts, the undeniability of which Galileo emphasizes so strongly. Instead, they raise the question of whether the apparent existence of these stars can be submitted to the logical dictates of a philosophical discourse that serves as the final, infallible arbiter of "real" as opposed to "apparent" existence. The Mathematician, furthermore, reveals the source of the insuperable authority enjoyed by this discourse in his own theater of persuasion simply by making reference to its antiquity ("according to the view of the ancients"). If the empirical facts are logically incoherent with this venerable discourse – to speak in Scholastic terms, if the stars' apparent existence is neither a possible nor a necessary deduction from higher axioms – then by default the authoritative truth-value of the philosophical discourse must be preserved and the empirical facts must be condemned as false. When judged from Galileo's perspective, who functions as both actor in his own theater of interpretation and spectator to that of the professors, the grand intellectual drama of vindication with which the Scholastics expect him to "play along" seems, from its premises down, to be nothing but an absurd farce of abstractions. From the point of view of the Professors, however, Galileo's argument blithely overturns the venerable edifice upon which scientific and philosophical knowledge as such are founded, and seeks to replace it wholesale with a cheap, though ingenious, optical deception.

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[22] It is of the utmost importance to understand that the genuinely stereoscopic character of Scene 4, upon which the effectiveness of its alienation effect (see below) depends, demands that the spectator and/or reader be able to acknowledge the relative legitimacy of the Professors' interpretive claims within the Scholastic paradigm of science. To treat the Professors' claims as specious or absurd, and thereby to elevate Galileo's as standing by the dictates of (modern and post-Galilean) common sense, not only commits a prejudicial anachronism, but also invites the spectator's and/or reader's total identification with Galileo – to the detriment, ultimately, of the scene's stereoscopic structure. Brecht himself insisted on a non-prejudicial representation of the orthodox Scholastic view and its exponents in his productions of the play. In a letter dated 27 December 1955, he wrote of *LdG*: "Ich muß darauf achten, daß die Gegner Galileis, die Kirchenfürsten und Hofleute, so positiv wie möglich dargestellt werden" ("I must take pains that Galileo's opponents, the princes of the Church and the courtiers, are presented in as positive a light as possible"; Brecht, "Vorbereitung der Aufführung," in: *Materialien*, ed. Hecht, 87; see also "Darstellung der Kirche" in the same volume, 13-15). To lose the carefully-maintained balance between both perspectives in

As they did for him, however, Galileo manages to interrupt their progress towards establishing the theater of interpretation in which their philosophical discourse is to be vindicated by drawing explicit attention to the specific nature of their discourse itself. Following the exchange just quoted, the Philosopher tries to begin the disputation in earnest by shifting into Latin, the *lingua franca* of educated debate, and the dynamics of stereoscopy immediately begin to reveal the relative limits of the Professors' perspective:

> THE PHILOSOPHER […] Aristotelis divini universum ...
> GALILEI Sollten wir nicht in der Umgangssprache fortfahren? Mein Kollege, Herr Federzoni, versteht Latein nicht.
> DER PHILOSOPH Ist es von Wichtigkeit, daß er uns versteht?
> GALILEI Ja.
> DER PHILOSOPH Entschuldigen Sie mich. Ich dachte, er ist Ihr Linsenschleifer.
> ANDREA Herr Federzoni ist ein Linsenschleifer und ein Gelehrter.
> DER PHILOSOPH Danke, mein Kind. Wenn Herr Federzoni darauf besteht ...
> GALILEI Ich bestehe darauf.
> DER PHILOSOPH Das Argument wird an Glanz verlieren, aber es ist Ihr Haus. -- Das Weltbild des göttlichen Aristoteles mit seinen mystisch musizierenden Sphären und kristallenen Gewölben und den Kreisläufen seiner Himmelskörper und dem Schiefenwinkel der Sonnenbahn und den Geheimnissen

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this scene and elsewhere also points the way to a straightforwardly heroic reading of Galileo's character, which stands at odds with the final scenes of the drama, regardless of the version in question.

> der Satellitentafeln und dem Sternenreichtum des Katalogs der südlichen Halbkugel und der erleuchteten Konstruktion des celestialen Globus ist ein Gebäude von solcher Ordnung und Schönheit, daß wir wohl zögern sollten, diese Harmonie zu stören.
> GALILEI Wie, wenn Eure Hoheit die sowohl unmöglichen als auch unnötigen Sterne nun durch dieses Fernrohr wahrnehmen würden? (*LdG* 2:39-40)
>
> THE PHILOSOPHER […] *Aristotelis divini universum…*
> GALILEO Shouldn't we proceed in the vernacular? My colleague, Mr. Federzoni, does not understand Latin.
> THE PHILOSOPHER Is it of importance that he understand us?
> GALILEO Yes.
> THE PHILOSOPHER I beg your pardon. I thought he was your lens-grinder.
> ANDREA Mr. Federzoni is a lens-grinder and a man of learning.
> THE PHILOSOPHER Thank you, my child. If Mr. Federzoni insists on it…
> GALILEO *I* insist on it.
> THE PHILOSOPHER The argument will lose some of its luster, but it is your house. -- The world-image of the divine Aristotle, with its mystically musical spheres and crystal vaults and the orbits of its heavenly bodies and the oblique angle of the sun's orbit and the secrets of the satellite-tables and the abundance of stars in the catalog of the southern hemisphere and the enlightened construction of the celestial globe is an edifice of such order and beauty that we should well hesitate to disturb this harmony.
> GALILEO How could I, if Your Highness were to perceive these both impossible and unnecessary stars through this telescope right now?

At a stroke, Galileo's razor-sharp irony cuts the professors' perspective to the quick in a moment of stereoscopic co-optation: under the sarcastic pretense of acknowledging that the stars are "both impossible and unnecessary" from the Scholastic perspective, he nonetheless insists on their existence as immediately accessible empirical fact. His polemical point could not be clearer: the Professors' concern as interpreters is indeed not with explaining empirical facts, but with preserving the authority of a philosophical discourse, and with performing that authority as a specific kind of verbal and intellectual spectacle. Galileo's request to debate in the vernacular draws attention to the arbitrary conventions and privileges of the traditional educated elite to which his interlocutors belong, which include university training in Latin. Where Galileo had invoked as his authority the subject who merely desires to understand what he sees, the Professors invoke a subject who is distinguished in very definite ways by language, institution, cultivation, and status – an entire repertoire, in other words, of refined theatrical techniques. More importantly, Galileo's move points out the mechanism of exclusion by which the elite thus distinguished maintains its freedom from responsibility to individuals who stand outside these privileges, but who nonetheless have a distinct claim to intellectual authority.[23] In this case, Federzoni is just such an individual. Galileo's intransigence boldly confirms Federzoni's claim to authority, and the child Andrea states in the most disarmingly facile form what Galileo's circle accepts as a straightforward case of "both/and", but what must strike the privileged ears of the professors as the distortion of a no less straightforward "either-or": "Mr. Federzoni is a lens-grinder *and* a man of learning" (emphasis mine). The professors acquiesce, this time, in Galileo's request, but not without casually betraying some part of the prejudice that undergirds their attachment to conventions: "The argument will lose some of its luster, but it is your house." Indirectly and a little sarcastically, the Philosopher here mourns the involuntary sacrifice of a kind of theatricality specific to his medieval, academic Latin, but which he nonetheless attempts to reconstitute in a translated, and thus *de facto* alienated, form in the overwrought, near-absurd flight of rhetorical fancy that follows his concession. What this purple outburst lacks in content, it seeks to compensate for in verbal effect. Substantially, it amounts to little more than a mystifying encomium to the Ptolemaic system, capped with an unintentionally ironic admonition against "disturbing" the "harmony" of a system that now seems to be largely kept in order solely by this sort of threadbare rhetoric. Stripped of its elitist and exotic verbal trappings, the Philosopher's abortive effort to gain the upper hand in disputation exposes his theater of interpretation to Galileo's critique, if not ridicule. The Professor's performance of interpretation is thereby stripped of its strictly interpretive value, leaving only void and illusory performance.

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[23] Andrew James Johnston offers an excellent reading of Federzoni's frustration here and in Scene 9 that accounts for the issues of interlingualism and Scholastic Latinity. Brecht configures these issues in terms of the politically-charged friction between the revolutionary and reactionary tendencies embodied in the two different scientific paradigms that clash in the play, while Johnston is careful to point out the difference between Brecht's presentation and the context of the historical Galileo's research. Johnston, "Chaucer, Galilei, Brecht. Sprache und Diskurs im *Leben des Galilei*," in: Walter Delabar & Jörg Döring, eds., *Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)* (Berlin: Weidler, 1998), 253-255.

Yet no single portion of Scene 4 reveals the political valence of these performances and counter-performances, nor presages the political consequences that will follow upon Galileo's innovations, as clearly as does the dialogue that follows upon Federzoni's indirect challenge to the authority of the textually-centered Scholastic tradition (*LdG* 2:42). This heated exchange leads at last to a line that adumbrates the primary risk of interpretation insofar as it works according to a stereoscopic logic: the risk, namely, of complicity in error, a complicity that results from Galileo's responsibility to his opponents as much as his responsibility to the authority he invokes. The interpreter's im-personation of authority thus works both for and against him simultaneously in performance, and the stakes are even higher where the performer does not acknowledge that he wears a mask at all:

> GALILEI *fast unterwürfig:* Meine Herren, der Glaube an die Autorität des Aristoteles ist *eine* Sache, Fakten, die mit Händen zu greifen sind, eine andere. [… I]ch ersuche Sie in aller Demut, Ihren Augen zu trauen.
> DER MATHEMATIKER Lieber Galilei, ich pflege mitunter, so altmodisch es Ihnen erscheinen mag, den Aristoteles zu lesen und kann Sie dessen versichern, daß ich da meinen Augen traue.
> GALILEI Ich bin es gewohnt, die Herren aller Fakultäten sämtlichen Fakten gegenüber die Augen schließen zu sehen und so zu tun, als sei nichts geschehen. Ich zeige meine Notierungen, und man lächelt, ich stelle mein Fernrohr zur Verfügung, daß man sich überzeugen kann, und man zitiert Aristoteles. Der Mann hatte kein Fernrohr! […]
> DER PHILOSOPH *groß:* Wenn hier Aristoteles in den Kot gezogen werden soll, eine Autorität, welche nicht nur die gesamte Wissenschaft der Antike, sondern auch die Hohen Kirchenväter selber anerkannten, so scheint jedenfalls mir eine Fortsetzung der Diskussion überflüssig. Unsachliche Diskussion lehne ich ab. Basta.
> GALILEI Die Wahrheit ist das Kind der Zeit, nicht der Autorität. Unsere Unwissenheit ist unendlich, tragen wir einen Kubikmillimeter ab! Wozu jetzt noch so klug sein wollen, wenn wir endlich ein klein wenig weniger dumm sein können! Ich habe das unvorstellbare Glück gehabt, ein neues Instrument in die Hand zu bekommen, mit dem man ein Zipfelchen des Universums etwas, nicht viel, näher besehen kann. Benützen Sie es.
> DER PHILOSOPH Eure Hoheit, meine Damen und Herren, ich frage mich nur, wohin dies alles führen soll.
> GALILEI Ich würde meinen, als Wissenschaftler haben wir uns nicht zu fragen, wohin die Wahrheit uns führen mag.

> DER PHILOSOPH *wild:* Herr Galilei, die Wahrheit mag uns zu allem möglichen führen! (*LdG* 2:42-43)
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> GALILEO *almost self-abasing:* My lordships, the belief in the authority of Aristotle is *one* thing, facts that are immediate and tangible are another. […] I beseech you in all humility to trust your eyes.
> THE MATHEMATICIAN Dear Galileo, as old-fashioned as it may seem to you, every now and then I am accustomed to read Aristotle, and I can assure you that in those circumstances, I do indeed trust my eyes.
> GALILEO I am accustomed to seeing the gentlemen of all the [academic] faculties closing their eyes to every single fact and acting as if nothing had happened. I show them my notations, and they smile, I put my telescope at their disposal so that they might be convinced, and they quote Aristotle at me. The man had no telescope! […]
> THE PHILOSOPHER *grandly:* If Aristotle is to be dragged through the muck here, an authority that not only the entire science of antiquity, but also the High Church Fathers themselves recognized, then a continuation of the discussion appears to me, in any case, to be superfluous. I refuse to engage in unobjective discussion. *Basta*.
> GALILEO Truth is the child of time, not of authority. Our ignorance is infinite – let us subtract just one cubic millimeter from it! Why desire to be so clever, when we can finally be just a tiny bit less stupid! I have had the unimaginable good fortune of getting my hands on a new instrument with which one can view a tiny scrap of the universe somewhat – though not much – more closely. Use it.
> THE PHILOSOPHER Your Highness, ladies and gentlemen, I must ask myself where all this is leading.
> GALILEO I would venture to say that as scientists, we do not have to ask ourselves where the truth may lead us.
> THE PHILOSOPHER *wildly:* Mr. Galilei, the truth may lead us anywhere it likes!

Galileo argues for the immediate, binding force of the senses and of "Fakten, die mit Händen zu greifen sind" (lit. "facts that can be grasped with the hands"). Nonetheless, he does not perceive that these sensory facts threaten to destabilize not just the interpretive edifice of science and philosophy as practiced since antiquity, but the social and political order built on their foundation.[24] Furthermore, by cleaving to the force of empirical facts, Galileo cannot recognize that the interpreter who attempts to understand such facts according to their own apparent logic nonetheless tacitly asserts their authority: he cannot see, in other words, that his own “truth” is just as much a “child of authority” as that of his interlocutors, and that his method entails an im-personation of the senses just as that of his opponents entails one of the text. On the other side, the professors argue for the institutionalized authority of a textual and discursive tradition that stretches in a secure and continuous line from antiquity to the present. The tradition they defend nonetheless finds itself helpless in the face of radically new experiences made possible by its own progress, but without any precedent in its vocabulary. The very same eyes trained in searching out the wisdom of ancient books have now turned their considerable energies from discourse to sensation, from a textual to an optical *organon*.[25] Between the seeing eye and the reading eye, as incommensurable as they are complicit, the spectator’s own eyes are asked to decide upon an authoritative point of view, in full awareness of the ways in which the compelling drama of either perspective may lead him “anywhere it likes” (“zu allem möglichen”) – namely, into the twilight territory of risk.

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[24] Galileo himself seems even more acutely aware of this long-term threat than his interlocutors, and in fact vainly attempts to draw the Grand Duke's attention to it somewhat later, still insisting on the new authority of vision and its potentially subversive effects: "In diesen Nächten werden über ganz Italien Fernrohre auf den Himmel gerichtet. Die Monde des Jupiter verbilligen nicht die Milch. Aber sie wurden nie je gesehen, und es gibt sie doch. Daraus zieht der Mann auf der Straße den Schluß, daß es noch vieles geben könnte, wenn er nur seine Augen aufmachte!" ("Every night now, telescopes all over Italy are being pointed to the heavens. The moons of Jupiter are not making milk any cheaper. But they have never, ever been seen before, and they are there beyond all question. From this fact, the man on the street concludes that there may be a great deal more [to be found] if he would only open his eyes!") How Brecht's Galileo imagines that he could ingratiate himself with the Medicean establishment by warning them against this threat without giving himself away as one of its prime movers is anyone's guess – but provides another measure of the risk-laden ironies in his interpretive position.

The uniquely Brechtian brilliance of Scene 4 lies in the way that the mutual appropriation and mis-appropriation of viewpoints between the empirical scientist and the deductive academics force both to show all their cards, to reveal the brute mechanics of their performances, and to betray the ambushes that await the one who gets caught up in the show. Their interaction is politically charged not only because of the political stakes attached to their respective viewpoints, but also because those viewpoints are developed and articulated within a plurality of possible positions. Whether manifested by stable dramatic characters or as functions of the dramatic action, perspectives in Brechtian theater generally take shape in this way, as responses addressed to a dynamic and contentious plurality of other perspectives that respond to it in turn. This plurality, furthermore, guarantees that the claims made by interpreters who represent a given authority must always retain a relative and polemical character: authority must be constantly re-impersonated precisely so that it can oppose, co-opt, defeat, or yield to the antagonists that constantly rise up against it. The shifting rhythm of stereoscopic combat can reveal the complicity of different viewpoints just as readily as it can separate and differentiate that which appeared uniform. Furthermore, because the process of their articulation and interaction takes place through the activity of response, each perspective never attains a pure self-identity or a transparent self-understanding. Viewpoints may shift, fragment, and reform from one moment to the next, but they never cease to be different in the process of interaction – the agents of the drama truly do "come into being in the form of an answer," and, once born, they survive solely by virtue of their ability to answer each other, and to maintain their vital differences. That error regularly usurps the title of truth, that blindness constantly claims inheritance of true vision, that the mask always speaks more eloquently than the bare face – these matters of fact prove that the risk of complicity in error is the order of the day in the spectacular arena of interpretation.

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[25] I owe this formulation to Darko Suvin, “Heavenly food denied: *Life of Galileo*,” in: Thomson & Sacks, 144-145.

Like a boxer whose strengths and weaknesses become more evident the longer he fights his opponent and the longer his opponent fights him, the Brechtian interlocutor gradually reveals the conditions and limits of his perspective not only to his opponent, but even more so to his spectators. Not only do the blind spots and frailties of his interpretive vision begin to get the better of him, but he draws ever more openly on the reserve of strength afforded him by specific techniques of selection, ordering, and evaluation – techniques that depend on the regime of his training as much as his fundamental disposition. When the contenders are equally matched, as they are in Scene 4, each interlocutor both mis-understands the other and understands him all too well; each doesn't quite catch the other's drift, but has also long since caught it – in a trap. In following this pugilistic spectacle of blow and counter-blow, response and counter-response, the spectator constantly realizes that he, too, has been "caught up" – by nothing other than theater itself, in a conversation of which he is usually only dimly or tangentially aware. If the spectator arrives at a judgment on the authority of one interpretive viewpoint, he must do so by identifying with the perspective of the other, which is equally subject to judgment in turn. One can only judge the quality of a given fighter, after all, by the way he *performs* against other fighters, not by any absolute or transcendent standard. The spectator remains continually aware of the perspective with which he identifies and which thus shapes his own complex activity of watching, listening, and judging – the awareness that any interlocutor can and should provide for another in the work of interpretation. Likewise, the spectator cannot ignore that his final, comprehensive judgment – and in this scene, the object implicated in judgment is nothing less than the universe itself – develops its specific character within dramatic intersections of viewpoints like this one, that is, in the performance of interpretation.[26] The proper experience of interpretive responsibility in Brechtian theater emerges when its spectator discovers that he cannot settle back into rapt contemplation of a hermeticized and sacralized art-image, that he can never "be alone" or "be as one" with art – he must instead participate in the profane, unruly, but free plurality of perspectives that its conversation opens up to him. He constantly finds himself not only in the company of others, but also in his *own* company, whenever he is in the company of art. In short, he is himself compelled to step into the ring, and respond.

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[26] I owe this formulation and much of my overall outlook here to Benjamin Bennett's reading of both *LdG* and the revolutionary claims Brecht makes for his theater. Bennett offers a strong and necessary distinction between interpretation itself and the performance of interpretation, foregrounding the way

The activities of identification and judgment so crucial to the interpretive perspectivism of Scene 4 also govern the larger part of Brecht's theoretical reflections on the role of alienation in the experience of theater, for both spectators and actors. Brecht's thinking on alienation can be understood as an interrogation of the dramatist's aims in persuading his spectator to accept or reject the interpretive authority of drama as an imitation of reality – just as Galileo and the professors set forth their own imitations of reality through dramatic impersonations of very different authorities. Brecht was by no means the first, moreover, to ask this question in the European traditions of theater: his formulation of the political responsibilities of theater in the interpretive imitation of reality took shape within a long-standing conversation in the German dramatic tradition about precisely these issues. What becomes unique and striking, however, about this tradition in the immediate context of Brecht and his *Leben des Galilei* is the fact that its seminal 18th-century representatives – much like Galileo's Scholastic antagonists in Scene 4, but according to their own distinct principles – had also formed their practice through a specific reception of Aristotle, that is, through the formation of a classical interpretive authority. Their model was based on the critical reconstruction of Aristotle's *Poetics* as a handbook of literary and dramatic practice, a strategy which emerged under the influence of various national, ideological, and intellectual pressures to serve the ends of a specific political program – namely, the rising power of the bourgeoisie and the

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interpretation reaches the level of political efficacy by being performed as a kind of theater in *LdG*. Benjamin Bennett, *All Theater Is Revolutionary Theater* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005), 57-85.

formation of a German nation-state. In a similar manner, the medieval reception of Aristotle, the representatives of which we see everywhere in *LdG*, had historically provided the logical and philosophical instrument with which the early Catholic church could rigorously codify its doctrines and thereby consolidate the power of its worldly political claims.

In view of this striking convergence, the questions posed by Scene 4 about authority, identification, and judgment, whether in scientific or dramatic form, now begin to evince a number of historical and even polemical indices of the relationship between Brecht's dramatic methods and the authority of his tradition. In many of Brecht's theoretical texts on dramatic practice, he explicitly defines his own literary and theatrical practices as "non-" or "anti-Aristotelian" and orients his own ideas against the prevailing reception of Aristotle in his tradition, which emphasized the spectator's emotional identification with the dramatic hero. If we consider the resonances between Brecht's response to the Aristotelian authority embedded in his German literary tradition on the one hand, and the response of Brecht's fictional Galileo to the Aristotelian authority embedded in Scholastic thought on the other, we must likewise examine the risks and responsibilities of Brecht's own position in his tradition just as we have done for his Galileo. Within the context of Brecht's *oeuvre*, we quickly see that "Aristotle," strictly speaking, designates neither a historical person, nor a corpus of texts, nor a philosophical system, nor a worldview with distinct political, social, and economic underpinnings. It is, rather, Brecht's designation for the terrain upon which his work pitches its battles concerning the problem of authority and identification in interpretation, in the dramatic world of his *Galilei* as much as in his engagement with the theory and practice of drama in his tradition.

As such, Brecht's relationship to Aristotle, like that of his Galileo, is far from one of straightforward appropriation or rejection. Andrew James Johnston puts the case most succinctly when he identifies the "Parallelität der [Brechtschen] anti-aristotelischen Dramenästhetik mit der anti-aristotelischen Physik des Protagonisten" ("parallelism between [Brecht's] anti-Aristotelian aesthetics of the drama and the anti-Aristotelian physics of its protagonist") as a "besondere Ironie" ("unique irony") of the play.[27] This parallelism, which binds together modernist dramatic form with early modern historical content, Johnston is right to call an instance of irony, and not a straightforward metaphor. While Johnston extracts a historical irony from the parallelism he points out by contrasting Brecht's representation of medieval, Latinate Aristotelianism with its historical reality in the era of Galileo, it is equally possible to extract a different irony from the same source by virtue of the intertextual and multigeneric character of Brecht's corpus. Along either path, Johnston's parallelism rings true, particularly his claim that "Brecht bezieht […] in einem Konflikt Stellung, den in anderer Form und mit anderen Fronten schon sein Held ausfechten mußte" ("Brecht takes up […] a position in a conflict which, in another form and with different battle-lines, his hero already had to fight to the finish"; Johnston in Delabar & Döring, 240). The conflict in which Brecht participated was the struggle to establish a new source of authority for the theory and practice of drama, just as his Galileo does for the theory and practice of science. Both figures are related to their traditions through the open disagreements and tacit complicities inherent to interpretive response. In order to understand how Brecht's dramas and his theories of alienation formed just such a response to his tradition, let us now turn to Lessing, one of Brecht's leading antagonists and interlocutors, who laid much of the theoretical groundwork for modern German dramatic practice and who was the thinker perhaps most responsible for the authoritative status of Aristotle in subsequent German tradition.

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[27] Johnston in Delabar & Döring, 239. Johnston's rich and wide-ranging essay approaches this parallelism in *Leben des Galilei* through a comparative and historical survey of multilingualism in the intellectual life of early modern Europe. His work discusses the emergence – in clear opposition to the Latinate Aristotelianism of medieval Scholasticism – of literary, scientific, and philosophical texts in the vernacular, particularly those by Geoffrey Chaucer and the historical Galileo Galilei himself, as coincident with the rise of a humanism that was politically aligned neither with the Latin of the Church, nor with the vernacular of the downtrodden masses, but rather with a vernacular current as the *lingua franca* for courtly sophistication and self-cultivation that prevailed under the absolutist states of the era. Johnston then compares the political valence of this vernacular humanism with the reconstitution of the vernacular in Brecht's play as an instrument of proletarian revolution, with ironic results. Though Johnston clearly ends up in different territory, the present discussion takes the same perplexing set of parallels as its point of departure, and overlaps at a number of points (see also 245-250 on Galileo Galilei). Nonetheless, Johnston does not treat the theoretical statements that undergird Brecht's anti-Aristotelianism: his discussion is comparative and intertextual along a different, though equally rewarding, axis.

## 3. Aristotle's Spectacles, Part 2: Lessing's Classical Vision and Brecht's Mass Perspectives

For the duration of Brecht's activity in the German theater scene before his exile and after his return to a divided Germany, one of the main objects of his theoretical polemics and practical antagonism was a mainstream theater he characterized alternately as "bourgeois," "Aristotelian," and "dramatic" – as opposed to his preferred predications for his own practice of theater as "revolutionary" or "proletarian," "non-Aristotelian,"[28] and, of course, "epic." By virtue of this particular series of juxtapositions, Brecht was asserting his own innovations against the formal, intellectual, and – most of all – political investments of an aesthetic tradition in the theater identified most prominently with the name of 18th-century philosopher and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), who along with Goethe and Schiller was one of the pivotal figures in the programmatic formation of a German national theater in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[29] Lessing's interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, formulated chiefly in the exchange of correspondence with Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) and Friedrich Nicolai (1733-1811) collected under the title *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel* (1755-1757) and in Lessing's own *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1769), offers one of the most influential receptions of classical dramaturgy in the German dramatic tradition. Like Brecht's own project, Lessing's Aristotelianism was an act of historical appropriation particularly well-suited to the demands of the progressive political agenda of its era.

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[28] Brecht describes his dramatic methods as *nicht-aristotelisch* ("non-Aristotelian") in many of his central theoretical texts, with different points of emphasis in his opposition to Aristotle according to his strategic aims in each case. The most prominent examples of these texts span the two most varied, troubled, and fertile decades of Brecht's productive career (1935-1955): "Über die Verwendung von Musik für ein episches Theater" ("On the Use of Music in an Epic Theater," 1935; AW 6:216-224), "Das deutsche Drama vor Hitler" ("German Drama Before Hitler," 1935; AW 6:225-228), "Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst" ("Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," 1936; AW 6:232-242), "Über den Bühnenbau der nichtaristotelischen Dramatik" ("On Stage Production in Non-Aristotelian Dramaturgy," 1936/37; AW 6:246-253), "Über experimentelles Theater" ("On Experimental Theater," 1939; AW 6:403-421), "Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt" (Short Description of a New Technique of Acting That Produces an Alienation Effect," 1937-1939; AW 6:467-486) and "Kann die heutige Welt durch Theater wiedergegeben werden?" ("Can the Contemporary World Be Represented in Theater?" 1955; AW 6:646-648). For a valuable reading of

Lessing emphasized that dramatic events should occur in a single, unbroken causal chain according to a process of "organic development", without the interpolation of secondary plot material, and in such a way that each element of the drama contributes a necessary and integral part to the whole. The deployment of these formal unities, which aimed at achieving a unified and homogeneous emotional effect among the audience, served a specific ideological aim. For Lessing, Aristotle's characterization of theater as an imitation of reality (Gr.: *mimēsis*) that could achieve the purification (*katharsis*) of the

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Brecht's non-Aristotelianism in his earlier *Lehrstücke* (learning plays) as well as *LdG*, see Dirk Backes, *Die erste Kunst ist die Beobachtungskunst. Bertolt Brecht und der Sozialistische Realismus* (Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1981), Ch. 3-4, 69-157; in a poststructuralist context, see Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 24-48.

[29] My reading of Lessing's legacy in German dramatic tradition and Brecht's anti-Aristotelianism is indebted to Helmut Jendreiek, *Bertolt Brecht. Drama der Veränderung* (Düsseldorf: August Basel Verlag, 1969), particularly 27-30, 38-43.

spectator through the provocation of fear and pity (*phobos* and *eleos*) meant that theater could exert a morally and politically transformative force on its spectators. Making recourse to the *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as to contemporary theories of affect in order to understand Aristotle's concepts of fear and pity, Lessing writes:

> Da nemlich, es kurz zu sagen, diese Reinigung in nichts anders beruhet, als in der Verwandlung der Leidenschaften in tugendhafte Fertigkeiten, bei jeder Tugend aber, nach unserm Philosophen [Aristoteles], sich diesseits und jenseits ein Extremum findet, zwischen welchem sie inne stehet: so muß die Tragödie, wenn sie unser Mitleid in Tugend verwandeln soll, uns von beiden Extremis des Mitleids zu reinigen vermögend sein; welches auch von der Furcht zu verstehen. Das tragische Mitleid muß nicht allein, in Ansehung des Mitleids, die Seele desjenigen reinigen, welcher zu viel Mitleid fühlet, sondern auch desjenigen, welcher zu wenig empfindet. Die tragische Furcht muß nicht allein, in Ansehung der Furcht, die Seele desjenigen reinigen, welcher sich ganz und gar keines Unglücks befürchtet, sondern auch desjenigen, den ein jedes Unglück, auch das entfernteste, auch das unwahrscheinlichste, in Angst setzet.[30]

> Since, in short, this purification [*Reinigung* = *katharsis*] consists in nothing other than the transformation of the passions into a readiness to practice the virtues, and since with every virtue, according to our philosopher [Aristotle], there are two extremes between which the virtue itself resides: so must tragedy, if it is meant to transform our pity [*Mitleid* = *eleos*] into virtue, be capable of purifying us from both of the extremes of pity; and the same should be understood for fear [*Furcht* = *phobos*]. Looking upon [the dramatic representation of] pity, tragic pity must purify not only the soul of a person who feels too much pity, but also that of a person who feels too little. Looking upon [the dramatic representation of] fear, tragic fear must purify not only the soul of a person who fears no misfortune whatsoever, but also that of a person in whom any misfortune, even the most distant, even the most improbable, inspires terror.

Lessing's interpretation of *katharsis* points directly to consequences which are transparently political: *katharsis* effects a kind of moral alchemy whereby the spectator, as the object of passions, is transformed into a subject of virtues – a subject who then *acts*, and virtuously at that, outside the theater. For Lessing, the *mimēsis* of individual and social reality is thus organized to transform the reality of which it is an imitation by transforming its spectators into free and rational beings. Dramatic representation, *qua* imitation, thus stakes its claim as a revolutionary political strategy: its interpretation of reality actively intervenes in the reality that it interprets.

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[30] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie. Zweiter Band.* In: *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden: Band 6: Werke 1767-1769*, ed. Klaus Bohnen (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985), §78, 574. Aristotle's *Poetics* was primarily introduced into the fray of 18th-century debates in Germany on dramaturgy and aesthetics by the translation of Michael Conrad Curtius (1724-1802), which, despite its flaws, biases, and anachronisms, had a definitive impact on Lessing and his milieu. M.C. Curtius, *Aristoteles Dichtkunst ins Deutsche übersetzet, mit Anmerkungen, und besondern Abhandlungen, versehen, von Michael Conrad Curtius* (Hannover : Johann Christoph Richter, 1753).

In order for this intervention to be effective, however, virtues and passions, in both reality and imitation, must remain constant entities across differences of time, space, and milieu. Lessing thus furthermore posits that dramatic *mimēsis* must allow the spectator to feel that he inhabits the same moral world as is represented on stage. In contrast to the stricter French neoclassical models favored by some of his contemporaries, most prominently Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766),[31] Lessing's advocacy of a more accessible dramatic language and a more realistic psychology were designed to bridge this gap between the world of the stage and that of the spectator. Primarily, however, the morally transformative effect of the drama depended upon the spectator's capacity to identify with the central figure of the work – to accept as immediate and consequential the world in which the hero moves and acts, and to view the hero's values, motivations, and sufferings as either actually or potentially the spectator's own. It was through this emphasis on identification that the political underpinnings of Lessing's aesthetics in the worldview of the contemporary bourgeoisie made themselves most evident:

> Die Namen von Fürsten und Helden können einem Stücke Pomp und Majestät geben; aber zur Rührung tragen sie nichts bei. Das Unglück derjenigen, deren Umstände den unsrigen am nächsten kommen, muß natürlicher Weise am tiefsten in unsere Seele dringen; und wenn wir mit Königen Mitleiden haben, so haben wir es mit ihnen als mit Menschen, und nicht als mit Königen. Macht ihr Stand schon öfters ihre Unfälle wichtiger, so macht er sie darum nicht interessanter. Immerhin mögen ganze Völker darein verwickelt werden; unsere Sympathie erfodert einen einzeln Gegenstand, und ein Staat ist ein viel zu abstrakter Begriff für unsere Empfindungen (Ibid., §14, 251).
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> The names of princes and heroes can give a play pomp and majesty; but they contribute nothing to its emotional effect. The misfortune of those whose circumstances most closely approximate our own must naturally make the deepest impression upon our souls; and if we take pity upon kings, we take pity on them as human beings, and not as kings. If their estate occasionally makes their misfortunes

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[31] Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962).

> more important, it does not for that reason make them any more interesting. After all, entire peoples may be involved in [those misfortunes]; our sympathy demands a single object, and a state is a much too abstract concept for our emotions.

Here Lessing reveals how the moral efficacy of psychological identification is guided by a principle of universal humanity. Our capacity to be moved, or even transformed, by what we see on stage ultimately derives from the common humanity we share with the *dramatis personae*, a categorical humanity that forms the indispensable ground for our identification with them. In a letter to Mendelssohn from 1757, Lessing describes the spectator's experience of identification as analogous to the sympathetic vibration of a string brought near another string of equal length that has just been plucked. What the plucked string "perceives" as pain, its untouched, but sympathetically vibrating counterpart "perceives" as pleasure: hence the spectator's capacity to understand and identify with the tragic hero, and hence the peculiar pleasure that emerges as the spectator watches calamity descend upon the hero.[32] The anthropomorphizing metaphor of the vibrating strings takes for granted the interchangeability of hero and spectator as two strings of the same material and length: in the experience of a powerful affect, the universal humanity they share responds with precisely the same tone. At the level of this universal humanity, all the political and socioeconomic differences between individuals, including those of group, race, class, or nation, as well as all the differences generated by historical, geographical, material, and cultural circumstance, recede or disappear completely. The theater thus aims at nothing less than the activation of this universality as a political principle, which thereby gains authoritative force, through unifying what would otherwise be the highly differentiated perspectives of its audience.

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[32] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn, and Friedrich Nicolai, "Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel," in: Lessing, *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*. *Band 3: Werke 1754-1757,* ed. Klaus Bohnen *et al.* (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2003), 713-714.

Given its Aristotelian roots, Lessing here attempts a maneuver that would promote a modern, universalist, and bourgeois politics on the basis of a classical authority reinterpreted and reconstituted according to his unique and historically specific ends. The exercise of this authority in the practice of dramatic representation for Lessing depends upon the maintenance of what might be called integrated unity. The classical unities of formal structure, which had the effect of narrowing the dramatic focus, naturalizing the chain of causality, and homogenizing the range of response, helped the work achieve its primary aim: the identification of the spectator with its central figure, which had the effect of eliding the differences between individual spectators and compelling their acquiescence to a principle of universal human brotherhood. In short, the political function of the dramatic work was to enforce a progressive and democratizing principle of universal human unity which had both formal and psychological dimensions, but which was legitimated by a classical authority – constituted as non-modern, depoliticized, and prescriptive at once.

Lessing's individualist and universalist humanism left its imprint on the post-18th century tradition of German theater with its focus on the relationship between forms of dramatic *mimēsis* and the political effects of dramatic spectatorship. Throughout the entire corpus of his theoretical writings, Brecht formed and re-formed his concept of modern theater in response to the legacy of Lessing's reception of Aristotle in contemporary performance – a legacy which, from Brecht's point of view, had become a liability in the radically altered context of the twentieth century. For Brecht, Lessing's specific and historically-bound political agenda, which had sought to energize and organize theatrical practice as one of its instruments, had been inscribed into the German tradition along with his stake in the politics of *mimēsis*. Where it had been a progressive agenda in its moment, however, it was fast becoming a reactionary one in both the politics and the aesthetics of the twentieth century. As Peter Brooker writes,

> Brecht saw drama as illusionistic and individualistic, a reactionary prop to petty-bourgeois morality, at a time when both artistic conventions and ideology had been superannuated by unprecedented social and economic change. Scientific and technological advance and corporate capitalism had decentred and subordinated the individual. A new 'epic' theatre was therefore required which would be adequate to the new subject-matter[, a theater that] would present individuals as socially constructed and malleable (Thomson & Sacks 188).

The traditional theater's focus on the experience of the bourgeois individual – the keystone of what had been its simultaneously neoclassical and progressive project – was fast entering into an untenable contradiction with modern historical conditions, in which the individual and his subjective passions were ceding their place as the historical subject *par excellence* to the collective and its objective power – in the shape of mass movements, class conflict, and international systems of production and exchange. Brecht was among the modernist vanguard of European dramatists trying to rethink the political authority of dramatic theory and practice in the context of these epochal changes. A 1929 radio broadcast entitled "Neue Dramatik" ("New Dramatic Form"), consisting of a conversation between Brecht, theater critic Herbert Ihering, and sociologist Fritz Sternberg, presents a crucial early document of Brecht's developing attitude towards the historical background and the political significance of the aesthetic problems facing contemporary theater. Sympathetic to Brecht's ambitions, Sternberg begins to contextualize the innovations of the former's theater by tracing the historical emergence of the heroic bourgeois individual at the end of the Middle Ages and the aesthetic expression of its characteristics in dramatic form:

> *Sternberg:* Das europäische Drama ist keinen Schritt über Shakespeare hinausgegangen. Der stand am Wendepunkt zweier Epochen. Was wir mit dem Namen Mittelalter umgreifen, wirkte sich in ihm aus, aber schon war der mittelalterliche Mensch aus seinen Bindungen herausgebrochen worden durch die

> Dynamik der Epoche; das Individuum war geboren worden als Individuum, als ein Nichtteilbares, Nichtvertauschbares. Und so wurde das Shakespearische Drama zum Drama des mittelalterlichen Menschen wie des Menschen, der sich immer mehr als Individuum zu entdecken begann und als solches in dramatische Situationen zu seinesgleichen wie zu übergeordneten Gewalten geriet. Es ist in diesem Zusammenhang bedeutsam, welche Stoffe sich Shakespeare für seine großen Römerdramen gewählt hat. Er hat uns kein Drama geschenkt über die großen republikanischen Zeiten Roms, in denen der einzelne Name noch nichts bedeutete, in denen der Kollektivwille schlechthin entscheidend ist, senatus populusque romanus, sondern er hat die Zeiten vor und hinter dem gewählt. Die große Mythenzeit, als der Einzelne sich noch der Masse entgegensetzte, im »Coriolan«, und die Zeit des sich auflösenden Reiches, das in seiner Expansion schon die Keime des Zerfalls trug (und dabei die großen Einzelnen hervorbrachte), im »Julius Caesar« und in »Antonius und Kleopatra«. (*Neue Dramatik* AW 6:72)

> *Sternberg:* The European drama has not come one step further than Shakespeare. He stood at the turning point of two epochs. What we comprehend with the name of the Middle Ages played itself out in him, but the human being of the medieval era had already been broken out of his shackles by the dynamic of the epoch; the individual had been born as an individual, as something indivisible, non-interchangeable. And so Shakespearean drama became the drama of the medieval human being as the human being who began to discover himself more and more as an individual, and, as such, came into dramatic situations involving his own kind as well as the power of traditional authority. In this context, it is significant to consider which matters Shakespeare chose for his great Roman history dramas. He has not given us a single drama about the great republican era of Rome, in which the individual name still meant nothing, in which the collective will holds the absolute power of decision, *senatus populusque romanus*; rather, he chose the eras before and after this one. The great mythical era, when the individual still set himself against the mass, in *Coriolanus*; and the era of the declining empire, which in its expansion already bore the seeds of its decay (and thereby brought forth the great individuals), in *Julius Caesar* and in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Here, Sternberg acknowledges that in its moment, the historical emergence of the individual in European drama gave expression to a revolutionary worldview, in which the individual as such transcended not only the boundaries of the feudal and ecclesiastical order, but the entire field of concrete historical relations as such. Similarly, this nascent concept of the individual arose dialectically, in response to the hegemonic order of a hierarchically-organized collective in the Middle Ages. Brecht’s response to Sternberg details how the dramatic form that emerged with Shakespeare corresponded perfectly to the desires, ambitions, and frailties of the emergent individual, whether he was represented on stage or he observed from the audience:

> Die großen Einzelnen waren der Stoff, und dieser Stoff ergab die Form dieser Dramen. Es war die sogenannte dramatische Form, und dramatisch bedeutet dabei: wild bewegt, leidenschaftlich, kontradiktorisch, dynamisch. Wie war diese dramatische Form? Was war ihr Zweck? Bei Shakespeare sehen Sie es genau. Shakespeare treibt durch vier Akte den großen Einzelnen, den Lear, den Othello, den Macbeth, aus allen seinen menschlichen Bindungen mit der Familie und mit dem Staat heraus in die Heide, in die vollständige Vereinsamung, wo er im Untergang sich groß zu zeigen hat. [...] Der erste Satz der Tragödie ist nur da für den zweiten, und alle Sätze sind nur da für den letzten Satz. Die

> Leidenschaft ist es, die dieses Getriebe im Gang hält, und der Zweck des Getriebes ist das große individuelle Erlebnis. (*Neue Dramatik* AW 6:72)

> The great individuals were the content, and this content yielded the form of these dramas. It was the so-called dramatic form, and here ‘dramatic’ means: wildly driven, passionate, contradictory, dynamic. What was this dramatic form like? What was its aim? With Shakespeare you see it exactly. Through four acts, Shakespeare drives the great individual – Lear, Othello, Macbeth – out of all his ties with family and state, out on to the heath, into complete isolation, where he must prove his greatness in his downfall. [...] The first sentence of the tragedy is only there for the second, and all the sentences are only there for the last. It is passion that keeps the gears moving, and the aim of the device is the great individual experience (*Erlebnis*).

Brecht’s commentary reveals how the elements of the bourgeois drama, even at its very beginnings with Shakespeare, were organized around the specific and irreducible aim of representing and transmitting what he calls the “great individual experience” of the dramatic hero. As we have just seen, this kind of experience remained central to the later bourgeois tradition represented by Lessing, whose entire theater of identification is designed to transform the individual experience of the dramatic hero into a universally human experience accessible to all. Brecht’s commentary here, furthermore, helps us see the extent to which Lessing’s invocation of a classical authority for his progressive dramatic practice is, in some sense, a politically- and philosophically-savvy equivocation. For Lessing, the authority of Aristotle serves only to legitimate in hegemonic terms what is really the decisive interpretive authority for dramatic *mimēsis:* the “great individual experience” of the rising bourgeoisie. This form of experience and its newfound authority, in Brecht’s time, had become synonymous with the meaning of *drama* as such in the European tradition: it had come to define what was “dramatic” about drama *tout court* – singular, passionate momentum coupled with dynamic and contradictory variety. And it was likewise this form of experience which, by Brecht’s time, had successfully defended its claim to the classical legacy against all challengers – this theater had become, for better or worse, “Aristotelian theater.” Sternberg’s rejoinder to Brecht, however, offers a thumbnail sketch of the fundamental historical shifts which have raised doubts not only about the responsibility of the bourgeois, Aristotelian theater to political reality, but also about the interpretive authority of individual experience in grasping the truth of the modern world:

> *Sternberg:* Aber Shakespeare verkörperte noch die heroische Zeit des Dramas und damit das Zeitalter des heroischen Erlebnisses. Das Heroische verging und die Erlebnissuche blieb. Je mehr wir uns dem 19. Jahrhundert [...] nähern, desto gleichförmiger wurde das bürgerliche Drama; der ganze Erlebniskreis des Bürgers drehte sich -- im Drama! -- im wesentlichen um die Beziehungen Mann -- Frau; Frau -- Mann. Sämtliche Möglichkeiten, die sich aus diesem Problem ergeben, sind einmal bürgerliches Drama geworden: [...] der größte Teil des Dramas des 19. Jahrhunderts ist mit dieser Persiflage erledigt. Was aber geschieht nun weiter, da doch nun einmal in der Wirklichkeit das Individuum als Individuum, als Individualität, als Unteilbares, als Unvertauschbares immer mehr schwindet, da im Ausgang des kapitalistischen Zeitalters wieder das Kollektive bestimmend ist. (*Neue Dramatik* AW 6:73)
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> *Sternberg:* But Shakespeare still embodied the heroic age of the drama, and with it, the age of the heroic experience (*Erlebnis*). The heroic concept passed away, but the yearning for experience (*Erlebnissuche*) remained. The closer we get to the 19th century, the more homogeneous the bourgeois drama becomes; the bourgeoise's whole sphere of experience (*Erlebniskreis*) – in the drama! – by and large turned around the relationships of man-to-woman and woman-to-man. The totality of possibilities that issue from this problem became bourgeois drama, pure and simple: […] the largest part of 19th-century drama is taken care of with this persiflage. Which is continuing to happen now, however, when the individual as individual, as individuality, as an indivisible, non-interchangeable entity is after all now disappearing more and more in reality, because the collective is once again the defining force in the decline of the capitalist era.

Sternberg's statement closes with the diagnosis of an imminent contradiction between the facts of social reality and the individualist disposition of contemporary drama. His presentation indicates that the authoritative status of individual experience in dramatic *mimēsis* had been undermined not by the final exhaustion of its possibilities, but by the growing impoverishment and insularity of the spheres in which it could still be persuasively and meaningfully articulated – namely, the sphere of domestic relations. The passions and experiences of the heroic individual, insofar as they still offered the favored object of dramatic representation, now functioned not as a transparent and authoritative window on the whole of social reality – a reality in which the collective had already come to assert itself as the preeminent political agent – but as a clouded lens fixed on its tiniest part, obscuring and mystifying the rest. In other words, the *mimēsis* of reality in the theater and reality itself had historically parted ways, and were headed for a collision. Although the fundamentally mimetic function of theater remained essentially the same – to represent, through artistic imitation, a certain experience of reality so as to make it available (whatever that might mean) to the grasp of the spectator – the crucial questions for contemporary theater very much concerned the authority to which one might have recourse for the experience that formed the core of drama. What kind of experience is to be imitated? Who or what is the subject of this experience? What form, level, or mode of reality is its object? How can it be adequately represented? What should its representation achieve?

Given this assessment of the situation of contemporary theater, Brecht’s main aesthetic problem in relation to the bourgeois tradition was how to invent and practice a method of dramatic representation that offered an accurate, uncompromising, and timely representation of modern reality, in which both the historical significance and the interpretive authority of the individual had manifestly receded, and those of the mass had asserted themselves as definitive. Since the mass itself was plural, dynamic, and contradictory, such a representation would have to avoid the bourgeois trap of subjecting the whole teeming multitude of perspectives given in the mass to the homogenizing, unifying, and mollifying illusions of a universal humanity shared by all, and an individuality that heroically transcends historical and political particulars. Brecht is quite clear, in fact, about how his self-avowedly “nichtaristotelisch” (“non-Aristotelian”) theater actually seeks to intensify the differences between its individual spectators: by striving for responses that polarize the socially and economically distinct perspectives given in its mass audience, Brechtian theater brings these perspectives into engagement, if not open conflict. In an essay from 1932 (revised and augmented in 1936), Brecht states his position in polemical terms:

> Die herrschende Ästhetik verlangt vom Kunstwerk […] eine alle sozialen und sonstigen Unterschiede der Individuen überbrückende Wirkung. Eine solche, die Klassengegensätze überbrückende Wirkung wird von Dramen der aristotelischen Dramatik auch heute noch erzielt, obwohl die Klassenunterschiede den Individuen immer mehr bewußt werden. Sie wird auch erzielt, wenn die Klassengegensätze der Gegenstand dieser Dramen sind, und sogar, wenn in ihnen für die eine oder andere Klasse Stellung genommen wird. In jedem Fall entsteht im Zuschauerraum auf der Basis des allen Zuhörern gemeinsamen „allgemein Menschlichen" für die Dauer des Kunstgenusses ein Kollektivum. *An der Herstellung dieses Kollektivums ist die nichtaristotelische Dramatik* [...] *nicht interessiert. Sie spaltet ihr Publikum.*[33]
>
> The dominant aesthetic demands from the work of art […] an effect that bridges all differences between individuals, whether social or otherwise. Even today, drama based on Aristotelian principles still strives for such an effect, which bridges class conflicts as well, although individuals are becoming ever more aware of class differences. Drama still strives for this effect when class conflicts form the main object of a particular work, and even when a play takes up a position for one class or another. In any case, what comes into being in the auditorium, on the basis of the "universal humanity" common to all spectators and for the duration of their enjoyment of the work, is a collective. *The non-Aristotelian dramaturgy* […] *is not interested in producing such a collective. It divides its audience.*

Brecht's non-Aristotelian theater thus strives to imitate a reality authoritatively created and experienced not by the individual, but by the mass; in representing it thus, his theater strives equally to transform the mass it represents – to activate the vast and untapped network of *differences* that criss-crosses the bodies and minds of that mass, and to unlock its potential for reflection, deliberation, and action. It is worth noting that Brecht is in full agreement with Lessing and the latter's tradition about the transformative effect of dramatic imitation on that which it imitates: in this respect, Brecht's methods stand entirely within the reception of Aristotle established by the bourgeois neoclassical tradition, and is, indeed, quite far from being "non-Aristotelian." As we have already seen, however, Lessing's reception of Aristotle had stressed that the principle of integrated unity should govern the aesthetic relationships between all the elements of dramatic *mimēsis* itself, on the one hand, and the relationships of identification between the individual spectator, the dramatic hero, and the collective of the audience, on the other. In response to this component of the bourgeois tradition, Brecht's theater aimed at nothing less than strategic and dialectical *dis-integration* on both of these fronts. In fact, it could be said that both the origin and the destination of Brecht's theater lay in the dis-integration of the modern mass itself – the sole interpretive authority of modern experience, whose claims had to be resolutely opposed to the unifying, classical authority inscribed in the bourgeois tradition. The realization of this dis-integration in the dramatic forms of Brecht's theater, furthermore, would not attempt to mystify the alienated condition of the modern subject by symbolically resolving its contradictions through the experience of an inauthentic "universal humanity." It would instead attempt to reenact that alienation in the theater as a dis-integration of interpretive perspectives, and to utilize all the methods of theater in rendering that alienation into an object of both recognition and interpretation from the plurality of perspectives given in its mass audience. The success of the alienation effect in Brecht's theater really meant that the spectator had attained a specific and authentic perspective on his or her *own* condition of alienation and dis-integration within the modern mass, and, furthermore, was now in a position to understand, criticize, and overcome it in reality.

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[33] Bertolt Brecht, "Mittelbare Wirkung des epischen Theaters," in: *Schriften zum Theater*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1957), 59, emphasis mine. Hereafter, texts by Brecht

Brecht's interpretive responsibility to the German bourgeois tradition of drama can thus itself be understood stereoscopically: it must be viewed from two different perspectives simultaneously, as both an intervention in, and a continuation of, the standing terms of the conversation into which Brecht enters. From one point of view, his theoretical texts actually perpetuate Lessing's Aristotelianism, insofar as Brecht tacitly

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appearing in this volume will be cited by title, the abbreviation ST, and the page number(s) in this edition: e.g. *Mittelbare Wirkung* ST 59.

assents to the model of *mimēsis* in dramatic representation as well as dramatic spectatorship. Just as actors on stage imitate the reality of human experience and impersonate its agents, so the spectators in the auditorium imitate the imitations, and impersonate the impersonations, once they leave the theater and reenter the real world – hence the interpretive authority of dramatic representation. Insofar as *mimēsis*, for both Brecht and Lessing, establishes the point of mutual exchange between stage and spectator and thus grants the theater its instrumental leverage on political reality, we can rightly claim that Brecht here invokes the authority of his tradition. In this case, Brecht impersonates Lessing, and through Lessing, Aristotle. From a different, but equally legitimate point of view, Brecht refuses to don the mask of his bourgeois tradition. For him, the exchange between politics and theater enacted by *mimēsis* in the bourgeois tradition is too strictly defined in terms of an individuality and a universality which have ceased to exist as meaningful authorities in the interpretation of political reality: the modern subject can no more embody a universal than he can rightly claim to be an individual unto himself. The tangled plurality of perspectives given in the modern mass, which always exists in the dynamic middle ground between individual and universal, now offers the new instrument to aid dramatic vision and the new authority to legitimate the interpretation of experience. Actor and spectator alike must wear many contradictory masks at once, and perceive from a multitude of angles.

This mandate, as we are about to see, forms the core of Brecht’s theories of alienation. Having established his responsibility to the terms of the traditional conversation, terms which offer as much servitude as they do freedom, Brecht now stands poised on the threshold of a new age in theater – or, depending on your point of view, balanced on the razor's edge of risk. We should note, too, that Brecht's responsibility to the historical arc of his tradition – the ways he inserts himself into, and is borne along by, a current of interpretation in time, the way he resists and reverses part of its momentum in order to expedite another part – runs quite precisely in parallel with Oedipus' tangled, half-conscious responsibility to the spatial mapping of Greek political culture. What Oedipus is to the "center-periphery" spatial structure of the *polis*, Brecht is to what might be called the "now-then" historical structure of modernity. As we shall see, furthermore, the more that Brecht's anti-tragic modernity resists the gravitational pull of Oedipus', or Aristotle's, tragic antiquity, the more it actually risks augmenting and intensifying the irresistible force of attraction exerted by its opponent.

## 4. Icarus and the Horse's Ass: Alienation as the Pluralization of Vision in Brecht's Theoretical Texts

If we approach Brecht's theories of alienation as an attempt to dis-integrate, modernize, and pluralize Lessing's neoclassical ideal of integrated unity, we find ourselves particularly well situated to view them equally well as a political critique directed at the interpretive authority of dramatic *mimēsis*. Along either path, Brecht's aim was to train actors and spectators alike in stereoscopic perspective as the authoritatively modern form of vision, the preeminent faculty of the new age. The *Verfremdungseffekt* (or *V-Effekt*), variously translated as "alienation effect" or "estrangement," was Brecht's name for the general device by which the spectator's perspectival dis-integration was achieved and its implied critique of dramatic representation was executed.[34] Brecht's articulation of the means and ends of the alienation effect arguably constitutes his single most significant innovation in modern dramatic theory and practice. More importantly, it represents the point at which Brecht's responsibility to Lessing's Aristotelianism, and the risks that accompany that responsibility, emerge in sharpest detail.

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[34] Barring a lengthy discussion of the controversy surrounding the significance and adequate translation of Brecht's term *Verfremdung*, I have chosen to settle for the most widely used and uncontroversial English rendering, "alienation" and "alienation effect."

One of the more inviting points of access to Brecht's concept of alienation appears in a fragment from 1937, "Verfremdungstechnik in den erzählenden Bildern des älteren Breughel" ("Alienation Techniques in the Narrative Paintings of Brueghel the Elder"), in which Brecht outlines how a dis-integrating dynamic of painterly representation provokes stereoscopic perception through the alienation effect:

> Geht man den malerischen Kontrasten des Breughel auf den Grund, so gewahrt man, daß er Widersprüche malt. Im »Sturz des Ikarus« überfällt etwa die Katastrophe die Idylle in solcher Art, daß sie sich höchst deutlich absetzt und daß auch über die Idylle wertvolle Einsichten entstehen. Er erlaubt der Katastrophe nicht, die Idylle zu verändern; vielmehr wird diese, selbst unverändert bleibend, nach wie vor unzerstört erhalten, lediglich gestört. In dem großen Kriegsbild »Die tolle Grete« führt die Schreckensstimmung des Krieges dem Maler nicht den Pinsel, wenn er die Urheberin, die Kriegsfurie, in ihrer Hilflosigkeit und Beschränktheit zeigt und ihr einen Dienstbotencharakter verleiht; so schafft er einen tieferen Schrecken. Wenn in flämische Landschaft ein Alpenmassiv gesetzt ist oder dem zeitgemäßen europäischen Kostüm das antike asiatische entgegensteht, dann denunziert eines das andere und zeigt es in seiner Besonderheit, aber zugleich erhalten wir Landschaft schlechthin, Leute überall.
>
> Nicht nur eine Stimmung geht von solchen Bildern aus, sondern eine Vielfalt von Stimmungen. Wenn der Breughel seine Gegensätze auch ins Gleichgewicht bringt, so gleicht er sie doch niemals einander an.
>
> Noch gibt es bei ihm keine Trennung des Tragischen vom Komischen, sondern sein Tragisches enthält selber Komik und seine Komik Tragisches (*Verfremdungstechnik in den erzählenden Bildern des älteren Breughel* AW 6:254).[35]
>
> If one gets to the root of Brueghel's painterly contrasts, one perceives that he paints contradictions. In the "Fall of Icarus," the catastrophe attacks the idyll in such a way that it very clearly defects [*sic*!] from it and valuable insights about the idyll also take shape. He does not allow the catastrophe to alter the idyll; rather, the latter – even though it remains unchanged, preserved intact (*unzerstört*) as it was before – is merely unsettled (*gestört*). In the great war painting "Dulle Griet," the terrorized mood (*Schreckensstimmung*) of war does not lead the painter's brush when he shows its author – the Fury of

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[35] See also the entire fascinating collection of fragments on Brueghel in the AW: "Über den V-Effekt beim älteren Breughel" (6:254), "V-Effekte in einigen Bildern des älteren Brueghel" (6:255-256), and "Eine Verfremdungstechnik in der Malerei des älteren Brueghel" (6:256). Brecht's reception of Brueghel in all of these pieces – which show that he shares far more with his forebear than a certain predilection for the earthiness and frugality of the peasant folk that was so often the subject of Brueghel's work – readily demonstrates the deep roots of Brecht's artistic methods not only in German literature and philosophy, but northern European art and culture more generally. They also make any narrow-minded attempt to write him out of these traditions for the sake of his Marxism (or, worse yet, for his unsavory personal and political decisions) seem self-defeating.

> war – in her helplessness and incapacity and lends her the character of a servant; thus he creates an even deeper terror. When an Alpine peak is placed in a Flemish landscape, or an ancient Asiatic costume confronts a contemporary European one, then one denounces [*sic*!!!] the other and shows it forth in its specific character – but at the same time we get landscape as such, with people all over it.
>
> One mood (*Stimmung*) only does not arise from such images – rather, a multitude of moods. If Breughel brings his contradictions into balance, he certainly never adapts them to each other.
>
> With him there is still no separation of the tragic from the comic: rather, his tragedy itself contains comedy and his comedy tragedy.

This conception of Brueghel's alienating technique, outlined here in the context of visual art, reveals the basic method that underlies Brechtian alienation in both theory and practice. By representing situations, figures, and events in such a way that underlying contradictions are pulled to the surface and made to engage each other directly in the viewer's experience, the viewer of Brueghel's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus"[36] cannot simply subsume his varied perceptions to a definite single viewpoint with its roots in the unified worldview of the artist and the overarching unity of the artwork itself. The process of identification, which takes place precisely by subsuming such a multitude of perceptions to a single figure and a single perspective, would culminate in the viewer's appropriation of the "great individual experience" that informs and unifies the entire work. As Gerold Koller argues, the success of this process in traditional forms of dramatic representation

> beruht wesentlich darauf, daß der Zuschauer den ästhetischen «Welt»-Entwurf des Dichters akzeptiert. Dieser Anfangsentwurf nun – man könnte ihn als ästhetischen Rahmen bezeichnen – ist Voraussetzung für die kausal vorwärtsschreitende Handlung. Das Handlungsgerüst stellt eine ästhetische Totalität dar, die nicht überschritten werden kann [...]. Sie erlaubt deshalb – zumindest während der Rezeption – keine Konfrontation mit der außerästhetischen Wirklichkeit. [...] Kritik ist lediglich als Kritik an der Darstellung, als ästhetische Kritik möglich, denn das Bühnengeschehen ist durch seine weltanschauliche Abgeschlossenheit aus der Alltagsrealität herausgenommen. Ein «Wenn und Aber» wird ungültig durch das anfänglich akzeptierte «Unter-der-Voraussetzung-Daß» (Koller 10).

> rests essentially on the spectator's acceptance of the poet's "global" conception. This primary conception – one could designate it as an "aesthetic frame" – is the prerequisite for the causal progress of the action. The structure of the plot presents an aesthetic totality that cannot be transcended […]. Therefore, it allows no confrontation with the reality that lies beyond its aesthetic bounds. […] Criticism is possible merely as criticism of the presentation, as aesthetic criticism, since the events on stage are removed from everyday reality through the self-contained character of their governing logic. Any 'Ifs, Ands, or Buts' are rendered invalid by the 'Under-the-Condition-That' accepted at the start.

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[36] See figure at end of chapter.

For Brecht, the masterfully applied alienation effect of Brueghel's painting depends on the fact that the image refuses to offer a hermetic "'Welt'-Entwurf," a "global conception" contained in a focal experience, despite the fact that it goes out of its way to create every possible expectation for one – in its subject matter (classical, mythological, and tragic), its genre (landscape), and its intended mode of reception (contemplation and introspection in the private home). Each of the central points of interest in the painting – the resplendent ship, the distant city, the pastoral scene surrounding the hard-working farmer, the idle and distracted shepherd, and the violent collision between Icarus himself and the water's surface, with legs flailing helplessly – is separated from the others by a system of spatial and existential gaps. Brueghel renders each of these foci as inhabiting distinct and simultaneous points in three-dimensional space, but the viewer apprehends them serially, as a network of points spread across the plane of the painting, such that their enlargement or diminution through perspective actually contributes to the force of their contending commentaries – witness, for instance, the fact that even the rear-end of the farmer's horse fairly dwarfs the entire "Icarus event." Each focal point suggests to the viewer an evaluation of the whole, but each of them also strictly delimits the emotional and intellectual effect of all the others, imposing different criteria of evaluation on the very same situations and objects, and delivering a sobering shock to any claim, whether tragic or comic, exalted or mundane, that takes itself too seriously. In Brecht's words, each viewpoint remains as much *unzerstört* (literally, 'undestroyed, intact') as it is systematically *gestört* ('disturbed, unsettled'). Furthermore, the specific character of its "intact" state (*seine Besonderheit*) jumps into sharp relief precisely because it has been roused from the indolence of unity and harmony into the wakefulness of confrontation and contradiction – or, to put a finer point on it, from identification to dis-integration. The "master perspective" of the work, the prerequisite of its viewer's appropriation – its aesthetic frame, in Koller's terms – undermines itself by demanding that the viewer simultaneously accept more than one perspective, one prerequisite, and one frame. The viewer's grasp of the work as a whole depends on the degree to which he can bring himself to perceive, think, and judge from within a multitude of contradictory perspectives – including those which arise from outside the "global conception" of artists and art in general and address themselves to a work from a position of critique. In short, the authority upon which its interpretive mimēsis is based is already plural: neither classical nor modern, but both; neither exalted nor everyday, but both; neither aristocratic nor democratic, but both. In exactly the same way, Brecht's techniques of alienation establish the authority of dramatic representation in the reciprocal interaction of response and critique, rather than the one-sided penetration and appropriation of experience through identification. As Koller writes, "Der »Rahmen« des aristotelischen Dramas ist es gerade, der im epischen Theater thematisiert wird" (Koller 11; "The 'frame' of the Aristotelian drama is precisely what is thematized in epic theater"). The univocal authority of the bourgeois individual and his integrated dramatic form is single-handedly replaced by the plurality of voices and perspectives that inhere in the constantly dis-integrating and re-integrating structure of the modern mass.[37]

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[37] With respect to the alienation effect, Brecht's ongoing engagement with Brueghel, as a vehicle for both refining his theoretical reflections and increasing their historical depth, has precedents in his lifelong fascination with various forms of "low" or folk culture in Germany as providing models of representation that run against the grain of traditional methods of drama associated with "high" culture. See, for instance, his seminal essay "Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst" ("Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," 1936; AW 6:232-242), in which he begins his reflections on alienation in the theater by discussing effects of distanciation common to certain forms of German folk art (232-233).

Brecht's interpretation of Brueghel lays the groundwork for understanding how alienation worked on a practical level in the methods of dramatic *mimēsis* adopted by actor and director, and how these were designed to interact with the attitudes, desires, and expectations of audiences whose interpretive approach to theater was predicated upon identification. The techniques of alienation that Brecht describes in his 1939 essay "Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt" ("Short Description of a New Dramatic Technique That Produces An Alienation Effect") function as catalysts of critical reflection for both actor and spectator on the interpretive authority invoked in and by dramatic *mimēsis*. In the context of my intergeneric reading here with *LdG*, two of these techniques concern us directly: the first, what might be called *incomplete impersonation*; the second, *textual displacement*.

The first group of techniques outlined in the "Beschreibung" and elsewhere explicitly depend upon the perspectival dis-integration of the actor from the dramatic figure he represents, or what Brecht calls "die nicht restlose Verwandlung" ("incomplete transformation"). For Brecht, the actor's imitation of action must rigorously separate the imitator from that which he imitates, and relate the former to the latter through critique and interpretation:

> Der Schauspieler läßt es auf der Bühne nicht zur *restlosen Verwandlung* in die darzustellende Person kommen. Er ist nicht Lear, Harpagon, Schwejk, er *zeigt* diese Leute. Er bringt ihre Aussprüche so echt wie möglich, er führt ihre Verhaltungsweise vor, so gut es ihm seine Menschenkenntnis erlaubt, aber er versucht nicht, sich (und dadurch andern) einzubilden, er habe sich hiermit restlos verwandelt. Schauspieler werden wissen, was gemeint ist, wenn man als Beispiel für eine Spielweise ohne restlose Verwandlung das Spiel des Regisseurs oder des Kollegen, der ihnen eine besondere Stelle vormacht, anführt. Da es sich nicht um seine eigene Rolle handelt, verwandelt er sich nicht völlig, er unterstreicht das Technische und behält die Haltung des bloß Vorschlagenden bei. (*Beschreibung einer neuen Technik* AW 6:469-470)

> The actor on stage does not allow his performance to reach the point where he has completely transformed himself into the character he represents. He *is not* Lear, Harpagon, or Schwejk, [rather] he is *showing* [us] these people. He presents their statements as authentically as possible, he demonstrates

> their modes of behavior as well as his knowledge of human beings allows him, but he does not attempt to deceive himself (nor anyone else, for that matter) into thinking that he has achieved complete transformation. Actors will know what is meant if, as an example of a method of acting without complete transformation, we consider the acting of the director or of a colleague who makes a demonstration for them of how to act a particular moment in a play. Since the demonstration does not concern his own role, he does not transform himself completely [sc. into character], he emphasizes the technical component and retains the attitude of one who is merely making a suggestion.

The performer actively resists his complete transformation into character chiefly by presenting his performance not as the immediate and spontaneous unfolding of an action before the eyes of his audience, but as the conscious and manifest representation of an action which occurs at a place and time other than the here and now of performance. It is, in a sense, *mimēsis* with a good conscience: the inauthentic unity of actor and role in the activity of impersonation is replaced with an authentically unbridgeable gap – like one of Brueghel's – between the one who impersonates and the one who is impersonated.

The technique of alienation thus makes dramatic *mimēsis* explicitly function as a kind of symbol or sign which refers back to, takes up a particular attitude towards, and repeats an action which never appears in its "immediate" or "spontaneous" form: in a word, it makes action *signify* rather than *appear*.[38] In doing so, the alienation effect provokes the spectator to recognize and question the invisible, unquestionable 'aesthetic frame' by which the thoughts and actions of a given character are validated as necessary, justified, and inevitable in the world of the play – to interrogate, in short, the authority that legitimates them. The alienation effects achieved in Chinese drama, for instance, share in precisely the symbolic-repetitive character that Brecht values in dramatic performance: “Der [chinesische] Artist stellt Vorgänge von großer Leidenschaftlichkeit dar, aber dabei bleibt sein Vortrag ohne Hitzigkeit. [… D]as ist wie ein Ritus, alles Eruptive fehlt ihm. Es handelt sich deutlich um eine Wiederholung des Vorgangs durch einen andern Menschen, eine, allerdings kunstvolle, Schilderung” (*Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst* AW 6:235; “The [Chinese] actor presents events of great passion, but his performance thereby remains without heated excitement. […] It is like a ritual, there is nothing explosive about it. It is clearly marked as a repetition of the event by another person, a depiction – but certainly an artful one”).[39] With the establishment of this referential or deictic distance, the Brechtian actor can assume a distinct interpretive perspective on the character he represents, from whom he always remains separate, and about whose actions his performance issues an ongoing critique: “Da […] sich [der Schauspieler] mit der Person, die er darstellt, nicht identifiziert, kann er ihr gegenüber einen bestimmten Standpunkt wählen, seine Meinung über sie verraten, den Zuschauer, der auch seinerseits nicht eingeladen wurde, sich zu identifizieren, zur Kritik der dargestellten Person auffordern” (*Beschreibung einer neuen Technik* AW 6:472; “Since [the actor] does not identify with the person whom he represents, the former can choose a certain standpoint towards the latter, betray his opinion about him, encourage the spectator – who for his own part is also not invited to identify – to undertake a critique of the person so represented”). As a result, the spectator must constantly vacillate between at least three different perspectives on a given character, all of which exist in a relationship of dis-integration with each other and are related stereoscopically: the perspective of the actor, as subject of dramatic *deixis*, that of his character, as object of *deixis*, and that of the spectator himself, who evaluates and criticizes both the other perspectives as much as he introduces questions and problems of his own. As with Brueghel's painting, the spectator must constantly renegotiate the authority with which he identifies at a given moment and which governs his overall interpretation of a specific character or of the drama as a whole. The jagged, abrupt shift he experiences from one authority to another, or from one perspective to another, constitutes the experience of the alienation effect.

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[38] To be fair, Brecht does stipulate that actors can and must identify with their roles to a certain degree, but stresses that the method of identification must either serve a strategic purpose in the effect they ultimately seek to create, or function as a transitional phase in the work of role-construction and rehearsal (*Beschreibung einer neuen Technik* AW 6:468-469). He nonetheless expressly prohibits the use of these techniques to facilitate the spectator's identification in performance. Such allowances by no means undermine Brecht's claims here or his broader theoretical commitments; rather, they demonstrate his dialectical appropriation of the techniques of dramatic tradition, only to press them into service for radically different aims.

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[39] See also Jendreiek 71-74.

A second group of alienating techniques articulated by Brecht depends upon the actor's exploitation, throughout the process of role-formation and in performance itself, of the possibilities for alienation inherent to the drama as a textual object. Brecht's textually-centered strategies compel the actor to build up his relationship to his character as a relationship with a textual object rather than one with a real and concrete subject. The dramatic text as such is never allowed to drop out as the mediating term in the relationship between actor and character: instead, it becomes a kind of refracting prism by means of which possibilities of interpretation and representation are multiplied through a number of verbal and textual transformations. The objectivity of the text – its unique and arbitrary grammatical and syntactic structures – becomes one more instrument by means of which the actor can alienate himself from his character. By strategically altering the form of the text and undermining its status as an authoritative "given," the actions and attitudes that the text represents likewise become available for criticism:

> Drei Hilfsmittel können bei einer Spielweise mit nicht restloser Verwandlung zu einer Verfremdung der Äußerungen und Handlungen der darzustellenden Person dienen:
>
> *1. Die Überführung in die dritte Person.*
> *2. Die Überführung in die Vergangenheit.*
> *3. Das Mitsprechen von Spielanweisungen und Kommentaren.*
>
> Das Setzen der Er-Form und der Vergangenheit ermöglicht dem Schauspieler die richtige distanzierte Haltung. Der Schauspieler sucht außerdem Spielanweisungen und kommentarische Äußerungen zu seinem Text und spricht sie auf der Probe mit (»Er stand auf und sagte böse, denn er hatte nicht

> gegessen:...« oder »Er hörte das zum erstenmal und wußte nicht, ob es die Wahrheit war« oder »Er lächelte und sagte allzu sorglos:...«). Das Mitsprechen der Spielanweisungen in der dritten Person bewirkt, daß zwei Tonfälle aufeinanderstoßen, wodurch der zweite (also der eigentliche Text) verfremdet wird. […] Das Setzen der Vergangenheit dabei stellt den Sprecher auf einen Punkt, von dem aus er auf den Satz zurücksieht. Damit wird der Satz ebenfalls verfremdet, ohne daß der Sprecher einen unrealen Standpunkt einnimmt, denn er hat ja, im Gegensatz zum Zuhörer, das Stück zu Ende gelesen und kann also vom Ende her, von den Folgen her, über den Satz besser urteilen als dieser, der weniger weiß, dem Satz fremder gegenübersteht. (Beschr. einer neuen Tech. der Sch. 6:470-471)

> When using a dramatic method with incomplete transformation, three expedients can help accomplish the alienation of the statements and actions of the dramatic character:
>
> 1. *Transposition into the third person.*
> 2. *Transposition into the past tense.*
> 3. *Reading stage directions and commentary out loud along with the scripted lines.*
>
> The use of the third-person form and of the past tense enables the actor to attain the correct, distanciated attitude. In addition, the actor solicits stage directions and commentaries to his text and recites them [sc. along with his lines] in rehearsal ("He stood up and said angrily, since he had not eaten…" or "He heard that for the first time and did not know whether it was the truth" or "He smiled and said all too carelessly:…"). Reading stage directions transposed into the third person along with one's lines has the effect of making two different speaking registers clash with each other, whereby the second (i.e. the actual text) is alienated. […] The transposition into the past tense in the same situation places the speaker in a position from which he looks back at the sentence. The sentence is likewise alienated thereby without forcing the speaker to take up an unreal perspective, since after all, in contrast to the listener, he has finished reading the play and thus, from the viewpoint of the end, from the viewpoint of the consequences, can judge the sentence better than the listener, who knows less and confronts the sentence as something more foreign.

The method described here treats the dramatic text not as a vehicle of universally human virtues or passions to be appropriated and reproduced in performance, but as an arbitrary verbal and conceptual structure that can be freely manipulated in a variety of ways. As a result, the actor comes to approach his role not through the mandates of a primal human necessity that links him directly to his character, but by the subtle contours of a quasi-algebraic textuality that separates one from the other through a series of free choices.[40] Brecht called a closely-related variation of this procedure, which was designed for final performance rather than rehearsal, the "Fixieren des 'Nicht – Sondern'" ("establishment of the 'not-rather'"):

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[40] At least two German scholars have investigated in more detail the verbal and textual characteristics of the alienation effect in Brecht's dramas: Gisela Debiel, *Das Prinzip der Verfremdung in der Sprachgestaltung Bertolt Brechts. Untersuchungen zum Sprachstil seiner epischen Dramen.* Diss. Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1960. Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1960; in a wider historical context, Gertrud Fankhauser, *Verfremdung als Stilmittel vor und bei Brecht* (Tübingen: Verlag Elly Huth, 1971).

> Geht [der Schauspieler] auf die Bühne, so wird er bei allen wesentlichen Stellen zu dem, was er macht, noch etwas ausfindig, namhaft und ahnbar machen, was er nicht macht; das heißt er spielt so, daß man die Alternative möglichst deutlich sieht, so, daß sein Spiel noch die anderen Möglichkeiten ahnen läßt, nur eine der möglichen Varianten darstellt. […] Das was er *nicht* macht, muß in dem enthalten und aufgehoben sein, was er macht. So bedeuten alle Sätze und Gesten Entscheidungen […] (*Beschreibung einer neuen Technik* 6:469; see also Jendreiek 74-77).

> When [the actor] goes on stage, in all the crucial moments he will make something which he does *not* do distinct, detectable, and surmisable in addition to that which he *does* do; that is to say, he acts in such a way that the alternative can be seen as clearly as possible, that his performance permits one to surmise the other possibilities, [but] only represents one of the possible variants. […] Whatever he does not do must be preserved [*enthalten*] and cancelled [*aufgehoben*; note that these are both Hegelian terms] in what he does do. In this way, all sentences and gestures come to signify decisions […].

Whether through verbal transposition or the establishment of the ‘not-rather’, each of the possible negated alternatives recovered and exploited by these methods offers a distinct perspective from which the totality of the action appears as a composition of arbitrary decisions – like language itself – rather than a transparent and self-enclosed process that unfolds according to the necessity authorized by the play’s ‘aesthetic frame.’ As Brooker writes, the establishment of the ‘not-rather’ “would therefore produce a jolt of surprise and illumination, as the familiar and predictable were not […] seen afresh but ‘seen through’; judged with the eyes of a suspicious, quizzically naïve spectator. [A]s a particular attitude, action or event was revolved to expose the shadow of its alternative, the taken-for-granted would be negated under the impetus of a new understanding and grasp of social alternatives” (Thomson & Sacks 191). In textual terms, this latter conception – that of Lessing’s bourgeois tradition – treats the dramatic text as a mediating representation of an immediate action. Its mediation must eventually be overcome as the imaginary action itself increasingly supplants, and finally replaces, its real representation. Since dramatic action must eventually appear in performance as a unified, necessary, and spontaneous totality, and since the subjects represented therein must appeal to the spectator on the level of identification, performance must elide the mediating and objectifying matrix of the text – paradoxically! – by perfecting its impersonation of that text. Brecht’s technique, on the other hand, takes this textual matrix as an instrument with which to interrogate the authoritative categories of unity, necessity, and spontaneity in the action itself through a series of alienating displacements, whereby the actor gains access to alternative authorities and interpretive perspectives. In short, rather than reading the dramatic action out of the dramatic text in order to dispense with the text, Brecht’s method attempts to read the structure of the text back into the action, only to dispense with dramatic action as we are accustomed to understand it: “Ist die restlose Verwandlung aufgegeben, bringt der Schauspieler seinen Text *nicht wie eine Improvisation, sondern wie ein Zitat*” (*Beschreibung einer neuen Technik* AW 6:470, emphasis mine; “If [the actor] foregoes complete transformation [sc. into character], he performs his lines *not like an improvisation, but like a quotation*”). A similar effect is achieved through the recitation of scripted lines alongside stage directions and commentary: here, the stereoscopic perspective created between the putatively immediate, embodied voice of the dramatic character and the mediating, disembodied voice of the dramatist leaves the former intact (*unzerstört*) even as it is subtly but decisively unsettled (*gestört*) by the latter’s interruptions, directions, descriptions, or even contradictions. As a result, the interpretive authority of any character – rooted in his or her specific perspective, formed in response to the entire progress of the drama as it happens, and performed in his or her speech and action – never becomes properly “universal,” never becomes perfectly interchangeable with the interpretive authority by means of which the actor or spectator is encouraged to make sense of the play as a whole. As the spectator’s interpretive approach to the actor’s performance, so the actor’s interpretive approach to his dramatic character is governed by the plurality of viewpoints opened by the alienating techniques he applies to the dramatic text.

As methods that achieve the alienation effect, Brecht formulated both incomplete impersonation and textual displacement as parts of a critical response directed not only at the Aristotelian authority of the bourgeois dramatic tradition, but also at the unifying and universalizing authority inscribed in the ‘aesthetic frame’ of traditional *mimēsis*. These techniques of alienation aimed to draw his spectators into the same situation of response and critique with regard to the forms of action and imitation they saw on stage. Whatever *mimēsis* the spectator might take up in his own actions after leaving the theater would be tempered by the critical and dynamic distance between two interlocutors, rather than the cramped proximity shared by the impersonator and the impersonated. The perspective on interpretive authority that Brecht developed through these methods was – at least within certain limits – plural, relative, and critical rather than unified, absolute, and obedient. It shared these characteristics with the alienation of modern mass experience, which provided both the political reality that authorized its techniques and the stereoscopic medium in which it was designed to exert its wider effects.

But this story is not quite finished. In order to do justice to the intergeneric approach to Brecht’s *oeuvre* which governs my discussion here, we must now return to *Leben des Galilei*, the primary dramatic intertext on interpretive authority from which we began, so that we may at last reckon with the multi-dimensional parallelism between Brecht and Galileo suggested by Johnston. We have investigated how both Galileo and Brecht negotiated the responsibility of their methods to a presiding Aristotelian authority by redefining the interpretive authority of vision in similar ways. Now we must likewise consider how the ambiguity and indeterminacy inscribed in this responsibility compels either figure to assume, and potentially to succumb to, the risk of complicity in error.[41] These risks are ascertainable within both the perspective on bourgeois dramatic tradition that Brecht establishes through his theories of alienation, and the perspective on scientific practice that Galileo introduces through his assertion of the authority of the senses and inductive method against the authority of textual tradition and deductive method. The manifold ironies and ambiguities that unfold from Galileo's response at the end of *LdG*, as we shall see presently, provide surfaces of reflection upon which we can read the indices of risk not just for the daring interpretive venture of Galilean science, but also for the equally daring venture of Brechtian theater. The displacement of visual perspective demanded by both Brecht and Galileo, the experience that finally pluralizes and liberates vision, is all too easily reappropriated by a regime of interpretation that seeks instead to subjugate vision to a master perspective. In short, the authority of pluralized vision that defines the new age, for both Brecht and Galileo, offers itself up all too willingly to the authoritarian, all-seeing eye that reasserts the old.

## 5. Galileo, Author: The Risk of Complicity and the Indifferent Instrument in Brechtian Theater and Galilean Science

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[41] Brecht's own complicities in some of the more egregious political and intellectual errors of his time were far more numerous and complex than I can hope to treat here, except through his Galileo by proxy. Chief among them, at least for most commentators on Brecht's biography, was his ambiguous, apologetic, and often self-serving relationship to the Stalinist hard-line that unilaterally defined the direction of international Marxist politics and theory for most of Brecht's productive life. That Brecht himself chose to assume (and, sometimes, not to assume) perilous risks, and has consequently been shouldered with sometimes devastating responsibilities, is a historical fact that explains some scholars' delicacy of approach in treating Brecht's Marxism, or, indeed, many scholars' resolute unwillingness to reckon with Brecht at all, despite his persistent relevance. It is also a fact which stands in the background of the present discussion as a tacit motivation to reckon with Brecht according to the terms I have chosen here. David Pike offers a balanced and clear-headed assessment of Brecht's often baffling complicities in his "Brecht and 'Inoperative Thinking'," in: *Critical Essays on Bertolt Brecht*, ed. Siegfried Mews (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1989), 253-275.

It is hard to believe that we encounter the same Galileo in Scene 14 of Brecht's play as we did in Scene 4. As we have seen in the latter passage, Galileo cuts in – after the Philosopher delivers his overwrought apologia for the Ptolemaic universe – to catch his interlocutors in the hapless irony now imposed on their thinking by a visible universe which, in its abrupt expansion with the advent of the telescope, has indeed shaken a grand edifice – not of the firmament, but of the Scholastic theater of interpretation built to contain and explain it. When accused of trying to disturb the Aristotelian harmony of the spheres, Galileo brazenly answers, "Wie, wenn Eure Hoheit die sowohl unmöglichen als auch unnötigen Sterne nun durch dieses Fernrohr wahrnehmen würden?" (*LdG* 2:40; "How could I, if Your Highness were to perceive these both impossible and unnecessary stars through this telescope right now?"). With this Galileo, who has cast his senses into the impossible distances of outer space and now asserts to his respondents, through a bitingly precise irony, the incontrovertible evidence of his interpreting eye, compare now the Galileo of Scene 14, after he has recanted the theory of a heliocentric universe before the court of the Inquisition. He has become an interpretive prisoner not just of the earth, but of his own house, the doctrine of the Church, his spinster daughter Virginia – now a nun collaborating with his clerical overseers – and, worst of all, his own accelerating blindness. Virginia approaches him with two geese left for him as a gift by an anonymous traveler, who we are later led to believe is his former student, Andrea Sarti:

> VIRGINIA Jemand auf der Durchreise hat ein Geschenk abgeben lassen.
> GALILEI Was ist es?
> VIRGINIA Kannst du es nicht sehen?
> GALILEI Nein. *Er geht hin.* Gänse. Ist ein Name dabei?
> VIRGINIA Nein. [… W]as ist wieder mit deinen Augen los? Die [Gänse] müßtest du sehen vom Tisch aus.
> GALILEI Du stehst im Schatten.
> VIRGINIA Ich stehe nicht im Schatten. *Sie trägt die Gänse hinaus.* […]
> VIRGINIA *zu dem Mönch:* Wir müssen nach dem Augendoktor schicken. Vater konnte die Gänse vom

> Tisch aus nicht sehen.
> DER MÖNCH Ich brauche erst die Erlaubnis vom Monsignore Carpula. (*LdG* 2:95-96)

> VIRGINIA Someone traveling through has sent you a gift.
> GALILEO What is it?
> VIRGINIA Can't you see it?
> GALILEO No. *He approaches.* Geese. Is there a name with it?
> VIRGINIA No. […W]hat's wrong with your eyes now? You must be able to see them from the table, at least.
> GALILEO You're standing in shadow.
> VIRGINIA I'm not standing in shadow. *She carries the geese out.* […]
> VIRGINIA *to the Monk:* We'll have to send for the eye-doctor. Father couldn't see the geese from his table.
> THE MONK For that I'll need permission from Monsignore Carpula.

Now Galileo himself is the object of an irony just as precise as the one he threw into the teeth of the professors, an irony expressed through his own words but against his will. The bare empirical fact that he now needs the approval of a higher ecclesiastical authority merely to see an eye doctor only scratches the surface of this contradiction. Having in part built his reputation and prepared his downfall on his keen-eyed discovery of the phases of Venus at the telescope (Scene 5, AW 2:48), whereby he sought to prove the heliocentric Copernican theory by the planet's passage into and out of shadow, Galileo's decaying vision prevents him from seeing even so far as the two geese his daughter is holding on the other side of the room. Not only, then, does the self-protective excuse he offers – Virginia was standing in shadow, like the planet Venus itself – ironically recall one of the greatest of his astronomical discoveries, it also plays directly upon the willfully crass statement he makes to Virginia's erstwhile fiancée Ludovico Marsili when Galileo decides (Scene 9, AW 2:67-79) to venture once again into controversial terrain with his research. When Marsili, who belongs to prosperous landed gentry, withdraws from his engagement to Virginia because he cannot risk associating himself with her father's heterodoxy, Galileo asks him flippantly: "Was hat meine Astronomie mit meiner Tochter zu tun? Die Phasen der Venus ändern ihren Hintern nicht" (*LdG* 2:75; "What does my astronomy have to do with my daughter? The phases of Venus don't change the shape of her ass at all.") The grand interpretive triumph that brought Galileo to his zenith and the reckless interpretive error that led to his imprisonment and his daughter's spinsterdom are juxtaposed in Scene 14 in a statement that is at once both a trivial ephemera and an over-saturated vertex of significance accumulated in the entire course of the drama. As in Scene 4, furthermore, the spectator is offered more than one interpretive perspective from which to evaluate the meaning of the dramatic action. The whole image of this meaning does not emerge through the lens of Galileo's immediate pathos, frailty and shame-faced rationalization alone. We must stereoscopically counterpose this single image through the retrieval, and reinterpretation, of at least three more distinct images: the past image of the middle-aged scientist, trapped in plague-wracked Florence (Scene 5, AW 2:44-49) but poised on the cusp of an epochal publication; the past image of his youthful daughter, flush with eagerness for an erotically satisfying and socially advantageous marriage (e.g. Scene 7, AW 2:55), but powerless in the face of her father's intellectual foolhardiness and her fiancée's *Realpolitik*; and not least of all, the present image of their gazes intersecting in Galileo's half-darkened study. One of them is compromised, embittered, and self-loathing for his errors of foresight and of insight; the other is driven by the magnitude of the former's errors to take cold comfort in the bosom of the authority that destroyed him and thereby to become her own father's persecutor, caretaker, and reeducator. Each of these four images is inscribed within the frame of a distinct interpretive perspective, whether it becomes available through partial identification with a character, through the form of dramatic representation, or remains available to the spectator alone. Most importantly, each generates a specific quantum of critique with reference to the present action by recourse to a horizon of interpretation that stands apart from that action and confronts it as something arbitrary, alien, curious and unforeseeable. And yet – beneath the technique of alienation, beneath the multiplication of interpretive perspectives, do we not sense here, in this telling snippet of dramatic irony that doubles back on and crosses over itself several times over, the reappearance of something like the tragic descent of Oedipus' language into impenetrable noise?

When we turn to the question of the interpretive authority from which each of these perspectives stakes its critical claim on the meaning of the present event, we find a mechanism at work in Scene 14 that remains distinctly different in tone and consequence from the optimism of either Galileo's science or Brecht's theater. Rather than facilitating a conversation between distinct authorities as in Scene 4, where the difference in interpretive responses to the nature of the universe quickly uncovers the mutual complicity and responsibility shared by authorities that remain distinct, the stereoscopic dynamic of Scene 14 collapses and cancels the difference between contending perspectives. In short, we cannot ultimately separate the perspective of the younger Galileo who boldly and willingly lays eyes upon the phases of Venus from that of the elder one who unwillingly and ironically recalls this discovery in the shameful revelation of his blindness – nor that of the younger from that of the elder Virginia, for that matter. For as much as we may want to approach these perspectives as *opposed* to each other, the raw pathos and vertiginous irony of the scene compel the spectator to see them as *continuous* with each other. This moment is one of many, in fact, in which we glimpse a Brechtian version of the “marriage that is no marriage,” the self-cancelling, self-escalating interpretive noise we saw at the climax of the *OT*. Scene 14 marks the point at which the negotiation of interpretive responsibility in Brechtian theater has definitively moved into the territory of interpretive risk: a risk which is inscribed within the mimetic form of that theater itself. This could not be clearer than in the moments following the passage just quoted, in fact, where we see Galileo voluntarily desist from the embodied vision that has authoritatively shaped the trajectory of his interpretive career, and proceed instead, almost unreflectively, to its extreme antithesis – namely, he dictates a number of textual interpretations to his daughter:

> GALILEI Wie weit war ich?
> VIRGINIA Abschnitt vier: Anlangend die Stellungnahme der Heiligen Kirche zu den Unruhen im Arsenal von Venedig stimme ich überein mit der Haltung Kardinal Spolettis gegenüber den aufrührerischen Seilern ...
> GALILEI Ja. *Diktiert:* ... stimme ich überein mit der Haltung Kardinal Spolettis gegenüber den aufrührerischen Seilern, nämlich, daß es besser ist, an sie Suppen zu verteilen im Namen der christlichen Nächstenliebe, als ihnen mehr für ihre Schiffs- und Glockenseile zu zahlen. Sintemalen es weiser erscheint, an Stelle ihrer Habgier ihren Glauben zu stärken. Der Apostel Paulus sagt: Wohltätigkeit versaget niemals. -- Wie ist das?
> VIRGINIA Es ist wunderbar, Vater.
> GALILEI Du meinst nicht, daß eine Ironie hineingelesen werden könnte?
> VIRGINIA Nein, der Erzbischof wird selig sein. Er ist so praktisch.
> GALILEI Ich verlasse mich auf dein Urteil. (*LdG* 2:96-97)
>
> GALILEO How far did I get?
> VIRGINIA Section four: in the matter of the position statement of Holy Church with regard to the unrest in the Venetian Arsenal, I stand in agreement with the attitude of Cardinal Spoletti towards the seditious ropemakers …
> GALILEO Yes. *Dictates:* … I stand in agreement with the attitude of Cardinal Spoletti towards the seditious ropemakers, namely, that it is better to distribute soup to them in the name of Christian charity than to pay them more for their ship- and bell-ropes. Wherefore it seems wiser to strengthen their belief instead of their avarice. The Apostle Paul says: Charity never faileth. – How's that?
> VIRGINIA It's wonderful, father.
> GALILEO You don't suppose an irony could be read into it?
> VIRGINIA No, the archbishop will be pleased. He's so practical.
> GALILEO I'll rely upon your judgment.

By this point in the drama, we have seen Galileo represented as the theoretical visionary (Scene 1, in his monologue to Andrea), the individual practitioner (Scene 3, in his discovery of the moons of Jupiter), the experimental demonstrator (Scene 9, in his refutation of Aristotle), and the agonistic defender (Scene 4, in his disputation with the Paduan professors) of a new modern science predicated upon the authority of sense.

Here, however, after his recantation, we see him applying the same breadth of interpretive acumen, the same talent for perspectival alienation, developed through all these roles pressed into service for the interpretive regime diametrically opposed to his own through its reliance on the authority of textual discourse. The confrontation between the sense-giving form of nature, which offers its meaning in visible form, and the sense-making mind of the empirical scientist, who reproduces that meaning through visual demonstration, has been replaced by another: between the mind of the interpreter, who generates meaning in textual form, and the form of human society, which reproduces that meaning through its subjection to textuality. This latter confrontation, as we can see from the exchange between Galileo and Virginia, employs a multitude of specifically textual mediations: Galileo submits to textual authority – most obviously, to the Apostle Paul, but no less so to the Archbishop himself – to legitimate his interpretation of the political situation in Venice, and he likewise acquiesces in his daughter's interpretive authority – "Ich verlasse mich auf dein Urteil," as he says – with regard to the possible political signification of his letter to the Archbishop. The real source of the subversive irony that Galileo fears the Archbishop might read into the former's words – namely, the attitude that distributing soup to the ropemakers, rather than raising their wages, is in fact a failure of charity because it leaves thoroughly uncharitable political and economic conditions untouched – lies in Galileo's own ability, well-honed through his practice of empirical science, to alienate himself from his own interpretive viewpoint and assume another. In short, Galileo's second thoughts in this passage provide a textbook instance of both the Brechtian techniques of alienation I have discussed: incomplete impersonation, because he treats his invocation of textual authority as a game to be played prudently and skillfully, not as an expression of credited truth; and textual displacement, because he evalutes how the language he uses might be interpreted from a number of different viewpoints. In applying these consummately Brechtian skills to his own words here, however, he achieves aims diametrically opposed to those he pursued as an innovative scientist. Rather than use the techniques of alienation to underline the revolutionary political ideas implied in the interpretation of nature, he uses the same technique with equal efficacy in the attempt to suppress every last trace of seditious thinking – every trace, that is, of a voice which is not that of Biblical authority – in his letter. In a word, Galileo identifies with his role. Here we have found clear indices of the risks in which Brechtian theater and Galilean science are jointly and inescapably entangled: the risk that the dialectical hammer of alienation can be used to erase critique and delay historical progress just as well as it can be used to provoke thought and give impetus to the dawn of a new age. This is the meaning of Galileo's recantation: the seeing eye has willingly become the accomplice of the reading eye, and the new age has, at last, proven complicit in the old.

The risk to which Galileo has succumbed here becomes even more clear when we consider the mode of interpretation presented to us by this exchange in its relation to Brecht's techniques of alienation. Galileo's employment of dictation here, while necessitated by the weakness of his vision, provides a consummate poetic image of the double bind that now governs his interpretive agency. By dictating to his daughter, Galileo submits his interpretation to be both written and read by others only in order to assert the authority of what has been written and read by others, thereby both impersonating the authority of text and strengthening its claims to provide a blueprint for political reality. The question that now arises is whether we can draw a meaningful dividing line between this mode of interpretation, which is clearly symptomatic of Galileo's interpretive condition after his recantation, and the mode Galileo employed as an empirical scientist – the kind of dividing line that would allow us to juxtapose these viewpoints stereoscopically, as the alienation effect demands. For in Galileo's practice of empirical science, he likewise submitted his interpretation to seeing through an instrument of observation provided by others (the telescope; cf. Scenes 1 & 2, AW 2:9-24), and to being seen by others in the performance of experimental demonstration. All of this he did in order to assert the authority of a vision which in either case is never authentically and immediately his own, to claim that authority nonetheless for his own through a kind of impersonation, and to strengthen its claim on the present meaning and future course of the political sphere. Can we, in good faith, separate these two forms of responsibility to authority, use each to alienate us from the other, and so bring them into stereoscopic engagement? Do they unsettle each other, or do they actually reinforce each other? The next exchange between Virginia and Galileo, minimal as it is, seems to suggest a definitive answer, and brings us back to the terrain of apocalyptic vision from which we set out here:

> GALILEI Was kommt als nächstes?
> VIRGINIA Ein wunderschöner Spruch: »Wenn ich schwach bin, da bin ich stark.«
> GALILEI Keine Auslegung.
> VIRGINIA Aber warum nicht?
> GALILEI Was kommt als nächstes? (*LdG* 2:97)
>
> GALILEO What's next?
> VIRGINIA A wonderful proverb: "Where I am weak, there I am strong."
> GALILEO No commentary.
> VIRGINIA But why not?
> GALILEO What's next after that?

Galileo evades interpreting the proverb Virginia feeds him because the bare logical contradiction it expresses as proverbial wisdom – the possibility of ascribing both strength and weakness simultaneously to one and the same position – presents in a surprisingly direct form how the stereoscopic dynamic of the alienation effect, whether Brechtian or Galilean, is already deeply entrenched in the counterrevolutionary ideology of the Church in the play. Rather than functioning as an exhortation to recognize how the weakness and suffering of the oppressed unfold within the material and historical processes of the immanent world, it figures precisely that weakness and suffering as the expression in the immanent world of connection with a transcendent deity of limitless strength. The interpretive move executed by the proverb, and, moreover, the move in which it is designed to train its interpreter, is an apocalyptic gesture: the transient and apparent world in which human beings suffer weakness is wrested aside, like a mask or a veil, to reveal that weakness, in the permanent and spiritual world, is true strength. Rather than opening a pathway into critical, historical consciousness, the proverb opens a pathway into ideological mystification – but it does so, furthermore, by application of the same technique of alienation, which does not dictate the political ends to which it is put, only the technical means. Its apocalypse moves backwards into the old age, not forwards into the new: but it is no less an apocalypse for that. Galileo’s terse evasion – “keine Auslegung” – betrays his awareness that the path of alienation, like the path of empirical science or, further back, the twisted interpretive path of Oedipus, is fundamentally Heraclitean: ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή (Diels-Kranz B60; “the path that leads up and the path that leads down are one and the same”). The ideological instruments of the authority that legitimates one interpretive perspective can all too easily be pressed into service by its antagonist. As a result of his recantation, Galileo has appropriated the perspective of his enemies just as much as they have appropriated his – each has come to impersonate the other. His past desire to interpret the universe for himself has proven inextricably, though paradoxically, integral to his present desire to impersonate the authority of the Church: he can only withdraw his power of interpretive vision, as it were neurotically, whenever the terrible blindness that underwrites this power draws near. One could well argue, then, that Galileo's interlocutor in this scene is not actually Virginia: rather, it is the untranscendable condition of interpretive risk, here articulated in subtly tragic terms.

The energizing stereoscopic interaction between interpretive viewpoints and their legitimating authorities, the dis-integration that culminated in the experience of the alienation effect, has, it seems, suddenly dropped out of the equation. The polar confrontation of distinct authorities has been replaced by the aporia of self-confrontation; the possibility of mutual alienation and mutual critique has been subsumed by the harrowing acknowledgment of a limit that cannot be crossed and a necessity that must be obeyed. This is the paradoxical condition of risk in which Galileo writes the *Discorsi* during his imprisonment, with a mixture of hope and fear that recalls the ambivalent attitude of the Theban suppliants at the beginning of the *OT* (δείσαντες ἢ στέρξαντες *OT* 11; "in fear or in hope"): hope that the interpretive theater of the seeing-eye can be transferred intact into the theater of the reading-eye, and fear that the authority of the visible universe will lapse after all into the authority of the text. If Galileo's final interpretive wager is to bet it all on crossing the figurative frontier from seeing to reading, its underlying paradox thickens as Andrea (Scene 15, AW 2:106-109) transports the text itself in the opposite direction, across the literal frontier between a regime of reading and one of seeing: out of the Italian provinces controlled by the Church, with its libraries and

Inquistors, into the free nations of northern Europe, with their laboratories and scientists. Not, however, without issuing in a final, ironic and "noisy" coda to the contrapuntal fugue played out between the rival authorities of Galileo and Aristotle throughout the entire drama. When Andrea submits his belongings to search at the border, he carries the contraband manuscript of the *Discorsi* openly in his hands, since he cannot desist for a moment from reading it. The border guard eyes him with the suspicion demanded by his profession:

> DER GRENZWÄCHTER Was ist das für ein Buch?
> ANDREA *ohne aufzusehen:* Das ist von dem großen Philosophen Aristoteles.
> DER GRENZWÄCHTER *mißtrauisch:* Was ist das für einer?
> ANDREA Er ist schon tot. […]
> DER GRENZWÄCHTER Die ganze Sucherei hat ja auch wenig Zweck. So offen würde uns ja keiner hinlegen, was er zu verbergen hätte. (*LdG* 2:107)
>
> THE BORDER GUARD What sorta book is that?
> ANDREA *without looking up:* It's by the great philosopher Aristotle.
> THE BORDER GUARD *suspiciously:* What sorta writer is he?
> ANDREA He's already dead. […]
> THE BORDER GUARD All this searching is really pretty pointless anyway. Nobody would carry in plain view whatever he had to hide.

Andrea's ruse succeeds in throwing the border guard off the scent, ensuring the dissemination of Galileo's findings in Northern Europe, but the practical dramatic aim of this device falls far short of its larger resonance as the play's final comment on the problem of interpretive authority. Like Galileo's terse excuse for his blindness in the previous scene, the form of Andrea's deception paradoxically communicates a truth which is lost on the border guard and may even be lost on its speaker, but cannot be lost on the spectator. It is another textbook case – not so much of alienation as of tragic irony. By making recourse to textuality, Galileo has willingly submitted to the risky double bind of the alienation from seeing-eye to reading-eye: he has both guaranteed the futurity of his research, which can only unfold in the absence of his own now-failing eyes, and subjected it to the risk of becoming one more textual authority like Aristotle himself, in the presence of many yet-unborn eyes. This provides the link to the meaning of the second, and equally resonant, component of Andrea’s deception: the guard’s ignorance of who Aristotle might be compels Andrea’s protective assertion that the author of the text is “already dead.” The dissemination of Galileo’s work, the entrance of his text into the regions of risk and the unforeseeable currents of interpretive futurity, announces the death of its author. As in the language of Oedipus, Andrea is more truthful in his lie than he realizes, and perhaps more truthful than he would like to be. Among each of the unforeseeable and uncontrollable scenes of interpretation that can now occur in futurity between this single text and its plurality of readers – for this is, after all, what textual dissemination means – it stands a chance of slowly but surely usurping the interpretive privilege of the empirical seeing-eye with that of the philosophical reading-eye. Andrea’s savvy bit of practical sophistry could very well turn into a poetic figure for historical truth: he has made himself an apocalyptic poet-prophet against his will. As if to presage this possibility, Andrea himself does not even look up from the authoritative arguments of its pages to confront the suspicious representative of another authority, whose only interest in him is, appropriately enough, to observe, notate, and regulate his journey. The figurative tableau thus presented repeats in a single image the entire progress of Galileo’s interpretive career as the scientist who will not tear his inquiring gaze away from the instruments of his research to confront the inquiring gaze and the instruments of political authority. Instead, the tableau subjects this career to a foreboding alienation by making a single, provocative substitution: the text of the *Discorsi* now stands in for Galileo’s telescope trained on the heavens. The genuine tragic terror and pathos of this moment, the resonant echo of Oedipus' desperate roaring, hit the mark for us once we recognize that there may not be a definitive difference between Jupiter's moons in the lens and the formulae describing their orbits in the book: the whole question of interpretive authority, whether dramatic or scientific, is carried in the dangerous parallax between one eye and the other. The whole exchange, in fact, "carries in plain view" exactly that which both Galilean science and Brechtian theater have to hide: perhaps not in the border guard's plain view, nor in Andrea's, nor in Galileo's, nor in Brecht's, but in ours.

From this perspective, the linked activities of the Brechtian spectator – understanding, criticizing, and overcoming – each of which feeds upon the stereoscopic fuel of the alienation effect, can be read as embodiments of a Brechtian *katharsis* – whereby his "non-Aristotelian" theater tacitly asserts itself as more faithful to its "Aristotelian" authority in certain ways than its bourgeois forebear. Just a few years after Brecht, sounding the Galilean battle-cry of alienation, wrote that "die nichtaristotelische Dramatik […] spaltet ihr Publikum" (*Mittelbare Wirkung des epischen Theaters* ST 59; "the non-Aristotelian dramaturgy […] divides its audience"), the Swedish student-actors who came to hear the war-exiled Brecht deliver his lecture "Über experimentelles Theater" in Stockholm on 4 May 1939 found him far more conciliatory towards the classical horizon and the formation of a unified collective response to drama:

> Was konnte an die Stelle von *Furcht* und *Mitleid* gesetzt werden, des klassischen Zwiegespanns zur Herbeiführung der aristotelischen Katharsis? [...] Welche Haltung sollte der Zuhörer einnehmen in den neuen Theatern, wenn ihm die traumbefangene, passive, in das Schicksal ergebene Haltung verwehrt wurde? Er sollte nicht mehr aus seiner Welt in die Welt der Kunst entführt, nicht mehr gekidnappt werden; im Gegenteil sollte er in seine reale Welt eingeführt werden, mit wachen Sinnen. *War es möglich, etwa anstelle der Furcht vor dem Schicksal die Wissensbegierde zu setzen, anstelle des Mitleids die Hilfsbereitschaft?* Konnte man damit einen neuen Kontakt schaffen zwischen Bühne und Zuschauer, konnte das eine neue Basis für den Kunstgenuß abgeben? [...] Das Prinzip besteht darin, anstelle der Einfühlung die *Verfremdung* herbeizuführen. (*Über exper. Th.* 6:417-418, emphasis mine)
>
> What could be put in place of *fear* and *pity*, in place of that classical carriage-and-pair for the inducement of Aristotelian *katharsis*? […] What attitude should the listener take up in the new theaters, if we refuse him the passive, dream-entangled, fatalistic attitude? He should no longer be abducted from his world into the world of art, no longer be kidnapped [*gekidnappt*]; on the contrary, he should be led into the reality of his world, with wakeful senses. *Was it possible, for instance, to replace the fear of destiny with the desire for knowledge, the feeling of pity with the readiness to lend aid?*

> Could one thereby create a new point of contact between stage and audience, could that provide a new basis for artistic pleasure? […] The principle is this: to induce, in place of identification, *alienation*.

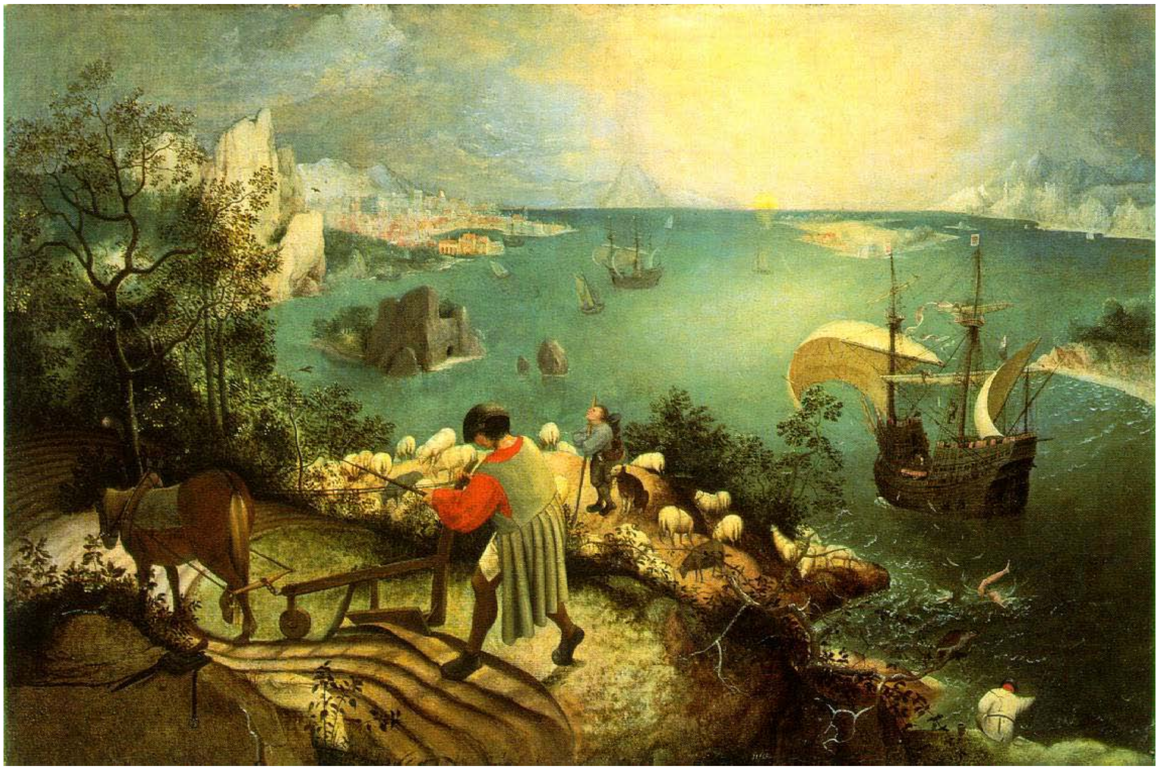
Here, Brecht descibes the cathartic effect of his modern theater not in terms of the oneirics and narcotics of bourgeois identification, with its attendant falsifications and stupefactions, but rather in terms of a keen and crisp awakening to truth, reason, and will: his juxtapositions are between dream and reason, illusion and reality, even passion and action. But the aggressively modern and class-conscious polemic against a mystifying and ideologizing Aristotle that we find in his previous essay from 1932/1936 has completely receded, and in its place we find an unmistakable desire to rehabilitate a classical authority on behalf of modern experience. Where the former shouted for a radical change in paradigm and the toppling of authority, the latter almost meekly suggests a strategic reorientation of attitude towards this authority, a series of substitutions in a paradigm already given – whereby we should immediately be reminded of the ironic and troubling series of substitutions we saw in Scene 15. The point to be made here is an essential one for understanding the risks and responsibilities of Brechtian alienation as a political critique of the theater's interpretive authority. We would not be far off, in perceiving Brecht's apparent vacillation of perspective on Aristotle here, to be immediately reminded of Galileo's shadow-play with the disembodied textual authority of Scripture in the play's final scene, the intensity of which lies in the way each perspective implicates itself ever more in the other, losing instead of gaining a distinct outline in its response. Galileo's struggle against classical or biblical authority, however immediate and transparent his arguments may seem, must ultimately establish and justify a new source of interpretive authority that risks the resurrection of the old: that is, after all, the way responsibility is tacitly born within the act of response. In the same way, Brecht's effort to alienate his spectator from the attitude of identification ultimately compels him to formulate a new practice centered on the alienation of perspective – itself a perspective with which the spectator must *nonetheless* at least partially identify. Complex ironies such as these form the virtual signature of Brecht's dialectical thinking. Even more so, they are subtle but potent indices of the risks inscribed in his critique of the authority that underwrites dramatic *mimēsis*, and of the responsibilities his practice bears within the past and future conversation contained in its tradition.

In one of the central passages of Brecht's major theoretical statement, the "Kleines Organon für das Theater" from 1948, he invokes the scientific gaze of Galileo as providing a prototype of the alienating gaze – not only for modern, disenchanted, capitalized humanity, but also for the spectator of Brechtian theater. As we read Brecht's anecdote, we cannot help but feel at this point some of the perilous and illuminating light of risk suffusing his account, as it were, from below:

> Das lange nicht Geänderte nämlich scheint unänderbar. Allenthalben treffen wir auf etwas, das zu selbstverständlich ist, als daß wir uns bemühen müßten, es zu verstehen. Was sie miteinander erleben, scheint den Menschen das gegebene menschliche Erleben. Das Kind, lebend in einer Welt der Greise, lernt, wie es dort zugeht. Wie die Dinge eben laufen, so werden sie ihm geläufig. … Damit all dies viele Gegebene ihm als ebensoviel Zweifelhaftes erscheinen könnte, müßte er jenen fremden Blick entwickeln, mit dem der große Galilei einen ins Pendeln gekommenen Kronleuchter betrachtete. Den verwunderten diese Schwingungen, als hätte er sie so nicht erwartet und verstünde es nicht von ihnen, wodurch er dann auf die Gesetzmäßigkeiten kam. Diesen Blick, so schwierig wie produktiv, muß das Theater mit seinen Abbildungen des menschlichen Zusammenlebens provozieren. Es muß sein Publikum wundern machen, und dies geschieht vermittels einer Technik der Verfremdungen des Vertrauten (152, §44).

> That which has not been changed for a long time appears unchangeable. On every side we encounter something that is too obvious for us to take the trouble to understand it. What human beings experience with each other appears to them to be human experience as such, as it is given. The child, living in a world of old people, learns what goes on there. For him, the way this world just happens to go becomes, for him, the way of the world. … So that all these 'givens' might appear to him as just so much to question and to doubt, he would have to develop that alien gaze with which the great Galileo observed a swinging lantern. The swinging astonished him, as if he had not expected it to be thus and did not understand how he might then grasp the law that governed its regular movements. It is this gaze, as difficult as it is productive, that the theater must provoke with its representations of human life in society. The theater must make its audience feel astonishment, and this occurs by means of a technique [*Technik*] of alienation from the familiar.

The modern will to *change*, whether the object of that will is seen in the structure of society or in the structure of nature, forms the point of departure for Brecht's interpretation of the Galilean anecdote, just as surely as the *instrument* of that change – the technique of alienation – forms its ultimate point of arrival. Here and elsewhere Brecht inscribes his theater within a historical narrative of modern consciousness, realized in the interaction between a science that produces new technologies, and technologies that bring forth new resources for science (*Kleines Organon* AW 6:525-527; §15-20). The word for *technology* in German is the same as the word for *technique*: *Technik*, and it is this word that Brecht uses to describe the alienation of the familiar (*Verfremdungen des Vertrauten*) in his theater. Thus we can say that Brecht's Marxist science produces the new technique and/or technology of alienation as the pre-eminent instrument of the modern will to change society, and takes as its prototype the alienating and disenchanting gaze of the scientist developed as a kind of interpretive technology, an attitudinal instrument of the will to change nature. Galileo's gaze functions as more or less the subjective correlative to the technology of his telescope: both open up new perspectives to interpretation by removing the enchanted haze of familiarity. Nonetheless, for as surely as the technological instrument connects the human will to change with the social or natural object of change, it is entirely disconnected from the nature of the change desired and the consequences of that change once effected. The nature of the change one desires to make in the dialectic – literally, in the conversation – between man and matter in history establishes the limits of the subject's responsibility; the consequences of that change once effected in the dialectic – the response returned to us in the movement of conversation, whatever its impact – constitute the subject's risk. In view of my intergeneric reading, I think that where both Brecht and Galileo err is in imagining that the instrument alone can guarantee the soundness of responsibility and exorcise the specter of risk: that the interpretive technology of alienation, in itself, possesses the authority, and assumes the responsibility, that can only properly belong to a plurality of interpretive agents and their plural wills to change. These agents, after all, are the ones for whom and by whom interpretive risks are assumed in the first place. The instruments of interpretation risk nothing, but the interpreter always risks something, if not everything. Brecht’s Galileo, no less than Galileo’s Brecht, are both proof enough of that.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (c. 1558); oil on canvas, mounted on wood, 73.5 x 112 cm; Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.

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# CHAPTER III

# INTERMEZZO: THE WELL-TEMPERED CLAVIER

*Only the one who draws the knife gets Isaac.*
– Kierkegaard[1]

Brecht's *Leben des Galilei* may end on a sober and guarded note of hope, but even this tone is tempered, as it were, by the minor chord of risk and complicity in which that single note sounds. As a sense-making instrument, Galileo's alienating technique of interpretation itself ultimately falls victim to its own mechanism, the redoubled or recursive alienation that it bore as an implicit risk from the beginning. The scientist's concupiscent and autonomous eye all too easily identifies itself with the diffident and surveilling eye of the Church; the apostate's explosive language all too easily becomes the passive conduit for citations and imitations derived from Biblical authority. The promise of the new age – not just the prospect of scientific and technological transformation, but even that of political revolution – on which Galileo builds his magisterial 'aria' in the opening scene has, indeed, born its fruit in season, but the harvest is bitter with irony. Rather than seeing the new interpretive instruments of science transform the world, the virtuoso of these instruments has allowed them to transform *him* into a being utterly alien to himself, altered beyond his own recognition. The play frames his failure of responsibility as at once an individual compromise, an historical catastrophe, and an object-lesson in the stakes of interpretive risk: for Galileo's tragedy lies in the fact that the same instrument of dissonance with which he shattered the crystalline harmony of the Ptolemaic universe has also, at last, shattered his own concord with himself. He has become other than himself, opposed to himself – in fighting his enemies with the power of a new vision, he has become his own enemy and willingly made himself blind. In this respect, Galileo's voluntary self-alienation simply repeats, in the form of historical allegory, the experience of the spectator of bourgeois theater – the theater against which, as we have seen, Brecht exerted all his practical and theoretical energies, precisely because it concealed the deadly poison of renewed self-alienation in the saccharine of identification:

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[1] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition. Kierkegaard's Writings, Volume 6.* trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983), 27.

> [D]er Zuschauer wird nicht etwa ins Nichts geführt, nicht in eine fremde, sondern in eine verzerrte Welt, und er bezahlt seine Ausschweifungen, die ihm nur als Ausflüge vorkommen, im realen Leben. Nicht spurlos gehen die Einfühlungen in den Gegner an ihm vorüber. Er wird sein eigener Gegner damit. Der Ersatz befriedigt das Bedürfnis und vergiftet den Körper.[2]
>
> The spectator [of bourgeois theater] gets carried away not merely into a void, not into a foreign world, but rather into a distorted [version of the real] world – and he pays the price for this debauchery, which appears to him only as a temporary excursion, in his real life. His experiences of identification with his enemy do not pass over him without leaving a trace: under their influence, he becomes his own enemy. The substitute satisfies his needs and poisons his body.

Insofar as the spectator enters the theater in an involuntarily alienated condition that blocks his access to an authentic (read: historical-materialist) interpretation of himself and his world, the modern subject can be said, like the compromised Galileo, to stand at odds with himself in equal measure. The false promises of bourgeois theater, however, not only reproduce the spectator's condition of self-contradiction, but make the spectator himself complicit in its reproduction – the doctor persuades the patient, as it were, to swallow his poison as if it were a panacea. Every technique developed by Brecht in his theater, as we have seen, aims to reenact alienation as the conscious focus of dramatic spectacle, in order to reveal to the spectator how he exists within and can overcome the self-opposition imposed by his historical condition. Nonetheless – and again, precisely like Galileo – in reenacting alienation as a dialectical instrument of enlightenment, Brechtian theater risks handing over the alienated subject to renewed delusion and disintegration by the very same device that promised his enlightenment and emancipation, his hard-won coherence with himself. At worst, the interpreter may only be freed from his slavery to alien perspectives only so that the future can imprison him in a blindness all his own.

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[2] Bertolt Brecht, "[A 8] Dritter Nachtrag zur Theorie des »Messingkaufs«," in: *Werke, Bd. 22,* ed. Werner Hecht *et al,* 700; trans. mine.

As I have tried to demonstrate, the danger of self-opposition appears no less intractable in Brecht's classical progenitor, the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, where the interpreter’s kinetic drive to arrive at truth brings him back – terribly, inexorably, uncannily – to the error from which he sought to escape. We have seen how, in Brecht, the ‘scientific’ alienation that aims to purge the modern mass subject of its historical narcosis only administers a drug that risks deepening the patient’s addiction by convincing him of his hard-won sobriety. In Sophocles, on the other hand, the bold kinesis of autonomous reason that aims to cure Thebes of its plague only paralyzes the structure of political space and the meaningfulness of common language by provoking the interpreter’s own disease – dislocation, disorientation, polyphony – to emerge in full bloom. When we last left Oedipus, his voice – the haplessly self-opposed voice of the tragic interpreter – was getting carried away by the force of its own revelations, shattered and dispersed into a multitude of meanings instead of coalescing in the singular clarity it originally sought: πᾷ μοι / φθογγὰ διαπωτᾶται φοράδαν; (Soph. *OT* 1309f.; “Where is my voice being swept away to, born on the wings of the air?”). Having tried to silence the interpretive noise generated first by the oracle, then by the riddle, then last of all by the plague, he has now recognized that the real source of this noise – a noise more extraordinary and unsettling than any of these partial and provisional manifestations – lies in the infinite cacophony that infects his own ordering, calculating, sense-making voice, revealing this voice as both his own most intimate possession and yet also something alien and abhorrent to him. In this moment, all the voices that have thus far come to meet him from elsewhere, from outside himself – the voices of the calamitous oracle, the baffling Sphinx, the suffering Thebans – appear at last as premonitions or reflections of his own self-divided speech. It is almost as if they had been addressing him all along, on his own behalf, so that he might actually come to hear *himself* in them before he and his voice cross that final threshold into irresolvable tragic discord, before, indeed, he has no choice but to reveal the nature of his own voice, a semantic echo-chamber in which the infinity of echoes eventually drowns out the original sound.

As explorations of interpretive risk and responsibility, then, the bond of tragic thought that links Brecht and Sophocles can perhaps best be expressed in terms of the musical figure with which I began here: the interpreter's pursuit of harmony with himself and with others unfailingly arrives at a point of dissonance so extreme that it destroys the ethical and political medium, shattering the instrument with which the music of meaning is made. As long as interpretation admits this tragic potential as a danger to be faced in the task of sense-making, the echo of this terminal discord – whether it comes from the bestial cry of Oedipus or the disastrous silence of Galileo – can never cease to ring in the ears of the one who sets before him- or herself the task of making sense.

All the same: even in this cataclysmic burst of discord, there were, and still are, the first strains of another music. The alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman (b. 1930), who helped begin a radically new era in American improvised music during the late 1950s and early 60s, once wrote of his early musical training: “It was when I realized I could make mistakes that I decided I was really on to something.”[3] In a sense, Coleman’s statement lays the groundwork for the music that can, and must, still be made once the music of interpretive tragedy, whether ancient or modern, plays itself to a point where it is no longer possible for the interpreter finally to resolve himself with himself or with others in the harmony of understanding. Although, as we shall see, the realization of ethical and political harmony does remain the ostensible aim of the new interpretive musician, there are at least two fundamental differences that both inscribe his music within what I have defined (ever so loosely) as the Sophoclean-Brechtian territory of tragedy and, at the same time, cast him out of its conservatories with violent force. Into the new and unforeseen wilderness of sound and sense that lies before him, moreover, he follows an unclear and distant summons, the tenuous promise of a concord upon which, without risking any hyperbole, it is fair to say he stakes his very life.

First, the new musician plays, as it were, in constant and direct confrontation with the possibility that his music, at any moment, *can* and even *must* dissolve into tragic dissonance. But the exceptional and brilliant discipline of this new virtuoso is such that he meets the inevitable arrival of dissonance with an inward, ironic, and melancholy laughter, and takes it as an invitation, even an imperative, to start the music again in a direction dictated by his error – as if the mistake opened a path for free play rather than merely struck an impassable barrier, and even if the pursuit of this previously unthinkable path only turns out to invite yet another harmonic catastrophe. This inward confrontation with the possibility of discord, furthermore, the ethical relation of self to self forged by this imminent possibility, is so continuous, so intimate, and so penetrating in the new musician's awareness that its shock, horror, and shame have not only settled into his very marrow and nerves, but have lent their tempo to a way of life that is distinctly his own and, against all odds, endlessly renews him every time it renews itself. Not for him the faith in a future concord – Thebes restored to health, Europe liberated by human reason – that ends by closing its ears to the future music it once hoped to hear, destroying its instruments, casting the orchestra to the four winds. Instead, the ever-imminent possibility of discord becomes the medium in which he holds a constant and excruciating vigil over himself and the task of his playing: the new musician relates to himself, becomes his own accompanist and interlocutor, through his prolonged and perverse romance with dissonance and error. His is a discipline above discipline, a rigor against rigor: after all, the pianist meticulously destroys the natural posture of his body, his arms, his hands to achieve the proper timbre on the keyboard; the jazz trumpeter consciously works at building up the scar tissue on his lips that will solidify his embouchure and enrich his tone; the cellist calmly drags a razor in parallel lines through the calluses formed on his left hand to improve his control of the strings.[4] How much more tortuous and perverse, how much more hell-bent on self-mutilation and self-negation, would be the discipline of the player who craves not merely to attain and master harmony, but then, having come within a hair's breadth of attaining and mastering it, desires nothing more than to overcome and destroy it? In short, this new musician, the virtuoso of negation, plays the interpretive instrument in contact with a risk that he does not dread and flee, but instead affirms and even desires – even more than the pianist desires the distortion of his spinal column and the cellist desires the disfigurement of his hands. Indeed, his virtuosity lies in his ardent pursuit of the *next* mistake, the arousing and invigorating suspense of an error that is sure to arrive again and again, because he recognizes the risk of error as the true material and the true medium of his art.

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[3] Ornette Coleman, “The Harmolodic Manifesto,” from Ornette Coleman's official web site (http://ornettecoleman.com), 10 February 2010.

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[4] While the first of these two examples of self-imposed corporeal discipline represent part of the common experience of musicians, I owe the third of them to my former student Kenneth Koshorek, an amateur cellist who related to me the following anecdote from his own experience. Mr. Koshorek knew a professional cellist who, because the calluses that had formed on the latter's left hand after decades of intense and concentrated pressure had begun to interfere with his technique, carefully cut them open in parallel lines that would match the spacing of the strings on the fingerboard of the cello. The subsequent wounds and scarring resulted in a substantial improvement in technique for the cellist, as well as a visible and, to all accounts, grotesque mutilation of his hand.

Second, and as if both to heighten what I have just called the suspense of error even further and to cast the entangling net of its complicities even more broadly, this musician must play his music with and among others, he must implicate them in the stern discipline of its conversation – because they are, as ethical and political subjects, already implicated – and in so doing more deeply implicate and discipline himself, more completely put his own existence at risk.[5] The properly ethical interplay between the musician and himself through the instrument can be neither sustained nor consummated without the political interplay between the musician and his fellow musicians. But then again: placed alongside this *sui generis* apparition, who exactly will these fellow players prove to be, and how will their music sound in concert with his? Will they be prepared to tear apart, as eagerly and as passionately as their companion, the fabric of sonic white lies that justifies all the familiar tempos, the harmonic fakes and melodic shortcuts, the shallow but flattering scales and modes – in other words, the threadbare fabric that holds together the music of their third-hand wisdom, petty dogmatisms, or hardened habits of being? Are their ears and minds keen enough to perceive, as this new musician can, the distant echo of Oedipus' roar or Galileo's silence within the cadences of their most banal assumptions and everyday judgments? And can they possibly follow his lead when he quietly and methodically converts this *pianissimo* counterpoint within their idle thoughts into an overpowering *fortissimo* that leaves them speechless and eviscerated,[6] only to find that this was just the first lesson, an étude for raw beginners, in a master class that will and must consume their whole lives? Will they perform vivisection upon their minds and thoughts with the same meticulous, detached, craftsmanlike devotion with which the cellist slashes open his own hands – all in the name of music alone? The ethical mission of the new music – and it is by no means inappropriate to speak of it as a mission –

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[5] *Mutatis mutandis*, the new interpreter undertakes dialogue with others as a duty imposed upon him by the imperatives of his own internal dialogue: οἷον, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ποιεῖς ἡγούμενος, εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα σὲ ἐλέγχω, ἄλλου τινὸς ἕνεκα ἐλέγχειν ἢ οὗπερ ἕνεκα κἂν ἐμαυτὸν διερευνῴμην τί λέγω, φοβούμενος μή ποτε λάθω οἰόμενος μέν τι εἰδέναι, εἰδὼς δὲ μή. καὶ νῦν δὴ οὖν ἔγωγέ φημι τοῦτο ποιεῖν, τὸν λόγον σκοπεῖν μάλιστα μὲν ἐμαυτοῦ ἕνεκα, ἴσως δὲ δὴ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιτηδείων (Plat. *Charm.* 166c-d; "'Oh come,' I said, 'how could you possibly think that even if I were to refute everything you say, I would be doing it for any other reasons than the one I would give for *a thorough investigation of my own statements* – the fear of unconsciously thinking I know something when I do not. And this is what I claim to be doing now, *examining the argument for my own sake primarily, but perhaps also for the sake of my friends*'" [Cooper/Sprague 653, emphasis mine in trans.]); quoted in Thomas C. Brickhouse & Nicholas D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), 14. All quotations from the Greek text of Plato are cited according to their standard abbreviations as given in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, the standard Stephanus pagination used in all modern editions of the Greek texts, and the most recent edition of the Oxford Classical Text (OCT). In the case of the *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist,* and *Statesman*, the most recent OCT is Plato, O*pera*, Vol. I, eds. E.A. Duke, W.F. Hicken, W.S.M. Nicoll, D.B. Robinson & J.C.G. Strachan (New York: Oxford UP, 1995); in the case of all other Platonic texts, the standard OCT remains Plato, O*pera*, Vols. II-V, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1900-1907). All translations of Plato into English are taken from the currently authoritative English translation of

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his complete works: Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, various trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), from which I will cite henceforth as follows: Cooper/[surname of respective translator], [page number].

[6] Two examples of such breathlessness and evisceration, from countless similar ones: ἀλλὰ μὰ τοὺς θεούς, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ οἶδ' ἔγωγε οὐδ' ὅτι λέγω, ἀλλ' ἀτεχνῶς ἔοικα ἀτόπως ἔχοντι: τοτὲ μὲν γάρ μοι ἕτερα δοκεῖ σοῦ ἐρωτῶντος, τοτὲ δ' ἄλλα (Plat.[/pseudo-Plat.] *Alc. I* 116e; "I swear by the gods, Socrates, I have no idea what I mean – I must be in some absolutely bizarre condition! When you ask me questions, first I think one thing, and then I think something else" [Cooper/Hutchinson 573]); ἀλλ', ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκ ἔχω ἔγωγε ὅπως σοι εἴπω ὃ νοῶ: περιέρχεται γάρ πως ἡμῖν ἀεὶ ὃ ἂν προθώμεθα καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλει μένειν ὅπου ἂν ἱδρυσώμεθα αὐτό (Plat. *Euthyph.* 11b; "But Socrates, I have no way of telling you what I have in mind, for whatever proposition we put forward goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it" [Cooper/Grube 11]).

always and deliberately *both* to fall short of *and* overcome the harmony it seeks to achieve, founds the integrity of the musician upon an impossibly sensitive responsibility to himself. Although the political mission of this practice, as we shall see, remains posterior to the ethical, the former cannot in good faith be divorced from the latter, since the practice assumes that the musician can never achieve self-responsibility without at once developing relations of responsibility between different musicians and forms of music, that is, between interpreters and practices of interpretation. In essence, the discipline of the new music demands that its ever-deepening, ever-broadening responsibility to itself involves a complementary responsibility to others. To accept this responsibility, naturally, is freely and knowingly to make oneself complicit in its risk, to take a share in a common wager the stakes of which encompass nothing less than the whole of one's life – precisely because under the terms of this wager, there is nothing in human life that falls outside music, outside the task of interpretation.

I have described this new interpreter as journeying upon an uncertain and unmarked path that may lead him into peril as easily as it may lead him to salvation. But unlike Oedipus, whose kinetic and topographic situation he shares in this respect, this new interpreter knows and accepts with his first step that the path he marks out leads into a labyrinth that will only generate further labyrinths, and that the epistrophic turn in which disaster and deliverance coincide only really returns the traveler to the chastened self-recognition that now motivates his 'second first' step. And yet in all these wanderings he willingly undertakes, through all the missteps and stumblings and vertiginous turnings he suffers – incredibly! – he believes in the possibility of an arrival just as much as he believes that it will most likely never belong to him, nor, perhaps, to the few bold enough to follow him.

In his resolve to follow this path, furthermore, I have also described the new interpreter as one who has been called upon to respond to a summons: cast out of the conservatories of high concord, he capitalizes upon his alien status by transforming it into an interpretive task, by perceiving himself as the addressee of an interrogating voice, the recipient of a mission, communicated from a remote and indefinite ‘there’ counterposed to the ‘here’ from which he already stands at one remove. Yet again, unlike Galileo, whose power of perspectival alienation he shares in this respect,[7] this new interpreter does not intuit his mission by subjecting his ‘here,’ in the form of his determinate, historical-material condition, to that oblique gaze by means of which its indwelling meaning, the potential ‘there’ of a future contained in it and conceived as necessary and emancipatory, literally makes itself present to him. In other words, the question posed to him does not ultimately issue from the experience of what we, existing within the 19th-century legacy of Hegel, Marx, and Darwin, would call history, nor does he submit to the categories of this experience in forming his answer. As this new interpreter conceives and pursues his mission, the technique of negation and alienation must surpass even this experience in order not merely to interpret, but even to receive in the first place the voice that addresses him: beyond sense, perspective, or the body as such; beyond historical and material condition; beyond time, space, change, circumstance, relation or qualification of every sort – beyond, indeed, the common limits set by every heretofore conceivable human experience. To all this, to everything that has given definition and meaning to the reality incontrovertibly recognized and interpreted as real by human beings, this interpreter makes himself an alien – all this he negates as delusion, as dream and mist, as a rumor half-recalled by a madman and then reported by a liar – in order to receive at last the voice addressed to him from the only true being and the only true reality.

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[7] See also Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press/Harvard UP, 2002), 198, on the origin of philosophical activity in the sudden awareness of one’s own “alienation, dispersion, and unhappiness”, and 230 on “the rediscovery of […] naïve vision.” It is well nigh impossible to ignore the resonances with Brecht generated by these passages.

To call this the voice of the divine – and the new interpreter can perhaps only call it by that name as a concession to common usage – renders it somewhat less alien, domesticates its danger, and places an illusory safety net beneath the tightrope upon which we, along with him, nonetheless remain poised, with our ears open, straining to hear *that* voice, the terrible and thrilling question posed by *that* music. For this virtuoso of negation will not allow either us or himself simply to remain poised there alone on that utmost precipice, absorbed in the tireless and imperturbable effort to listen, risking all and reserving nothing. At the same time, he asks of himself and his fellow travelers that we exist both ‘here’ and ‘there’ at once, that we make the same effort to listen to and recognize the contour of *that* sound in *this* ungodly noise and pandemonium called human experience – because the perilous and interminable search for harmony amid the very acts of playing and listening, the real task of the new interpretation, lies in the dialogue of each music with the other, of each musician with the other. The only music worth playing unfolds not as a single melody, but contrapuntally; the only path of thought worth following does not follow a straight line, but zig-zags between truth and error. It is in this sense that the participants in interpretive dialogue truly submit to the discipline of risk: they most resolutely fight against error when they deliberately perpetuate it; they most strictly follow the path when they pursue every possible digression and diversion, indulging and cultivating every obstacle to progress; they play with the richest imaginable harmony – as Coleman says, they get “on to something” – whenever they turn the music violently against itself over and over again, tapping into the immense fertility and power of the mistake.

# CHAPTER IV

# A RECKLESS VOICE OF CONSCIENCE: SOCRATES AT RISK IN THE *APOLOGY*

**IN MEMORIAM MICHAEL ROTH**

εἰώθει γάρ, ὁπότε τύχοι, παίζειν μου εἰς τὰς τρίχας. [Plat. *Phd.* 89b]

## I. Introduction: Living with Noise

The advent of the new interpreter, the dialogist – that disciplined musician of dissonance, that tireless traveler of the forking paths of error, that impious and corrupt alien to any state who nonetheless approaches them as the god-sent prophet of ethical and political conscience – announces itself in a personality as inevitable as he is improbable in both the history and the literature of the West. As if his identity had not already become obvious, this was Socrates.[1] Reflecting Socrates' capacity as the *agent provocateur* of radical alienation and negation, for instance, the Callicles of the *Gorgias* responds to a characteristically Socratic conclusion dispiritedly, speaking from within the all-too-ordinary human territory that Socrates has long since left behind, *à la* Oedipus, on his wandering ways. Gorgias' sense of consonance is quite undone by the single jarring tone Socrates strikes:

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[1] Among all the scholarly works on Plato – the epitome of a critical literature that would take more than a dozen lifetimes to absorb, let alone digest – the most broad-ranging, most approachable, and most concise modern work that offers a general crash-course in Plato and/or Socrates for the raw beginner is Richard Kraut, "Introduction to the Study of Plato," in: *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Kraut (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992), 1-50. While Kraut's piece is addressed to the "philosophical" much more than the "literary" reader of Plato, there is probably no better single survey of the questions and problems that concern most modern scholarship on Plato than Kraut's, and it merits reading even by those more advanced in Platonic studies, whether in the "literary" or the "philosophical" direction. Gregory Vlastos' brilliant essay "The Paradox of Socrates" (in: Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy, Volume II: Socrates, Plato, and Their Tradition*, ed. Daniel W. Graham [Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995], 3-18) is perhaps the single most trenchant invitation to the study of Plato and Socrates in modern scholarly literature; Vlastos is the most influential Platonic scholar of the 20th century bar none, and his challenging and expansive theses must be reckoned with, whether directly or indirectly, in every serious contemporary attempt to understand Plato. Terry Penner's article "Socrates and the Early Dialogues" (Kraut 1992, 121-169), which draws on most of the major modern commentators on Plato (T.H. Irwin, Kraut, Vlastos, *inter*

> εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, πότερόν σε θῶμεν νυνὶ σπουδάζοντα ἢ παίζοντα; εἰ μὲν γὰρ σπουδάζεις τε καὶ τυγχάνει ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ὄντα ἃ λέγεις, ἄλλο τι ἢ ἡμῶν ὁ βίος ἀνατετραμμένος ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐναντία πράττομεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἢ ἃ δεῖ; (Plat. *Gorg*. 481b-c)
>
> Tell me, Socrates, are we to take you as being in earnest just now, or joking [παίζοντα]? For if you *are* in earnest, and these things you're saying are really true, won't this human life of ours be turned upside down, and won't everything we do evidently be the opposite of what we should do?

Callicles earnestly strives to break free of the alienation he has suffered at Socrates' hands, a disorienting turnabout of perspective that suggests to him nothing less than the total reorganization of ordinary human values and attitudes, by recasting the whole preceding argument as an extended jest, the kind of childish indulgence (παίζω [v.] = to joke, mock, or jest > παῖς [n.] = small child) that can easily be dismissed. Callicles' reaction is as typical for Socrates' interlocutors as it is revealing for the character of Socrates; as Hadot writes, "Socrates' fellow citizens could not help perceiving his

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*alios*) is representative of the modern mainstream view on the chronology of the dialogues, the diachronic development of Plato's thought in them, and the relationship between the historical and the "fictional" Socrates in the group of shorter, mainly aporetic dialogues that scholarly consensus marks as "early" in Plato's writing career; it is to this group that the *Apology* is thought to belong. For a cogent and wide-ranging historical overview of the last half-century of Platonic scholarship, see Gerald A. Press, "The State of the Question in the Study of Plato," in: *Plato: Critical Assessments, Volume I: General Issues of Interpretation*, ed. Nicholas D. Smith (New York: Routledge 1998), 309-332. On the contemporary consensus concerning the dating and organization of the Platonic canon, see also J.A. Philip, "The Platonic Corpus," *op. cit.*, 17-28; Holger Thesleff, "Platonic Chronology," *op. cit.* 50-73. For a strongly-argued alternative thesis on the chronology of the dialogues that has gained some currency against the prevailing view, see Charles H. Kahn, "Did Plato Write Socratic Dialogues?" *op. cit.* 120-140. Furthermore, Kahn's *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 36-100, marks one of the few attempts by a scholar interested in the literary dimensions of Plato to offer new hypotheses from this quarter addressed to the traditional questions about Plato's intellectual development, the chronology of the dialogues, and the historicity of Plato's Socrates. Although many of the questions pursued in this vein of literature will not directly concern my analysis here, these works have at least offered me a wide-angle view of the playing-field on which the present discussion tries to find a new position.

invitation to question all their values and their entire way of acting, and to take care for themselves, as a radical break with daily life, with the habits and conventions of everyday life, and with the world which they were familiar [*sic*]” (Hadot 2002, 36). Callicles wants – and perhaps *we* want, along with him! – to be reassured that the path Socrates has opened is after all certainly a path of error, a mistake exploited purely for comic effect that justifies the infallibility of common sense, the common paths of interpretation, the common harmony that domesticates the music of sense.

But as always, infuriatingly, Socrates himself leaves the question of his own earnestness open – indeed, he leaves the path open, the harmonic resolution open – and instead claims that his obsequious fidelity to an ‘other’ voice, that of philosophy, like the fidelity of a (male) lover to his (male) beloved, demands that he always speak the same words and think the same thoughts as his beloved. This sly claim to indirect discourse presents Socrates as the transmitter of words and thoughts that properly belong to his beloved; he only acts as a kind of wireless router that selflessly conveys signals from the distant ‘there’ where the beloved truth lies to the ‘here’ of dialogue, shared by Callicles and his other interlocutors: μὴ θαύμαζε ὅτι ἐγὼ ταῦτα λέγω, ἀλλὰ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν, τὰ ἐμὰ παιδικά, παῦσον ταῦτα λέγουσαν. λέγει γάϱ, ὦ φίλε ἑταῖϱε, ἃ νῦν ἐμοῦ ἀκούεις […] ἥ δὲ φιλοσοφία ἀεὶ τῶν αὐτῶν [sc. λόγων], λέγει δὲ ἃ σὺ νῦν θαυμάζεις, παϱῆσθα δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς λεγομένοις. (Plat. *Gorg*. 482a-b; “[I]nstead of being surprised at my saying [these things], you must stop *my beloved* [τὰ ἐμὰ παιδικά], philosophy, from saying them. For he always says what you now hear me say, my dear friend […]. [W]hat philosophy says always stays the same, and he’s saying things that now astound you, although you were present when they were said" [Cooper/Zeyl 826f.].[2]) We, along with Callicles – whose own erotic and political obsequiousness Socrates subtly lampoons with the same rhetoric elsewhere in this passage – might reasonably conclude that the trope itself, namely, the dictatorship of speech and thought exercised by the beloved over the lover, entails that the philosopher as interlocutor plays a transmissive or plainly submissive role. In this respect, his role would be analogous to prophetic speech, for instance, where the speaker's language is clearly marked as indirect discourse, a language not his own, on behalf of an absent (because divine) party. The rhetorical figure of the philosopher *qua* desirous prophet, if taken in earnest, implies the negation or elision of the philosopher as an independent ethical subject, an agent *in propria persona*: he seems to invoke a kind of diplomatic immunity, or even to riff elaborately on the dictum "Don't shoot the messenger." On this (flat) reading, in short, Socrates claims no *responsibility* for what he has said, in both the conventional sense of the term and its special meaning in the problem of interpretation. But this rhetoric of 'irresponsibility' naturally proves ironic, or at least enthusiastically polysemous: as Socrates goes on to claim, it is not in spite of, but by virtue of this conscious ethical self-deferral, the ceding of one's own voice before that of Philosophy, that he outlines an exceptional and authentic ethical status for himself *qua* philosopher. This special status not only far surpasses the status of the prophet or the lover, but also casts into radical doubt the glib ethical self-affirmation of Callicles and his all-too-human common sense. Socrates' apparent irresponsibility, as we will see in a moment, emerges as the only authentic ethical *and* interpretive responsibility; through a subtle play on words, his apparent childish joking (παίζοντα 481b) likewise twists around to reveal a lover's earnestness (παιδικά 482a > παιδικός [adj. > παῖς, as above] = childish, boyish; neut. pl. παιδικά [n.] = beloved [male] youth, darling, favorite) in the relation of the philosopher to truth. The life of this relation subsists on the thrilling and harrowing, light-hearted and dead-serious wager made every moment in the chosen life of love – the same wager, it bears mentioning, that is made every moment in the chosen life of thought.[3]

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[2] With masculine pronouns substituted for the translation's feminine ones.

To Callicles, the paradoxically active zeal with which Socrates has passively channeled that distant voice, the indirect discourse of his absent and obscure beloved – the dogged persistence with which he has followed an interpretive path dictated not by any real beloved, whether human or divine, but rather by the process of interpretation itself – has put him completely out of tune with the present and transparent dictates of common sense. As a preemptive response against this line of thought, Socrates executes a characteristically virtuosic epistrophy at Callicles' expense that cuts straight to the root of Socratic philosophy as a quest for harmony in the perpetual suspense of dissonance and error. Against all expectation, Socrates argues that it is precisely by virtue of his conscious and deliberate submission to interpretive reason – his one and only “beloved” – and his transmission of what this reason dictates that he can begin the journey towards ethical self-coherence, autonomous agency and absolute consistency of thought, word, and deed. Callicles, on the other hand, with all his common sense (and his numerous lovers) must forever and abysmally fall short of this prize. In essence, Socrates’ deliberate choice to live in interpretive dissonance with the human world, rooted in his deferral to reason, serves as evidence that he is on the way to achieving concord with both himself and truth, and, ultimately, that in this concord with self and truth the philosopher alone is *identical with himself* and *speaks in his own voice*:

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[3] In a relatively rare turn among scholars of Plato, Hadot acknowledges the paradoxical light-heartedness at the core of classic Socratic irony – a concept so hotly debated and so earnestly pursued down through the generations of Platonic scholars – when he writes that this irony "is a kind of humor which refuses to take oneself or other people entirely seriously; for everything human, and even everything philosophical, is highly uncertain, and we have no right to be proud of it" (Hadot 2002, 26). With the Socratic turn in the problem of interpretation, the uncertainty of human life and of human knowledge – in a word, the *risk* entailed by living and knowing, or at least presuming to live and to know – lead the philosopher to adopt a kind of elegiac levity, a laughing melancholy at once resigned and resolute. If, as I have suggested here, Socrates effectively turns against the tragic tradition by transplanting the tragic attitude toward risk and responsibility into the realm of everyday interpretation, on the one hand, and by affirming the creative rather than destructive power of tragic error on the other, it could be argued that he turns just as much against a certain tradition of comedy by transforming laughter into an exhortation to the highest earnestness and a chastening reminder of human limits. (For the same reason, I find I must disagree with Hadot – at least in terms of nomenclature – when he identifies the "historical tonality" of the Platonic philosopher-figure in the *Symposium* as "ironic and tragic at the same time," since he defines the "tragic" side of this tonality in terms of the philosopher's unfulfilled desire for wisdom due to the "insurmountable distance between philosophy and wisdom" [Hadot 2002, 47]; such unrequited desire may be elegiac or melancholic, but cannot, I think, rightly be called "tragic." This objection gains even more weight, and the tragicomic character of the Socratic philosopher comes into even sharper focus, when we consider the conclusion of the *Symposium* itself, where Socrates himself is reported to have argued "that authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy: the skillful tragic dramatist should also be a comic poet" [Plat. *Symp.* 223d; Cooper/Nehamas & Woodruff, 505].) Then again, a redoubled irony lies in the fact that Plato's Socrates, at any rate, hardly ever laughs – though he usually has ample occasion and justification to do so, if we view his interlocutors through his eyes – and is all too often the one laughed at by precisely those whom he should, by rights, deride.

> ἢ οὖν ἐκείνην ἐξέλεγξον, […] ἢ εἰ τοῦτο ἐάσεις ἀνέλεγκτον, […] οὔ σοι ὁμολογήσει Καλλικλῆς, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, ἀλλὰ διαφωνήσει ἐν ἅπαντι τῷ βίῳ. καίτοι ἔγωγε οἶμαι, ὦ βέλτιστε, καὶ τὴν λύραν μοι κρεῖττον εἶναι ἀνάρμοστόν τε καὶ διαφωνεῖν, καὶ χορὸν ᾧ χορηγοίην, καὶ πλείστους ἀνθρώπους μὴ ὁμολογεῖν μοι ἀλλ' ἐναντία λέγειν μᾶλλον ἢ ἕνα ὄντα ἐμὲ ἐμαυτῷ ἀσύμφωνον εἶναι καὶ ἐναντία λέγειν. (Plat. *Gorg.* 482b-c)
>
> So you must either refute him [sc. philosophy], […] or, if you leave that [sc. the counter-argument] unproved […] there will be no agreement [ὁμολογήσει] between you, Callicles, and Callicles, but you will be in discord [διαφωνήσει] with him all your life. And yet for my part, my good man, I think it’s better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune and dissonant [ἀνάρμοστόν τε καὶ διαφωνεῖν], and have the vast majority of men disagree [μὴ ὁμολογεῖν] with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself [ἐμὲ ἐμαυτῷ ἀσύμφωνον εἶναι], to contradict myself, though I’m only one person (Cooper/Zeyl, 827, with masculine pronoun substituted for feminine ἐκείνην [482b] in trans.).

Although Socrates’ prophetic pose makes him appear to speak at odds with the whole world, although his otherworldly and dissonant music may sound forth here and now as an absurd and laughable clamor – literally, as *diaphonic* (διαφωνεῖν) rather than *symphonic* (συμφωνεῖν) music – he catches Callicles’ common sense red-handed in a far more egregious crime. Although the whole multitudinous world may agree with Callicles, he speaks at odds with *himself* and is out of tune with *himself*, paradoxically because his common-sense voice does not allow him to hear the voice of interpretive reason and perform its peculiar music. Perhaps more than any other passage in Plato, this one discloses the priority of ethical self-coherence and concord relative to their political counterparts in the Socratic task of interpretation. The philosopher *qua* radical interpreter should rejoice in the flat mockery he receives from the stern professors of common sense, he should even exult in his own degradation and, indeed, political endangerment at their hands, because these are living proofs of his progress in the task of traveling towards himself and harmonizing himself with himself as an authentic ethical agent. But we must likewise be careful to understand mockery and degradation – in Greek, *katagelōs* (κατάγελως [n.] = mockery, derision, ridicule > καταγελάω [v.] = to laugh at, jeer at, *lit.* 'to laugh down'[4]) – of philosophical discourse in Platonic dialogue as a variation, but not strictly an inversion, of the genuine dialogic response, the *apokrisis* (ἀπόκϱισις [n.] = answer > ἀποκϱίνω [v.] = to separate, distinguish; to give answer to, reply). Both are equally interpretive responses, and in the machinations of Socratic interaction, both can be almost equally provocative to further dialogue and interpretation. Whereas the move of *katagelōs*, however, seeks to *restore*, to *dis*-alienate the perspective of a bewildered interlocutor back to his former common-sense position of safety, the critical and, in a sense, *super*-alienating move of *apokrisis* seeks to *redefine* the terms of dialogue, to redirect its path or retune its elements – in sum, to renew contact with the suspense of error in dialogic exchange. But where the danger imposed by and renewed through *apokrisis* in the discursive form of dialogue remains on the ethical plane – namely, the interlocutor's relation to himself through truth – the risk posed by *katagelōs*, with its fundamentally restorative and reactionary motivation, modulates this same risk on to the political plane – namely, the philosopher's relation to others through truth. And it scarcely bears mentioning that this political risk is the one to which Socrates, poised over his cup of hemlock, ultimately succumbs.

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[4] See e.g. Plat. *Euthyph.* 3d-e, where γελάω and παίζω are paired as virtual synonyms that Socrates uses ironically to describe the discourse of a person who simultaneously holds mutually contradictory propositions: on Socrates' view, the 'joke,' of course, is on the one who speaks in this manner, not on the one to whom he speaks.

The priority of ethical harmony directly shapes what I have described as Socrates' crucial and distinctive choice, in both this passage from the *Gorgias* and, as we shall soon see, the entirety of the *Apology*: for him, the risks of ethical dissonance far outweigh the risks of political dissonance – or, to use a bolder term, dissidence.[5] By making his vigilant self-relation into the center of his interpretive practice, nonetheless, the philosopher's effort to respond to the singular voice of truth once and for all, to follow the path towards himself that it traces out in all earnestness, is precisely what initiates and endlessly perpetuates his efforts to respond to the multiple voices of his interlocutors in the political arena. This complicity shared by the ethical and political, self and other, singular and plural, is the fundamental paradox that justifies Platonic dialogue as the only literary genre suited to reflect the Socratic moment in the interpretive problem of risk and responsibility.

I will try to explain here, in a preliminary way, what can only be called the motive for dialogue as the genre of Socratic interpretation in terms of the central preoccupations of this project.[6] By the same token, moreover, I hope to adumbrate why the *Apology* – which, as a public, narrative monologue, immediately seems the least likely candidate for an *ars poetica* of the Platonic dialogue – in fact contains a comprehensive matrix for understanding how this motive for a specific literary form serves equally as the motive for a specific ethics and politics of interpretation. As we will soon see in more detail, Socrates' philosophical mission as he describes it in the *Apology* has its root in a desire *not* to engage that 'other voice' of the Delphic oracle in conversation – a voice which, like the voice of Socrates' fictional beloved in the *Gorgias*, he receives as identical with the voice of philosophy itself – but instead *utterly to refute its claim and refuse its address.* Here, at what turns out to be the founding moment of his career as a dialogist, Socrates would only all too gladly forego the entanglements of interpretive conversation, both with himself and with others, and make his way with all due haste back into a silence that has just now become irretrievable. Just as Oedipus responds to the oracle concerning his own atrocious fate, to the Sphinx's tangled speech, and then again to the cacophony of plague-ridden Thebes, by seeking to impose *silence* upon these objects through his power of interpretation, so does the Socrates of the *Apology* seek to impose a comparable silence upon the unbearable noise generated within his own ethical relation, within his self-awareness and self-estimation, by the god's affirmation of his unsurpassed wisdom. Yet was there ever before, or has there ever been since, such an impassioned lover of undisturbed hermeneutic silence, such a studied nostalgist for a pre-ethical and pre-political quietude of mind, who turned out to be such a tireless thinker and champion talker as Socrates? And was there ever before, or has there ever been since, one who has been told by the infallible voice of a deity that he possesses the utmost measure of human wisdom – that is, of interpretive concord with himself and truth – but who then, in a triumph of perversity, uses this statement itself as a blunt instrument to shatter the very same concord he is said to enjoy?

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[5] Emerson's thinking draws a distinction precisely parallel to this Socratic priority of the ethical over the political in "Self-Reliance," when he writes on the priority of 'direct' over 'reflex' duties: "The populace think that your [sc. the non-conformist's] rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere antinomianism; and the bold sensualist will use the name of philosophy to gild his crimes. But the law of consciousness abides. There are two confessionals, in one or the other of which we must be shriven. You may fulfil your round of duties by clearing yourself in the *direct*, or in the *reflex* way. Consider whether you have satisfied your relations to father, mother, cousin, neighbour, town, cat, and dog; whether any of these can upbraid you. But I may also neglect this reflex standard, and absolve me to myself. I have my own stern claims and perfect circle. It denies the name of duty to many offices that are called duties. But if I can discharge its debts, it enables me to dispense with the popular code. If any one imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandment one day." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 146.

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[6] A considerable portion of recent scholarship has been devoted to the relatively new question of why dialogue should prove to be the indispensable literary-discursive form for Platonic philosophy. My own attitude here has chiefly been informed by Charles L. Griswold, Jr., "Plato's Metaphilosophy: Why Plato Wrote Dialogues," in: *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings,* ed. Griswold (New York: Routledge, 1988), 143-167, and Michael Frede, "Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form," in Smith 1998, 253-269.

These paradoxes issue from, and feed back into, no other origin than the fertility of the intentional error, the power of the deliberate and cultivated mistake, which gives the Platonic dialogue its generic motive just as the most minute irregularity in a mathematical system can generate an infinite and irresolvable iteration. Though the oracle seems auspicious enough, its words doom Socrates endlessly to reenact Apollo's disintegration of the former's hermeneutic silence into the 'noisy' ethical activity of thought and the even 'noisier' political activity of conversation, both of which achieve in equal measure the disintegration of the interpreting subject into confrontation with itself in the act of interpretation. More importantly, this ethical and political disintegration, the experience of separating oneself from oneself and becoming other than oneself, here and now ceases to be the source of tragic horror. Instead, it has become the arduous and ardent work of Platonic dialogue, and it is undertaken with the hope, but not the certainty, of a reintegration that always lies just over the horizon.[7] The motivation of dialogue as the literary form *par excellence* of Socratic interpretation thus lies in Socrates' reluctant embrace of the iteration and itineracy imposed by self-disintegration: the interpreter must not silence noise, but must live in and through noise, he must consciously and eagerly *risk* noise – and yet strive to hear its nascent music. In the peregrinations of dialogue form and of philosophical life, no one – not even, or especially not, Socrates – is able to demarcate where the territory of ethical self-consonance and the anticipation of truth ends and where the territory of political dissonance and the suspense of error begins. It may all be noise; it may all be music.

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[7] Hadot describes precisely this process of disintegration as both the end-product and the constant impetus of dialogic discourse. Under the influence of dialogue, Socrates' interlocutor "becomes aware of the contradictions in his discourse, and of his own internal contradictions. He doubts himself; and, like Socrates, he comes to know that he knows nothing. As he does this, however, he *assumes a distance with regard to himself. He splits into two parts*, one of which henceforth identifies with Socrates, in the mutual accord which Socrates demands from his interlocutor at each stage of the discussion. The interlocutor thus acquires awareness and begins to question himself" (Hadot 2002, 29, emphasis mine; qv. 200f. on Seneca's "inner court" and its reappearance in Kant). But the philosophical experience of disintegration achieved at crucial moments in the Platonic dialogues – regardless of whether it produces positive results or aporetic perplexities – never represents a final achievement: disintegration is not a state to be attained nor a location to be reached, but a principle of movement that must be sustained in order to retain its force and meaning,

Nonetheless, the complicity of ethics and politics, truth and error, noise and music in the Platonic dialogue, with all its transactions in risk, error, and responsibility, is not in itself the reason why Socrates presents such a vital moment of synthesis and departure in the genealogy that directly concerns us here. We have seen similarly intractable complicities before in Oedipus' figuration of movement in space, or Brecht-Galileo's figuration of visual perspective, according to the terms of the interpretive task. The quality, or even better, the *decision* that both connects and separates Socrates from the interpretive problematics of what I have loosely called the tragic tradition lies in the fact that he affirms and practices precisely that which both Brecht and Sophocles render impossible to affirm or to practice for both their protagonists and their audiences. In a word, the Socratic turning point in this genealogy consists in the fact that Socrates affirms, practices, and ultimately sacrifices his life for *the right to prove oneself wrong* as

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which rigorously organize the philosopher's entire way of life. This is why Hadot goes on to write, "The real problem is therefore not the problem of knowing this or that" – which would imply the subject's achievement of a final condition by certain instrumental or methodological means, and the subject's coming to rest in that condition – "but of *being* in this or that way" (*ibid.*; qv. 36). The concept of existing in and through disintegration as a principle of interpretive movement – a principle, it bears mentioning, not unlike Oedipus' tragic kinesis – is one which will loom large in my reading of Socrates in the *Apology* as the persistent interlocutor of his own and others' voices.

an interpreter. He affirms risk not just as a necessary evil imposed upon the interpreter's task, but as an invigorating tonic to its aims; he affirms error not as a final and cataclysmic point of descent into horror and vertigo, but as the sobering point of ascent to an infinitely renewable beginning; he affirms responsibility not in terms of inexorable complicities or involuntary self-alienation, but in terms of the constant and not displeasurable vigilance of the ensemble player, giving to and partaking in the music of *logos* wherever it leads. All this he affirms not with the superhuman resignation to the final un-making of both subject and sense that proves to be Galileo's or Oedipus' sole mark of distinction in the face of death, but instead with a – dare I say it? – divine exultation in the endless re-making of both subject and sense that constitutes the intensified, clarified, elevated *life* of conversation. The new interpreter – musician, wanderer, prophet at once – strives for nothing else than to embody this life in his own person, which is not the life of a kind of corporate, super-individual subject, but the trans-individual life of an activity, a relation, a *praxis*. For the limits of this life are coextensive not with those of the interpreter's life, bound as it is to time, space, matter, circumstance, and then at last to death, but rather with those of interpretation, of sense-making as such, which endlessly seeks out what is true in what is false, and listens to the wrong notes that together compose the right music. For Socrates, the life we attain when we consciously resolve to exist *in pursuit of* meaning and harmony, *on the way to* truth, is the sole form of life that can be said to grant us a share in immortality. In the practice of dialogue that pursues truth, as Pierre Hadot writes, "the 'I' which must die transcends itself and becomes an 'I' which is henceforth a stranger to death, since it has identified itself with the *logos* and with thought" (Hadot 2002, 68) – that is, with the life of conversation. In comparison to all the other famous Socratic paradoxes, perhaps the greatest lies in Socrates’ faith – and it can only rightly be described as faith – that conversation, in more than one sense, forever *out-lives* its participants.

## II. Figures of Endangerment: Socratic Spirituality and the Language of Platonic Dialogue

Now that I have, as it were, constructed an improvisation upon an introductory set of harmonic changes, let me now, following the custom of jazz musicians, step forward after the end of the first tune and address the audience in order to introduce the members of the ensemble with whom I have been playing, to whom I have been responding, thus far. In bringing my fellow musicians into the foreground, moreover, I will seek to render them the greatest Socratic tribute – at least in terms of the fiction(s) of Socrates I have thus far constructed – by foregrounding the noise and discord entangled within the structure of their own delicately harmonized interpretations, and letting it sound out loud. At the same time, and by the very same move, I of course invite my auditors to render the same paradoxical honor to my own music: this combined tribute and invitation is, after all, the true meaning and proper enactment of what I mean by interpretive responsibility.[8]

It should be evident by this point that I have *not* tried to approach the singularity of the Socratic moment in this genealogy by constructing the object of investigation as either (A) the exposition in Plato of a coherent system of Socratic *doctrines* that makes either implicit or explicit claims about the practice of interpretation; or (B) the exposition in Plato of a coherent Socratic *method* of philosophical thinking which can be treated as both a demonstration of, and a model for, a certain practice of interpretation; or even (C) the exposition in Plato of a full-blown Socratic *theory of interpretation*, if there even is one, or a reconstruction of what such a theory might look like based on extant evidence.[9] It would be an understatement to claim that the panorama of questions related to doctrine and method in the Platonic dialogues has provoked and inspired generations of scholars;[10] it would be at least narrow-minded to claim that the Platonic dialogues do not explicitly raise or try to answer any questions about interpretation as an activity that has certain conditions, limits, and dangers; and certainly it would be near-idiotic to claim that any of these questions are unimportant.

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[8] It should be noted that with this same gesture, I make myself, as my interlocutors do and every other interpreter of the ‘new music’ must, a metaphorical son of Socrates: τοσόνδε μέντοι αὐτῶν δέομαι: τοὺς ὑεῖς μου, ἐπειδὰν ἡβήσωσι, τιμωρήσασθε, ὦ ἄνδρες, ταὐτὰ ταῦτα λυποῦντες ἅπερ ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐλύπουν, ἐὰν ὑμῖν δοκῶσιν ἢ χρημάτων ἢ ἄλλου του πρότερον ἐπιμελεῖσθαι ἢ ἀρετῆς, καὶ ἐὰν δοκῶσί τι εἶναι μηδὲν ὄντες, ὀνειδίζετε αὐτοῖς ὥσπερ ἐγὼ ὑμῖν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐπιμελοῦνται ὧν δεῖ, καὶ οἴονταί τι εἶναι ὄντες οὐδενὸς ἄξιοι. καὶ ἐὰν ταῦτα ποιῆτε, δίκαια πεπονθὼς ἐγὼ ἔσομαι ὑφ' ὑμῶν αὐτός τε καὶ οἱ ὑεῖς. (Pl. *Ap*. 41e-42a; “This much I ask from them [sc. the jurists who sought to punish Socrates by their votes of condemnation]: when my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by causing them the same kind of grief that I caused you, if you think they care for money or anything else more than they care for virtue, or if they think they are somebody when they are nobody. Reproach them as I reproach you, that they do not care for the right things and think they are worthy when they are not worthy of anything. If you do this, I shall have been justly treated by you, and my sons also” [Cooper/Grube 36].)

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[9] In making this statement, I am not at all polemicizing against the vast body of scholarly literature which approaches the study of the Platonic corpus along these or similar avenues. Rather, I am trying to approach this corpus strictly in terms of its historical and 'conversational' position in the present genealogy, in which I believe Plato's work is deeply embedded along pathways that this same scholarly tradition has often criss-crossed but only sporadically and recently developed. This is the implicit reason why, rather than trying to reconstruct the concrete, historical reality of Socrates as an individual thinker – as so much scholarship is still motivated to do – I refer generally to a 'Socratic moment' in the genealogy of the problem of interpretation, and why I approach Socrates as a rich and complex literary invention on the part of Plato. Any alternative route means not only entering into any number of long-standing debates about the relative historicity of Plato's Socrates (or rather, any one of his Socrateses) that simply do not belong in the present project, but also endangering the coherence of the project itself. The interpretive risks and responsibilities posed by the literary character of Socrates inevitably count much more in the present discussion, after all, than any extratextual historicity of Socrates as a concrete individual. The question at stake here has always been how new possibilities and new realities are raised for the problem of interpretation in the production and reception of literary texts, which by no means stand outside of their historical context, but do not consistently or reliably present themselves as historiography or doxography. All of this is also to say, however, that Plato's fiction of Socrates motivates the question of its historicity not in spite of, but precisely *because of* its power to engage us as a literary invention – to which we should compare the relative power of Xenophon's or Aristophanes' fictions of Socrates, and then ask whether the scholarly tradition would be half as motivated as it is to recover 'the historical Socrates' in the absence of Plato's art.

[10] For some recent treatments of the problem of 'Socratic method,' see Gerard Kuperus, "Traveling with Socrates: Dialectic in the *Phaedo* and *Protagoras*," in: Gary Alan Scott, ed., *Philosophy in Dialogue: Plato's Many Devices* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 193-211, and Gary Alan Scott, ed., *Does Socrates Have A Method? Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 2002), *passim*. For a widely influential reading of Plato's ethical theory that takes an exemplary stance in favor of Plato's doctrinalism, see Terence Irwin's monumental *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995).

For the purposes of my present project, however, the full significance of the Socratic moment cannot exclusively derive from a certain set of "objective" doctrines, methods, or theories presented in Plato's dialogues. Such an approach, I believe, would entail an abrupt though tacit shift in method from "literary" to "philosophical" analysis, whereas it is one of my key contentions here that what we call "philosophical discourse" on the problem of interpretation – beginning at least as early as Plato – responded to, and thus participated in, a long-standing conversation about this problem conducted through the production and reception of literature. A shift in method at this point, in other words, would nullify the very argument the method is meant to defend. It would render Socrates as the absolute origin of a brand-new conversation, the conversation of "philosophy," which would seek to silence completely the unbearable noise and confusion generated by "literature" and replace it with the rational, hierarchical, and harmonious movement of dialectic.[11] What we actually encounter in the reading of the Platonic corpus is not merely a paragon of eminently literary richness inseparable from philosophical complexity; viewed within its historical context, we also encounter a many-layered intervention in a host of pre-existing conversations from which "philosophy" does not or cannot declare its radical independence, and in which instead it makes itself deeply, even enthusiastically complicit. In Plato's hands, philosophy becomes not the patricide, but the prodigal son of literature. In terms of the problem of interpretation, moreover, the dialogues enact not a usurpation, but an ambivalent drama of departure and return, a strenuously applied effort to give new form, content, and context to a conversation Plato inherited from his culture and its literature – a culture and literature that, like Socrates, he so dearly wishes to reawaken, reinvigorate, and perhaps even save.[12]

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[11] This method, of course, would "take Socrates at his word" concerning the expulsion of the poets and the critique of *mimesis* in the *Republic*, the demolition of poetic inspiration in the *Ion*, the interrogation of cultural values inherited from Homeric literature in the *Hippias Minor*, and probably also the critique of rhetoric and of writing in the *Phaedrus*. Taking Socrates at his word on these and other occasions, of course, demands that we efface the poetic, mimetic, rhetorical, and literary dimensions of the texts in which Socrates' words appear – and this demands an art that I cannot master.

Reading the dialogues as embedded within, rather than over-against, their literary tradition means that we must attend to the dynamic and uncertain play generated between Plato's "objective," "philosophical" ideas about the practice of interpretation, on the one hand, and the more properly "subjective," "literary" forms of interpretive experience presented to the reader of the dialogues, on the other. In its main outlines, this approach has slowly gained ground in scholarship over the past fifteen years or so: there has been renewed interest in the prosopography of Socrates' interlocutors[13] and in Plato's exploitation of dramatic and literary devices,[14] both of which help to excavate an implicit, and often ironic, commentary within the dialogues on both the philosophical "action" itself and the widely varying political and intellectual fates of the historical individuals whom Plato translates into his fictions, including Socrates.[15] This research has achieved much in retrieving those aspects of the dialogues that render them genuinely "historical fictions" – with all the poetic license, retrospective insight, and implicit paradoxes that that genre entails. This effort to retrieve the literary, and in particular the dramatic, qualities of the dialogues has in turn opened up new viewpoints, many of them yet to be fully exploited, on some of the perennial concerns of more strictly philosophical scholarship on Plato: for instance, the relationship between the universal and particular; between the embodied, temporal nature of personality and the disembodied, atemporal nature of truth; between mythical narrative and philosophical dialogue; between the historical Socrates and his contemporary Athenians; and between philosophy and politics more generally.

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[12] Rosemary Desjardins, for instance, argues that the problem of interpretation is perhaps the cornerstone problem in Plato's thought in general. In her view, the primary task of Platonic dialogue lies not so much in the positing of doctrines that signify universally and univocally, but in discriminating between more or less legitimate interpretations of a given doctrine – that is, to use my own terms, in discovering the true "voice" in which a given doctrine, or, indeed, any discourse at all, is spoken. Each such process of evaluation and discrimination, for Desjardins, represents a specific reckoning with, and response to, part of the ancient Greek cultural tradition inherited by Socrates and/or Plato. As she writes, "the dialogues might even be seen as dialogues *with the tradition*", a tradition in which Plato's philosophy consciously situates itself as both a new response to the tradition and a new method of responding to tradition in general (122). The philosophical task of self-knowledge becomes possible only by making oneself conversant with the tradition in which one stands. Invoking Gadamer, Desjardins concludes that "self-understanding must seek to resolve that tension between acceptance and interrogation, respect and critique, reconstruction of the past and application in the present": as good a description as any of what I call interpretive complicity and responsibility writ large. Rosemary Desjardins, "Why Dialogues? Plato's Serious Play," in Griswold 1988, 110-125.

[13] The most comprehensive recent work on Platonic prosopography, an incomparably rich and well-researched reference of particular use to the literary- and historically-minded among interpreters of Plato, is Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002).

[14] The principal texts in my own understanding of this recent scholarship include the following: James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991); *id.*, "How to Read a Platonic Dialogue," in Smith 1998, 273-286; Jill Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy: Literary Device and Dramatic Structure in Plato's Dialogues* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP,

All of the scholars who have pursued this direction of inquiry, however, have had to confront at least two crucial questions. First, how can the critic who approaches the Platonic dialogues as *both* literature *and* philosophy present a coherent argument that bridges the methodological, disciplinary, and discursive gap that separates literary from philosophical modes of analysis?[16] Second, how can such an argument also respond (in

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1999); and Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002). Gordon's introduction (1-17) offers a concise summary of what she calls the "analysis and argument-focused methods" of modern philosophical debates on Plato (3-6) and delivers a virtual manifesto of an "alternative" approach (7-13) interested in reclaiming the "philosophical *function*" of literary device in Plato's dialogues (7). Blondell's brilliant and far-reaching work incorporates intergeneric and intertextual study of Plato's work within its literary and cultural context, paying particularly close attention to ancient theories of character and its representation in dramatic literature; the debt I owe in the present discussion to many of her insights is more than I can hope to acknowledge explicitly.

[15] On whom see Nails 2002, 263-269.

[16] So, for instance, in formulating a literary-dramatic approach to Plato's dialogues, Gordon claims to make "an implicit argument for the union of philosophy and literature in the works of Plato. But I must,

the fullest sense) to the historical, conceptual, and institutional conditions that created and widened this gap in the first place – a schism for which it is clichéd and myopic to indict Plato's ideas themselves without taking into account (somehow!) the subsequent history of Western philosophy and literature? These are, in fact, huge and crucial questions, and any attempt to answer them must have ramifications far beyond the province of scholarship on a writer of prose in ancient Attic Greek. They are questions about how and why we are inclined to respond to the language of literature and the language of philosophy differently as interpreters, how and why these sets of responses have

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paradoxically, make the very distinction I want to efface. […] The bifurcation of philosophy and literature, in part, grows out of the analytic conception of philosophy. If philosophy is defined as the activity that uses logic and focuses on appropriate objects such as arguments and their constituent parts, then whatever is extralogical is also deemed extraphilosophical" (Gordon 10, 11). As we shall see, Gordon's attitude towards analytic philosophy tacitly registers a certain impatience with the 'post-spiritual' outlook of modern philosophical discourse as Foucault defines it. Alan C. Bowen ("On Interpreting Plato," in Griswold 1988, 49-65) offers an earlier definition of the conflict between these approaches and marks the beginning of the trend, now gaining ground in Platonic scholarship, to try to resolve the tensions between these approaches. In the history of modern Platonic reception, Bowen distinguishes between "philological" and "philosophical" methods, both of which, as he puts it, are founded upon "a response to a bad question" first raised by the "late eighteenth-century German assumption that the Platonic text is the means by which we are to construct and verify our views of Plato's philosophical thought," and that philosophical thought, by definition, is systematic (63; qv. 52-55 for a succinct history of this assumption and its consequences). Neither the philological nor the philosophical approach that develops from this assumption, Bowen argues, "involves interpreting Plato's philosophical thought: philologists interpret Plato's texts and philosophers think with the text as a guide. […] The ultimate object of philological concern is the literary artifact taken by itself in abstraction from all its historical accidents: the philologist argues from the written word, about the written word, to the written word. […] Unlike philology, […] philosophy – or more precisely, the philosophical study of Plato's writings – seeks to answer the questions these writings raise and thus moves from the text toward solution of general problems" (60, 61). As he concludes, "the philosophical response to a dialogue must be predicated on sound philology *if* it is to be guided by the text," which means "that one cannot isolate the logical and dialectical structure of the argumentation in the dialogue without paying heed to the humor and irony at the dramatic level" (64). The method I try to formulate and apply here, despite its flaws, assumes that if Plato's philosophical thought does, in fact, have *any* systematic character, this thought must be approached and interpreted as constituting a *system of (literary) figures*, and such a system necessarily varies its structure and meaning depending on the intra- or intertextual frame of reference. Furthermore, my method tries to demonstrate how these Platonic systems of figures implicitly draw upon a preexisting literary currency, and how his figurations have been received and reconfigured in turn by his modern interlocutors. On the surface, such a method would seem to have more in common with a "philological" than a "philosophical" approach, as each is defined by Bowen. On a deeper level, however, I think that Plato's originality both as philosopher and writer derives from his bold and galvanizing intervention in a pre-existing conversation, and that this intervention attempted to reorganize completely the terms and categories of interpretive exchange in *literature* itself. *Philosophia*, in Plato's coining of the term, can be understood as the name he gives to this decisive shift in the relationship between, and the significance of, certain literary figures.

separated into parallel, though sometimes intersecting, interpretive conversations, and not least of all what is at stake – what we *risk* – in perpetuating their mutual non-confrontation.

For the purposes of this genealogy, I want to propose that the real interpretive activity of Socratic philosophy and the real content of its discourse lies in the *way of life* that renders the "subjective" and "objective" elements in the experience of the philosopher-interpreter inseparable – so much so, in fact, that we must at last confront our reflex to separate them as a violent and unjustified anachronism. As I have already argued, what at once separates and connects the tragic-literary "solution" to the problem of interpretation from the Socratic-philosophical "solution" is that tragedy sees an end, a point of absolute limitation and dissolution, in precisely the same situation where Socrates sees an infinitely renewable beginning. The revelation of error becomes not a reason to disavow life at last, but a reason *and* a way to live it – at last. Philosophy, in short, offers a way to *live* literature, to transform one's whole life into a field of play for the risks and responsibilities of interpretation: this way of life ultimately eludes every possible terminus in error – contradiction, transgression, even death itself – because, by nature, it can always begin its search for meaning again.

The idea that Socrates generalizes the problem of interpretation to apprehend the whole of human life, and creates a specific way of life in response to it, shows a strong affiliation to Pierre Hadot's organizing claim in his *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, which is worth quoting at length:

> [T]he history of 'philosophy' is not the same as the history of philosophies, if what we understand by 'philosophies' are theoretical discourses and philosophers' systems. In addition to this history, however, there is room for the study of philosophical modes of life. [… A]t least since the time of Socrates, the choice of a way of life has not been located at the end of the process of philosophical activity, like a kind of accessory or appendix. On the contrary, it stands at the beginning […] Philosophical discourse, then,

> originates in a choice of life and an existential option – not vice versa. […T]he task of philosophical discourse will therefore be to reveal and rationally justify this existential option, and it leads back to it, insofar as – by means of its logical and persuasive force, and the action it tries to exert upon its interlocutor – it incites both masters and disciples to live in genuine conformity with their initial choice. In other words, it is, in a way, the application of a certain ideal of life. […] We will not be concerned with opposing and separating philosophy as a way of life, on the one hand, and, on the other, a philosophical discourse that is somehow external to philosophy. On the contrary: we wish to show that philosophical discourse is a *part* of this way of life. […] Can Socrates' discourse be separated from the life and death of Socrates? (Hadot 2002, 1, 3, 5, 6)

In the case of Socrates, what I have identified as the explicit and decisive affirmation of risk and responsibility in the interpretive task, and the reorganization of human life around this task alone, together represent the innermost content of his "existential option." Hadot traces the relationship between various such "options" and the discourse inseparably linked to them throughout the entire history of philosophy in the West, but marks its inception with Socrates and its golden age in the Hellenistic and Roman eras. In Hadot's conception, the discourse of philosophical dialogue as practiced by Plato's Socrates represents not only a kind of objective, textual, or *a posteriori* trace of the interpretive practice that follows upon this existential decision, but also, by the very same token, works as a constant *a priori* justification and provocation to renew and enrich this interpretive way of life in every moment – and to summon others to heed its call. As Hadot goes on to argue, citing textual sources as historically dispersed as Polemo, Epicurus, Epictetus, and Seneca, the bond between philosophical discourse and the philosophical way of life in antiquity was conceived in such strong terms that the possibility of discourse alone taking precedence before, or even usurping the place of, the corresponding way of life presented the locus of a specific and dire risk. The resulting "ambiguity of philosophical discourse" pursued for its own sake, as Hadot describes it, meant that

> all schools [of ancient philosophy] denounced the risk taken by philosophers who imagine that their philosophical discourse can be sufficient to itself without being in accord with the philosophical life. […] Traditionally, people who developed an apparently philosophical discourse without trying to live

> their lives in accordance with their discourse, and without their discourse emanating from their life experience, were called ‘Sophists’ (Hadot 2002, 174).

On the one hand, then, we have the Socratic affirmation of the risk of discord and error, a risk which at once integrates and threatens the discourse and life of the philosopher, but must be acknowledged and negotiated in every moment of the subject’s experience and existence. On the other hand, we have the mirror-image of this Socratic risk, what might be called the Sophistic risk, whereby the “subjective” or existential component, and the “objective” or purely discursive component of philosophical interpretation, remain disintegrated.[17] Under the terms of Socratic risk, the suspense of error works as a catalyst of renewal and revision in which discourse, way of life, and their integral relation remain, as it were, harmonically unresolved but musically invigorating. Under the terms of Sophistic risk, no matter how perfect and alluring the mutual attunement of concepts in a given philosophical discourse may appear, the entire symphonic edifice must disavow the shifting sands of discord and incoherence upon which it is built – precisely because this edifice in no way corresponds to a conscious and resolute existential decision undertaken by a real individual. In a sense, it is a music which no one actually plays out loud. The bad musical conscience, as it were, of the Sophistic philosopher and the good musical conscience of the Socratic philosopher nevertheless share a common root in the question of interpretive error, a question in which both discourse and way of life are intractably implicated and to which each form of risk offers a response – as troubling and unsatisfying as either response may ultimately be.[18] With either alternative, along either path, the error in question is one that endangers not this or that interpretation, but the very being of the interpreter himself, and thus shows its direct kinship to the catastrophic error of the tragic tradition. Whereas the ‘Sophists’ take a detour around error and endangerment by developing an ever more sovereign and virtuosic discourse, Socrates takes up these issues in earnest as the material of an interpretive ethos.

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[17] The scholarly literature on the group of Greek thinkers and teachers who were contemporary with Socrates and collectively referred to as ‘the Sophists’ is too vast and specialized to give any adequate overview of it here; furthermore, the question of the historical Socrates’ relationship to this group informs an entire sub-category of Platonic scholarship. The authoritative collective and translation into English of the most significant extant texts produced by the Sophists is Rosamond Kent Sprague, ed., *The Older Sophists* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001). A brief, accessible, and well-balanced recent treatment of Socrates’ relationship to the Sophistic movement is offered by Paul Woodruff, “Socrates Among the Sophists,” in: *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe & Rachana Kamtekar (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 36-47.

Hadot’s conception of the intimate relationship in antiquity between philosophical discourse and the philosophical way of life imposes a number of constraints and grants a number of freedoms to the interpreter of Plato: first of all, in approaching the Platonic *oeuvre* as a body of literary-philosophical texts, and second, in approaching the Socratic moment captured in these texts as a crux in the genealogy of interpretive risk and responsibility. If we allow ourselves to succumb to the Sophistic risk of “objectifying” Plato in the process of interpretation – that is to say, if we concern ourselves as readers purely with explicating either the literary form of the dialogues, their philosophical content, or some combination of the two as discourse *per se* – we blind ourselves to all the complex forms of ethical and political responsibility that are the fertile ground in which these texts take root, not least of which is the mutual responsibility between *logos* and *bios*, between discourse and way of life. Furthermore, if we pursue this “objective” mode of interpretation, we deny precisely the same risk and the same responsibility that Socrates’ life and death ask us to affirm. First, we deny that our modes of speaking and thinking as interpreters, on the one hand, and all the existential choices that govern our way of life, on the other, are mutually implicated, and that they perpetually exist in the suspense of error. Second, we deny that we too, as ethical and political subjects, are – for better and for worse – complicit in, and responsible to, the people and things out of which we make meaning, and from this meaning make our own ways of life. In responding to Plato through interpretation, we have no choice but to respond to Socrates, and this means responding to ourselves, to others, to the world as it exists, and to the ever-absent voice of philosophy itself by soberly confronting the dangers and pleasures that form the *habitus* of the interpreter. In a word, this means shouldering the burden of the Socratic risk, and by this act acknowledging the force of the "subjective" as well as "objective" elements of philosophy as a practice of interpretation: it means allowing yourself, your text, or your other to address you in the form of a question. In enabling and cultivating this experience of address, which, as I have indicated, is the primary work of dialogue, the Platonic text cannot and should not be made to represent the sedimentary deposit of a certain current of thought, or, as it were, the stable transcription of a certain musical idea. Instead, it must be read and reread as an originary exhortation to, and a persistent impetus for, the life of interpretation: it embodies the creative gravity that – precariously, almost recklessly – moves, shapes, and divides the river, or the improviser's instinct to elaborate, vary, and expand upon a melody or rhythm up to and even beyond the limits of his or her ability. The most radical implication of Hadot's work – a work which scarcely announces its radicalism – lies in its logical conclusion that the most important participant in a Platonic dialogue is not in fact Socrates, but the reader. The reader is the only one who stands to realize whatever still stands as hope and promise, as possibility in the person of

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[18] See also Jürgen Mittelstrass’ contrast between Sophistic/eristic intention and Socratic/elenctic intention, in which, similar to Hadot, he concludes that “Dialectics in the Socratic-Platonic sense is not just a *form of argumentation* but also especially a (philosophical) *form of life* (*Lebensform*)” (Jürgen Mittelstrass, “On Socratic Dialogue,” in Griswold 1988, 130-132; qv. 136-138, 142).

Socrates and the text of Plato: the reader must claim the right to prove herself *in toto* – not just in her discourse, but in her very ways of living – wrong.

While Hadot's research in many ways culminates with *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, his earlier work, especially some of the material later collected and translated in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (1981),[19] proved greatly influential on one of the preeminent contemporary thinkers in comparative humanistic studies, the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Indeed, the very same effort to demonstrate, on the basis of historical and textual evidence, the profound integration of philosophical discourse and philosophical living gives all its impetus to Foucault's work in this area, albeit with ultimate aims that are far removed from Hadot's: namely, the genealogy of sexuality as a practical, institutional, and discursive category in modernity. A valuable portion of Foucault's research on the genealogy of ancient philosophical practices, contemporaneous with the work on the epochal volumes of his *History of Sexuality*[20] and clearly indebted to Hadot, was made public in the series of lectures he delivered at the Collège de France between January and March 1982 entitled *L'herméneutique du sujet*.[21] Transcripts of these lectures have recently (2005) become available in English translation as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.[22] In engagement with the full textual, historical, and practical expanse of ancient philosophy from the Socratic moment through the Hellenistic and Roman eras, Foucault lays out a provocative alternative genealogy of ancient thought which views the Socratic injunction to the *epimeleia heautou* ("care of the self") as representing the general form or principle within which a broad variety of philosophical practices, each with its own historically variable aims, came to be inscribed at different points throughout antiquity. The provocative force exerted by Foucault's mode of account, furthermore, consists in its core thesis that rather than the Delphic-Socratic command to *know* oneself (*gnōthi seauton*) around which the history of ancient philosophy has traditionally been organized, it is the command to *care for* oneself that provides the historical horizon of intelligibility for this proliferation of ancient doctrines and practices. In Foucault's distinction between knowledge of the self and care of the self, furthermore, and in his reorganization of their relationship in antiquity, we can recognize a provocative reformulation and expansion of Hadot's distinction between discourse and way of life. Foucault's genealogy represents the imperative to self-knowledge as simply a single, though potent and wide-ranging, instantiation of the imperative to self-care, which occupies a much broader conceptual and practical terrain than the province of self-knowledge alone. This alternative genealogy of ancient thought bears significant implications for the history of modern thought, as Foucault himself points out. Briefly put, it brings into focus the prioritization of self-knowledge, and self-knowledge alone, as the means of access to truth in modern (for Foucault, post-Cartesian) philosophy, and the resulting construction, in modern historiography, of a false and potentially distorting continuity not only between ancient and modern philosophical practice, but between ancient and modern philosophical language. By articulating the care of the self as a lever with which to pry apart this false continuity, Foucault compels each of these conceptions to confront the singular and incommensurate character of the other across the gap of the Cartesian ‘event,’ leaving both of them profoundly transformed.[23]

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[19] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson; trans. Michael Chase (New York: Oxford/Blackwell, 1995); English translation of Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1981). See also Hadot's inaugural address on the occasion of his election to the Collège de France: "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy," trans. Arnold I. Davidson & Paula Wissing, *Critical Inquiry* 16:3 (1990), 483-505.

[20] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976/1984): Vol. 1: *La volonté de savoir* (1976); Vol. 2: *L'usage des plaisirs* (1984); Vol. 3: *Le souci de soi* (1984). English translation: Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978-1986): Vol. 1: *An Introduction* (1978); Vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure* (1985); Vol. 3: *The Care of the Self* (1986).

[21] Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet: cours au Collège de France (1981-1982)*, ed. François Ewald, Frédéric Gros, Alessandro Fontana (Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil, 2001). Where applicable, I have cited the French text in this edition.

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[22] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82*, ed. Frédéric Gros & Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Picador, 2005).

Without reflexively assimilating Foucault’s ‘self-knowledge’ to Hadot’s ‘philosophical discourse,’ and the former’s ‘self-care’ to the latter’s ‘philosophical way of life’ – an assimilation to which, at a bare minimum, neither writer would be likely to assent unconditionally – we can discern in both thinkers an effort to reevaluate the apparent fixity, clarity, and objectivity of the knowledge conveyed through philosophical discourse by situating it within the contingent and malleable experience of subjects who choose to *live* in and through this language. In essence, for both Foucault and Hadot, ancient philosophy poses a deep and troubling question to modern philosophy: a question, as I will argue, that the Socratic affirmation of interpretive risk and responsibility poses with original and unflinching boldness – perhaps, as we shall see, even more than Foucault himself is prepared to admit. In order to define the terms in which this question can be posed, Foucault conceptualizes the ancient care of the self by distinguishing two areas of its concern which, as we shall see, have wide-ranging implications for both our understanding of the philosophical discourse of antiquity in general and the literary language of the Platonic *oeuvre* in particular. While the distinction between these two areas operates across the entire breadth of Foucault’s genealogical undertaking in these lectures, its particular resonance in connection to the "new music" of the Socratic moment makes it worth quoting at length:

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[23] In all of the foregoing paragraph, I am nearly as indebted to Arnold I. Davidson’s brilliant and incisive introduction to Foucault’s lectures (Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, xix-xxviii) as I am to the reading of these lectures themselves in my attempt to present an overview of Foucault’s thesis.

> We will call, if you like, "philosophy" the form of thought that asks, not of course what is true and what is false, but what determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood and whether or not we can separate the true and the false. We will call "philosophy" the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth. If we call this "philosophy," then I think we could call "spirituality" the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call "spirituality" then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth [*le prix à payer pour avoir accès à la vérité*] (Foucault, *Hermeneutics* 15; *Herméneutique* 16f.).

If the properly "philosophical" content of ancient philosophy is to be found in its positing the conditions and limits of a subject's access to truth when that subject consciously sets out on the path of philosophical interpretation, then the properly "spiritual" content of this philosophy is to be found in the work of ethical transformation which the subject performs upon his own being in order to travel on this hermeneutic path, in order – quite literally – to *realize* in his own subjectivity the (still limited and conditional) truth to which he has earned the right of access.[24] It is not too far afield, then, to view the function of "philosophy" proper, as Foucault describes it, as setting the rules of a certain game – the structure of the board, the significance of the pieces, the relationships between players, the permitted and forbidden moves, the choice of strategies, the conditions of victory or defeat – in short, all the elements of a game in which the subject voluntarily participates when he chooses to pursue interpretation philosophically. The role of “spirituality,” on the other hand, is to motivate and direct actual game-play, on the level of the subject’s concrete and singular experience, towards an increasing mastery of the game – and perhaps even towards his eventual victory – that would signify his mastery of both his own subjectivity and the truth to which he aspires by one and the same token.

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[24] It is highly instructive to compare Foucault's conception of philosophical spirituality as the wholescale transformation of the subject with Mittelstrass' description of the development of the "philosophical orientation" in subjects engaged in dialogue: "Philosophical reflection […] aims at changing the participating subjects and at constituting a dialogical subject […]. Such subjective achievements gained in philosophical dialogue are possible only in a give-and-take that involves not the opinions but the subjects themselves. The result of philosophical dialogue is a new subject with a new philosophical orientation, a subject that comes into existence with the decline of the old subject, inevitably through conflict or combat. *In philosophical dialogue it is the individuals and not their opinions that are at stake*" (Mittelstrass in Griswold 1988, 129, emphasis mine). For Mittelstrass, however, such transformation culminates with the realized ideal of a "rational being," which does not necessarily correspond to Foucault's subject who "works on" or "cares for" him- or herself, nor my own idea of a subject who consciously puts his/her own subjectivity as such at risk. From the perspective of reader-response theory, Gordon also considers how Platonic dialogues are designed to transform the subjectivity of the reader (Gordon 1999, 43-61, esp. 57-61).

The player of the ancient philosophical “game,” moreover, does not simply play a game alien to his being in order to win a prize equally alien to his being, wherein both game and player remain unchanged in their structure or meaning. Through Foucault’s conceptualization, we can see that in the game constructed between philosophy and spirituality in antiquity, the meaning of the game constantly changes because the real medium of play is the player himself, his own mode of being and his awareness of truth. Accordingly, the final aim of play is achieved not only in the consummate illumination and justification of all the moves executed by the player towards the end of truth, but also in the wholesale transformation of the player who executed those moves as so many difficult and painstaking operations performed upon himself – as so many instances of “care for himself.” As Foucault continues:

> Spirituality postulates that the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth and is not capable of having access to the truth. It postulates that the truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*) […,] that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, *other than himself*. The truth is only given to the subject *at a price that brings the subject’s being into play* [*à un prix qui met en jeu l’être même du sujet*]. For as he is, the subject is not capable of truth (Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, ibid., emphasis mine; *Herméneutique* 17).

By their very nature, the various and, indeed, sometimes even mutually contradictory articulations of this “philosophical spirituality” throughout antiquity demand a kind of analysis and fit into a kind of history that are by and large resistant to what Hadot calls the modern "history of *philosophies*" (Hadot 2002, 1, emphasis mine) – that is, the history of philosophers' systems. The task of understanding the integral relationship between the concrete, individual practice of the *epimeleia heautou*, on the one hand, and the philosophical discourse which was at once its justification and its proving ground, on the other, therefore poses a unique problem, and not only to the historian of philosophy. In a more directly relevant way, it poses a comparable problem for the present effort to locate the Platonic dialogue *as literature* in a genealogy of the problem of interpretation – but I will come to this primary problem in a moment, by an indirect route.

For the historian of philosophy, at any rate, any presumed continuity between ancient and modern philosophy becomes contentious or incoherent once we acknowledge the integral unity of philosophical thought and spiritual exercise in antiquity as something entirely foreign to the modern way of thinking about and doing philosophy. Insofar as the Cartesian *cogito*, in Foucauldian terms, organizes the "event" of modern philosophy solely in terms of knowledge – a kind of insurrection, as it were, by the long-subordinate *gnōthi seauton* – it renders ancient philosophical spirituality into something opaque and vaguely suspect from the viewpoint of the modern subject:

> We can say that we enter the modern age [in philosophy] when it is assumed that what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge alone[, …] when the philosopher […] can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as a subject (Foucault, *Hermeneutics* 17).

Foucault's declaration conceals a provocation: Can we moderns conceive a form of philosophical, scientific, or even humanistic knowledge that does not merely address us mundanely as "one more thing to learn," but rather calls upon us to alter the very form of our subjectivities, to uproot, transplant, and reconstruct not only the faculty by virtue of which we know any of the things we claim to know, but our very existence as knowing subjects? Can we imagine a lived experience of knowledge – neither a method of gaining it, nor a discipline organized around it, nor a catalog of its objects – in short, an experience in which we truly *live* the practice of interpretation in such a way that it summons us to become other than ourselves? Last but not least: can we imagine a discourse, an actual *language* which does not merely help communicate knowledge or produce interpretations, but instead turns the knower or interpreter around to confront his whole being, in the moment of making sense, and transforms this being from an answer into a question addressed to itself?[25] This, at least in Foucault's view, sums up the challenge posed by ancient philosophy not just to the history of philosophy, but to all contemporary institutions, practices, discourses, and subjects who profess and produce knowledge of every kind. It is also, from my own point of view, the challenge posed most keenly through the figure of Socrates and the dialogues of Plato.

This challenge bears powerful implications for both the aforementioned historian and the present genealogist, particularly where the latter has a stake in philosophical discourse *as literature*. The long wake and elaboration of the “Cartesian event” as described by Foucault has, I believe, exercised a profound retroactive effect on the very language of ancient philosophy by shaping the range of interpretive responses available to its subsequent readers – i.e., the hermeneutic categories, interests, and expectations of modern philosophers. The chief effect has been to circumscribe radically the full breadth of meaning in ancient philosophical discourse – including, to take the most immediate example, the literary-philosophical discourse of the Platonic *oeuvre* – to the domain of discovering, justifying, and communicating knowledge, and knowledge alone. Beyond the narrow borders of this domain, in the now-deserted outlands of spirituality, such discourse has *de facto* lost nearly all its previous force:

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[25] This question, which may perhaps only amount to a rhetorical one here, is more often than not the most conspicuously unasked and most assiduously avoided question about the nature and power of philosophical knowledge in ancient thought within any number of hotly contested conversations going on in mainstream contemporary scholarship on Plato and/or Socrates in both philosophy and classical studies. The lengthy and still ongoing conversation in which this polarizing question practically screams out to be asked – with the potential, furthermore, to make an impact that transcends the merely rhetorical – concerns the problem posed by the Socratic denial of *akrasia*, or "weakness of the will": the possibility that one can willingly choose what is bad over what is good despite knowing what is good in the moment of choice. The arguments that have raged about this problem in Platonic-Socratic thought seem to turn on precisely what Socrates means when he refers to "knowledge of the good": as he uses it, the variety of knowledge that would truly render *akrasia* impossible would *have* to be a knowledge that transforms the subject in his being as subject, rather than a mere knowledge of facts that fit into and reproduce preexisting subjective categories. Two recent and thoughtful contributions to this debate nearly reach such a redefinition of Socratic knowledge without quite embracing the idea of a knowledge that transforms the knower: Christopher Rowe, "Socrates in Plato's Dialogues," in Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar 2006, 159-170; and Heda Segvic, "No One Errs Wilingly: The Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism," *op. cit.* 171-185. Rowe, in particular, goes so far as to argue against the prevailing thesis that the 'more Platonic' views on *akrasia* presented in the dialogues of the middle period (*Republic, Phaedrus, inter alia*) represent a definite improvement on the 'more Socratic' views on the same presented in the earlier dialogues. The apparent Platonic 'improvement,' in Rowe's view, depends upon a watering-down of the strong, transformative Socratic concept of knowledge.

> [T]he consequence [of the “Cartesian event”] is that access to truth, whose sole condition is henceforth knowledge, will find reward and fulfillment in nothing else but the indefinite development of knowledge. The point of enlightenment and fulfillment, the moment of the subject’s transfiguration […] can no longer exist. We can no longer think that access to the truth will complete in the subject, *like a crowning or a reward, the work or the sacrifice, the price paid to arrive at it* [*comme un couronnement ou une récompense, le travail ou le sacrifice, le prix payé pour arriver à elle*]. Knowledge will simply open out onto the indefinite dimension of progress, the end of which is unknown and the advantage of which will only ever be realized in the course of history […]. *If we define spirituality as being the form of practices which postulate that, such as he is, the subject is not capable of the truth, but that, such as it is, the truth can transfigure and save the subject, then we can say that the modern age of the relations between the subject and truth begin* [*sic*] *when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject* (Foucault, *Hermeneutics* 18-19, emphasis mine; *Herméneutique* 20).

We can see then that the challenge posed by antiquity for the modern historian of philosophy lies in trying to reestablish and investigate the historically variable relationship between a subject for whom the task of philosophy is to work on and reconstruct himself, and a truth whose function in philosophy is to aid in, and finally consummate, the subject’s work on himself undertaken in its name. For the genealogist of the problem of interpretation, on the other hand, the task is to decide how Foucault’s dual conception of philosophy and spirituality, rooted in Hadot’s concern with the relationship between discourse and way of life, helps us understand Socrates as the agent of a crucial and affirmative moment in the genealogy of interpretive risk and responsibility. The first question we must ask under this heading is: What relationship can we establish between the Socratic affirmation of interpretive risk and responsibility, on the one hand, and the "event" of philosophical spirituality on the other, which, *per* Foucault, Socrates is the first to formulate and practice in a recognizable form? I believe that what unites the problem of philosophical interpretation with the problem of philosophical spirituality in the person of Socrates lies in the remarkable feedback loop that the latter establishes between *language* and *life,* to which loop he subsequently gives the name of philosophy. In the concrete practice of Socratic philosophy, a certain way of thinking and speaking about meaningful truth – in essence, a specific choice of interpretive *language*, or *logos* – entails and is entailed by a certain way of relating to oneself, to others, and ultimately to the truth – in essence, a specific choice of ethical and political *life*, or *bios*. Neither language nor life, once Socrates connects them in this endless circuit, can ever come to rest in the complacency of a knowledge which does not demand the continuous transformation of the knower, can ever offer an interpretive response which does not open up another interpretive question.

If Socrates is, in fact, the first interpreter with a good conscience to mark out and tread upon the circular path of dialogue, which leads into life from language and ever so treacherously back into language from life – if, indeed, philosophy exerts its effects by affirming constant dislocation and suspended discord, with all their attendant dangers, as a basic principle of both thinking and being – then we are immediately led to ask whether there is room in the Foucauldian dyad of philosophy and spirituality for a subject in whom these two latter categories appear to be as closely united and mutually reinforcing as they are perpetually at odds and on the brink of disintegration. *Pace* Foucault, Socratic spirituality, the seminal form of "care of the self," consists in casting profound doubt on the truth-claims of various discourses (*logoi*)[26] – indeed, it often seems to consist in little else – and, in so doing, this spirituality can suffer a rebound effect by undermining part of its own legitimation as a mode of living, which rests with the precariousness of *logoi*, by the same stroke. Can we possibly reconcile this near-reckless risk-taking in a game of truth, this self-willed vertigo of dialogical responsibilities, with the austere rigor of a technique by means of which the subject "works on himself" in order to receive a truth that "transfigures," even "saves" his very being as the reward for carefully measured preparations and freely chosen sacrifices? For if Socrates offers any salvation at all, it is indeed an eccentric and precarious salvation: the salvation of the hardened gambler, not the salvation of the advanced ascetic.

It should become clear at this point that the gaming analogy I employed earlier to describe the relationship between philosophy and spirituality was not only somewhat contentious and disingenuous in context, but already implied the critique of Foucault's categories which I now bring forth in earnest. In the passages I have cited and in a number of comparably crucial points in Foucault's related writings, a subtle but decisive ambiguity embedded in Foucault's thinking leads to two contending and mutually incommensurable descriptions of spirituality – particularly in the phrases I have transcribed above in the original French.[27] On the one hand, Foucault generally defines the spiritual component of ancient philosophical practices in terms of discrete techniques, procedures, or instrumentalities ("purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc.") that compel the subject to follow a prescribed method in order to achieve a foreseeable and relatively secure result. To give a schematic instance: in condition X of my subjectivity (delusion, falsehood, self-contradiction, etc.), I wish to bring my subjectivity into condition Y (knowledge, truth, self-coherence, etc.); hence, in order to achieve this end, I perform steps A, B, and C in a specific series – like a carpenter constructing a table – secure in the knowledge that by following this technique or method, by paying the price it demands, I will in fact achieve my intended result and attain the condition I desire. The effort that goes into this process, as Foucault says, amounts to "the price to be paid for access to the truth [*le prix à payer pour avoir accès à la vérité*]", upon payment of which comes "a crowning or a reward [*un couronnement ou une récompense*]". Nor is the discursive logic in evidence here a phenomenon limited merely to the scope of the present lectures: a comparable paradigm governs the language of Foucault's contemporary research and writing. In "Subjectivity and Truth," the course summary for the preceding year (1980-1981) of Foucault's lectures at the Collège and continuous in many of its central concerns with those of *Hermeneutics*, he undertakes "an inquiry concerning the instituted models of self-knowledge and their history," for which, as he explains,

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[26] This examination applies regardless of whether the *logoi* examined by Socrates rate as properly "philosophical" or not, either by his or by our own standards. Euthyphro's addle-headed views on piety in the eponymous dialogue, for instance, would probably rate as sub-philosophical by either measure, whereas the interlocutors who are closer to the Sophistic and rhetorical tradition or who are actually themselves Sophists – for instance, Thrasymachus in the *Republic* – may not present viewpoints that appear "philosophical" to a reader who has already absorbed into her marrow the long afterlife of Socratic culture, but do represent viewpoints that demand a more conceptually robust response from Socrates in proportion to their insidious dissemination (for Plato and/or Socrates) in contemporary Greek culture.

> The guiding thread that seems the most useful […] is constituted by what one might call the *'techniques of the self,'* which is to say, the *procedures* […] suggested or prescribed to individuals in order *to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends,* through relations of self-

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[27] For the understanding of these phrases and for my comprehension of the French text of Foucault's lectures in general, I owe a debt to Spencer Hawkins, Amr Kamal, and Shannon Winston, all of whom examined the texts in question, confirmed the translations, and listened patiently to my questions (not to mention my scarcely passable French pronunciation).

> mastery or self-knowledge. […] What should one do with oneself? *What work should be carried out on the self?* How should one "govern oneself" by performing actions in which *one is oneself the objective of those actions, the domain in which they are brought to bear, the instrument they employ, and the subject that acts*?[28]

The care of the self is, in the strictest sense of the terms employed here, *work* carried out on the self, constituting oneself as a *raw material* (the sculptor's marble, for instance) to which are then applied a number of *instruments* or *techniques* with definite purposes (hammer, chisel, sandpaper), and from which definite *sacrifices* (the chunks and flakes of scrap stone that gradually fall away) must be extracted in order for the final product to take its proper shape. For the sake of convenience, I will call this way of thinking the 'economic-instrumental logic' in Foucault's discourse on the care of the self. According to this logic, the subject either gives up something in order to gain something else of greater relative value ("I pay a dollar *in order to* get a cup of coffee": economic) or, more generally, submits to a prescribed regimen of actions in order to achieve a desired end ("I follow the blueprint *in order to* build a table": instrumental). In light of Hadot's distinction between philosophical discourse and philosophical way of life, this version of the care of the self would articulate either category as a series of procedures complementary to the other: discourse is the instrumental means of which life is the end, and life is the instrumental means to which discourse is the end. Spiritual practice draws the subject along a sort of ascending spiral path, oscillating between language and life and proceeding by rigorous and certain steps towards its goal. This goal is at once singular and dual: in it are entwined both access to the truth that transfigures and authenticates the subject's very being, on the one hand, and the authentic form of the subject itself that has sought this transfiguration on the other.

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[28] Michel Foucault, "Subjectivity and Truth," in: *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1997), 87, emphasis mine. In the course summary for *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, furthermore, Foucault writes of the ancient *epimeleia heautou* in comparable terms: "The very term *epimeleia* does not merely designate an attitude of awareness or a form of attention that one would focus on oneself; it designates *a regulated occupation, a work with its methods and objectives.* […] We may say that in all of ancient philosophy the care of the self was considered as both a duty and *a technique*, a basic obligation and *a set of carefully worked-out procedures*." Foucault, "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," in: *Ethics*, 95, emphasis mine. In the aptly titled "Technologies of the Self," a text deriving from a seminar Foucault gave at the University of Vermont in October 1982 (Foucault, *Ethics*, 223n.), he identifies four different kinds of technologies by means of which "humans develop knowledge about themselves": technologies of production, of sign systems, of power, and of the self, the last of which "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of *operations* on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as *to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality*" (Foucault, *Ethics*, 224f., emphasis mine).

Elsewhere in Foucault's discourse, however, there are traces – perhaps only traces – of an entirely different and, to my thinking, entirely incommensurable logic in the description of ancient spiritual practices – a latent logic, as it were, which, if we allow it some breathing room, lets us both approach the discourse of Plato's dialogues as literary language with genuinely spiritual dimensions (in Foucault's sense of the term) and gives Socrates a precise location in the genealogy of interpretive risk and responsibility. By using this latent logic to dislodge the Socratic moment from within Foucault's genealogy, and thereby to reveal its radical force as an 'event' that goes well beyond even Foucault's conception, my inquiry will also ultimately open the way – within and beyond my close readings of Plato – to what might be called, with good reason, a spirituality of interpretation.

In short, there are indications in Foucault's discourse on the "care of the self" that ancient spiritual practices can also take shape as open-ended, contingent, or even dangerous actions, the end results of which may differ widely from the desired outcome because all the contributing variables cannot be known or reckoned with in advance. While the subjects who perform these actions still perform them in order to attain values that appear determinate and attainable, they nonetheless act into a medium of uncertainty; in other words, they exist within the suspense of error. Through the rebound effects of their own actions, these subjects can come to interpret themselves *qua* subjects, or interpret the values that had motivated and structured their actions, in ways that cast doubt upon their previous conceptions or overturn them completely. To give an example that contrasts with the previous schema: in condition X of my subjectivity, I wish to bring my subjectivity into condition Y, so in order to achieve this end, I *begin* to perform steps A, B, and C in a certain series, but after I have completed step B, say, I discover that not only does condition Y now seem less desirable than some other condition Z, but that steps A and C actually work *against* the realization of condition Z. In order to achieve condition Z, I must now retrace my steps to perform some other step A', then B again, then C', at which point I achieve condition Z – only to realize that it has led me into an even more dire and intractable position than I existed in under condition X, or would have come into under condition Y… and so on. The person who puts down a dollar to buy a cup of coffee realizes halfway through the transaction that he has picked up not a cup of coffee, but a pack of chewing gum; the carpenter who sets out to build a table realizes halfway through his task that he is following the blueprint not for a table, but for a bookshelf. Although these latter examples, which seek to import this logic back into the economic-instrumental situations from which it fundamentally differs, sound a bit ridiculous, they offer a clear enough practical image of what can only be called – with an admittedly hideous term – the 'kindyneutic logic'[29] of Socratic interpretation and, indeed, of the language of Platonic dialogue. This is the perambulatory logic of the new music, the philosophical-spiritual suspense of error that, in the strongest sense of Foucault's own language, "brings the subject's being *into play* [*met en jeu l'être même du sujet*]"

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[29] This cumbersome neologism demands more than a little explanation: Grk. κίνδυνος [*kindynos*] = danger, risk, hazard, venture, enterprise > κινδυνεύω [*kindyneuō*] = to venture, hazard, risk > κινδυνευτικός [*kindyneutikos*] = adventurous, risk-taking > Eng. *kindyneutic*.

(emphasis mine).[30] The language and life of Socrates himself, I will argue – that model of self-decomposing composition – offer in some respects a clear confirmation of, and in others a strong challenge to, Foucault's categorization of philosophical spirituality under the heading of "technologies of the self." For Socrates offers us not a *technology*, not a tool, instrument, or procedure, by means of which we come to know and transform ourselves according to unshakeable values or precepts – according to, as it were, a blueprint for life. Rather, his gift to us, the gift of Socratic spirituality which we are justifiably reluctant to receive, is a *kindynology*: a terrifying, arousing, maddening game of risk, a game from which we are free to walk away without so much as picking up a hand, but in which, if we choose to play it, we must in the end wager everything we are, say, think, or do. The rules, the board, and the players themselves change drastically, often beyond recognition, with every turn in play – but under no circumstances can we take back a move once it is played.[31] For Socrates, we can only care for ourselves – to use Foucault's term – by putting *our selves* at risk.

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[30] The ambiguity and incommensurability of which I speak is particularly marked in this very passage, which, as I have cited it in full above, combines both the economic-instrumental and the kindyneutic modes of description in a single and not insignificant phrase: "The truth is only given to the subject *at a price* [i.e., economic-instrumental] *that brings the subject's being into play* [i.e., kindyneutic: *à un prix qui met en jeu l'être même du sujet*]." Does this mean that one pays a price *in order to* bring something into play, or that one pays a price *as a result of* bringing something into play, or that 'paying a price' and 'bringing something into play' are simply two different ways of saying the same thing? Though one can perhaps beg off the question by claiming that the text at hand is the transcription of an oral, *ergo* at least minimally extemporaneous lecture, and hence that the pressure of performance – particularly under the adverse conditions of Foucault's heavily-attended and temporally-constrained lectures at the Collège de France – contributed to this incongruous mixing of metaphors, the contemporary published texts cited indicate that a similar ambiguity is operative even where Foucault's language was not subject to performative pressure.

[31] Let us not forget, either, the possibility in all such games that the game itself can be a con through which we become the marks of better players – or even worse, that the game is designed to con all players equally, to no one's ultimate benefit. One is tempted to think of Tegwar, the card-game played by Bruce Pearson (Robert DeNiro) and Henry Wiggen (Michael Moriarty) in the film *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1973). Tegwar is (secretly) an acronym for "The Exciting Game Without Any Rules." Pearson and Wiggen invite various suckers to join them in a round of the game, and then improvise nonsensical and arbitrary rules designed to confuse and fluster their marks and, more importantly, to separate them from their money. There is always the possibility – not entirely negative in its implications – that Socratic philosophy might,

In terms of both philosophical doctrine and spiritual transformation, nothing could be further from the economic-instrumental mindset, in which present sacrifice and future reward are clearly defined and securely linked, than that obscure high-stakes game, the confusing and discordant music, into which Socrates draws himself and his interlocutors ever more deeply in the progress of dialogue. Nothing other than the tacit embrace of this kindyneutic logic, moreover, could illuminate Foucault's own principled justification, in *The Use of Pleasure* (1984), for the thorough rethinking and reorganization of his genealogical project on sexuality that not only delayed the publication of this second volume, but altered the scope and viewpoint of the project.[32] His humble, direct, but no less electrifying language could be imagined, without much difficulty, as words placed in Socrates' mouth by Plato in some lost fragment of the *Apology*:

> As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which *enables one to get free of oneself*. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in *the knower's straying afield of himself*? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.[33]

Here, in a text only a little more than a quarter-century old,[34] a text that introduces a historical, discursive, and institutional inquiry into a quintessentially modern question – namely, the problematization of 'sexuality' – we find in transposed form two of the major

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after all, be a game of Tegwar which is nonetheless so fascinating in its inventions that even after we realize that we have been taken in, we still want to play. If this is the case, it might be an instance of a con-game in which everyone is equally conned – even Socrates! – and in which only the game itself prevails in the end.

[32] See n. 21 above. The first and – in Anglophone scholarship – still most widely read volume of *The History of Sexuality* was published in 1976; the other two volumes, in quick succession, appeared only some eight years later. The most directly illuminating text on the reasons for this delay and the reorientation that caused it is an interview with Foucault from April 1983 that was conducted by Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus: "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in: Foucault, *Ethics*, 253-280.

[33] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 8 (emphasis mine).

[34] At the time of writing (2008-09).

kindyneutic motifs of Socratic philosophy and spirituality. First, there is the idea of ‘getting free of oneself’ in and through a certain practice of interpretation, a Galilean motif, as it were, with positive overtones of hard-won mastery and knowledge: the idea of passing beyond or rising above oneself, turning about to confront oneself, seeing oneself from the perspective of another, each of which ultimately contributes to attaining a certain freedom from, and mastery over, oneself as knower and interpreter. The aim is to achieve a coming-together, a meeting or a *congress* with oneself in which authentic autonomy becomes possible. Second, and as the accomplice (as it were) of the first motif, there is the counter-idea of ‘straying afield of oneself’ in and through interpretation, an Oedipal motif with negative overtones of uncertainty and error: the idea of departing or wandering away from oneself, turning away from oneself, becoming different from or alien to oneself. This second motif entails seeing oneself not as the sovereign traveler who pushes forward knowing the way and the destination, but rather as a stranger in a strange land, lured onward by the seductive pull of the path itself rather than the certainty and desirability of its endpoint. It culminates in a coming-apart, a departure or a *digress* from oneself in which all autonomy retreats. In the kindyneutic logic of Foucault’s text as in that of Socratic philosophy, congress and digress are at one *and* at odds in the practice of dialogic interpretation. Just as one always attains freedom from and mastery over oneself only under certain conditions and within certain limits, their attainment never represents a final emancipation, a consummate access to truth itself, so much as a new limit to pass beyond, a new horizon to rise above, a new interlocutor from whom one must slowly and painstakingly draw forth answers to new questions. The freedom and mastery thus attained are only worthy of the name, then, when they draw their strength from the intensity of their doubts, when they extract their vital nervous energy from the suspense of error in which they exist. They thus become principles of interpretive movement and conversation – that is, truly philosophical and spiritual principles – not grounds for acquiescence in the canons of knowledge or for silence in the face of the other. The one who truly knows the way knows only that he does not truly know the way: this Socratic wisdom, reformulated and enacted by Foucault himself in his own intellectual practice, suggests a form and content for the Socratic "care of the self" that replaces Foucault's technology of the self with a kindynology. The gaming table supplants the artist's workbench, the cutting contest supplants the symphony performance, and the moment-to-moment practice of endangerment supplants the once-and-for-all salvation of the acolyte.

If I am at all justified to locate Socrates' affirmation of risk and responsibility at the very core of the philosophical spirituality he proposes and embodies, we must then ask two closely related questions: first, how exactly does this kindyneutic spirituality, this mutual endangerment of language and life, inflect or augment the literary meaning of the Platonic *oeuvre*, in which it leaves behind a definite trace in the fictions of Socrates' person and conversations? Second, how does the literary trace of such spirituality aim to implicate the reader him- or herself in these fictions, to draw the whole life and being of the interpreter on to a path of endangerment that runs closely parallel to, if not finally joins, the treacherous and thrilling way of Socratic philosophy? In other words, how does the properly spiritual dimension of Plato's language compel the reader to engage in spiritual practice? These two questions are centrally concerned with what *we* have to risk, to what *we* must respond, if we allow the language of the Platonic dialogue to address us not as subjects who seek *different knowledge* or *different interpretations* while *remaining the same as ourselves*, but rather as subjects who seek *to know differently* and *to interpret differently*, and thereby perhaps *to become different from ourselves*. I am far from asking how we can become good, orthodox Platonists; rather, I am asking how Plato's Socrates shows us one way – a way completely unprecedented, though not unanticipated, in this genealogy – that language can, and even must, put life at risk, and that life likewise can and must put language at risk. These two questions are crucial, I believe, not only because of their pivotal place in this particular genealogy, but also because of the way they allow us to reassimilate Socratic-Platonic philosophy into the literary tradition within which it emerges at once as both a genre of literature and – for the first time and in good faith – a corresponding genre of life.

As I see it, then, the only responsible way to propose answers, however initial and provisional, to the questions posed by Hadot's and Foucault's research in the present genealogy is to explore how Platonic texts – in our case, the *Apology* – represent the kindyneutic ethos of Socratic interpretation through a specific form of literary discourse, and transform the interpreters of this form from observers into participants, from innocent bystanders into accomplices, through the responsibilities this form entails. I propose to do this by exploring the literary "figures" of *voice* central to this text: the voice of the divine in the oracle, the voices of others in the city of Athens, and the voice of the philosopher himself. On the one hand, Socrates converses agonistically with each of these voices in the ethical experience he narrates in his speech; on the other hand, he designates himself the prophetic representative of these voices in the equally agonistic conversations he initiates in the political realm, not least of all in his defense speech itself. In short, he consciously uses his voice from ‘here’ as both adversary and agent of the voices from ‘elsewhere’ – a voice he knows is at once his own and not his own, at once ethically self-opposed and politically oppositional. Thus, I place the word “figures” in quotes above because the concept is only useful here if it is applied in a dual sense: each Socratic “figure” of voice, in the sense of a figurative language about voice, presents a coherent series of tropes, motifs, or images that functions on the level of literary-philosophical discourse to transform the subject that receives it on the level of spirituality. Conversely, the “figures” of voice, in the sense of “persons” or “characters” created through voice, jointly define a certain way of life, a subject that responds to objects through a discourse that effects spiritual transformation.

By either understanding of the term “figure,” the addressee of Socrates’ philosophical discourse and the subject of spiritual transformation ultimately prove to be the reader him- or herself. These “figures” are personae of Socrates, but they also provide us with a literary grammar for the language of philosophy; they are likewise personae of the reader, but they also provide us with a critical grammar for the language of interpretation. If we approach these “figures,” furthermore, not by avoiding their double-sidedness – if not, indeed, their veritable duplicity – but by freely joining in the games they play, I think we come as close as any critical methodology can to understanding these texts on their own terms: that is to say, according to the mutual interplay of figurative speech and speaking figures, the Socratic interplay of language and life. As we will see, the three “figures” I want to investigate will not only recall Sophocles’ Oedipus and Brecht’s Galileo in significant ways, but will also point forward to Hannah Arendt’s development of a Socratic form of life as the common ground shared by acting and thinking. As far as Plato's Socrates is concerned, the voice from within, the voice from beyond, and one's own voice among others – however inextricable they might prove to be from one another – create the plural matrix of discourses from which the philosophical interpreter draws life itself.

### III. *In (im)propria persona*: Socratic Figures of Voice and the Birth of Interpretive Conscience in the *Apology*

The explicit generic frame of Socrates' discourse in the *Apology* is simple enough to understand: he has been called upon to answer the charges lodged against him by his accusers, and his speech is his response to those charges.[35] His accusers have articulated their interpretation, their response to his words and deeds, and Socrates addresses his own response as much to this interpretation as to the words and deeds by which his accusers had first felt themselves addressed – Socrates' own way of life. In short, Socrates must respond not only to his accusers' understanding of him, but also to his own self-understanding. Even before he utters a single word, Socrates' speech bears the burden of this dual responsibility: his response to his accusers, on the one hand, makes him complicit in the terms of a political conversation about him conducted by others – a conversation to which he has (ironically) arrived late in the game. Socrates' response to his own self-understanding, on the other hand, renews his complicity in the terms of an ethical conversation about himself that he has been conducting with himself and with others for quite some time. He must not only negotiate the dangerous terrain mapped out by either complicity – one in the language and life of philosophy, the other in the language and life of politics – but furthermore, he must succeed in showing that these two parallel and mutually hostile conversations are really one: that they have the same basic objects and concerns, that they aim for the same ultimate ends, that they need to be combined or integrated in order to achieve these ends, and, most of all, that it is and has been Socrates' special mission to achieve the integration of these conversations. Only by achieving this integration can he resolve the contradiction between ethics and politics, between philosophical and civic life, expressed in the indictment against him.

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[35] For a detailed treatment of how the dialogues grouped around Socrates' trial and execution (in narrative order: *Theaetetus*, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*) reflect the concrete actuality of ancient Athenian law and what is likely to have been the experience of the historical Socrates in submitting to the procedures of this law, see Debra Nails, "The Trial and Death of Socrates," in Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar 2006, 5-20; on the *Apology* in particular, see 12-14. For an influential and authoritative argument concerning the possibility of political and personal motives for the charges against the historical Socrates, see Gregory Vlastos, "The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy," in: *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994), 87-108.

Yet when we return to the simple generic frame of the defense-speech, we discover at the outset that virtually everything is stacked against Socrates and the possibility of integration for which he stands. By responding to the charges against him, by trying to answer in political terms the question about himself that they pose, he risks reinforcing the political discourses, practices, and institutions that proscribe his ethical way of life as something hostile to politics. On the other hand, by trying to answer in ethical terms the question about himself posed by the charges, and moreover by doing so in a genre of discourse – the public, forensic monologue – diametrically opposed to the dialogue of ethical inquiry, he risks distorting or misrepresenting philosophy not just as one possible relationship between language and life, but as the specific option that has defined his own self-understanding. By either the ethical or the political route, Socrates risks becoming his own enemy the moment he opens his mouth: he risks speaking in the voice of his accusers. In terms of literary "figures" of voice, then, we can say that Socrates' risks and responsibilities in the *Apology* – or more generally, the risks and responsibilities of philosophical interpretation when it speaks in the political realm – make him assume a persona and use a language that must *listen to*, *and speak in*, *two voices at once*. Insofar as politics and ethics are already mutually inextricable in philosophical conversation, as I have argued above, this double-listening and double-speaking are endemic to Socratic dialogue, in which the interrogator must interrogate both himself and the other and the respondent must respond to both himself and the other (see Hadot 2002, 29). But in this respect, the *Apology* – as a monologue! – raises the stakes attached to these Socratic voices as no other Platonic text does: Socrates must make his audience accept a blatant political paradox – that the voice of the philosopher speaks *on behalf of* the city because it speaks *against* it – on the basis of a blatant ethical paradox – namely, that the voice of the god speaks *on behalf of* Socrates' wisdom because it speaks *against* human wisdom in general. Through his own voice, Socrates must listen and respond to a voice from 'elsewhere,' the voice of the god, as well as a voice from 'here': the clamorous and uncomprehending voice of Athens and his accusers. If we take the word *prophet* in its etymological sense – *prophētēs* (προφήτης), one who speaks (*phēmi*) on behalf of (*pro*-) another – then Socrates' mediating position in this text between ethics and politics, between the god and the city, makes him a kind of two-faced prophet, the single point at which the circumferences of two self-enclosed circles of meaning make contact and through which they can communicate.

What throws this plural voice of Socrates into particularly high relief in the *Apology*, furthermore, and what makes this text such a brilliantly indirect revelation of the literary character of Platonic dialogue, is the fact that Socrates' dialogic voice and the monologic voice of the genre in which he speaks are intractably at odds. One can compare it to the experience of hearing a musical composition intimately bound to the structure and resources of the piano – say, Thelonious Monk's "Straight, No Chaser" – played on an instrument with completely different structure and resources, such as the tenor saxophone. Virtually at once, one actually hears what had been most fundamental to the original composition all along – its quintessentially "pianistic" logic – through its remapping on to the logic of another instrument. The instrumentally-bound character of the composition, as well as the specific character of the instrument itself, only becomes audible *negatively,* when it sounds forth with an altered voice. Socrates' monologue in the *Apology* makes the structure and resources unique to dialogue palpable by precisely the same negative route. Can we really expect philosophical discourse from Socrates, or a philosophical response from his audience, when both are subject to a genre that polarizes the voice of one against the silence of innumerable others? Can we really expect that the invitation to danger that always remains enfolded in Socrates' kindyneutic ethical language – a danger he invites for himself and to which he invites others – will somehow deliver him from the real and immediate political danger to his mortal being now facing him in Meletus' accusation?

Of course not. Nevertheless, the manifest rhetorical and legal failure of the *Apology* – a text written by Plato precisely *because* the speech it commemorates failed so brilliantly – reveals *by its very failure* the dialogic nature of Socratic interpretation, which condemns in its turn the standards of rhetorical and legal success as even more spectacular failures. Socrates finds a way to begin from the foregone conclusions imposed by monologue, to open up his speech so that he can resist and even, to a certain degree, defeat the foreclosure forced upon the voice of the philosopher. As Peter Warnek writes,

> To begin by asserting that the *Apology* does *not* belong to the dialogue form is only to preclude […] the very possibility of encountering the great difficulty raised by the text, which concerns namely how Socratic dialogue […] remains deeply incompatible with the conventions of public speaking[. …] The *Apology* has to be read as a deeply dialogical *logos* that is already enacting its own impossibility, as it attempts to speak its truth in a situation that already limits its very way of speaking, threatening to render dialogue altogether impossible.[36]

Under conditions that make dialogue impossible, he proves that dialogue is the most urgent necessity; expecting that the Athenians will silence the 'noise' of his voice forever in death, he proves that the silence of the philosophical interpreter robs the city of its own true voice and reduces its language to noise – all for the lack of his conversation. While it has often been noted that Socrates meets death in order to preserve the integrity of his conscience, it has not as often been noted that by the same token, Socrates allows the Athenians to silence the voice of their own conscience by silencing him – conscience, not necessarily in the moral sense of the term, but in the sense of an active, interpretive *con-scientia*, knowing (*scientia*) something along with (*con-*) others, and, by engaging their viewpoints on the thing known, coming to know one's own *way* of knowing it as well. As the voice of the oracle is to Socrates as an ethical being, so is the voice of Socrates as a political being to the city – and so, in turn, is the fiction of that voice in the Platonic text to its reader. It is a voice from inside that comes from outside; it demands that one care for oneself by constantly putting oneself at risk; it repeatedly derails the monologic and singular voice by converting it to the dialogic and plural voice. All of this sets the stage on which we can see the Socratic "figures" of the philosopher's voice step forward: it is a voice of *conscience* in the augmented sense, a doubly listening and doubly speaking voice that constantly reinserts plurality and dialogue into singularity and monologue, whether in relation to itself or others. The figures of this voice, I will argue, organize the spiritual content and exert the spiritual force of Socrates' language in the *Apology*.

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[36] Peter Warnek, *Descent of Socrates: Self-Knowledge and Cryptic Nature in the Platonic Dialogues* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2005), 55, 56.

I want to focus on Socrates' presentation to the Athenian court of the interpretive problem that proves central to his ethical self-understanding – and it is all too fitting that this phenomenon manifests itself to him in the form of a voice: the voice of Apollo's oracle, which issues the well-known, though no less provocative judgment about Socrates' wisdom. This voice emanates from an absolute "elsewhere" beyond both ethics and politics, inhabited by all-seeing, all-knowing divinities, but by addressing Socrates directly (as he sees it) and demanding his interpretive response, it assumes a troubling central position in the extremely intimate "here" of Socrates' self-awareness. The shape this trouble takes, the precarious play of interpretive questions and answers set in motion by this visitation, traces an expanding spiral in which first Socrates himself, through the disintegration of his ethical awareness, gets caught up, and then in turn begins to pull others in along with him.[37] Dialogue forms the medium of this strange spiraling current –

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[37] The figurative language I employ here owes a certain debt to a famous passage from Heidegger: "Sind wir auf das Sichentziehende bezogen, dann sind wir auf dem Zug in das Sichentziehende, in die rätselvolle und darum wandelbare Nähe seines Anspruchs. Wenn ein Mensch eigens auf diesem Zug ist, dann denkt er, mag er noch so weit von dem Sichentziehenden entfernt sein, mag der Entzug wie immer auch verschleiert bleiben. Sokrates hat zeit seines Lebens, bis in seinen Tod hinein, nichts anderes getan, als sich in den Zugwind dieses Zuges zu stellen und darin sich zu halten. Darum ist er der reinste Denker des Abendlandes. Deshalb hat er nichts geschrieben. Denn wer aus dem Denken zu schreiben beginnt, muß unweigerlich den Menschen gleichen, die vor allzu starkem Zugwind in den Windschatten flüchten. Es bleibt das Geheimnis einer noch verborgenen Geschichte, daß alle Denker des Abendlandes nach Sokrates, unbeschadet ihrer Größe, solche Flüchtlinge sein mußten. Das Denken ging in die Literatur ein." ("If we are related to what withdraws itself, then we are drawn along with the self-withdrawing, in the enigmatic and thereby elusive nearness of its claim upon us. If a human is properly drawn along, then that one is thinking, however far that one may be removed from the self-withdrawing, and even if the withdrawal also remains, as ever, veiled. Socrates, in the time of his life, up until and into his own death, did nothing other than place and keep himself in the pulling draft of this drawing. For this reason he is the purest thinker of the West. Because of this he wrote nothing. For whoever begins to write from out of thinking inevitably has to resemble those humans who seek refuge in the lee before this overpowering draft. It remains a strangely familiar fact of a still concealed history, that all thinkers of the West after Socrates, their greatness notwithstanding, have had to be such refugees. Thinking turns into literature.") Martin Heidegger, *Was*

its spiritual medium, to use Foucault’s term – and what gives this current its initial momentum is the birth of what I have called interpretive conscience in Socrates’ experience of his own voice confronting the voice of an absolute Other: the god. Examining the way this ethical dilemma takes shape through the manifestations of a divine voice to Socrates will help us understand the subsequent political dilemma posed by Socrates’ way of life, and then in turn the plural nature and spiritual effect of Socrates’ own voice.

After arguing to the Athenian court (19a-20c) that the reputation he has gained is unfounded – the reputation, that is, as a paid purveyor of rhetorical technique or natural knowledge in the manner of the Sophists, and thus one among the typical civic troublemakers of 5th century Athens – Socrates imagines the words of a respondent (ὑπολάβοι ἂν οὖν τις ὑμῶν, 20c; “perhaps one of you might then answer” [my trans.]) who raises what would be the next logical question. If you are not in fact one of these Sophistic troublemakers, says this imaginary interlocutor, then what exactly have you been doing that is so out of the ordinary (τῶν ἄλλων πεϱιττότεϱον, something “in excess of” or “beyond [what] others [do],” with transgressive overtones; see τι […] ἀλλοῖον ἢ οἱ πολλοί) that you have gained such a scandalous reputation (διαβολαί, “slanders” or “calumnies”; φήμη τε καὶ λόγος, “talk and stories”)? Having thus dispensed with a widespread mis-interpretation of his way of life, Socrates must now present a counter-interpretation. This task is made all the more difficult, furthermore, by at least three considerable dangers. First, the way of life he must interpret on behalf of his audience is itself centrally preoccupied with a problem of interpretation, if not *the* problem of

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*Heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1954), 52, quoted in Warnek 2005, 207 (Ch. 3, n. 1, spelling corrected); trans. Warnek, 49.

interpretation as such. Socrates' response risks exacerbating the hostility of his fellow citizens in the very effort to ameliorate them. If his outward way of life presents a threatening enigma to them in the political realm, wide open to misinterpretations and misrepresentations, then by revealing its roots in the even more inscrutable enigma of Socrates' ethical experience, he might only be adding fuel to the flames of hermeneutic frustration that will consume him. Second, and as a result of this first danger, Socrates' own interpretation, in its present context, makes itself *a priori* responsible to and complicit in the "talk and stories" he seeks to refute, because it is presented as part of the same conversation. In other words, the narrative of ethical experience Socrates offers must necessarily refer and relate itself to the well-established, though no less erroneous, narrative of his political reputation. As an interpretive response, it cannot *substitute*, but only *supplement* prior 'readings' of his words and deeds – one can only try to 'correct' the terms of a conversation by submitting to them first. Third, as Socrates puts it a moment later, his self-interpretation is so jarringly out of tune with the popular conception in its points of reference that "perhaps some of you will think I am joking" (καὶ ἴσως μὲν δόξω τισὶν ὑμῶν παίζειν, 20d; my trans.), the same reaction we have seen with Callicles in the *Gorgias*. The chasm that separates the terms so crucial to Socrates' interpretation of his ethical experience, as we shall see, and the terms applied to him in the long-standing conversation about him in the *polis*, is so unimaginably wide that his response risks appearing, in a sense, 'irresponsible' to the established conversation. Whatever truth about himself he speaks in conversation may only seem an utterance coming from left field, a ridiculous and churlish *non sequitur* that forces itself out of the very dialogue it seeks to join. From all three perspectives, Socrates must dispel the misinterpretation that has caused his political endangerment by relating the process of interpretation that started him on the path of ethical endangerment – namely, the kindyneutic path of philosophy. The only weapon he has to fight against the danger he has not chosen is another danger that he *has* chosen, and will choose now and always.

This chosen danger, the pearl of Socratic ethical experience, is made to reveal its original grain of sand in the (in)famous statement that opens the narrative of Socrates' experience with the Delphic oracle:[38]

> ἐγὼ γάρ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, δι' οὐδὲν ἀλλ' ἢ διὰ σοφίαν τινὰ τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ἔσχηκα. ποίαν δὴ σοφίαν ταύτην; ἥπερ ἐστὶν ἴσως ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία: τῷ ὄντι γὰρ κινδυνεύω ταύτην εἶναι σοφός. οὗτοι δὲ τάχ' ἄν, οὓς ἄρτι ἔλεγον, μείζω τινὰ ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον σοφίαν σοφοὶ εἶεν, ἢ οὐκ ἔχω τί λέγω: οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἔγωγε αὐτὴν ἐπίσταμαι, ἀλλ' ὅστις φησὶ ψεύδεταί τε καὶ ἐπὶ διαβολῇ τῇ ἐμῇ λέγει. […] οὐ γὰρ ἐμὸν ἐρῶ τὸν λόγον ὃν ἂν λέγω, ἀλλ' εἰς ἀξιόχρεων ὑμῖν τὸν λέγοντα ἀνοίσω. τῆς γὰρ ἐμῆς, εἰ δή τίς ἐστιν σοφία καὶ οἵα, μάρτυρα ὑμῖν παρέξομαι τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς. Χαιρεφῶντα γὰρ ἴστε που. […] καὶ δή ποτε καὶ εἰς Δελφοὺς ἐλθὼν ἐτόλμησε τοῦτο μαντεύσασθαι -- καί, ὅπερ λέγω, μὴ θορυβεῖτε, ὦ ἄνδρες -- ἤρετο γὰρ δὴ εἴ τις ἐμοῦ εἴη σοφώτερος. ἀνεῖλεν οὖν ἡ Πυθία μηδένα σοφώτερον εἶναι. καὶ τούτων πέρι ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῖν αὐτοῦ οὑτοσὶ μαρτυρήσει, ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖνος τετελεύτηκεν. (Pl. *Ap*. 20e, 21a)
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> What has caused my reputation is none other than a certain kind of wisdom [σοφίαν τινὰ].[39] What kind of wisdom? Human wisdom, perhaps. It may be that I really possess this, while those whom I

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[38] While I take it for granted that this portion of the *Apology* presents Socrates narrating his own experience, many more strictly "philosophical" interpreters of the *Apology* tend to elide the narrative dimension of his discourse, with the result that they synthesize into a set of propositions or paradoxes (e.g. Socrates' denial of wisdom) what is in fact a number of discrete and sequential steps in Socrates' thinking over time, each of which is interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of subsequent revelations. So, for instance, Mark McPherran ("Elenctic Interpretation and the Delphic Oracle," in Scott 2002, 114-144) reorganizes the narrative of Socrates' interpretation of the oracle as a (rather cumbersome) progression through a series of logical propositions (122-126) as a demonstration of the method of *elenchus*. For an interesting treatment of some of these narratological issues, focused on the function of Socrates as narrator or frame-narrator in several dialogues other than the *Apology*, see Anne-Marie Bowery, "Know Thyself: Socrates as Storyteller," in Scott 2007, 82-110.

[39] The qualifying and delimiting force of τινὰ [= one, a certain one, one among others] is not to be overlooked here, as it perhaps is by Socrates' audience in the ensuing uproar to which he reacts in 20e. Plato and his philologists have the privilege of relishing subtleties which the internal audience(s) of a given dialogue cannot – not to speak of its external audience(s). Then again, if the Athenian jury in Plato's text had been composed of philologists and/or philosophers, Socrates would most likely have been acquitted and Plato would never have been prompted to bring the text into being in the first place. The text of the *Apology* – not, perhaps, unlike Plato's dialogues as a whole – thus necessarily demands a less-than-ideal internal audience if it is to have any existence or meaning at all: the inarticulate noise of the uncomprehending crowd, like Euthyphro's pious puffery or Meno's cynical sophistication, creates the asymmetry of viewpoints that fuels Plato's language. Somebody in the text has to miss the force of the τινὰ,

> mentioned just now [sc. the Sophists] are wise with a wisdom more than human; else I cannot explain it, for I certainly do not possess it [οὐ (…) αὐτὴν ἐπίσταμαι, lit. “I do not know it”], and whoever says I do is lying and speaks to slander me. […] The story I tell does not originate with me, but I will refer you [ἀνοίσω] to a trustworthy source. I shall call upon the god of Delphi as witness [μάρτυρα] to the existence and nature of my wisdom, if it be such. You know Chaerephon. […] He went to Delphi at one time and ventured [ἐτόλμησε] to ask the oracle – as I say, gentlemen, do not create a disturbance – he asked if any man was wiser than I, and the Pythian replied [ἀνεῖλεν] that no one was wiser. Chaerephon is dead, but his brother will testify [μαρτυρήσει] to you about this. (Cooper/Grube 21)

There are two characteristics of this passage which sound out the keynotes in the narrative that is to follow. First, in support of his assertion that his reputation is due to a certain kind of wisdom, Socrates implicitly claims that if there is such a thing as wisdom, there may be different *varieties* or *degrees* of wisdom, that human beings can only possess the kind of wisdom appropriate to them (ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία, “human wisdom”), and that it is *only* this wisdom that he claims to possess. He is conspicuously careful to qualify and delimit his initial claim to wisdom in this way – εἰ δή τίς ἐστιν σοφία καὶ οἵα, lit. “if [my own wisdom] is wisdom at all, and namely wisdom of this sort [i.e. human]” – because the outright, unqualified claim to possess wisdom endangers the one who makes it, judging by the sudden uproar in the court that has clearly ignored this careful qualification (μὴ θορυβεῖτε, ὦ ἄνδρες, “gentlemen, do not create a disturbance”). In a characteristically backhanded manner, he does not explicitly deny that the Sophists, whose reputation he wrongly shares (ὅστις φησὶ ψεύδεταί, “whoever says [sc. that I am a Sophist] lies”), may possess a variety or degree of wisdom that surpasses the human (μείζω τινὰ ἢ κατ' ἄνθρωπον σοφίαν, lit. “a kind of wisdom greater than [that which] befits a human being”). He does, however, deliver a very subtle judgment on their claim by suggesting that the ascription of such wisdom to his own person amounts not to praise, but to slander: ὅστις φησὶ […] ἐπὶ διαβολῇ τῇ ἐμῇ λέγει, “whoever says [that I possess such

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for instance, so that we can catch it; but just as we begin to feel proud of our refined perceptions, Plato gives us yet another reason to wonder what else we might still be missing.

wisdom] speaks to slander me." This is not merely because such a claim is untruthful in his own case, but also because, following Socrates' implicit view about human wisdom, the alleged possession of a more-than-human wisdom would be a willful transgression – something that would mark a person's conduct as truly τῶν ἄλλων περιττότερον in its more sinister aspect, "in excess of" the limits prescribed for normal human life (20c, see above). If Socrates endangers himself by making a claim in this context to any wisdom at all – if, that is, he assumes a certain political risk by founding his counter-interpretation on this claim – his claim already adumbrates the greater risk in store for those who either denounce him for this claim or claim any other kind of wisdom for themselves. His apparent arrogance only holds up a magnifying mirror to the concealed arrogance of those who accuse him. What Socrates' specifically human wisdom amounts to, he has not yet made clear, but what is already coming into focus is the implicitly dialogic character of his voice, which provokes its hearers in order to chasten them, which exposes itself to the suspense of error in order to reveal the grave error in which its hearers may already dwell. If *pro forma* dialogue is impossible in this context for generic reasons, Socrates finds ways to exploit the potential polyvocality of monologue to seek comparable ends.

The second characteristic of this passage that proves crucial to the figures of voice in the subsequent narrative lies in the way the Socratic claim to wisdom is authorized by a chain of referrals (ἀνοίσω) to absent authorities:[40] first to the account of the deceased

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[40] The play of authority and impersonation so deeply impressed upon my reading of the *Apology* stands in stark contrast, for instance, to Mittelstrass' claim that "In Socratic dialogue the beginnings of reason do not have their origins in reference to someone else's or to one's own authority. 'To orient oneself in thought (in dialogue)' means finding together with others the place where reason resides. It does not mean putting oneself in someone else's place" (Mittelstrass in Griswold 1988, 134). Granted, I have not devoted enough attention to the question of a universal and impersonal faculty of reason in Plato's thought to respond fully to the line of thinking Mittelstrass represents here; I do think, however, that there is much more semantic and historical distance between Mittelstrass' post-Kantian use of the term *Vernunft* (Ger.: 'faculty of reason') and Plato's use of the term *logos* than Mittelstrass seems prepared to admit. *Logos*, for

Chaerephon, which in its turn is authorized by reference to the utterance of the spatially and, one might say, ontologically removed oracle at Delphi. The “figure” of Socrates’ voice in this passage depends upon a conscious, critical impersonation of absent voices worthy of the Brechtian stage: as Socrates puts it quite explicitly, οὐ γὰρ ἐμὸν ἐρῶ τὸν λόγον ὃν ἂν λέγω (lit. “the word I speak is not my own”). As with his playful citation of the “voice of philosophy” in the passage from the *Gorgias* already discussed, we see Socrates again making recourse to the ironic figure of “prophetic irresponsibility”: by referring his discourse to an absent or inaccessible source, Socrates avoids responsibility for the claim that he is wise because he was not the one who originally made that claim – yet at the same time, as we shall see, it is precisely this claim made by another that Socrates transforms into his own, most intimate ethical possession. The conspicuous absence and/or otherness of these authorities, furthermore, implicitly criticizes the legalese forced upon Socrates by infusing this language with sharp irony: he undercuts the usual rhetorical force of μάρτυρα ὑμῖν παρέξομαι (“as my witness before you, I shall call upon…”) by making its object an entity that cannot possibly be made present to the court as a witness except through Socrates’ own prophetic mediation, namely, τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς (“the god at Delphi”). The only witness who can be called upon to *voice* the truth about Socrates cannot be summoned before the court of Athens; *mutatis mutandis*, the only qualified outside observer who can be called upon to *voice* the philosopher’s ethical experience cannot present itself in the political realm. By drawing attention to the twofold remove of his own present voice in the forensic monologue from the absent voices that would authorize its truth, Socrates deliberately undermines his own

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Plato’s tradition as well as for Plato himself, was inextricably bound to the faculty of verbal expression and interaction in a way that *Vernunft* is not, or at least not necessarily.

legal-political authority in order to criticize his hearers' inability to acknowledge any other authority – especially the authority they should most of all acknowledge, the voice of a god. The referential chain of voices likewise reveals how the ethical experience Socrates is about to narrate must necessarily suffer the distortions or misrepresentations of indirect discourse as it tries to express itself in a political voice – and how impoverished political expression and understanding must be if such indirection and distortion are par for the course. For every finger Socrates playfully points at himself, there are three more pointing at his accusers; for every risk he brazenly assumes, he uncovers the far more dire risks in which his auditors are entangled. Hearing Socrates' apparent monologue, we are very much listening to a dialogic plurality of voices – and woe unto us if we fail to discern the music in the noise.

At this point in the narrative, Socrates' own 'direct discourse,' to the effect that he possesses a certain positive wisdom (though it remains to be defined) shares a limited coherence with the oracle's 'indirect discourse,' to the effect that there is no one wiser than Socrates. What the voice of the oracle states in negative and comparative terms about Socrates, the voice of Socrates declares in positive and determinate terms: their propositional contents appear to be more or less interchangeable. If the narrative ended at this moment, the substance of Socrates' defense would amount to separating himself from the Sophists and declaring himself a sage on the basis of Delphic authority. No one is wiser than Socrates: *ya basta*. But the apparently straightforward unison harmony shared by these two interpretive 'voicings' is anything but straightforward. At the beginning of his narrative, Socrates does not confront his listeners (and readers) simply with a claim and its supporting evidence, but rather juxtaposes the first seed and the final flower of an arduous process of interpretation – a process all the more remarkable for the apparent simplicity and transparency of its original material.[41] What makes the oracle's statement into an interpretive problem for Socrates, and indeed into the ethical basis for the risks and responsibilities he assumes in philosophizing, is the fact that the god's judgment on Socrates' wisdom directly contradicts Socrates' judgment of the same, and *Socrates cannot find a way to set aside his own judgment*. To put more of a point on it: Socrates' ethical awareness, and along with it the interpretive practice of dialogue, is born from and dwells in the irresolvable tension between a divine voice from 'elsewhere' that always speaks the truth about human beings, and the human voice from the most intimate 'here' of self-awareness that wants, hopes, *needs* to speak the truth about itself.

Rather than blandly ceding the priority of the former voice over the latter, rather than invoking "prophetic irresponsibility" in earnest, Socrates makes the opening move in a dialogic game between these two voices, making each complicit in and responsible to the other. This is his defining decision: the decision neither to submit to nor to reject offhand the interpretive voice of the other, but to dwell in the suspense of error it creates in his own awareness.[42] From this choice the ethical and political mandates of the philosophical way of life, as we shall see, issue forth with transparent rigor: Socrates decides to *live* simultaneously through the oracle's voice and his own. He receives the oracle not as a statement at face value, but as a new medium of ethical life, a new way to relate to and interpret himself. The oracle has answered, and Socrates, from the oracle of his *own* awareness, now boldly answers the god:

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[41] Warnek argues in very similar terms for Socrates' apparently eccentric relationship to the straightforward language of the oracle, and emphasizes the character of Socratic dialogue as the natural extension of Socrates' interpretive response to it: "The oracle, if it does issue a command, also does not tell Socrates what to do in unambiguous terms, does not give him straightforward instructions at all. Thus, it is not possible to account for Socratic practice simply by tracing it back to a divine imperative. […] Instead, it must be emphasized that Socrates himself understands his practice first of all as a way to *interpret* the oracle, as a way to test its meaning, to determine what the god is saying. What is decisive, then, is that the practice must already have established itself by first of all refusing to accept the divine word – by not simply accepting what the word only appears to say" (Warnek 2005, 95).

[42] So Warnek describes something very similar to this voluntary suspense when he writes that Socrates' "philosophical practice begins by insisting that the possibility of a genuine obedience to the god calls for an interpretive response. This response, while it must appear to reject the oracle, also cannot amount to its simple rejection. […] Because the difficulty raised by the oracle goes beyond the alternatives of its simple acceptance or rejection, the interpretive response of Socrates demands that he hold himself in an openness toward the oracular claim without becoming indifferent to it. Socrates must challenge the word, attempt even to *refute* it, precisely so that the word may nevertheless be accepted, received. […] The

> ταῦτα γὰρ ἐγὼ ἀκούσας ἐνεθυμούμην οὑτωσί: "τί ποτε λέγει ὁ θεός, καὶ τί ποτε αἰνίττεται; ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ σοφὸς ὤν: τί οὖν ποτε λέγει φάσκων ἐμὲ σοφώτατον εἶναι; οὐ γὰρ δήπου ψεύδεταί γε: οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῷ." καὶ πολὺν μὲν χρόνον ἠπόρουν τί ποτε λέγει: ἔπειτα μόγις πάνυ ἐπὶ ζήτησιν αὐτοῦ […] ἐτραπόμην. (Pl. *Ap*. 21b)
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> When I heard of this reply I asked myself: "Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? [τί ποτε αἰνίττεται, lit. "What is he riddling about"]? I am very conscious [σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ] that I am not wise at all [οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν, lit. "(in matters) neither great nor small"]; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie, it is not legitimate for him to do so [οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῷ]." For a long time I was at a loss [ἠπόρουν > ἀπορέω (v.), ἀπορία (n.) *inter alia*, see below] as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly [μόγις πάνυ] turned to […] investigation […]. (Cooper/Grube 21)

Socrates shatters the apparent simplicity of the truth that comes to him through the oracle's voice by hoping, even insisting, that his own voice must somehow speak the truth *as well*. The sense of the oracle's message has suddenly rendered Socrates' experience of himself into nonsense, just as the sense of Socrates' experience has rendered the oracle's message into nonsense. As if a curtain on a quiet stage has just been drawn back to reveal a violent struggle, the apparent consonance of viewpoints that Socrates expressed in 20e-21a has been split open to reveal its original dissonance: each music, as it were, here confronts the other as noise. Particular attention, first of all, must be paid to the ethical structure of Socrates' vocabulary in expressing the denial of wisdom that leads to this dissonance: when he says (in Grube's translation) "I am very conscious that I am not wise at all," the phrase he uses to describe the precise quality of

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response, as the call to a practice, must be able *to suspend the apparently inevitable closure belonging to interpretation*" (Warnek 2005, 96, 97, latter emphasis mine).

his awareness is σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ. The verb οἶδα (without the συν- prefix) is a common verb form that usually translates simply as “I know.” The συν- prefix, combined with the reflexive dative pronoun ἐμαυτῷ (“myself”), alters its meaning subtly but significantly. Whereas Grube, with good authority (LSJ III.), takes σύνοιδα as simply an emphatic form of οἶδα (hence the “very”), σύνοιδα also (per LSJ II.) denotes knowledge of a common object *shared with* (σύν [prep.] = with, along with) another subject.[43] In Socrates’ case, the common object of knowledge is Socrates himself, and the other subject who shares this knowledge is – Socrates again, after the act of ethical self-reflection has concluded.[44] The subject of this self-reflection delivers a verdict on its object – that this guy over here, Socrates, is not wise at all – and proceeds to share this knowledge *of* itself *with* itself (ἐμαυτῷ) as it would with another subject. In effect, by accepting the interpretive voice of this ‘other Socrates’ when it has judged his wisdom, Socrates at this point *makes himself complicit in and responsible to himself and only himself*. It must be stressed, furthermore, that this ethical structure, the relation of self to self embedded in Socrates’ vocabulary here, is *not yet* dialogic in the proper sense. Having posed the question of his own wisdom to himself, he definitively answers the question and silences his (internal) questioner. Digress is completely resolved by a subsequent congress: the case is closed.

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[43] It is worth noting that the LSJ itself lists this passage from the *Apology* under I.a., where its meaning boils down to “to know something from one’s experience of someone or something such that one can bear witness to it.” Socrates’ statement would then translate roughly (and maximally) as “I know from my experience of myself, and can bear witness to the fact, that *etc*.” ἔξοιδα (a word especially favored by Sophocles) and κάτοιδα both mean “to know thoroughly or very well” in a sense closely corresponding to Grube’s preferred σύνοιδα III. and would have been available to Plato; although the usage of these latter verbs appears mostly restrained to tragedy, it is interesting to note that of the three compounds, only σύνοιδα takes a reflexive pronoun. The philological point I make here, I think, remains equally true whether one takes σύνοιδα in sense I.a. or II., both of which (relying solely on LSJ’s witnesses) appear to be somewhat more well-attested in contemporary Attic Greek than Grube’s preferred sense III. The discrete act of συνείδησις to which Socrates refers requires (a) that he actively take himself as an object of his own knowledge, i.e. enter into an ethical relationship with himself, (b) that the self-knowledge he achieves be incorporated into his awareness *as if* another subject had achieved it and shared it with him, and (c) that he can readily bear witness to this knowledge as certain and true.

[44] This verbal shading is ignored even by Vlastos in his magisterial reading of this and other passages in Plato concerning Socrates’ claims to knowledge: Gregory Vlastos, “Socrates’ Disavowal of Knowledge,” in Vlastos 1994, 39-66 (see esp. 42).

In view of what follows, however, we likewise cannot afford to downplay the extraordinary character of this initial ethical achievement – and this achievement is not limited to the fact that Socrates manages to separate himself from himself and give judgment on himself as another. What is most significant about the initial act of ethical self-reflection that figures the voice of this ‘other Socrates’ is that it directly paves the way for Socrates’ extraordinary reckoning with the voice of the oracle. Socrates’ examination of his own wisdom has already opened and prepared a space of *possible dialogue* in which other positions, other assessments, other interpretations of its object can be – but have not yet been – voiced. The advent of the oracle’s contrarian voice into this ethical space, its entry into conversation about a common object, now begins to transform into kinetic energy what Socrates’ own ethical examination had stored up as potential energy. In one of the few and vital instances in the Platonic corpus where Socrates applies this (quintessentially Socratic-Platonic) term to himself, Socrates freely admits that the irruption of the oracle into his ethical awareness put him “at a complete loss” (ἠπόρουν > ἀπορέω [v.]), into the condition called *aporia* (ἀπορία). The ethical synthesis Socrates achieved beforehand in “shar[ing] with myself the knowledge [σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ] that I am not wise at all” has now disintegrated, and he must find a way to form a new συνείδησις, a new *con-science*, that integrates the oracle’s voice and his own within a stable, common language for conversation. Like Oedipus, whose aporetic horror derived from the fact that his voice had unknowingly debased the normative language of space and movement it was meant to protect and preserve, Socrates, in entering the suspense of error concerning wisdom, faces the possibility that the normative language he and his contemporaries use to talk about wisdom only enacts a similar debasement of its meaning. Moreover, the possibility that everyone, including Socrates, is dead wrong, even tragically misguided, when they talk about wisdom is what ultimately makes Socrates' ethical aporia the occasion for a capital trial in Athens. The conflict of interpretations, the clash of voices that Socrates experiences in his own person, *about* his own person, does not merely concern the authenticity of his ethical self-awareness as such – a crisis which would perhaps be sufficient to cause dismay on Socrates' part, but would not in itself pose significant ethical and political risks for him. The oracle could very well have contradicted Socrates' self-evaluation on his knowledge of arithmetic, or his manner of dress, or his culinary skills. Because nothing other than wisdom itself *in toto* – access to and communication of the truth by human beings – is the central term in both interpretations, and because this concept has now become a locus of risk, this conflict concerns every subject who has any stake at all in a truth arrived at by interpretation. Most distantly, that includes us; most immediately, it includes the entire city of Athens in the late 5th century BCE. And it is in the context of this city and its citizens that Socrates yet again distinguishes himself from the tragic tradition – and from Oedipus, whose situation in many respects he shares – by taking the aporia of error not as a terminus but as a point of departure for a renewed effort of interpretation. Through the practice of dialogue, as Socrates presents it in the *Apology*, he tries to resolve his ethical aporia, the dissonance shared by human and divine interpretations of (his) wisdom, by reinventing the normative language about wisdom so as to reconcile his interpretation with that of the god.

Just as the concept of ‘wisdom’ is no longer so transparent that it does not require interpretation, becoming instead a question that must be answered, so the ‘wise person’ – and let us not forget that the oracle puts Socrates at the very top of this genus – is no longer an entity transparent to himself, but instead a question posed to himself about himself. To seek an answer to this question that he has become through the interpretive noise of the oracle’s voice, Socrates turns to others, to the domain of politics, and to the practice of dialogue proper – where his own mode of living becomes just as much a source of noise, an incessantly contrarian voice addressed to others’ modes of living. This turn to politics, it must be noted, while it represents a necessary extension of Socrates’ ethical project, modulates the suspense of error from Socrates’ ethical relation into his political relations. The ethical risk that attaches itself to ‘wisdom’ in the face-off between Socrates’ voice and that of the oracle now becomes a political danger attached to the ‘wise man’ in the face-off between Socrates’ voice and those of his interlocutors. As usual, furthermore, the risks Socrates knowingly faces in his dialogic peregrinations, as one who *denies* himself wisdom, adumbrate the far more dire risks that his interlocutors unknowingly face in *claiming* wisdom for themselves. The three groups he “investigates” (ζήτησιν 21b), through their dialogic responses, indirectly reveal different kinds of risk attached to the outright claim of wisdom. I want to focus here on the first two groups, the statesmen and the poets. Socrates’ encounter with the statesmen lays much of the groundwork for what is to follow with the poets:

> ἦλθον ἐπί τινα τῶν δοκούντων σοφῶν εἶναι, ὡς ἐνταῦθα εἴπερ που ἐλέγξων τὸ μαντεῖον καὶ ἀποφανῶν τῷ χρησμῷ ὅτι “οὑτοσὶ ἐμοῦ σοφώτερός ἐστι, σὺ δ' ἐμὲ ἔφησθα.” διασκοπῶν οὖν τοῦτον […] ἦν δέ τις τῶν πολιτικῶν πρὸς ὃν ἐγὼ σκοπῶν τοιοῦτόν τι ἔπαθον, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, καὶ διαλεγόμενος αὐτῷ--ἔδοξέ μοι οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφὸς ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, εἶναι δ' οὔ: κἄπειτα ἐπειρώμην αὐτῷ δεικνύναι ὅτι οἴοιτο μὲν εἶναι σοφός, εἴη δ' οὔ. ἐντεῦθεν οὖν τούτῳ τε ἀπηχθόμην καὶ πολλοῖς τῶν παρόντων. (Pl. *Ap.* 21b-21d)

> I went to one of those reputed wise [δοκούντων σοφῶν εἶναι, including "those who appear to be wise," "those who think (themselves) to be wise," and "those who are thought (by others) to be wise"], thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: "This man is wiser than I, but you said I was." Then, when I examined this man – […] he was one of our public men [τις τῶν πολιτικῶν] – my experience was something like this: I thought that he appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not. I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise, but that he was not. As a result he came to dislike me, and so did many of the bystanders. (Cooper/Grube 21)

Before outlining how Socrates' encounters uncover different kinds of risk in store for those who claim wisdom, I would like to make two general points about Socrates' pursuit of dialogue that make their initial appearance in this passage. First: it cannot be emphasized enough that, in the wake of his aporetic experience, Socrates' self-proclaimed purpose in turning to the investigation of his fellow Athenians through dialogue is basically a reactionary and restorative one on behalf of his own – and presumably his contemporaries' – judgments about wisdom. He sets out, as he says, ὡς […] ἐλέγξων τὸ μαντεῖον (21c), "in order to refute [ἐλέγχω] the oracle" – in order to silence the noise that its response has forced into both his ethical awareness and the language of wisdom.[45] It is almost as if Callicles' scoffing in the *Gorgias* were now placed into the mouth of Socrates: 'Apollo, surely you must be joking by saying that no one is wiser than me – a person who doesn't think he's wise at all? For if you're being serious, won't the way we talk and think about wisdom be turned upside down, and won't everything we do with regards to wisdom be the opposite of what we should do?' The second part of Socrates' declaration of purpose underscores this boldness further: ὡς […] ἀποφανῶν τῷ χρησμῷ (21c) is far more muscular than Grube's "say to [the oracle]": ἀποφαίνω means "to declare, make known, or prove" (LSJ A.II.) with a strong undertone of making something directly manifest to the senses so as to be irrefutable (φαίνω) – in other words, a verb more suited to describing the declaration of an oracle to a man than that of a man to an oracle. That Socrates imagines himself in a position to *reply* to an oracle at all already sets him quite apart from virtually every other personage in ancient Greek literature who comes to deal with oracular pronouncements. If one is dismayed or confused by an oracle, the most one can typically arrogate to oneself is to ask the oracle another, more focused question, one putatively less likely to yield an ambiguous response. But to engage the prophet of Apollo in the sort of animated, vernacular conversation Socrates imagines – "οὑτοσὶ ἐμοῦ σοφώτερός ἐστι, σὺ δ' ἐμὲ ἔφησθα" (21c; "This guy here is wiser than me, but you said I [was the wisest]!") – is practically comic, verging on the irreverent or even openly impious. We are quite far indeed, at this point in the narrative, from the view taken by many scholars who – primarily, no doubt, with the intent to exculpate Socrates of impiety – want to construe his pursuit of the philosophical way of life in terms of unreflectively pious dedication to a divine mission.[46] Socrates' piety – if it can be called such – is the fruit of long and perilous labor in the fields of interpretation, and only later does it become the food of his convictions. Both the expectation that he can refute the word of a god, and the kind of street-level banter in which Socrates anticipates this refutation, clearly exacerbate the risks of his situation as he faces down capital charges of impiety. By one and the same token, however, Socrates offers an ironic 'acting-out' of his auditors' indignity, directed at a god who would declare this incorrigible wise-ass as the wisest of all mortal men. Socrates' playful but purposeful impiety and his conscious self-endangerment form a dialogic image of his auditors' unconscious impiety and self-endangerment in satirical miniature; his voice impersonates both Socrates himself *qua* aloof, ironic interrogator and the dullest and most reactionary of his listeners. In essence, the dialogic voice of the 'other Socrates' – the detached, scrupulous, negative mask that scrutinizes both the face it conceals from the world and the world from which it conceals the face – never does cede its place to either the voice of the oracle or the din of the crowd. It only strives towards speaking a common language with both.

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[45] Arieti expresses the view that "Socrates' simultaneous belief and disbelief" in the oracle constitutes "a classic instance of tragic *hamartia*" (Arieti 1991, 159), even going so far as to claim in a note that "his *hamartia* is just like that of Oedipus, who both believes and disbelieves the Delphic oracle" (n. 8, 164). While this idea reflects a comparative approach to tragedy and philosophy amenable to my own, I think Arieti's focus on the issue of belief rather than the issue of meaning obscures this point in his argument. By focusing on Socrates' "simultaneous belief and disbelief" without exploring how this dialogic attitude plays out in the process of interpretation, Arieti's idea only telescopes the diachronic dimension of his narrative into an all-too-neat paradox. More importantly, however, it begs the question of what "belief" in anything might entail when one does not yet understand the meaning of the thing in which one is to believe or disbelieve, as Socrates does throughout his story and perhaps even beyond its end. Secondly, I see nothing that is necessarily tragic, and indeed much that is resolutely anti-tragic, about the practical, personal, and political results of Socrates' reckoning with the oracle – that hypothesis is the bedrock for much of my argument here. As for the comparison to Oedipus, similarity of interpretive situations does not entail congruity of responses: if Plato had Sophocles' tragedy directly in mind at all when narrating Socrates' process of interpretation, it was not as a model but as an antagonist. The point of repeating certain elements of Oedipus' reaction to the Delphic oracle in Socrates' reaction – and these elements are numerous and very rich, as Arieti is right to point out – is not merely to reproduce, but rather to comment on and respond to the tragic tradition in which such narrative situations involving oracles had an established place and range of meaning.

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[46] A contemporary treatment by Bussanich, for instance, is at pains to exclude all possibility of impiety in Socrates' conduct towards the oracle: John Bussanich, "Socrates and Religious Experience," in Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar 2006, 200-213 (see esp. 200-206). My own broader view on the question, which I do not have space to treat in detail here, coincides almost precisely with that of M.F. Burnyeat, "The Impiety of Socrates," in: *Plato's* Euthyphro, Apology, *and* Crito: *Critical Essays*, ed. Rachana Kamtekar

The second general point that must be made before getting to the specific risks assumed by the statesmen and the poets involves what I will call the ontological status of 'wisdom' and 'the wise man' at the point in Socrates' narrative when he turns to dialogue. If Socrates' acute *perception* of the dissonance between his own and the oracle's 'voicings' of wisdom motivates his turn to dialogue, what he discovers in the course of his conversations with various representative individuals in Athens is their chronic *deafness* to a dissonance of a different sort in their own voices. It is all too easy

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(New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 150-162. The seminal essay for contemporary debate on the problem of Socrates' piety is, of course, Gregory Vlastos' "Socratic Piety," *op. cit.* 49-71.

to ascribe this latter dissonance, furthermore, to a failure on the part of Socrates' interlocutors to negotiate the (threadbare) dichotomy between appearance and reality, or 'seeming' and 'being' wise – though this passage positively (and necessarily) teems with the various Greek terms that delineate between seeming and being. I think that this portion of Socrates' narrative can only be adequately understood in light of the profound ethical experience that serves as its motivation, namely, the birth of what I have called interpretive conscience in Socrates' experience of aporia. Because the ontological status of 'wisdom' and 'the wise man' has suffered such a serious blow through the effects of the oracle's proclamation, Socrates can no longer rely on these ideas as absolute givens, as reliable names for reliable realities. Rather, the only thing he can do in good faith is go forth and examine 'wisdom,' as it were, placed firmly inside its scare quotes, as a locus of indeterminacy and potential risk. Socrates expresses quite subtly the attitude of disenchanted apprehension that guides him throughout his dialogic examinations: he does not approach his first victim, for instance, as "one of those who *are* wise" (which would be τινα τῶν σοφῶν *ὄντων*) but rather as "one of those *reputed to be* wise" (τινα τῶν *δοκούντων* σοφῶν *εἶναι*, 21b). The careful locution indicates how 'wisdom' has been dislodged from the ontological pride of place it had enjoyed before, and makes this dislocation palpable to the minds of Socrates' auditors. The meaningful reality, if any, of 'wisdom' can only be justified by the way of life of individuals who claim to *live* in and through the language of wisdom; their way of life, on the other hand, can only be justified by the logical coherence and normative force in their language of wisdom – a language that now bears the burden of proof against the oracle's clearly very different language. In short, if Socrates is to refute the language of wisdom by which the oracle judges him to be the wisest of men, he must vindicate the language – one among many languages, perhaps – by which men judge other men to be wise. This he can only do by demanding the very highest standards of coherence from the language of men – demanding that when men talk about wisdom, they speak with a single voice about a single truth, and that when men live wisdom, they live a single way of life governed by the same single truth. While Socrates uses a language of 'seeming' and 'being' to narrate his own experience in the dialogues about wisdom, he only does so by working the suddenly quite fluid and precarious boundary between them – by living not on the side of 'being' against mere 'seeming,' but rather in the suspense of error *between* 'seeming' and 'being.' Moreover, Socrates' cultivation of this suspense through dialogue depends upon the action of interpretive language, of voices and voicings, in both constructing and deconstructing interpretive authority. In essence, each group of Socrates' interlocutors remains deaf to the nature of their own voices, claiming for those voices an original and authoritative 'wisdom' that originates in, and is authorized by, voices which are not their own. The dialogues that Socrates narrates can be read as his interlocutors' involuntary and unsuccessful education in the risks of interpretive ventriloquism: all unawares, they become other than themselves, create dissonance in themselves, by speaking in any voice but their own.

In this light, the chief failure of the statesmen in 21b-e in regards to wisdom is their lack of the kind of ethical self-reflexivity that allowed Socrates, for one, to deliver judgment on his own wisdom in the voice of another: theirs is the most basic failure of interpretive conscience. Because they have not made the ethical effort to find a vocabulary of wisdom in which they can carry on an interpretive conversation with themselves about themselves, their voices simply impersonate other voices speaking about them: τοιοῦτόν τι ἔπαθον […] -- ἔδοξέ μοι οὗτος [sc. ὁ πολιτικὸς] δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφὸς ἄλλοις τε πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, εἶναι δ' οὔ (21c; "my experience was something like this: I thought that this [statesman] appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not"). The diffuse and indiscriminate voice of "many other people" (ἄλλοις […] πολλοῖς ἀνθρώποις) produces a sort of apparition of the 'wise man' – a δοκεῖν εἶναι ('seeming-to-be') persona – and the statesman, all unawares, obliges them by transforming himself into this very same apparition. His capacity for self-reflection is thus limited to reflection in a borrowed mirror, as it were: his political self, concatenated from others' judgments, serves as stand-in for an ethical self. He appears to himself to be wise – and with a vengeance (μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ, "*most of all* to himself," emphasis mine) – only because he is reflected back to himself through the medium of other voices. The ethical failure of the statesman, once it is repeated often and by enough people, erodes whatever value the concepts of 'wisdom' and 'the wise man' may have as media of interpretive conscience – the very value Socrates seeks to reclaim for the language of wisdom – and flattens out this value into an instrument of self-interest and relative advantage in the political realm.

The most significant verbal feature of Socrates' assessment of the statesman's wisdom, furthermore, is the fact that the latter's condition of seeming-wise (δοκεῖν μὲν εἶναι σοφὸς, 21c) just as much as his condition of not-being-wise (εἶναι δ' οὔ [σοφός]) are grammatically and conceptually dependent upon the way these conditions *appear* to Socrates' faculty of interpretive judgment. Socrates does *not* say 'this man seemed wise, but was not,' a statement which would implicitly fix 'being' and 'seeming' as absolute categories of which Socrates implicitly claims a privileged knowledge, and thus also a knowledge of ‘wisdom’ *per se*. Instead, he says (in the most literal terms) “this man *seemed to me* [ἔδοξέ μοι] to seem to be wise […], but not to be wise.” At no point, then, does Socrates position himself beyond the limits of his individual ability to interpret and judge; if the oracle has taught him anything by now, it is certainly the fact that this faculty of intepretation exists in the suspense of an error that patiently waits to be revealed by the response of another. We are only too apt to forget that this same Socrates has already had his *negative* self-assessment about ‘being wise’ uprooted by the oracle and cast into the uncertain currents of ‘seeming-being,’ and that this aporetic experience has led him directly into the dialogic effort to reassert a stable ontological status for ‘wisdom.’

Yet in his actual dialogue with the statesman, ironically, Socrates repeats the oracle’s demolition of ‘seeming’ and ‘being’ rather than finding the means to recover from it. The statesman suffers precisely the same uprooting of his *positive* self-assessment about ‘being wise’ through Socrates’ response, where Socrates speaks in the voice of the oracle and the statesman speaks in the voice of (a previous) Socrates – but with decidedly different results: κἄπειτα ἐπειρώμην αὐτῷ δεικνύναι ὅτι οἴοιτο μὲν εἶναι σοφός, εἴη δ' οὔ. ἐντεῦθεν οὖν τούτῳ τε ἀπηχθόμην καὶ πολλοῖς τῶν παρόντων (21c-d); “I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise [ὅτι οἴοιτο μὲν εἶναι σοφός], but that he was not. As a result he came to dislike me [ἀπηχθόμην, lit. “I came to be hated”], and so did many of the bystanders” [Cooper/Grube 21]). Socrates refuses to add his own voice to the chorus of admirers whose collective ‘voicing’ of the statesman’s wisdom issues from the statesman’s own mouth, just as the oracle refused to put its voice in harmony with Socrates' individual 'voicing' of his non-wisdom to himself. The situation with the oracle, as we have seen, puts the authenticity of both Socrates' ethical awareness and 'wisdom' itself at risk, imposing the task of dialogue on him as the means to restore their authenticity. The situation with the statesman does more than just renew the oracle's threat to the authenticity of 'wisdom' instead of resolving it, by the strange twist already noted. More importantly, it repeats for Socrates in the intersubjective domain of politics what had already transpired in the intrasubjective domain of ethics: *aporia*, the condition of danger in which one loses one's grasp on the language one shares with oneself, now becomes *apechtheia* (ἀπέχθεια [n.] = intense hatred, enmity, abhorrence > ἀπηχθόμην 21d), the condition of danger in which one loses one's grasp on the language one shares with others. The crucial mis-step made by Socrates here lies in his expectation that the statesman already possesses an interpretive conscience that has developed enough to admit the kind of ethical aporia Socrates himself has already experienced – that he already possesses a dialogic voice that can confront itself as another and make other voices present in itself. What Socrates finds instead is a voice entirely subsumed by other voices, a pseudo-authoritative language that simply speaks itself in the absence of any identifiable authority, an intersubjectivity in place of a subjectivity – in short, the veritable incarnation of interpretive irresponsibility. The statesman's potential embrace of the ethical self-endangerment to which Socrates invites him rebounds instead against Socrates himself in the shape of the latter's political endangerment at the hands of others. In trying to defeat the oracle's ethical kindynology by using dialogue as an *ad hoc* political technology, Socrates has only driven the oracle's point further home by putting everything he has – ethics and politics, life and language – at stake in an increasingly dangerous game. In a Heraclitean turn, Socrates' pursuit of dialogue has made what at first seemed to be the path up and out of the labyrinth of risk and responsibility identical with the path that leads down into its very center: ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή ["The road up and the road down are one and the same"; fr. 60 Diels-Kranz]. Thus we can say that Socratic dialogue aims to *become* a technology that restores the originality and authority of the voices that take part in it, and integrates their disparate languages into a shared vocabulary; nonetheless, it can only *be* and *remain* a kindynology that constantly reveals how voices in dialogue displace and undermine themselves and each other, and that dis-integrates the language through which they seek reconciliation.

Socrates' dialogue with the poets, furthermore, not only reveals that they lack interpretive conscience as much as the statesmen, but gradually heightens the ethical and political condition of risk in which Socrates stands. In other words, the attempt to use dialogue as a technology to restore 'wisdom' and 'the wise man' to their previous status consistently bears its fruit only as a kindynology in which these same concepts and the subjects who make use of them are put at risk. The increasing endangerment of Socrates, moreover, yet again offers a dialogic mirror-image of the greater danger in which his interlocutors continually exist but of which they remain continually ignorant. Like the voice of the 'wise' statesman, which originates in and is authorized by a diffuse, collective voice that the statesman appropriates for his own, the voice of the 'wise' poets can make no substantial claim to an authority that originates in the speaker himself:

> μετὰ γὰρ τοὺς πολιτικοὺς ᾖα ἐπὶ τοὺς ποιητὰς […] ὡς ἐνταῦθα ἐπ' αὐτοφώρῳ καταληψόμενος ἐμαυτὸν ἀμαθέστερον ἐκείνων ὄντα. ἀναλαμβάνων οὖν αὐτῶν τὰ ποιήματα ἅ μοι ἐδόκει μάλιστα πεπραγματεῦσθαι αὐτοῖς, διηρώτων ἂν αὐτοὺς τί λέγοιεν, ἵν' ἅμα τι καὶ μανθάνοιμι παρ' αὐτῶν. […] ὡς ἔπος γὰρ εἰπεῖν ὀλίγου αὐτῶν ἅπαντες οἱ παρόντες ἂν βέλτιον ἔλεγον περὶ ὧν αὐτοὶ ἐπεποιήκεσαν. ἔγνων οὖν αὖ καὶ περὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐ σοφίᾳ ποιοῖεν ἃ ποιοῖεν, ἀλλὰ φύσει τινὶ καὶ ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντεις καὶ οἱ χρησμῳδοί: καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι λέγουσι μὲν πολλὰ

> καὶ καλά, ἴσασιν δὲ οὐδὲν ὧν λέγουσι. τοιοῦτόν τί μοι ἐφάνησαν πάθος καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ πεπονθότες, καὶ ἅμα ᾐσθόμην αὐτῶν διὰ τὴν ποίησιν οἰομένων καὶ τἆλλα σοφωτάτων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἃ οὐκ ἦσαν. (Pl. *Ap.* 22a-c)
>
> After the politicians, I went to the poets […] intending in their case to catch myself [ἐπ' αὐτοφώρῳ καταληψόμενος ἐμαυτὸν, lit. “to catch myself red-handed”] more ignorant than they. So I took up those poems with which they seemed to have taken the most trouble and asked them what they meant, in order that I might at the same time learn something from them. […] Almost all the bystanders might have explained the poems better than their authors could. I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge [οὐ σοφίᾳ ποιοῖεν ἃ ποιοῖεν] but by some inborn talent [φύσει τινὶ] and by inspiration [ἐνθουσιάζοντες], like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say. The poets seemed to me to have had a similar experience [τοιοῦτόν τί (…) πάθος (…) πεπονθότες]. At the same time I saw that, because of their poetry [διὰ τὴν ποίησιν], they thought themselves very wise [sc. the wisest] men in other respects [οἰομένων καὶ τἆλλα σοφωτάτων εἶναι ἀνθρώπων], which they were not (Cooper/Grube 22).

Even more transparently than the statesman, the poets do not speak their wisdom in their own voices. Socrates sets aside the question of whether or not their *poems* contain actual wisdom – indeed, by conspicuously tabling this question, he leaves it open that they very well might – and focuses purely on whether or not the *poets* themselves, actively speaking for themselves in dialogue, are in fact the authoritative origin of this wisdom. He finds that, in place of the *vox populi* so thoroughly imitated by the statesman that it becomes his own voice, the poets claim for their own human voices a wisdom that rightly belongs to a divine power that speaks through them – whether, as Socrates says, by an indwelling receptivity to divine influence that passively bears fruit among human beings (φύσει τινὶ 22c, roughly “by a certain innate generative power”) or by a similarly passive capacity to be possessed by a divine spirit that takes control of the poets’ faculties in order to achieve its own ends (ἐνθουσιάζοντες 22c, lit. “possessed or inspired by a god,” or even “in a state of ecstasy”). In other words, the poet’s voice can only exercise its eminently active and creative power – of which the chief evidence is the tangibility of that definitive “created thing,” the poem itself (ποίημα) – by making itself into the passive instrument of a divine voice; they rightly possess neither the wisdom their voices speak through their poems nor these voices themselves in the moment of poetic utterance.

Hence when Socrates goes on to claim that the poets οὐ σοφίᾳ ποιοῖεν ἃ ποιοῖεν (21e-22c), literally “they do not create the things they create by means of wisdom,” he clearly means a wisdom that the poets themselves would possess as speaking subjects – i.e. the very wisdom he is out to discover, articulate, and defend against the oracle – not the wisdom that may very well belong to the divine power that acts through them.

Like the statesman, then, the poets are dependent upon an origin and authority other than themselves for the wisdom attributed to and transmitted by their voices, and they endanger themselves through the tacit plagiarism they commit in claiming ownership of this wisdom. The poets’ failure to measure up on the scale of interpretive conscience is in some ways, however, even more devastating than that of the statesman: not only are the poets’ voices not their rightful possessions, but their voices in turn depend upon *other voices* – ἅπαντες οἱ παρόντες (22b), “all those who were present” – to yield the full measure of whatever meaningful wisdom the former communicate. A divine voice has to speak *through* them, and other human voices have to speak *for* them, if the ‘poet’s voice’ is to speak for itself at all and the ‘poet’s wisdom’ is to speak on behalf human wisdom in general. Whereas the political hyperreflectivity, as it were, of the statesman’s voice at least functionally stands in for an ethically self-reflexive voice, the poets emerge from Socratic cross-examination as ethical *and* political non-entities. Their interpretive irresponsibility, their incapacity to answer for what they say and be answered in turn, is so deep that it nearly beggars description: theirs are voices that truly ‘speak themselves,’ like automata, in the complete absence of a human subject that both speaks and knows what it speaks. Where ‘wisdom’ is concerned, trying to weigh the poets on the scales of interpretive conscience – evaluating their ability to converse with themselves and others about their relationship to ‘wisdom’ – makes as much sense as expecting my word processing program to converse with itself and me about its relationship to my dissertation.

Nonetheless, there is still at least one point in Socrates’ treatment of the poets that undercuts what would otherwise be a savage indictment of these particular ‘wise men’ with a kindyneutic turn, implicating Socrates and his auditors in the self-endangerment of the poets. When he locates the authorizing source of the poets’ ‘wisdom’ in their passive-receptive capacity for divine inspiration, he compares them to οἱ θεομάντεις καὶ οἱ χρησμῳδοί: καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι λέγουσι μὲν πολλὰ καὶ καλά, ἴσασιν δὲ οὐδὲν ὧν λέγουσι (22c; “seers and prophets [θεομάντεις, lit. ‘divinely-inspired prophets’ and χρησμῳδοί, lit. ‘oracle-chanters’] who also say many fine things without any understanding [ἴσασιν […] οὐδὲν, lit. ‘they know nothing’] of what they say” [Cooper/Grube 22]). Here Socrates addresses specifically and explicitly the rhetorical attitude which, in the context of both the passage from the *Gorgias* discussed above and Socrates’ report of the oracle’s message at 21a, I previously called “prophetic irresponsibility.” Socrates’ ironic assumption of this attitude in the passage from the *Gorgias*, as I argue above, provokes reflection on how the philosopher’s voice achieves ethical authenticity and autonomy through conscious self-negation or -elision. In the earlier passage from the *Apology*, it similarly polarizes and brings into dialogic confrontation the contradictory threads running through Socrates’ voice in its context: the certainty of divine knowledge against the uncertainty of human interpretation, the exoteric here-and-now of conventional courtroom rhetoric against the esoteric beyond of gods and truths, the language one speaks in one’s own voice against the language one speaks by reference to another’s.

Both of these parallels, I think, serve to bring out the dialogic motivation behind Socrates’ reference to prophets and oracles in his characterization of poetic inspiration at 22a-c. We cannot forget that Socrates’ *own* oracle, the *interpretandum* which has given impetus to his entire undertaking, was issued as a response to Chaerephon’s question by the Pythian priestess of Apollo (ἥ Πυθία 21a), herself one of those “oracle-chanters” (χρησμῳδοί) who, like the poets, “say many fine things without any understanding of what they say.” Chaerephon’s transmission of this response to Socrates is structurally identical to the priestess’ transmission of the god’s response, or the poets’ transcription of their divine inspiration: all are merely links in a chain of indirect discourse, each one not acting or speaking *in propria persona* but simply “suffering the same kind of suffering” as the one before (rendering τοιοῦτόν τί (…) πάθος (…) πεπονθότες, 22c, very literally). Unlike the priestess, Chaerephon, or even the poets, however, Socrates claims outright that he does not understand what the divine voice is actually saying when it speaks to him (τί ποτε λέγει ὁ θεός, καὶ τί ποτε αἰνίττεται; 21b; “Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle?” [Cooper/Grube 21]). Socrates’ self-proclaimed lack of understanding, a direct analogue to his denial of wisdom, breaks the spell of “prophetic irresponsibility” under which such chains of indirect discourse stand by discovering that there is no necessary and binding relation between the truth one speaks and the one who speaks it, between language and life: Socrates himself would have no more or less access to the oracle’s meaning if he repeated it to himself or to others a hundred times. The person-to-person transmission of indirect discourse stops with him, in effect, because he allows this discourse to *address* him as a problem that threatens the integration of language and life in his ethical self-reflection. The oracle's language is no longer merely spoken *through* him; rather, it is now spoken *to* him. That he insists on mutually re-integrating language and life through the pursuit of meaning, on relating the subject's voice and the subject itself through the pursuit of knowledge – these are the aims for the sake of which he undertakes the task of interpretation, with its hidden risks and entangling responsibilities. The poets' failure to undertake the task of interpretation with the very gifts that divine wisdom lavishes upon them corresponds to their failure to relate the voices they project with the lives they live. True, Socrates endangers himself with his auditors by interrogating poetry, yet another of the traditional cornerstones of wisdom in 5th- and 4th-century Greek culture; nonetheless, the dialogical counterpoint running through his attack is that the poets (not to mention Socrates' auditors) endanger themselves by transmitting poetry *without* interrogating it – or, even worse, without allowing poetry to interrogate *them*. Ultimately, the poets and their readers denigrate the divine wisdom with which they have been solemnly entrusted by simply not asking the archetypal question of the interpreter: "What does this mean?" Even the oracle's proclamation remains a sequence of arbitary signs, without a true speaker and without a true hearer, until this crucial question is asked.

Now, at this point, it must be admitted that there is an extraordinarily fine line separating the nature of Socrates' voice as I have described it thus far – that is, as a conscious, kindyneutic play of impersonations that binds together his dialogic interrogation of others with his self-interrogation – and the nature of the voices he hears in conversation with the statesman and the poets. *No one Socrates encounters* – neither the statesman, nor the poets, nor (most importantly!) Socrates himself – *truly speaks for* *himself, in his own voice*.[47] Insofar as this is true for all of them alike, none of them has any legitimate claim to a wisdom that originates in, and derives its authority from, the respective human subject that their voice represents to others through language. Their ways of speaking and their ways of life must necessarily remain out of tune with each other as long as they *believe* that, as subjects of speech, they possess their own voices, and as subjects of knowledge, they possess their own wisdom – for as long as wisdom is something communicable in speech, these must be two sides of the same coin.

The delicate difference that separates Socrates from his interlocutors, nonetheless, takes root in the denial of his own wisdom that was the first fruit of his ethical self-reflection. In precisely this act of conscience, of standing apart from himself and speaking about himself in the voice of another, Socrates discovers that as far as both his own wisdom and his own voice are concerned, *he has nothing to say for himself*:[48] he only comes to possess his own voice fully when he speaks from the position of another, just as he only comes to possess wisdom by denying that he possesses any of it at all. And what a difference this difference makes, as we see in his reflections following the exchange with the statesman:

> πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν δ' οὖν ἀπιὼν ἐλογιζόμην ὅτι τούτου μὲν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐγὼ σοφώτερός εἰμι: κινδυνεύει μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲν καλὸν κἀγαθὸν εἰδέναι, ἀλλ' οὗτος μὲν οἴεταί τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἴομαι: ἔοικα γοῦν τούτου γε σμικρῷ τινι αὐτῷ τούτῳ σοφώτερος εἶναι, ὅτι ἃ μὴ οἶδα οὐδὲ οἴομαι εἰδέναι. (Pl. *Ap.* 21d)
>
> So I withdrew and thought to myself: "I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile [οὐδὲν καλὸν κἀγαθὸν], but he thinks he knows something when he does not [οἴεταί τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς], whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know [ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα,

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[47] It is possible to see this characterization of Socrates as an implicit addition to, or even critique of, the modern critical problem of "Platonic anonymity," that is, Plato's refusal as a writer to speak in his own voice, or present his ideas as his own, in his dialogues. For a couple differing assessments of the significance of Plato's anonymity, see Ludwig Edelstein, "Platonic Anonymity" in Smith 1998, 183-200; Paul Plass, "Philosophic Anonymity and Irony in the Platonic Dialogues," *op. cit.* 201-220.

[48] As Warnek puts it quite neatly: "The singularity of Socrates lies in the fact that he would be nothing special at all. And this already intimates his great transgression" (Warnek 2005, 101).

> οὐδὲ οἴομαι]; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent [σμικρῷ τινι αὐτῷ τούτῳ, lit. “by this small thing”], that I do not think I know what I do not know [ἃ μὴ οἶδα οὐδὲ οἴομαι εἰδέναι].” (Cooper/Grube 21)

This passage marks a vital and striking shift in Socrates’ use of what I have called the language of wisdom, and thereby also a crucial refiguration of his elusive voice. Whereas the language of his original self-assessment applied a familiar human language in *negative* terms (‘not wise at all’), and the language of the oracle’s assessment of him applied an utterly foreign, divine language in *superlative* terms (‘wisest of all’), suddenly Socrates’ *negation* – quite counterintuitively! – here becomes the basis of a qualitative *comparison* (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου […] σοφώτερος, 21d: “wiser than this man”). How can the complete absence of a given quality in a certain entity – i.e., wisdom in Socrates – become a positive standard of comparison such that we can say the same quality is actually *more absent* in other entities, e.g. in the statesman? The only solution is to flip the script, as Socrates does, and talk about wisdom with a different voice – that is, reinterpret the positive character of wisdom as a quality possessed by human beings. What matters in his use of comparative terms is no longer relative degrees of presence, but rather relative degrees of absence: one cannot be more or less wise, only more or less unwise. By virtue of this semantic shift, his language now occupies a point precisely halfway between the positive human conception of wisdom and the equally positive, but diametrically opposed divine conception. By the same token, his voice now issues from a point somewhere between his own understanding and that of the oracular god.

In Socrates’ process of dialogic interpretation, we have seen how the formation of his ethical relation represented an initial interpretive response to himself, and how the aporetic confrontation with the oracle represented a definitive counter-response. In terms of this process, the partial impersonation of the oracular voice that we witness here, in the guise of Socrates’ shifting vocabulary, represents not so much a grand dialectical synthesis, a recovery of ethical self-identity on a higher plane, as it does the moment of Socrates’ voluntary entry into a state of suspense. The conversation he has carried on with himself, with the oracle, and with his fellow Athenians, has not, as it turns out, foreclosed on the meaning of wisdom as such: rather, it has opened this term up, brought it into play and put it at risk, in order to renew the promise of its inherent possibilities. Nor has this conversation divorced forever the subject of speech from the voice in which the subject speaks: it has only prised them apart in order to suggest the multitude of their possible relations, the many languages in which it is possible and perhaps even necessary to speak. Thus, as a subject who willingly takes risks with language and who consciously speaks in many voices at once, Socrates’ ethical self-reflection reacts to the dialogue with the statesman with a revised disavowal of knowledge – ἃ μὴ οἶδα οὐδὲ οἴομαι εἰδέναι (21d; “I do not think I know what I do not know”) – that functions dialogically as an intense positive stimulant for the work of interpretation. Where Socrates’ original disavowal of wisdom had a purely ethical origin and endpoint, this disavowal operates on both the political and ethical levels. On the one hand, it points an accusing finger at the poverty and barrenness of interpretive certainty, by virtue of which so many of his fellow Athenians think they already know what they do not know and feel no need to interpret further. On the other hand, it offers an open invitation to the relative wealth and fertility of interpretive suspense, by virtue of which Socrates enjoys an infinity of places, times, and occasions on which to begin thinking and interpreting all over again. If Socrates starts from the assumption that he has nothing to say for himself, then everything that can be said, and every voice in which it can be said, stand at his disposal as so many dangerous and thrilling possibilities for conversation.

Not only does Socrates both narrate and perform this kindyneutic opening-up of the voice and the subject in the *Apology*: it is also what leads him directly to the interpretation by means of which, at last, he finds a common language with the oracular response he originally set out to refute and silence. He now finds himself committed to this language – a language conspicuously not his own – as a prophet of an entirely new kind, one who impersonates other voices not in order to *deny* responsibility for them, but rather precisely in order to *assume* responsibility for them, to take up for himself the dangerous burden of interpreting them. Measuring the wisdom of the statesmen, poets, and craftsmen alike by the new language of ‘comparative absence’ described above, he finds that his own *non*-wisdom constantly falls short of theirs by the absence of the very same “small thing” (σμικρῷ τινι αὐτῷ τούτῳ, 21d) in each case – namely, the belief that he is wise. Returning, as it were, to the original conversation with the oracle that had been interrupted by the dialogues with his fellow citizens, he asks and answers a new question by dialogically occupying both his own position and that of the oracle at once: ὥστε με ἐμαυτὸν ἀνερωτᾶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ χρησμοῦ πότερα δεξαίμην ἂν οὕτως ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν, μήτε τι σοφὸς ὢν τὴν ἐκείνων σοφίαν μήτε ἀμαθὴς τὴν ἀμαθίαν, ἢ ἀμφότερα ἃ ἐκεῖνοι ἔχουσιν ἔχειν. ἀπεκρινάμην οὖν ἐμαυτῷ καὶ τῷ χρησμῷ ὅτι μοι λυσιτελοῖ ὥσπερ ἔχω ἔχειν (22e; “so that I asked [ἀνερωτᾶν] myself, on behalf of the oracle [ὑπὲρ τοῦ χρησμοῦ], whether I should prefer to be as I am, with neither their wisdom nor their ignorance, or to have both. The answer I gave [ἀπεκρινάμην] myself and the oracle was that it was to my advantage to be as I am” [Cooper/Grube 22]). Socrates’ partial impersonation of the oracle in addressing himself with its voice serves a distinct dialogic purpose in his process of interpretation: it grants *interrogative* force to the oracle’s original, purely *declarative* statement about Socrates’ wisdom. In short, the baffling “No one is wiser than Socrates” gives way to the provocative “Which man is wiser, the one who believes he is wise but is not, or the man who neither is wise nor believes he is wise?” Socrates’ answer, that the ‘wiser man’ is of the latter kind – his own kind – is inserted equally into three conversations: his ethical conversation with himself (ἀπεκρινάμην […] ἐμαυτῷ, “I answered myself”); his conversation with the oracle (ἀπεκρινάμην […] τῷ χρησμῷ, “I answered the oracle”); and the political conversation with the court, in which the narration of this imaginary response itself serves as an implicit response to the accusations of his fellow citizens (hypothetically: “in telling you how I answered then, I answer you now as well”). Because this threefold answer, however, necessarily adopts the oracle’s language of wisdom and changes its addressee from Socrates alone to every Athenian present in the court, Socrates *de facto* makes himself into the same sort of ethical and political problem for Athens that the oracle originally became for him: he invites others to put themselves at risk at the same time as he puts himself at risk in their eyes. And such an invitation – to give up the “small thing” of interpretive certainty and enter into the suspense of error, to give up one’s own voice to enter into a dizzying game of impersonations – is not easily taken.

As we have seen, Socrates’ efforts to refute the oracle have paradoxically made him into its advocate and its proxy before the entire political body of Athens. Having interpreted the oracle’s declaration as a provocative interrogation, and in full awareness of the danger in which he now stands as a result, he turns at the end of his narrative to reinterpreting its language as an *imperative* squarely directed at his own life and the lives of his auditors:

> ἐκ ταυτησὶ δὴ τῆς ἐξετάσεως, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πολλαὶ μὲν ἀπέχθειαί μοι γεγόνασι καὶ οἷαι χαλεπώταται καὶ βαρύταται, ὥστε πολλὰς διαβολὰς ἀπ' αὐτῶν γεγονέναι, ὄνομα δὲ τοῦτο λέγεσθαι, σοφὸς εἶναι: οἴονται γάρ με ἑκάστοτε οἱ παρόντες ταῦτα αὐτὸν εἶναι σοφὸν ἃ ἂν ἄλλον ἐξελέγξω. τὸ δὲ κινδυνεύει, ὦ ἄνδρες, τῷ ὄντι ὁ θεὸς σοφὸς εἶναι, καὶ ἐν τῷ χρησμῷ τούτῳ τοῦτο λέγειν, ὅτι ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία ὀλίγου τινὸς ἀξία ἐστὶν καὶ οὐδενός. καὶ φαίνεται τοῦτον λέγειν τὸν Σωκράτη, προσκεχρῆσθαι δὲ τῷ ἐμῷ ὀνόματι, ἐμὲ παράδειγμα ποιούμενος, ὥσπερ ἂν εἴποι ὅτι "οὗτος ὑμῶν, ὦ ἄνθρωποι, σοφώτατός ἐστιν, ὅστις ὥσπερ Σωκράτης ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ἄξιός ἐστι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν." ταῦτ' οὖν ἐγὼ μὲν ἔτι καὶ νῦν περιιὼν ζητῶ καὶ ἐρευνῶ κατὰ τὸν θεὸν καὶ τῶν ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων ἄν τινα οἴωμαι σοφὸν εἶναι: καὶ ἐπειδάν μοι μὴ δοκῇ, τῷ θεῷ βοηθῶν ἐνδείκνυμαι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι σοφός. (Pl. *Ap*. 22e-23b)
>
> As a result of this investigation, men of Athens, I acquired much unpopularity [πολλαὶ μὲν ἀπέχθειαί μοι γεγόνασι, lit. "many enmities (*apechtheiai*) arose against me"], of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden; many slanders came from these people and a reputation for wisdom [ὄνομα δὲ τοῦτο λέγεσθαι, σοφὸς εἶναι, more lit. "the name of 'wise man' came to be spoken (sc. about me)"], for in each case the bystanders thought that I myself possessed the wisdom that I proved that my interlocutor did not have. What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom [ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία, cf. 20e quoted above] is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example [παράδειγμα: *paradeigma* [n.] "pattern, model; precedent, example; lesson, warning" > Eng. *paradigm*], as if he said: "This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless [ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ἄξιός ἐστι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν]." So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me [κατὰ τὸν θεὸν] – and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god [τῷ θεῷ βοηθῶν] and show him that he is not wise. (Cooper/Grube 22)

In returning to the question of Socrates' 'slanderous' reputation as a wise man (σοφός), the narrative has come full circle to its original point of departure (at 20c-d) in the question posed by a hypothetical interlocutor who demands to know what Socrates has done to earn the reputation of a *sophos* if he is not, in fact, a Sophist proper. Where Socrates' carefully qualified claim to human wisdom in that passage provoked an outcry, his return to the term *sophos* here achieves a remarkable 'plural voicing' of this key term in the two competing languages of wisdom we have seen thus far.

In the language of Athens, the epithet *sophos* already speaks with a forked tongue. On the one hand, it is applied as a term of buoyant praise to the δοκούντες σοφοὶ εἶναι – a phrase that all at once signifies "those who appear to be wise," "those who think (themselves) to be wise,” and “those who are thought (by others) to be wise” (see 21b, quoted above) – among whom are the statesmen, poets, and craftsmen. On the other hand, it is applied as a dangerous slander against Socrates, who – in the praise-giving sense of the term – neither appears to be wise, nor thinks himself wise, nor is thought by others to be wise; instead, he comes to share in the same epithet by appearing to outstrip the wisdom of the δοκούντες σοφοὶ εἶναι, distinguishing himself as ‘wiser than the wise’ and making himself passionately despised for it.

In the language of the oracle – a language for which Socrates’ preceding narrative now appears as a strange and circuitous vindication – Socrates is indeed a *sophos*, just as he originally claimed at 20c-d, but this title comes to him without any particular charge of praise or blame. This is because Socrates’ interrogative reading of the oracle’s statement entails that wisdom, as we have seen, can only be attributed to human beings in terms of its greater or lesser *absence* as a quality in them. Following the logical dictates of this interpretation, Socrates concludes that the oracle has paradoxically made him the exemplary or paradigmatic case of human wisdom as such (παϱάδειγμα 23b), precisely because “he has recognized that he is truly worth nothing in regards to wisdom” (ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ἄξιός ἐστι τῆ ἀληθείᾳ πϱὸς σοφίαν, 23b). In place of the purely social function of praise or blame, his nomination as a *sophos* by the oracle bears not only a declarative and interrogative significance, but also, as we see now, the imperative force of a divine command to Socrates that compels him to bring language and life into confrontation through the practice of dialogue.

In both the human and divine languages of wisdom, then, Socrates both is and is not a *sophos*. By a supreme dialogical paradox, he must deny that he is a *sophos* in human terms by arguing that he *is*, in fact, a *sophos*, but only in Apollo's terms. In the effort to find a common language with both the god and the city, Socrates cannot help but 'voice' the term *sophos* plurally, speaking all its contradictory meanings at once. His paradigmatic interpretation of the oracle, after all, amounts to an injunction to make his life and his voice into the arena where all such meanings are dislodged from their positions of certainty, pitted against one another, and put at risk: the arena, in short, of interpretive conscience. As a result, Socrates puts his very "name" (ὄνομα 23a, b; see also Warnek 2005, 65f.) at risk – not only what others call him ('Socrates, the wise man'?), but also what value they give him, how they understand him. Socrates transforms this name into an interpretive question for all those who speak it: the kind of question that turns the respondent around to meet himself, question himself, and put himself at risk. Whenever we try to make sense of Socrates – his 'name,' voice, and life – we must also make sense of ourselves – our own 'names,' voices, and lives – caught up in the interminable and dangerous game of making sense.

Like Sophocles' Oedipus and Brecht's Galileo, Socrates sets his life and his voice before the city as a challenge to their powers of interpretive response: responding to any of these figures means making oneself complicit in his duplicitous language, joining him on the tightrope suspended between one possible meaning and another, between one possible subject and another. In Socrates' case, however, the inevitable fall from the tightrope does not throw the interpreter into an abyss, as it does with Oedipus or Galileo, nor does it bring him down softly on the safety net of certainty: the jolting fall from one tightrope is simply the first firm step one takes on another. For Socrates, what does remain certain and unshakeable lies not in any safety net below, but rather in the drive to travel the length of the rope ahead. The mandate that he reads in the god’s words, the command to face down the dangers of thought and the entanglements of conversation, wherever they lead, offers him an inviolable refuge from the greater peril of thoughtlessness and irresponsibility: the danger in which and from which he lives as a philosopher paradoxically offers a greater security than any alternative. This is the paradox that binds together the philosopher’s language with his way of life, and, later in the *Apology*, Socrates describes it in terms of the command given to a soldier to stay at his post, even and especially when he faces great risks in doing so:

> οὗ ἄν τις ἑαυτὸν τάξῃ ἡγησάμενος βέλτιστον εἶναι ἢ ὑπ' ἄρχοντος ταχθῇ, ἐνταῦθα δεῖ, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, μένοντα κινδυνεύειν, μηδὲν ὑπολογιζόμενον μήτε θάνατον μήτε ἄλλο μηδὲν πρὸ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ. ἐγὼ οὖν δεινὰ ἂν εἴην εἰργασμένος, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, εἰ ὅτε μέν με οἱ ἄρχοντες ἔταττον, οὓς ὑμεῖς εἵλεσθε ἄρχειν μου, καὶ ἐν Ποτειδαίᾳ καὶ ἐν Ἀμφιπόλει καὶ ἐπὶ Δηλίῳ, τότε μὲν οὗ ἐκεῖνοι ἔταττον ἔμενον ὥσπερ καὶ ἄλλος τις καὶ ἐκινδύνευον ἀποθανεῖν, τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τάττοντος, ὡς ἐγὼ ᾠήθην τε καὶ ὑπέλαβον, φιλοσοφοῦντά με δεῖν ζῆν καὶ ἐξετάζοντα ἐμαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, ἐνταῦθα δὲ φοβηθεὶς ἢ θάνατον ἢ ἄλλ' ὁτιοῦν πρᾶγμα λίποιμι τὴν τάξιν. (Pl. *Ap*. 28d-29a)
>
> Wherever a man has taken a position [τις ἑαυτὸν τάξῃ, lit. “stations himself”] that he believes to be best [ἡγησάμενος βέλτιστον εἶναι], or has been placed by his commander [ὑπ' ἄρχοντος ταχθῇ], there he must I think remain and face danger [μένοντα κινδυνεύειν], without a thought for death or anything else, rather than disgrace [πρὸ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ]. It would have been a dreadful way to behave, men of Athens, if, at Potidaea, Amphipolis and Delium, I had, at the risk of death [ἐκινδύνευον ἀποθανεῖν], like anyone else, remained at my post where those you had elected to command had ordered me [με (…) ἔταττον, “stationed me”] and then, when the god ordered me [τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ τάττοντος, lit. “with the god stationing (me)”] as I thought and believed [ὡς ἐγὼ ᾠήθην τε καὶ ὑπέλαβον], to live the life of a philosopher, to examine myself and others, I had abandoned my post [λίποιμι τὴν τάξιν] through fear of death or anything else. (Cooper/Grube 27)

The risk taken by the philosophical interpreter – in ethics and in politics, in the midst of life and in the face of death – does not amount to simply thinking and acting with the courage of one’s convictions, regardless of the danger: it means putting at risk both oneself in the moment of thought or action and the convictions from which one acts and thinks as well. “Wherever a man stations himself […] or is stationed by his commander” (οὗ ἄν τις ἑαυτὸν τάξῃ […] ἢ ὑπ' ἄρχοντος ταχθῇ 28d), he does so without any guarantee of safety or certainty except whatever he gains through the exercise of his interpretive conscience with himself and others. Socrates has taken up his own ‘post’ (τάξις 29a “post, station” > τάσσω [Attic: τάττω] “to draw up, station, marshal, post”) at a command that was given to him as much by himself as by the god: this was possible only after he had made the strenuous and still unconsummated effort to hold a conversation with a being that cannot finally be known in a language that cannot be fully understood. By submitting his life to the dialogic discipline of conscience – that is, in striving to make sense of himself and others through the matrix of this unimaginably foreign language – he believes to have discovered in and through the practice of dialogue itself an imperative that summons both language and life to confrontation. And while this belief is grounded in a voice and source that Socrates takes to be divine, he has arrived at this belief not by any unimpeachable, direct revelation but by his own faculty to make sense, to weigh appearances, and to judge. He speaks this belief, at last, in his own voice: Socrates does not say that the god gave him this ‘post’ in no uncertain terms; rather, he only says he “thought and believed” (ώς ἐγὼ ᾠήθην τε καὶ ὑπέλαβον 28e) this to be the god’s meaning, using two words for subjective belief (οἴομαι and ὑπολαμβάνω) that freely admit a great deal of uncertainty. Death, after all, is not the real danger that faces Socrates at this moment, at least not according to his own lights: it is far worse to fall victim to the “disgrace” (τὸ αἰσχρόν 28d)[49] of betraying whatever concord between language and life he has achieved through his own powers of interpretation, however erroneous or discordant they may prove to be in the very next turn of the conversation, the very next change in the music.

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[49] For reasons of space, I cannot do full justice here to Socrates’ comparison of himself to Achilles in 28b-28d, which precedes the passage on *taxis* in 28d-29a and sets its heavily-charged cultural background. See Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), 178-186, for an excellent discussion of this passage that pays careful attention to the Homeric allusion that gives Socrates’ military language a broader context.

To speak of the "voice of conscience" is to invoke a dead metaphor, but with Socrates, the metaphor is not only very much alive, it is the crucial metaphor of the philosopher's ethical and political practice of interpretation. If the reading I have offered here has tried to give a new voice to a metaphor that has long since lost its voice, by the same token I am trying to give a new voice to Socrates himself – and the attempt to do this, in the end, marks the point at which I think the properly spiritual dimension of Plato's language once again stakes its claim in the present. The ethical function of the Socratic voice, as we have seen, is to be the conscience of its subject, to allow this subject to carry on a conversation with itself in itself, and so to become the medium of the subject's self-reflection; the political function of this voice is to be the conscience of its auditors, to offer them a medium of reflection in which they hear the many different voices that echo within their own, and so to bring those voices into conversation within them as well. If Socrates is, as I have tried to show here, a virtuoso impersonator of voices, every interpretation of Socrates that meets him on his own terms is an attempt to impersonate the impersonator, to add yet another voice to the murmuring crowd of voices that issue forth from him already. When we make this attempt, what happens – with a remarkable and jolting turn in logic – is that we discover Socrates impersonating our voices back at us, *reading* us, just as much as we are impersonating his voice back at him in the act of reading him. The spiritual turn, the properly kindyneutic turn, in this process of reading and being read by Socrates arrives when we find ourselves called upon by Socrates – as he himself was called upon by the oracle – to impersonate ourselves, speaking what we only just now thought to be our own language in our own voices, back to ourselves. It is at that moment that one fully enters the spiritual game of interpretation, and takes on the impossible task of making oneself, like Socrates, into a “real fake”: giving life back to one’s own dead language in another and bringing another’s dead language back to life in oneself. That is the moment of the greatest danger – and of the greatest pleasure – in the life of the interpreter.

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# CHAPTER V

# A STRANGE NEW FORM OF LIFE: THINKING, ACTING, AND ENDANGERMENT IN THE THOUGHT OF HANNAH ARENDT

## 1. Taking Responsibility for Past and Future: The Task of Thinking and the End of Tradition

> Each new generation, every new human being, as he becomes conscious of being inserted between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave anew the path of thought. And it is after all possible, and seems to me likely, that the strange survival of great works, their relative permanence throughout thousands of years, is due to their having been born in the small, inconspicuous track of non-time which their authors' thought had beaten between an infinite past and an infinite future by accepting past and future as directed, aimed, as it were, at themselves – as *their* predecessors and successors, *their* past and *their* future – thus establishing a present for themselves, a kind of timeless time in which men are able to create timeless works with which to transcend their own finiteness. This timelessness, to be sure, is not eternity; it springs, as it were, from the clash of past and future, whereas eternity […] indicates the collapse of all temporal dimensions. The temporal dimension of […] the activity of thinking gathers the absent tenses, the not-yet and the no-more, together into its own presence.
>
> – Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*[1]

As we embark upon the last portion of this project, it only seems fitting to begin by considering that each of the writers and thinkers I have dealt with here, each with his distinct role in the genealogy of interpretation, also finds an unlikely common ground with the others in the attitude towards past and future defined in this passage by Arendt. In order for the activity of interpretation to become questionable to the one who interprets, and, indeed, in order for the interpreter to become questionable to himself, he must open his ears to the questions addressed to him by both the past and the future –

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[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 210-211; hereafter *LM*.

questions that are determined from either side by his inhabiting *this* singular present and no other. To *think* about interpretation in Arendt's terms means allowing oneself this experience of address in the midst of time, the experience of *being called upon to answer* by a living process of thought that far exceeds the limits of one's own life, preceding one's birth and outlasting one's death. In heeding this call to think and interpret, the one who thinks achieves a supremely paradoxical feat: on the one hand, she acknowledges the peculiar finitude of her own concrete existence – peculiar because birth and death simply limit the living and thinking done by a human being without necessarily completing them. On the other hand, she claims for herself, as the authentic past and future of her own present life, the life of the conversation in which she participates, into which she inserts and reveals her own irreplaceable self through word and deed. In acknowledging the condition of finitude that circumscribes thought and interpretation, the thinker actively overcomes it for as long as she persists in thinking and interpreting; moreover, she also *takes responsibility*, in the broadest sense of this word, for the world she thinks about and interprets.

Insofar as thinking for oneself and educating others are two sides of the same coin, we can thus say with Arendt – as she writes in her 1961 essay "The Crisis in Education" – that interpretation, like education, represents "the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable."[2] The complementary tasks of interpreting and educating, of making meaning and talking about meaning, are thus deeply rooted in the human condition of finitude and the interpretive condition of responsibility. In responding to the world with the full measure of her being, the thinker responds to others and herself on its behalf, transforming her own present, finite life as a thinking being into the arena where the infinite forces of both past and future confront and contest one another, and where the thinker herself becomes in turn participant and referee in the struggle.[3] In short, the life of the individual thinker or interpreter offers itself up as the scene for the life of interpretation *par excellence*, the life that "gathers the absent tenses, the not-yet and the no-more, together into its own presence" not in order to escape from lived time into eternal time, but rather to receive fully the double address of past and future in the present moment of life.

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[2] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 193; hereafter *BPF*.

The curious bond between the finitude of the one who thinks and the infinity of the thinking process itself[4] finds ironic expression for Arendt in the surprising durability, the “strange survival” of the works of thinking through the eons of time: it is as if the resolutely and incorrigibly *present* character of all thinking, its humble plodding up and down in the narrow gap between past and future, paradoxically conquered for the thinker the broad empires of time that press in upon it on both sides. Only by constantly staking anew her claim over the tiniest sliver of time in the present can the thinker-interpreter lay claim to all time, can the life she lives in thinking gain the permanence that remains denied to her given, literal life because her thinking takes root in a past before her birth and a future after her death. The representatives of both the tragic and the philosophical traditions whom we have examined so far thus share not only the peculiar experience of address that Arendt describes, but also the desire for a life that exists beyond life as a mere given. In so many different ways, each of them says: Only by responding to the present world as it is given to us, by thinking about and interpreting this world, do we take responsibility for ourselves and for it; similarly, only by assuming the risks and complicities entailed by this responsibility do we gain some measure of a life that does not stand secure and sovereign over the paltry domain of its own concerns, but rather ranges freely over and beyond itself in time and in thought, in freedom and in danger – a life that finds its true home only when it stands outside its own bounds. Insofar as the act of interpretation takes responsibility for its own past and future – that is, its own prehistory and afterlife in the interpretive conversation – as well as the past and future of its object, it willfully imposes the radical finitude of meaning on the infinities of time, space, and matter, constantly aware that it risks error and disaster in this violent imposition. Only with the courage to accept past and future as “aimed” and “directed” at

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[3] Here I am making a somewhat elliptical reference to the parable of Kafka which so intrigued Arendt that she devoted two different and provocative commentaries on it in both *BPF* (7-15) and *LM* (202-213, where it is combined with a discussion of a passage from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part III, Section 2, "On the Vision and the Riddle"). Kafka's text runs as follows in the English translation used by Arendt: "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. 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? 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 fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other." German text: Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. V (New York, 1946), 287; English translation: Kafka, *The Great Wall of China*, trans. Willa & Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), 276f.; cited in *BPF* 7 and *LM* 202 (with Arendt's emended translations in both cases).

[4] Arendt's conception of the thinking activity as inherently infinite demands some clarification here, although it will not concern us much in the following discussion. In the context of the clash between past and future that figures so prominently in her description of the thinking-activity in the preface of *BPF* and the closing chapters of *LM*, Arendt explains this infinity most succinctly in the latter text, where it arises from a sort of calculus of forces: "The two antagonistic forces of past and future are both indefinite as to their origin; seen from the viewpoint of the present in the middle, the one comes from an infinite past and the other from an infinite future. But though they have no known beginning, they have a terminal ending, the point at which they meet and clash, which is the present. [The movement of thinking in the present], on the contrary, has a definite origin, its starting-point being the clash of the two other forces, but it would be infinite with respect to its ending since it has resulted from the concerted action of two forces whose origin is infinity. This […] force, whose origin is known, whose direction is determined by past and

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future, but which exerts its force toward an undetermined end as though it could reach out into infinity, seems to me a perfect metaphor for the activity of thought” (*LM* 209).

herself, and with the patience to tread the winding paths of meaning in the present, wherever they lead, can Arendt's thinker take possession of time, and of life, through thought.

By rearticulating the thinking ego's experience of time, whereby the forces of past and future meet and oppose one another in the present rather than following one another in linear succession, Arendt forges a conception of the thinker's or interpreter's task that is uniquely modern and thus resolutely post-traditional in temperament. First and foremost, she dispels the notion that we are still the direct inheritors of an illuminating tradition that binds past, present, and future in an unbroken chain.[5] Indeed, according to her, dwelling within such a tradition guarantees the present's possession of the past and future by default – a possession that makes demands on the present, to be sure, but entirely different in kind from those imposed by the precarious and circuitous process of genuine thinking. As eternal and transcendent life is related to time-bound and contingent living, so tradition is related to the thinker who exists within it: in each case, the former constitutes the source and prerequisite of the latter, and the proper function of the thinker is to reveal the unchanging truth of her tradition under the changing guise of her moment. Thinking within a tradition preserves and augments the renewed life that the thinker has received from it as much as the renewed life it has received from her. A perfect symmetry governs their relation: the one who thinks preserves the life of what comes down to her from the past, retrieves it from oblivion in the present, and renews it for the future, and that which is preserved by thinking does the same for the life of the thinker.[6]

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[5] In terms of the history of philosophy in general and of political thought in particular, Arendt argues that the Western tradition came to an end in the writings of Karl Marx: "The beginning [of the tradition] was made when […] Plato described the sphere of human affairs – all that belongs to the living together of men in a common world – in terms of darkness, confusion, and deception which those aspiring to true being must turn away from and abandon if they want to discover the clear sky of eternal ideas. The end came with Marx's declaration that philosophy and its truth are located not outside the affairs of men and their common world but precisely in them, and can be 'realized' only in the sphere of living together […]. The end came when a philosopher turned away from philosophy so as to 'realize' it in politics" ("Tradition and the Modern Age," *BPF* 17). She makes parallel claims in this essay – a crucial text for understanding what tradition means to Arendt – for the end of traditional religion in the thought of Kierkegaard and the end of traditional metaphysics in the thought of Nietzsche. In terms of concrete political and historical reality, on the other hand, Arendt argues elsewhere, and with great pathos, that the end of the Western tradition became a *fait accompli* with the emergence of the totalitarian regimes. As she writes, "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 bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface [in the shape of totalitarianism] and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why 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." Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), ix; quoted in Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), 30. See also Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), 8-10. For a cogent recent treatment of Arendt's conceptual narrative concerning tradition in modernity, see Dana Villa, "Totalitarianism, Modernity, and Tradition," in: Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999), 180-203; for an approach grounded in Arendt's intellectual and personal influences in Germany before and after the Second World War, see Antonia Grunenberg, "Arendt, Heidegger, Jaspers: Thinking Through the Breach in Tradition," *Social Research* 74.4 (2007): 1003-1028. Arendt is quite emphatic, furthermore, in both "Tradition and the Modern Age" and elsewhere that the end of the Western tradition as a historical fact was not 'caused' in some sense by the critique and inversion of that tradition in the work of Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche – as if a straight line connected these three

Arendt, on the contrary, repeatedly asserts that amidst the unprecedented events of the modern world, the guiding thread of tradition has been effectively frayed and broken, its living force extinguished; that the traditional questions and answers by means of which Western culture, at least since Roman antiquity,[7] has understood its

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men to the Nazi death camps or the Stalinist gulag. See section 4 below for a discussion of "Understanding and Politics," a crucial text in Arendt's argument that totalitarianism marked the end of tradition.

[6] This formulation of the relationship of the individual to a living tradition freely combines and condenses Arendt's description of the Roman concept of tradition as informed by authority (*auctoritas*) and the appropriation and modification of the this concept by the early Catholic church (see in particular section IV of "What Is Authority?", *BPF* 120-128).

[7] Arendt's striking and provocative commentaries on the specifically Roman invention of what we now call tradition emerge in sharpest relief in the manuscripts recently edited by Jerome Kohn and published as *The Promise of Politics*. In "The Tradition of Political Thought," Arendt writes: "Our tradition, properly speaking, begins with the Roman acceptance of Greek philosophy as the unquestionable, authoritative binding foundation of thought, which made it impossible for Rome to develop a philosophy, even a political philosophy, and therefore left its own specifically political experience without adequate interpretation […] Plato, to be sure, was not aware that tradition, whose chief function it is to give answers to all questions by channeling them into predetermined categories, could ever threaten the existence of philosophy. […] Plato's violent treatment of Homer, who at the time had been considered the 'educator of all Hellas' for centuries, is for us still the most magnificent sign of a culture aware of its past without any sense of the binding authority of tradition. Anything even remotely resembling this is quite inconceivable in Roman literature." Arendt, "The Tradition of Political Thought," *The Promise of Politics,* ed. Jerome

philosophical and political experiences have lost their validity. As for Nietzsche, whose words she often quoted in this connection, both the originary, transcendent sphere to which the tradition belonged and the immanent realm in which the interpreter of the tradition moved have been abolished by one and the same stroke: “We abolished the true world: which world has remained? perhaps the world of appearances? … But no! together with the true world we abolished the world of appearances.”[8] In this respect, Arendt’s conception of the relationship between tradition and the modern age stands diametrically opposed to that of a thinker like Paul Ricoeur, in whose essay “Structure and Hermeneutics” the temporal structure of interpretation is characterized by the incorporation of what Ricoeur calls “the time of interpretation,” or the lived temporality of sense-making, into “the time of transmission,” or the historical continuity of the tradition:

> [T]hese two temporalities concern each other, mutually relate to each other. We feel that interpretation has a history and that this history is a segment of tradition itself. Interpretation does not spring from nowhere; rather, one interprets in order to make explicit, to extend, and so to keep alive the tradition itself, inside which one always remains. It is in this sense that the time of interpretation belongs in some way to the time of tradition. But tradition in return, even understood as the transmission of a *depositum*, remains a dead tradition if it is not the conceptual interpretation of this deposit: our ‘heritage’ is not a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful and which by this very act is replenished. Every tradition lives by grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living.[9]

Ricoeur’s “treasure,” passed hand-to-hand from the past to the future via the present, conspicuously resembles the divine gift of transcendent grace, “from which we draw by

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Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 54f. For a pathbreaking study of the still-underestimated Roman influence on Arendt’s thought, see Dean Hammer, “Hannah Arendt and Roman Political Thought,” *Political Theory* 30.1 (2002): 124-149.

[8] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Götzendämmerung*, in: *Werke*, Vol. 2, ed. Karl Schlechta (München: C. Hanser, 1954-56), 963; cited in *BPF* 30. Arendt cites the passage again, in a different context, and using another translation, at *LM* 11.

[9] Paul Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics,” in: *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 27. Insofar as Ricoeur is speaking from and to a specifically structuralist standpoint in this and other works, it is worth considering to what extent structuralist and even post-structuralist critical vocabularies, which still largely

the handful and which by this very act is replenished." On the other hand, the gift of transcendent life bestowed by tradition wholly depends upon and is reproduced by the continuous resurrection of tradition in the immanent present of interpretation: "Every tradition *lives* by grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it […] remains living" (emphasis mine). In order to integrate these two temporal perspectives, Ricoeur forges a third temporality, "the time of meaning itself," in which the vital intersection between traditional-transcendent and interpretive-immanent time "would permit the struggle between these two temporalities, one transmitting, the other renewing" (Ricoeur 28). Even pending this dialectical resolution, however, the life of the tradition in the immanent world for Ricoeur inhabits and is bound to a temporality of linear succession: the present is solely responsible to the past, and the future merely offers the empty, homogeneous medium in which the consequences that follow upon the present's response appear and play themselves out.

For Arendt, what distinguishes the problem of thinking or interpretation in the modern world, after the end of tradition, is twofold. First, we face the ubiquitous danger of losing the depth of meaning normally granted by a past that we now encounter as something alien and uncertain, incapable of guiding us in the activity of thought. For Arendt, the coin in which Ricoeur's treasure of the past is minted, as it were, finds its value irrevocably debased by the turnings of modern history. The language we receive from the tradition has suddenly grown opaque and obscure, and our experience becomes even more alien and impenetrable than it was before we tried to make sense of it. In effect, the modern break with tradition threatens to devolve into a state of affairs where

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operate in the tension between structure and event, have to gain from Arendt's phenomenological description of the temporality of thought, which is by no means clearly reducible to this dichotomy.

"thought and reality have parted company, […] reality has become opaque for the light of thought, and […] thought, no longer bound to incident as the circle remains bound to its focus, is liable either to become altogether meaningless or to rehash old verities which have lost all concrete relevance" (*BPF* 6).[10] By the very same loss of tradition, however, we face an equally ubiquitous opportunity to approach, grasp, and reawaken that past in ways that have never been attempted before precisely because they were rendered impossible by a tradition that set boundaries to the possible meanings of the past even as it kept that past alive.[11] "To most people today," Arendt writes, the tradition of Western culture

> looks like a field of ruins which, far from being able to claim any authority, can hardly command their interest. This fact may be deplorable, but implicit in it is the great chance *to look upon the past with eyes undistracted by any tradition*, with a directness which has disappeared from Occidental reading and hearing ever since Roman civilization submitted to the authority of Greek thought (*BPF* 28, emphasis mine; see also *LM* 212).

Historically, intellectually, and experientially, we exist *after* the effective end of the tradition that still gives us the language, the distinctions, and the values we use every day to interpret a world that may indeed have already rendered our methods of interpretation obsolete, erroneous, and dangerous. If we depend upon this tradition to give a meaning and a life to our experiences over and above their immediate present, we will render them stillborn. Nonetheless, for Arendt, it is precisely by bringing oneself to face the error and obsolescence of the traditional categories, by directly confronting a worldly reality that defies timeworn metaphors and bars the usual paths of approach, that the one who thinks can prepare herself for the dangerous, burdensome, but quintessentially human task of beginning something new. For Arendt, the new beginning achieved in thought, furthermore, demands a retrospective as well as a prospective dimension; as Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves writes, "To re-establish a linkage with the past is not, for Arendt, an antiquarian exercise; on the contrary, without the critical reappropriation of the past our temporal horizon becomes disrupted, our experience precarious, and our identity less and less secure."[12] Reckoning with the aporias of our tradition, the aporias of our own language, in the confrontation with modern experience demands that we face past and

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[10] See also the "Prologue" to Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1-6; hereafter *HC*. In the "Prologue" to *HC*, Arendt formulates the earth-alienation of the modern scientific worldview in terms of the radical split between experimental-technological *doing* and verbal-conceptual *thinking*: "The 'truths' of the modern scientific world-view, though they can be demonstrated in mathematical formulas and proved technologically, will no longer lend themselves to normal expression in speech and thought" (*HC* 3). The mutual alienation of action and thought in scientific rationality – the prime symptom of which for Arendt was the invention of the atomic bomb – represents on the stage of contemporary history the same state of affairs that the mutual alienation of traditional categories and real experience represents in the realm of philosophical and political reflection.

[11] Elisabeth Young-Bruehl notes the same 'positive duplicity' with which Arendt characterized the demolition of the Western tradition: "The breakdown of tradition which Hannah Arendt viewed, in political terms, as the decline and fall of the nation-state and, in social terms, as the rise of mass society, she experienced, in spiritual terms, as the spread of nihilism. Fully aware of the political and social dangers of nihilism, she was also aware that nihilism can have as its correlate – though it is very rare – free thought,

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the 'beaten pathways of thought' having been swept away, dynamited." Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, "Hannah Arendt's Storytelling," *Social Research* 44.1 (1977): 187.

[12] Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, "Modernity and the Human Condition: Hannah Arendt's Conception of Modernity," *Thesis Eleven* 30 (1991): 78; see 76-80 for an excellent discussion of the influence of Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin on Arendt's idea of a critical re-appropriation of the past outside the framework of any tradition, and also a defense of the apparent "hermeneutic naiveté" of such re-appropriation (80). Similarly, Sheldon Wolin argues that "theorizing was conceived [by Arendt] as an act of recovery, of reacquiring lost meanings, of remembering. She did not intend theorizing to be an archaeology, an excavation of lifeless political remains; but a mode of *re*-flection and *in*-sight which carried the mind back to a privileged moment in the history of politics when the genuinely political […] was embodied for the first time." Sheldon Wolin, "Hannah Arendt and the Ordinance of Time," *Social Research* 44.1 (1977): 96. Similar perspectives on the question of tradition are echoed throughout the whole history of scholarship on Arendt; see also Stan Spyros Draenos, "Thinking Without A Ground: Hannah Arendt and the Contemporary Situation of Understanding," in: *Hannah Arendt, the Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 218f. & 221; Jean Yarbrough and Peter Stern, "*Vita Activa* and *Vita Contemplativa*: Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought in *The Life of the Mind*," *The Review of Politics* 43.3 (1981): 328; Elizabeth Minnich, "Thinking with Hannah Arendt: An Introduction," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10.2 (2002): 125; Dana Villa, "Arendt, Heidegger, and the Tradition," *Social Research* 74.4 (2007): 983-1002. In a significant departure from the line of thinking I present here, however, Villa argues specifically against assimilating the gesture of re-appropriation to dialogue (à la Gadamer) in Arendt's thought. For Villa, the chief issue in Arendt's thought is not that we have forgotten the content of the tradition and need to reinitiate conversation with it; rather, "*the tradition itself is the primary form of forgetfulness*, essentially a reification" (*Arendt and Heidegger*, 10, emphasis in original).

future alike with the "undistracted" eyes of which Arendt writes.[13] To invoke again the image with which I closed the preceding chapter: it is only by facing the fact that we already speak a dead language that we can begin to give it a new life.

## 2. Thinking, Acting, Life: Socrates "Made Beautiful and New"

The connection Arendt draws between, on the one hand, the end of tradition that marked the beginning of the modern world, and, on the other, the peculiar urgency gained by questions of interpretation as a result, is not all that earns her a distinctive and significant place in the genealogy of interpretive risk and responsibility. In the discussion presented by this final chapter, I want to examine the force which at one time gave continuous historical form to the tradition of which Arendt speaks, but which now can only be revived briefly, in exceptional and decisive moments. In Arendt's thought, this force is none other than the *life* of interpretation as such – both the mode of life it dictates for those who interpret and the figurative life interpretation possesses by itself as a 'doing' over and above its doers. Of course, this idea of a distinctive life of interpretation was first raised in my reading of the *Apology*, and it gains a powerful, if idiosyncratic, significance for modern philosophical and political experience in Arendt's work. Furthermore, the relationship between thinking and life articulated in her writing is exactly what compels her (perhaps ironically) to rediscover and resurrect Socrates, that paradigmatic origin of the Western tradition of philosophical thought, as a model thinker, precisely because his historical position *before* the formation of the tradition as such strangely mirrors our own position after its definitive end. As Dana Villa has acutely observed, Arendt defines our contemporary situation as "weirdly parallel to the one Socrates confronted in fifth-century (BCE) Athens. There, too, traditional morality had fragmented or been hollowed out, [yet] the way out of this situation, for Arendt as well as Socrates, is no return to a shattered tradition, nor a simple call to action, but a radical questioning of all the old 'yardsticks' for action and judgment."[14] Furthermore, as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl notes, such interrogation must necessarily take on the same form for us as it did for Socrates: that of a dialogue between equals. Arendt

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[13] Arendt's approach to the tradition as a mass of fragments, each as potentially illuminating of contemporary experience as it is potentially obfuscating, indirectly depends upon the thought of Walter Benjamin and, further afield but no less palpably, the artistic practice of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht's concept of *gestus*, in fact, especially as we have considered it in Chapter 2, fragments the naturalized and reified continuities of dramatic action in a way precisely parallel to Arendt's fragmentation and interrogative reconstruction of the philosophical tradition. The similarity of approach has both historical, biographical, and intellectual resonances, as Arendt belonged to the prewar German intellectual and artistic circles in which both Benjamin and Brecht moved. Arendt knew Benjamin personally, and was interested enough in the life and work of both Benjamin and Brecht to devote significant essays to each of them: "Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940" and "Bertolt Brecht: 1898-1956," in: Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1968), 153-206 and 207-249. Seyla Benhabib forcefully brings out the parallels between Arendt's and Benjamin's treatment of historical temporality, inviting a further extension to Brecht's dramaturgy: "The very structure of traditional historical narration, couched as it is in chronological sequence and the logic of precedence and succession, serves to preserve what has happened by making it seem inevitable, necessary, plausible, understandable, and in short justifiable. Nothing seemed more abhorrent to Arendt than the dictum that *die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht* […]. Her response to this dilemma was the same as Walter Benjamin's: to break the chain of narrative continuity, to shatter chronology as the natural structure of narrative, to stress fragmentariness, historical dead ends, failures and ruptures. Not only does this method of fragmentary historiography do justice to the memory of the dead by telling the story of history in terms of their failed hopes and efforts, but it is also a way of preserving the past without being enslaved by it […]." Seyla Benhabib, "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative," *Social Research* 57.1 (1990): 181f.; see also Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4f. We can extend Benhabib's point here by saying that Arendt's treatment of the reified continuity of the philosophical tradition is closely allied to the way Benjamin treated the reified continuity of historical time and the way Brecht treated the reified continuity of dramatic representation: each shattered the monolithic, univocal surface of the object before

> knew that she lived in […] times in which a long tradition had unraveled and scattered in a vast mental diaspora to the ends of the memories of men. But she viewed this rupture as a sign that the threads, the thought fragments, were to be gathered, freely and in such a way as to protect freedom, and made into something new, dynamic, and illuminating. […] When the past is *not* transmitted as tradition, it can be freely appropriated; and when such free appropriation presents itself historically, *it becomes the occasion for dialogue* (Young-Bruehl 1977, 183, emphasis mine).

What appears to the overhasty reader of Arendt's reception of Socrates, then, to be merely another conservative effort to reassert the authority of a classical origin over a

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them in order to bring to the surface the contradictions, multiple voices, failed efforts, and suppressed experiences that moved in its depths.

confusing and uncertain modernity actually turns out to be something at once more rigorous and more subversive. As I hope to show, Arendt does not rehabilitate Socrates as the guardian of a tradition to be reclaimed, reconstructed, and revered from a comfortable distance, but instead greets him as a formidable contemporary of the deconstructive and post-metaphysical temperament of the modern world – what we would call, in the terms of this project, its condition of heightened interpretive risk and responsibility. In short, Arendt finds in Socrates the embodiment of a life of interpretation that does not depend upon a living tradition, the embodiment of what we have characterized here as the kindyneutic nature of thinking *in extremis*: for Arendt, Socrates' thinking submits to the condition of risk, enters upon the suspense of error, *in order to realize a form of life through the endangerment of life*. In Arendt's thought, as John McGowan writes, "not only does [Socrates'] example flesh out more of what thinking entails than a more abstract description could, but […] it offers an image of a possible life that we might wish not so much to emulate as to be worthy of." Socrates, McGowan concludes, "embodies another standard, another way of being in the world, against which we can judge our own lives."[15]

By stressing the groundless, interminable, and kindyneutic characteristics of thinking, furthermore, Arendt does not merely retrieve an explicitly Socratic model of "the soundless dialogue between me and myself" (*LM* 31 *inter alia*) for the life of interpretation alone. By defining the life of interpretation *qua* life, she also (perhaps unwittingly) forges a link between thinking and acting by explicitly defining both activities as complementary variations on a common form of life. This will sound at first

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[14] Villa, "Thinking and Judging," in: *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, 100.

as if I were merely reiterating the distinction between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* that maps the path of Arendt's thought after *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951),[16] or as if I want to relocate Arendt into the tradition of "life-philosophy" (*Lebensphilosophie*) represented by figures such as Bergson and Nietzsche. I believe, however, that Arendt's language of life points towards a deeper, stranger, richer homology shared by thinking and acting than either such argument could bring out. In the contexts I will explore here, Arendt's 'life' surpasses the premodern distinction between action and contemplation and stands diametrically opposed to the vitalistic life-force of the much more recent *Lebensphilosophie* tradition.

As far as the separation of active and contemplative forms of life is concerned, Arendt consistently, and with good reason, retains a robust distinction between thinking and acting throughout her work – albeit one that has confused and frustrated many of her scholarly commentators.[17] "It is difficult to imagine," writes Jerome Kohn,

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[15] John McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 141.

[16] Although this scheme organizes Arendt's *oeuvre* around the (allegedly) opposite poles represented by *HC* and *LM* – at the obvious expense of the interceding work, which includes *On Revolution*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and her voluminous essays and articles – the developmental approach to her thought in terms of early-political and late-philosophical periods has hardened into something of a commonplace since it first appeared in scholarly discourse in the late 1970s and early 80s; see, for instance, Yarbrough & Stern, *passim*, and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's *Life of the Mind*," *Political Theory* 10.2 (1982): 277-305. I would not categorically disagree with alternate periodizations of her oeuvre, such as that of Hans Jonas, who quite early on proposed an alternative view on Arendt's changing viewpoint and range of concerns: "What [Arendt] comprised under *The Life of the Mind* went beyond the *vita contemplativa* which she originally thought to oppose to the *vita activa* of the earlier work. Only 'Thinking' would come under the head of contemplation, surely not 'Willing' and 'Judging.' Indeed, the new twist which Hannah Arendt gives to the classical polarity of the active and the contemplative life, of the practical and the theoretical, is its substitution by the not unrelated but significantly different and characteristically modern polarity of man in the plural and man in the singular, or man in the world and man with himself." Hans Jonas, "Acting, Knowing, Thinking: Gleanings from Hannah Arendt's Philosophical Work," *Social Research* 44.1 (1977): 28. I would only argue, *pace* Jonas, that it is by no means so simple to align Arendt's earlier work with 'man in the plural' and the later with 'man in the singular,' since even in the conception Arendt proposes in *LM*, thinking requires a certain experience of plurality.

[17] While her writing and thinking most often took the firmness of this distinction as a matter of course, Arendt was provoked to assert it directly – and rather piquantly – in her remarks at a conference

> the distinction between the activities of thinking and acting more sharply drawn than it is by Arendt. It is not a question of two ways of life, an old story, or of the relation between theory and practice, a modern variant. It is rather that the two *experiences* have nothing in common: doing something in the world that is irrevocable, and doing 'nothing' in the world, in fact 'undoing' the thought trains that have been followed as soon as the thinking process ceases.[18]

The melancholy incredulity that tempers Kohn's partisanship of Arendtian categories here sets the tone for most scholars in discussing this dimension of her thought: either they want to recruit Arendt in elevating the activity of theorizing about politics to the level of active political engagement;[19] or they want to take Arendt to task for repudiating the motivation of political action by an instrumental rationality of means and ends without elaborating a transparent alternative account of the relationship between action and thought;[20] or they seek to bridge the gap between thinking and acting by

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dedicated to her work not long before her death. The failure to maintain the distinction, as she claims in the sequel, and the privileging of action over thought – whether action is called 'engagement,' 'commitment,' 'opposition,' or 'resistance' – accounts for the constitutionally bad conscience of politically-minded intellectuals in the modern age: "Now I will admit one thing. I will admit that I am, of course, primarily interested in understanding. This is absolutely true. And I will admit that there are people who are primarily interested in doing something. I am not. I can very well live without doing anything. But I cannot live without trying at least to understand whatever happens. […] You know, all the modern philosophers have somewhere in their work a rather apologetic sentence which says, 'Thinking is also acting.' Oh no, it is not! And to say that is rather dishonest. I mean, let's face the music: it is not the same! […] The unwillingness of people who actually are thinking and are theorists to own up to this, and to believe that [thinking] is worthwhile, and who believe instead that only commitment and engagement is worthwhile, is perhaps one of the reasons why this whole discipline is not always in such very good shape. People apparently don't believe in what they are doing." Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in: Hill, 303, 304, 309. For a broad but extraordinarily incisive overview of Arendt's reception in journalistic, philosophical, and academic circles up to the mid-1990's, see Craig J. Calhoun and John McGowan, "Introduction: Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics," in: *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, ed. Calhoun & McGowan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1-24, esp. 5-8.

[18] Jerome Kohn, "Thinking/Acting," *Social Research* 57.1 (1990): 129.

[19] This attitude is especially evident in the questions and challenges posed to Arendt by the various interlocutors in "On Hannah Arendt" (in Arendt/Hill, esp. 301-315), and in the scholarship of the decade immediately following Arendt's death (roughly the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s).

[20] George Kateb's early essay, "Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 5.2 (1977): 141-182, poses the questions and sets the (enthusiastic but exasperated) tone for a lengthy conversation in Arendt scholarship: what exactly, according to Arendt, should the *content* or *purpose* of politics be, when giving politics a definite purpose to fulfill or a content to embody outside of politics itself instantly assimilates it to an instrumental rationality that Arendt defines as non- or anti-political? Margaret Canovan's broad-ranging exegeses of Arendt's central texts have often guided the progress of the debate: see Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (London: Dent, 1974) – the first monograph devoted to Arendt as an original thinker; *id*., "The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought." *Political Theory* 6.1 (1978): 5-26; and *id*., *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1992). Although entering upon this thorny debate

foregrounding the portions of Arendt's work that construe the thinking activity as the narrative recounting of actions;[21] or they cannot reconcile Arendt's earlier valorization of action in *HC* with her (apparent) later valorization of thought in *LM*, and thus want to interpret *LM* as the lamentably incomplete project in which she would have articulated the meaning of thinking for acting with an account of the faculty of political judgment.[22] The latter perplexity has given rise to the most persistent and varied interpretive efforts over the last three decades, including the intensification of interest in the brief treatments of judgment that appear in both the writings Arendt published during her lifetime[23] as

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lies far beyond the scope of my discussion here, it must be noted that these and related questions about Arendt's thought are quite far from being settled.

[21] Outside of the voluminous discussions of political judgment in Arendt's work, the scholarship on Arendtian storytelling provides probably the most fertile and engaging angle on the problematic relationship of thinking and acting, although, as I note here, it tends to concentrate on the narratological dimensions of the thinking activity in Arendt's work at the expense of her equally strong interest in forms of thought that do not depend on the strictly narrative recounting of experience: to name just two examples, the Socratic practice of dialogue and the Augustinian concepts of imagination and memory. An early article by Melvyn Hill ("The Fictions of Mankind and the Stories of Men," in Hill (ed.), 275-300) inaugurates the discussion of Arendt's investment in narrative thinking, continued by Seyla Benhabib, "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative." *Social Research* 57.1 (1990): 167-196; Lisa Jane Disch, "More Truth Than Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 21.4 (1993): 665-694; and Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) – perhaps the definitive and certainly the most fertile and imaginative work on the topic.

[22] The massive quantity of scholarship on this subject resists any attempt at easy summary. Key recent treatments include: Albrecht Wellmer, "Hannah Arendt on Judgment: The Unwritten Doctrine of Reason," *Hannah Arendt: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, ed. Garrath Williams (London: Routledge, 2005 [orig. publ. 2001]), Vol. 4, 217-233, and Dianna Taylor, "Hannah Arendt on Judgment: Thinking for Politics," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10.2 (2002): 151-169. A recent and significant dissident voice in this scholarship appears with Dana Villa's piece "Thinking and Judging," in: *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, 87-106. Villa repudiates the tendency in the debates surrounding Arendt's distinction between thinking and acting to look toward her (largely unwritten) thought on judgment for a resolution; as he writes, "I want to dampen the tendency among political theorists to view her theory of judgment as the crowning synthetic moment of her political philosophy, the moment in which the gap between thinking and acting is finally overcome [...]. In my opinion, Arendt had very good reasons for preserving the distinction" (88).

[23] The closing pages of Arendt's 1960 essay "The Crisis in Culture" (*BPF* 216-222), in which Arendt first outlines a theory of judgment based on Kant's third Critique, comprises the slender, but still most substantial and most discussed text in the scholarly debates.

well as the series of lectures she gave on Kant's political philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1964 and the New School in New York City in 1970.[24]

While each of these basic concerns and the various interpretive approaches that have arisen from them serves a legitimate purpose, the scholarly conversation thus far has yet to take account of the striking similarity of conceptual structure and the unifying set of metaphors that create a kind of mutual gravitational pull between thinking and acting in Arendt's language even as she retains and defends the difference between them as activities. The mutual attraction between these two concepts through a common language is, I believe, strong, suggestive and widespread enough to allow us to elaborate their relationship even without embarking upon a speculative reconstruction of Arendtian political judgment.[25] Rather than connecting thinking and acting via judgment, in short, I want to argue that life is the central term of a common language that joins them – but this is not just any life, nor is it the 'life' of the *Lebensphilosophen*. Thinking and acting are related to each other in Arendt's thought by reconstituting, even authenticating the life of the one who thinks or acts, but this authentication of life is granted at the price of the individual's endangerment of 'mere', natural life as it is given to all living beings. What Kimberley Curtis writes of the actor applies in equal measure to the thinker, where their shared attitude toward this merely given life is concerned – namely, that he or she "needs a certain (uneasy) sense of alienation from and even hostility toward life."[26] In essence, the one who thinks or acts does so in order to realize a strange new form of life that depends upon the mere life he possesses by default even as it revolts against it, puts it in question, interrogates its limits. Ingeborg Nordmann, for one, describes what she calls the 'aporia of life' that renders Arendt's conceptual vocabulary of life ambiguous, even duplicitous:

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[24] Now published as Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[25] Or, for that matter, simply disregarding the rigor with which Arendt maintains the distinction and mistaking the give and take of interpretive conversation for authentic action, as does Jonas: "Plato did not only articulate his 'wonder' for himself in thinking, but wished to share and propagate it. […] And no one will contend of Socrates's life of conversation that it served his own instruction only. *Thinking has the will to communicate itself, and communication is action into the world.* […] *Thus, whoever added to this tradition did act; and the gap between those contraries, visible action and invisible thought, closes.* Nobody will deny the 'withdrawal' of thought from the world of appearances, the turning inward into oneself; but the countermovement outward, the utterance, the telling as it were of its story, belongs to it by nature" (Jonas 41-42).

> Thinking and action are, as [Arendt] expresses it with a nod to Bergson's *élan vitale*, 'pure being alive,' which 'creates its own tension, which stretches a human life and challenges it, and without which one would basically collapse with boredom.'[27] A concept of life, on the other hand, that glorifies the unadulterated dynamic of the life process offers a paradigm for the destruction of the world by dragging all that which constitutes the world into a process of absorption and consumption.[28]

Nordmann's dramatic juxtaposition of these two forms of life in Arendt's thought only underscores their eccentric continuity with one another. The new form of life suggested by Arendt's language 'lives' *only* through thinking or acting, is equally 'alive' in the actualization of both, and the decisive conditions to which it consciously subjects itself are risk and responsibility – rather than the twin necessities of 'mere' life, namely, self-preservation and the preservation of the species.[29] In essence, Arendt's articulations of both thinking and acting jointly adumbrate a concept of life that turns against necessity in order to ground itself in freedom, that turns against certainty and univocality in order to ground itself in danger and dialogue. This strange new form of life, as I have called it, with its clear investment in the ethos of endangerment, expands the possible domain of

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[26] Kimberley Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real: Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 43.

[27] Nordmann's citation here is from Arendt's own translation of *HC* into German: Arendt, *Vita Activa, oder*, *Vom Tätigen Leben* (München: R. Piper, 1981), 184. The German edition has received scant attention in Anglophone scholarship – all the more remarkable considering that this passage, like many other passages in *Vita Activa*, does not appear in the original English edition of *HC*.

[28] Ingeborg Nordmann, "The Human Condition: More Than a Guide to Practical Philosophy," *Social Research* 74.3 (2007): 777.

Socratic spirituality – to invoke Foucault’s term again – from the realm of philosophy into the realm of politics. In a manner of speaking, then, we can say that Arendt modulates Socrates’ dialogic voice into yet another register – that is, the tonality of a modern and plural politics without any absolute ground; she repeats, as it were, (pseudo-)Plato’s mysterious attribution of his writings to a “Socrates made beautiful and new” in the *Letters* (Σωκϱάτους […] καλοῦ καὶ νέου γεγονότος; [pseudo-]Plat. *L.* 2.314c) – a Socrates reborn not just for philosophical thought, but also for modern political action. For Arendt, then, risk and responsibility, which we have understood thus far as conditions for the activity of interpretation, thus come to constitute nothing less than the existential condition of the properly human *life* as it is lived in action and in thought.

Before asking how Arendt’s appropriation of Socrates allows her to articulate risk and responsibility as the conditions of a life lived in thinking and acting, let me take a moment to perform two preliminary tasks. First, I want to justify an assumption inherent in my approach to Arendt thus far, and second, I want to answer a possible question about the relevance of my central concerns to the interpretation of Arendt’s thought as a whole. This assumption and this question, furthermore, will help mark out my position within the scholarly conversations surrounding Arendt, and will suggest the novel angle of approach that will reveal the existential as well as political and philosophical depth of Arendt’s work in relation to interpretive risk and responsibility. First: for a writer who insisted so strongly on the importance of making clear distinctions in thinking and speaking – often at the expense of making herself clear to readers unfamiliar with the distinctions upon which she depended – my reader will do well to ask what justifies my

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[29] Dana Villa puts the sharpest point on the conundrum where action is concerned: “For Arendt, genuine political action is never a means to (mere) life, but the embodiment or expression of a *meaningful*

conflating Arendt's notion of 'thinking' with my own notion of 'interpretation' and assigning the same conditions and limits to both. Why should risk and responsibility condition Arendt's concept of thinking in the same ways as they do interpretation in the present project? Second: for a thinker whose work is now so closely integrated into the canon of twentieth-century political theory, my reader will also do well to ask what relevance, if any, the present argument may bear to her political thought – an argument which so far has been concerned with the least overtly political elements of her work. How can Arendt's fascination with Socrates, then, tell us something significant about Arendt's thought as a whole – not just her ideas concerning how and why individuals engage in the inward activity of thought and interpretation, but also the ideas for which she is chiefly known, namely, those concerned with how and why individuals engage in the outward undertaking she calls political action? Addressing the former assumption and the latter question does not merely eliminate a couple obstacles to the progress of the present discussion. As we shall see, it will lead us directly to the core issue in Arendt's thought that marks out her contribution to the narrative of this project: namely, in directly relating thinking, *qua* interpretation, and acting by means of the concept of life.

## 4. Danger and Dialogue: Thinking About Thinking

Let us first consider whether the conflation of Arendt's concept of thinking with my own concept of interpretation does, in fact, reflect some deeper identity shared by both, and whether approaching the former through the terms established for the latter proves productive for both. To do so, I want to make recourse to an early essay by Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," a piece that serves two useful functions in this

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life" (*Arendt and Heidegger*, 31).

context: first, it foreshadows to a remarkable degree the concept of thinking – here, "understanding"[30] – that gets elaborated more fully in her later work; second, it expresses her conception in terms that make it remarkably amenable to the ideas of risk and responsibility. "Understanding and Politics,"[31] published three years after Arendt's monumental *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, speaks directly to the political, moral, and intellectual *pathos* – in the etymological sense of that term: a thing one both experiences and suffers – of totalitarian power. For Arendt, the nature of thinking itself comes into question when we try to respond to totalitarianism through thought, above all because totalitarianism possesses "a horrible originality which no farfetched historical parallels can alleviate […] not because some new 'idea' came into the world, but because its very actions constitute a break with all our traditions; they have clearly exploded our categories of political thought and our standards for moral judgment" ("UP" 309-310). The experience of totalitarian power, in other words, throws thinking back upon the thinker, compelling him or her to reflect upon the conditions and limits of the thinking activity itself, and without recourse to the same traditional frameworks that have collapsed in its wake.

In terms of the task Arendt sets for her own essay, then, the question of thinking about totalitarianism becomes just as much a question of thinking about the nature of thinking, or trying to understand the nature of understanding:

> Understanding, as distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge, is a complicated process which never produces unequivocal results. It is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world. […Understanding] is the specifically human way of being alive; for every

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[30] John McGowan (*Introduction*, 108) also sees 'understanding' in Arendt's earlier essay as continuous with her elaboration of 'thinking' in her later work.

[31] Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)," in: *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 307-327; hereafter "UP". This piece was originally published in *Partisan Review* 20:4 (1954).

> single person needs to be reconciled to a world into which he was born a stranger and in which, to the extent of his distinct uniqueness, he always remains a stranger. […] The result of understanding is meaning, which we originate in the very process of living insofar as we try to reconcile ourselves to what we do and what we suffer. (UP 307-309)

What Arendt describes here as the conciliatory function of understanding throws into sharp relief the conversational character of interpretation performed under the conditions of risk and responsibility. The activity of interpretive response can be understood quite literally as a *coming-to-terms* with the world as it is, and with others as they are, in the course of an unending dialogue: the effort to think, understand, or interpret is fundamentally an effort to arrive at a set of common terms, to articulate a common language with one's interlocutors. It is crucial to see, nonetheless, that Arendt stresses the inherently equivocal nature of such language, which reflects both the radically shifting terrain of the world it seeks to describe as well as the gaps and fissures of the conversation through which it emerges. In working against the "constant change and variation" of experience, the sheer unfolding of understanding in time and in language ironically perpetuates it; the language that would finally allow us to "be at home in the world" undercuts its own achievement by altering the very world in which we had sought to come home, changing us back into "strangers," new arrivals on its shores, all over again.

Hence the aim and object of understanding appears in the form of neither "knowledge" nor "information," as Arendt writes, but "meaning."[32] Responding to experience with meaning may protect us against the dangers inherent in meaninglessness, but the act of response itself imposes other, unforeseen, and sometimes even greater dangers on those who undertake it. The conciliatory work of the thinker or interpreter ultimately generates sources of blockage, incoherence, and conflict that escape his or her own immediate notice and move towards not reconciliation, but disintegration. In the end, the 'noise' – as I have called it elsewhere – created by the language of understanding itself forms a part of the "what we do and what we suffer" that proves as intransigent and as irreducible as any other experience to which interpretation responds. Near the end of the same essay, Arendt acknowledges the reflexive movement that necessarily characterizes the process of understanding as a result, transforming arrival into renewed departure, reconciliation into repeated disintegration, and so on, taking this circularity as evidence of the conversational nature of understanding:

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[32] Though analysis of this issue is certainly both necessary and significant, it must lie outside the scope of the present discussion to consider whether or not Arendt's writings attest to a content for the concept of "meaning" more specific than its general usage. Attempts to perform this analysis in recent scholarly literature have been few; in relation to my own concept of interpretation, George Kateb, in "Ideology and Storytelling," *Social Research* 69.2 (2002): 321-357, takes a very germane point of departure in arguing that "the quest for meaning" in Arendt's work "is not the desire for an ordinary explanation that remedies one's ignorance, that adds one more bit of knowledge to one's store of knowledge, while leaving that store cumulatively richer but basically unaltered" (326f.). Nonetheless, Kateb ultimately argues the troubling point that "An event, or an experience, or a condition, or a whole

> Understanding will not shy away from this circle but, on the contrary, will be aware that any other results would be so far removed from action, of which understanding is only the other side, that they could not possibly be true. Nor will the process itself avoid the circle the logicians call 'vicious'; it may in this respect even somewhat resemble philosophy, in which great thoughts always turn in circles, engaging the human mind in nothing less than an interminable dialogue between itself and the essence of everything that is. ("UP" 322)

The dialogic form of understanding explains why interpretation must constantly encounter and respond to itself whenever it encounters and responds to its object, and

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individual life, or the world as a whole, can be made to be meaningful if the thinking imagination takes hold of mere thereness or 'sheer happenings' and manages to persuade the reader or auditor that sheer happenings point to or actually fall into a pattern or design, or betray the presence of an intention or purpose that is more than that of the actors or that of human beings altogether" (334). From here, it is a short leap for him to conclude that "ideologies, whether totalitarian or not, whether murderous or not, are not different in their appeal from fictional stories, historical stories, personal stories, myths, legends, religion, and metaphysical systems [...] if that appeal stems from the ability of any of these intellectual modes to confer meaning on reality" (355). To be brief, I cannot bring myself to agree with Kateb here, not least of all since Arendt's articulation of ideological thinking (see esp. "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government," the final chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1994), 460-479) contrasts so completely with the ideas she explores in connection with thinking proper (as in *LM* and elsewhere). Furthermore, the interpretive dimension Arendt views as essential to the task of thinking – that which separates meaning as the result of thinking from knowledge as the result of cognition, to borrow also why, as a source of sustenance as much as threat, interpretation constantly accompanies the process of living itself. As Ernst Vollrath has argued, understanding for Arendt is not and can never be a finite, instrumental activity, but rather becomes "*a way of being in the world* in which human deeds and misdeeds happen, that is, new phenomena appear" to which human beings must respond.[33] Above all, the existential element is what must be stressed in Arendt's account here: meaning is something "originate[d] in the very process of *living*", and understanding, the activity that brings forth meaning, is "the specifically human way of *being alive*" (emphases mine). In this pair of phrases and in Arendt's characterization of understanding as an "interminable dialogue," we can hear quite distinctly the first overture in Arendt's writing to what I have identified as one of the dominant motifs of Socratic philosophy, namely, the dangerous and pleasurable dialogue between language and life. For Arendt as for Socrates, understanding is the deliberate, distinctively human way of *living* the dangers and pleasures of meaning.

The Socratic motif that remains implicit in this early formulation of Arendt's thinking about thinking is announced outright when she returns to the phenomenology of the thinking experience in her later work. The more aggressively and expansively she pursued this phenomenology, the more she was drawn to Socrates as a figure for whom the dangers and pleasures of the thinking experience always proved more significant and valuable than any of the always-provisional results of thinking in the form of concepts, doctrines and systems. Arendt's definitive approach to Socrates as a model of the

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Arendt's Kantian terminology (see *LM* 53-65) – manifestly resists the reduction of the thinking activity to the mere identification of "pattern or design" in its object.

[33] Ernst Vollrath, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," *Social Research* 44.1 (1977): 173, emphasis mine.

thinking activity – in a passage later incorporated nearly verbatim into her final book, *The Life of the Mind* – appears in her stunning essay “Thinking and Moral Considerations.”[34] Frustrated at the absence of evidence in the tradition for the phenomenology of thinking she was trying to construct – as opposed to the surfeit of evidence for the results and by-products of the thinking activity in ‘philosophies’ – Arendt writes:

> The trouble is that few thinkers ever told us what made them think and even fewer have cared to describe and examine their thinking experience. In this difficulty, unwilling to trust our own experiences because of the obvious danger of arbitrariness, I propose to look for a model, for an example that, unlike the ‘professional’ thinkers, could be representative for [everybody], that is, to look for a man who counted himself neither among the many nor among the few […]; who did not aspire to being a ruler of cities or claim to know how to improve and take care of the citizens’ souls; who did not believe that men could be wise and did not envy the gods their divine wisdom in case they should possess it; and who therefore had never even tried his hand at formulating a doctrine that could be taught and learned. In brief, I propose to use a man as our model who did think without becoming a philosopher, a citizen among citizens, doing nothing, claiming nothing that, in his view, every citizen should do and had a right to claim. You will have guessed that I intend to speak about Socrates […]. (“TMC” 17f.)

Two elements in Arendt’s proposal here to take up Socrates as a representative of the thinker’s activity are particularly striking, and prepare the way for the argument I would like to pursue in the following discussion. The first of these further justifies why we should approach Arendt’s articulation of the thinking experience through the concepts of interpretive risk and responsibility; the second indicates how this approach is in a unique position to help us bridge the gap between Arendt’s ‘thinking about thinking’ and her ‘thinking about acting,’ and to what productive conclusions such an approach might bring us not only for understanding Arendt, but for facing the larger existential stakes of this genealogy.

In the passage just quoted, Arendt describes Socrates – quite against the grain of his near-universal reputation – as a person “who did think without becoming a philosopher.” In a single, striking phrase descriptive of Socrates’ thought, Arendt dissolves the ossified link between the activity of thinking as such and what has become the profession or institution of ‘philosophy’: at a single stroke, she neither divests the former of its potential dignity and legitimacy nor leaves the latter’s dignifying and legitimizing power unquestioned. If Socrates is to be a model of the thinking activity with contemporary bearing, it is not only because Plato’s fiction of Socrates, in word and in deed, offers more direct evidence of the experience of thinking than any other thinker we know of. It is also because this Socrates represents the ubiquitous possibility of thinking even and especially *without ‘philosophy’ as such or ‘a philosophy’*, and without any of the professional, disciplinary, or intellectual prejudices and limitations that accompany ‘philosophy’ as a specific institutionalization of thinking. In Socrates’ pre-traditional context, Arendt finds the sole guidepost for our own post-traditional condition, where the task of thinking is *de facto* addressed universally to every living human being *qua* human being: as Jean Yarbrough and Peter Stern write, “the decline of traditional philosophy abolishes the age-old distinction between the few who philosophize and the many who do not” (Yarbrough & Stern 328). The astonishing magnitude of Arendt’s underlying claim here only becomes explicit later in this same essay: “Thinking in its noncognitive, nonspecialized sense as a natural need of human life […] is not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty of everybody; by the same token, inability to think is not the ‘prerogative’ of those many who lack brain power but the ever-present possibility for everybody – scientists, scholars, and other specialists in mental enterprises not excluded” (“TMC” 35f.). The success of the thinking activity does not depend on the authority

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[34] Hannah Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture,” *Social Research* 51.1/2 (1984): 7-37. This essay has been republished in Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New

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York: Schocken Books, 2003), 159-189. In the present discussion, I cite the *Social Research* version, hereafter “TMC”.

invested in the thinker by the institutions of philosophy, science, or scholarship; nor does this authority, in whomsoever it is invested, offer any solid guarantee against the individual’s failure to think at all. For Arendt, once we are suspended on the high-wire of thought, no matter what aptitude or authority for thinking we claim in advance, there are no ultimate safety nets.

In consequence, we should take Arendt very much at her word when she writes that thinking – or, in our nomenclature, interpretation – is “a natural need of *human life*” (emphasis mine). Thinking and interpretation are not only everybody’s business for Arendt: they form one of the natural and necessary conditions of the *way of life* we define as human. Even as such a condition, however, thinking and interpreting are not activities that are performed by default and achieve success as a matter of course: it is only the successful prosecution of thought and interpretation that in fact forms such a precondition – a prerequisite, even – of an authentically human life. This fairly tremendous assertion, nonetheless, simply radicalizes the Socratic dictum from the *Apology* that ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ (Pl. *Ap.* 38a; “the unexamined life is not worth living for human beings”) – a statement that can be translated equally well as “the unexamined life [i.e. one lived without thinking] *cannot be lived* by a human being.” Despite all evidence to the contrary, then, Arendt’s Socrates *qua* model thinker would exemplify the argument that the lives we live rank as human if and only if our living is engaged or, indeed, fully realized in the activity of thinking. At all other times, it seems, our lives are something other than human, perhaps even less than human; at any rate, the potential for realizing such an authentically human life in the modern age, where the pursuit of thinking is constantly endangered by the absence of a stable tradition to nourish its energies and preserve its products, seems quite fragile indeed in Arendt's vision.

In terms of mutual illumination, then, I think we are on solid ground to see Arendt's definitions of 'thinking' and 'understanding' as being of one piece with my own idea of interpretation, especially considering how risk and responsibility (though not, of course, under these names) come into the foreground of Arendt's 'thinking about thinking' in light of the modern end of tradition. The link seems even more compelling when we perceive how both Arendt's 'thinking' and my 'interpretation' – especially in view of the Socratic moment – do not merely define the specialized activities of the professional scholar, scientist, or philosopher, but rather give a name to one of the constitutive aspects of human life and the activity of human beings as a specific genus of living beings. Taking my point of departure in the same decisive passage from "TMC" quoted above, I now want to cross over from my guiding assumption, which concerns the interpretive character of thinking, to the question about the broader relevance of my approach, the implications of thinking thus conceived for Arendt's political thought.

## 5. Anarchy and Groundlessness: Thinking about Acting

If Arendt's Socrates, purely in his role as a model thinker, does indeed represent "a citizen among citizens, doing nothing [and] claiming nothing that, in his view, every citizen should do and had a right to claim", then what possible model of citizenship – or indeed, of political life in general – must Arendt have in mind that would allow her to modulate Socrates' exemplarity from the sphere of private contemplation and conversation to that of public deliberation and action? Furthermore, Arendt's radicalization of the Socratic dictum about the constitutive force of *thought* for human life would seem to contradict – or at least sit very uncomfortably with – the much more recognizably Arendtian conception of political *action* as the ultimate ground of whatever meaning is to be found in a truly human existence. After all, it is the significance of *action*, *not* thought, for human life that forms the dominant theme of Arendt's political thought, to the details of which we will soon have reason to turn.

The question of the relevance of my approach now appears as a question of the internal coherence of Arendt's thought itself over the three decades of its maturity. To offer a preliminary answer to this quandary, I want to examine the revision and expansion of the key passage from "TMC" quoted above as it appears towards the end of the first volume of *LM*, in the context of the question "What makes us think?" Directly prior to a revised presentation of Socrates as a model thinker, taken directly from "TMC", Arendt writes:

> The best, in fact the only, way I can think of to get hold of the question is to look for a model, an example of a thinker who was not a professional, who in his person unified *two apparently contradictory passions, for thinking and acting* – not in the sense of being eager to apply his thoughts or to establish theoretical standards for action but in the much more relevant sense of being equally at home in both spheres and able to move from one sphere to the other with the greatest apparent ease, very much *as we ourselves constantly move back and forth between experiences in the world of appearances and the need for reflecting on them*. (LM 167, emphases mine)

Although it remains merely prefatory to a much longer discussion, this description of Socrates is a striking and delicately worded statement that rewards close attention. First of all, we are brought up rather short by the implicit idea that Socrates as we know him from Plato is a model *actor* as well as a model *thinker*. The Socrates that speaks in the *Apology*, at any rate, is so preoccupied with examining himself and his fellow citizens in philosophical dialogue that he has scarcely any time left over for other activities; furthermore, he only serves the city in an official capacity – that is, *acts* in the public sphere – grudgingly, when he is compelled to do so by law, and even in these cases makes himself remarkable only by *refusing to act*.[35] Nonetheless, Arendt's language here suggests quite palpably that the "passions for thinking and acting," at least insofar as (she claims) they appear in Socrates, are *only* "apparently contradictory": the implication being that they spring from one and the same source and realize one and the same desire. The passion that apprehends both thinking and acting, by Arendt's reckoning, does not move one to "establish theoretical standards for action," nor, as she writes later in the same passage, does this passion make one "aspir[e] to be a ruler of men" or submit "meekly to being ruled". In a word, the passion for thought and action has nothing to do with *governing* or *being governed*: it aims for neither the regulation of action by some standard or doctrine discovered in thinking, nor the regulation of thinking by the conventional standards that regulate human affairs, nor, furthermore, the submission of either action or thought to inflexible rules and standards immanent in their own respective realms. By implication, both thinking and acting can only be *anarchic* in a dual sense: the basic character they hold in common resists or even dissolves all hierarchical relations of *rulership*, whether those of governing or of being governed. They are anarchic, in short, because conversation between equal partners is always fundamentally anarchic.

But this is indeed a peculiar form of anarchy: for although thinking and acting take place without any absolute ground on either side of the equation, each constantly makes recourse to the other as if the other could offer such a ground, just as each resists and challenges the other in order to overturn such a ground. In the anarchic mutual revolt of acting and thinking, then – what we might call the centrifugal energy of conversation –

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[35] Most notable in this regard is Socrates' refusal to participate in the arrest of Leon of Salamis when he is enlisted to do so by agents of the oligarchy (Pl. *Ap.* 32a-e). Indeed, instead of acting one way or the

we can discern the equal share of actor and thinker in the condition of risk; in the reciprocal grounding and stabilization of thinking by acting and vice versa – what we might call the centripetal energy of conversation – we can discern the equal share of actor and thinker in the condition of responsibility.[36] If we move in a circular path between acting and thinking, between "experiences in the world of appearances" and "the need for reflecting on them," and if these activities find a common ground and rule only in the way they mutually negotiate and perhaps even perpetuate their anarchic groundlessness, then – all evidence to the contrary! – Socrates does indeed offer an exemplary case of the

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other, he simply goes home.

[36] What I call here the 'anarchic' relationship between acting and thinking in Arendt's political thought can really be considered a shorthand description of her fundamental difference in outlook from that of mainstream, empirically-based political science since at least the middle of the 20th century. On Arendt's relationship to this mainstream, Wolin writes, "Prior to the appearance of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*, the study of political theory was essentially a special branch of the history of ideas. It was neither political nor theoretical. As a consequence, political theory was exceedingly vulnerable to the challenge posed shortly after WWII by the proponents of the scientific study of politics who argued for an idea of theory based upon the methods of the natural sciences. The version of theory which political scientists borrowed from their colleagues in the more advanced social sciences was remarkable not only for its tendency to associate theory with 'methodology' but for its distinct hostility toward history and philosophy. As a consequence, this new form of theory had nothing very significant or interesting to say about the issues which dominated the politics of the twentieth-century" (Wolin 1977, 92f.). The relationship between critical discourse and political reality sketched out by such a political science, as Richard Bernstein has persuasively argued, is chiefly *explanatory* and *predictive*: like empirical science, the task of political thinking is to identify and articulate a nexus of causes that explains how certain phenomena arise 'in the wild' and predicts how similar phenomena will arise given identical preconditions. Like the Baconian scientist who subjects nature to his own ends by submitting to nature's own laws, the empirical political scientist's basic attitude is that of a technologist of human behavior – and here the relationship between thinking and acting must needs be anything but anarchic. Arendt's conception of human action, on the other hand, always assumes that action is far from completely determined by any given nexus of causes – that human actors fail to be fully human, or fully actors, unless their actions are at least in some respect unforeseen and spontaneous. The oppositional stance to an explanatory-predictive model of political science that Arendt pursued through her entire career, as Bernstein writes, is rooted in the insight "that such a development of empirical political theory presupposes and encourages the development of a world in which repetitive regularities come to dominate behavior. Ironically and tragically, this would be a world in which political action [as Arendt understands it] comes to play an increasingly insignificant role." Richard J. Bernstein, "Hannah Arendt: The Ambiguities of Theory and Practice," in: *Political Theory and Praxis: New Perspectives*, ed. Terence Ball (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 143; see also Vollrath 167-171, and David Luban, "Explaining Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Theory of Theory," *Social Research* 50.1 (1983): 215-248 *passim*. This same world would organize all the energies of political science and practical reality as much as possible so as to minimize or even eliminate the risks and responsibilities associated with both thinking and acting that are basic to Arendt's conception – and along with them, all traces of human spontaneity, uncertainty, and indeterminacy. A world, in other words, not entirely unlike our own.

strange passion that Arendt describes. We can see a foreshadowing, as it were, of this unlikely exemplarity in Arendt's statement quoted above, written some twenty years before in "UP", that action is in fact "only the other side" of thinking. Only Socrates – the thinker who left behind no positive doctrine of thought, and the actor who made himself conspicuous and memorable by not acting – resolves to *live* in and through the passion for risk and responsibility, those 'groundless grounds' in which thinking and acting find a common source.

It is worth noting that in this context, the only way to reassert the coherence of Arendt's discourse on thinking and acting, a discourse which insists on the common source of political and philosophical activity even as it rigorously separates those same activities, is by making recourse to the groundlessness that characterizes risk and the dialogic reciprocity that characterizes responsibility. The horizon of comprehension, as it were, for Arendt's thinking thus necessarily transcends the already high-level categories of thinking and acting, such that we are led to ask whether it might be better to characterize her neither as a political thinker *per se* nor as a politically-minded critic of the philosophical tradition, but as a theorist – perhaps *the* modern theorist *par excellence* – of risk and responsibility. Without necessarily belaboring this last point, we can at least perceive quite vividly that approaching Arendt's writings through her 're-voicing' of Socrates between philosophy and politics illuminates not only her appropriation and interrogation of a philosophical tradition that now exists only in fragments, but also her searching critique of a modernity that has obscured and effaced the meaning of political action.

From this insight, then, the basic issues that will guide the rest of the present inquiry arise more or less directly. First, I want to discuss in some detail how risk and responsibility, as we have defined them here, form the basic conditions for the unique form of life realized in thinking for Arendt, and how in turn the figurative language of life Arendt creates, quite aside from what might have been her own intentions, bridges the conceptual gap between thinking and acting in a subtle but significant way. Since the present project must necessarily emphasize the risks and responsibilities of thinking as a form of interpretation, however, a full-scale treatment of this last argument – which would have to present a reinterpretation of not just the philosophical, but also the political dimensions of Arendt's thought in their totality – lies well beyond the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, my discussion should at least open the path to such a reinterpretation by drawing critical attention to one particularly significant constellation of figurative terms that bridge the gap between thinking and acting in Arendt's discourse – namely, that of appearance and disappearance. As we shall see, the development of this single strand in Arendt's conceptual vocabulary culminates in her 're-voicing' of Socrates as the exemplary case of a thinker-actor who makes the paradoxical relation between appearance and disappearance into not only the basis for an entire way of life, but also the *sine qua non* of a properly human life – the life that comes into being only by taking up the burden of risk and responsibility. The strange new 'endangered life' embodied in Arendt's reconstructed Socrates, most importantly, comes to represent a mode of being which, using Foucault's language, can be articulated as a spirituality that comprehends politics as well as philosophy.

## 5. The Danger of Disappearance: Arendt's Language of Phenomenality

By way of justifying my approach to Arendt as a figure in this genealogy, I have already indicated in a preliminary way how the activity of thinking or understanding, by definition, unfolds under the conditions of risk and responsibility in Arendt's work. In order to show just how pervasive these underlying conditions are in the whole span of Arendt's work, however, and just how much their tacit presence builds an invisible bridge, as it were, between thinking and acting in her conceptual vocabulary, I want to explore in detail a single aspect of her articulation of thinking that takes the guise of a figurative language of appearance and disappearance. The ambiguities and tensions of this language, as we shall see, reflect the forms of risk and responsibility inherent in the activity of thought, but they also find transparent parallels in her articulation of acting. The investment in an ethos of risk and responsibility that underwrites Arendt's language, moreover, helps highlight the importance she gives to Socrates as exemplar of that peculiar form of human life, realized exclusively in either thought or action, upon which the entire edifice of her political and philosophical reflection is built.

It is no accident, then, that as far as the importance of this form of life to Arendt's thought is concerned, the most extensive document we have of her conception of the thinking activity is the first part of a (projected) trilogy of volumes collectively titled *The Life of the Mind* – which title, incidentally, tacitly calls upon us to reimagine the relative weight and meaning of both 'life' and 'mind' in the range of activities covered by this traditional expression.[37] The argument of the work itself, furthermore, pursues the same practice of disrupting and reconfiguring expectations as its title presages. For instance: although it seems entirely counterintuitive to begin a book on thinking – the least visible or perceptible of all human activities – with an exposition of the fundamentally phenomenal, 'appearing' character of the world, not to mention a rigorous critique of the being/appearing dichotomy that forms one of the taproots of traditional Western metaphysics, this is precisely what Arendt does at the outset of *LM*. The resulting approach, in part, organizes her subsequent discussion on the structure and meaning of the thinking activity around the conceptual polarity between *appearance* and *disappearance* and forges a unique language around this dichotomy:

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[37] In the same vein, and although practical circumstances ultimately obliterated the neat symmetry, we should note that Arendt's original projected title for *HC* was *Vita Activa*, the Latin term for 'the life of action,' traditionally opposed to the *vita contemplativa*, 'the life of the mind.' Arendt's own German translation of *HC* retains this original title: *Vita activa, oder, Vom tätigen Leben* [*Vita activa, or On the Life*

> The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. Nothing could appear, the word "appearance" would make no sense, if recipients of appearances did not exist – living creatures able to acknowledge, recognize, and react to – in flight or desire, approval or disapproval, blame or praise – what is not merely there but appears to them and is meant for their perception. In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, *Being and Appearing coincide*. […] Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody. (*LM* 19, emphases in original)

This opening statement does not merely set forth the first and most important philosophical premise for Arendt's exposition. More importantly, it orients her argument not towards the definition of an unchanging and univocal *essence* of the thinking activity,

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*of Action*] (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960). Arendt criticizes the separation and mutual alienation of this pair of concepts in antiquity (namely, in Aristotle's distinction between the *bios politikos* and the *bios theoretikos*) and their reception and modification in medieval Latinity even more so. (See *HC* 7-21 for Arendt's historical and theoretical investigation of this opposition in Western thought.) The point is that Arendt is not merely taking up a very old pair of terms at face value, nor that she is trying to undermine the distinction from within, but rather that she is trying to articulate a contemporary meaning for them that draws upon traditional meanings and concepts even as it interrogates the tacit assumptions behind them. (This interrogation, I should reiterate, does not go so far in Arendt's work as to cancel the difference between thinking and acting altogether.) The common concern that draws together *HC* and *LM* in her oeuvre – not the least evidence for which is the fact that this concern is announced in the respective title of either work – is in the last analysis a *form of (human) life*. It remained an open question for Arendt – just as it should remain open for us – whether we can retain the traditional distinction without automatically privileging one form of life over the other; or, for that matter, whether we can propose a new taxonomy for but rather towards a retrieval of the plural and variable *experiences* of thinking that become possible in a world defined by an 'ontology of appearance' and a multitude of subjects to whom that world appears in a multitude of ways. Arendt does not necessarily mean, moreover, that sentient beings exist only insofar as they appear to each other and themselves, nor that sensible objects exist only insofar as they appear to sentient beings – at its worst, that line of thinking threatens the kind of solipsism Arendt is at pains to avoid. Rather, her point is that sentient beings and sensible objects alike exist expressly *in order to* appear and perceive appearances. In short, whatever appears does not appear in order to give evidence of what (truly) exists beyond appearance; rather, whatever exists, exists *in order to* appear. [38] Indeed, this is what Arendt means when she describes sentient beings and sensible things as "meant for" each other, "meant to" perceive and be perceived; both spectacle and spectator are "meant for" each other, not in the sense of existing in a relation of mutual adequation (as, broadly speaking, in the Kantian experience of the beautiful), but rather in the sense that the *reality* of each is confirmed and, indeed, even constituted by the sensing and sensible presence of the other. Whatever meaning the world has, whatever meaning *we* have, does not lie in the dark and unfathomable depths of things, but is borne forth on a series of brilliant surfaces – each of which may appear in a multitude of ways to each among the multitude of its beholders.

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forms of life that could overcome the mutual alienation of thinking and acting – or knowing and doing – that has plagued the Western tradition of philosophy at least since Plato and Aristotle.

[38] One of the most striking demonstrations Arendt offers for this fundamental thesis, in fact, points to the role of appearance in the life process. Arendt challenges the near-universal tendency of biologists, sociologists, and psychologists "to interpret all appearances as functions of the life process." Drawing on the work of Swiss zoologist and biologist Adolf Portmann (*LM* 27-30), she asks "Could it be that appearances are not there for the sake of the life process but, on the contrary, that the life process is there for the sake of appearances? Since we live in an *appearing* world, is it not much more plausible that the relevant and the meaningful in this world of ours should be located precisely on the surface?" (*LM* 27).

Proceeding beyond this starting point in the analysis of the thinking activity for Arendt means resolving a striking and multiple paradox: how can we reconcile the *non*-appearing character of the thinking process, the non-appearing character of the thinker insofar as s/he thinks, and the non-appearing (or at best only metaphorically appearing) character of thought-objects with a world strictly governed by the regime of appearances? For a world in which manifest visibility is the preeminent criterion of reality, how can the invisible, obscure, and traceless process of thought have any substance or meaning at all? Arendt first approaches this problem by defining the transition in experience from sensing to thinking, from appearances in the world to the dis-appearance that marks the thinking activity, as a process of *withdrawal*:

> [Mental activities] all have in common a *withdrawal* from the world as it appears and a bending back toward the self. This would cause no great problem if we were mere spectators, godlike creatures […]. However, *we are of the world and not merely in it*; we, too, are appearances by virtue of arriving and departing, of appearing and disappearing […]. These properties do not vanish when we happen to be engaged in mental activities and close the eyes of our body, to use the Platonic metaphor, in order to be able to open the eyes of our mind […] As Merleau-Ponty once put it, "I can flee being only into being," and since Being and Appearing coincide for men, this means that I can flee appearance only into appearance. And that does not solve the problem, for the problem concerns the fitness of thought to appear at all, and the question is whether thinking and other invisible and soundless mental activities are meant to appear or whether in fact they can never find an adequate home in the world. (*LM* 22-23, emphases in original)

By defining thinking as a withdrawal from immediate appearance, Arendt suggests, we only give a name to its paradoxical and, indeed, perhaps even dangerous character without resolving the tensions it creates. Here we catch the first glimpse of the fact that – in Arendt's later borrowing of a phrase from Heidegger – the thinking activity is fundamentally "out of order" when viewed from the perspective of phenomenal experience, "as though men, whenever they reflect without purpose, going beyond the natural curiosity awakened by the manifold wonders of the world's sheer thereness and their own existence, engaged in an activity *contrary to the human condition*" (*LM* 78). As we have seen so often before in this genealogy, the ‘place’ of interpretive thinking lies wherever it will be ‘out of place.’

In terms of the risks of interpretation, then, we can perceive that thinking always proves more or less dangerous for the thinker because thinking by nature *exceeds*, and in so doing *turns against and negates*, whatever is merely given in sense experience: in a word, its predilection for dis-appearance openly defies the universal regime of appearances. The primary risk of interpretation, in effect – the first danger of interpretation from which all its other dangers follow – is that interpretation always turns *away from* what is apparent and given in order to seek the *meaning* of the apparent and given, risking the loss of precisely that which it sought to gain in earnest. The quest for meaning, in effect, must run the risk of meaninglessness: “Thinking always deals with absences and removes itself from what is present and close at hand. This […] means that reality and existence, which we can only conceive in terms of time and space, can be temporarily suspended, lose their weight and, together with this weight, their meaning for the thinking ego” (*LM* 199). Just as the thinker-interpreter, moreover, *resists* appearance and of necessity takes refuge in the dis-appearance of his thinking ego and his thoughts from a world of brilliant surfaces, so, too, does he risk severing the vital relation he possesses to such a world in the very effort to deepen and strengthen that relation. “The Epicurean [dictum] *lathē biōsas*, ‘live in hiding,’” Arendt writes, is “an at least negatively exact description of the *topos*, the locality, of the man who thinks […W]e would call thinkers the inconspicuous men by definition and profession” (*LM* 71, 72). Just as the thinker risks losing himself in thought, as we say, because he is temporarily lost to that world of appearance to which he still belongs and must ultimately return, so the interpreter risks losing himself in interpretation because he no longer exists in the same realm inhabited by the real object he seeks to interpret.

Despite the fact that Arendt's sharply paradoxical formulation of thinking as withdrawal or dis-appearance from appearance threatens at times to rend the logical fabric of her language, it already contains within itself the means to resolve its paradox – at least as it appears in this form. What the thinker pursues in and through the activity of thinking "can be conceived only as another 'appearance,' another phenomenon originally hidden but supposedly of a higher order, thus signifying the lasting predominance of appearance" (*LM* 24). In other words: if the rule of the world is appearance, as Arendt begins to argue via Merleau-Ponty in the passage above, the withdrawal achieved in thinking can only represent a flight from appearance into appearance – albeit perhaps into a different order of appearances:

> Since mental activities, non-appearing by definition, occur in a world of appearances and in a being that partakes of these appearances through its receptive sense organs as well as through its own ability and urge to appear to others, they cannot come into being except through a deliberate *withdrawal* from appearances. It is withdrawal not so much from the world […] as from the world's being *present* to the senses. *Every mental act rests on the mind's faculty of having present to itself what is absent from the senses.* Re-presentation, making present what is actually absent, is the mind's unique gift, and since our whole mental terminology is based on metaphors drawn from vision's experience, this gift is called *imagination* […]. (*LM* 75-76, emphases in original)

This key passage modulates Arendt's pairing of sensible appearance and intelligible dis-appearance into the pairing of presence and absence.[39] Arendt resolves the paradox by reconstituting its key terms; in doing so, however, she betrays the fact that neither of her key pairings can be conceived of as a polar opposition, but rather must be imagined as extreme points on a continuous spectrum. The thinker withdraws into dis-appearing absence – absence from the appearing world and from himself *qua* appearing thing – because it is only in this absence that he can "imagine" or truly *make present* the objects of his thought, which are themselves absent from his senses, in the mind's inner space of appearance.[40] If thinking aims at uncovering the *meaning* of whatever one thinks about, then by virtue of an even more deep-seated paradox, we find that the presence of any given thing must be pressed into absence, as it were, in order for thinking to press out its meaning. This is precisely what Arendt argues quite boldly a couple pages later:

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[39] It is worth noting here that Arendt's vocabulary of presence and absence extends beyond her discussion of thinking, which is my focus here, to inflect her articulation – or what would have been her articulation – of political judgment as well. For Arendt, judgment depends upon not so much the presencing of absent objects to the mind, as in thinking, as the inscription of one's own present viewpoint within the viewpoint of an absent other. Michael Denneny's language makes clear how the play of presence and absence underlies Arendtian judgment: "What changes [the] *dokei moi*, the subjective 'it seems to me,' to a judgment of taste is our ability to look at the same thing from the perspective of other people. We do not judge as they might judge; our judgments are not identical with their judgments (which would be empathy), but we judge from their point of view. By the utterly mysterious power of the imagination, *that strange ability to make present what is absent and to make ourselves absent from our immediate presence and present to some absent perspective, we are able to put ourselves in the other's position and see, not as he*

> In order for us to think about somebody, he must be removed from our presence; so long as we are with him we do not think either of him or about him; *thinking always implies remembrance; every thought is strictly speaking an after-thought*. It may, of course, happen that we start thinking about a still-present somebody or something, in which case we have removed ourselves surreptitiously from our surroundings and we are conducting ourselves as though we were already absent. (*LM* 78, emphases mine)

In short, the meaning of any phenomenon can only *appear* in the mind at the threshold of the thing's *disappearance* from the world: thinking 'absents' a thing in order to 'present'

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*sees, but how it looks to us from his point of view.*" Michael Denneny, "The Privilege of Ourselves: Hannah Arendt on Judgment," in Hill (ed.), 264, emphasis mine.

[40] The present point on the mutual entanglement of appearance and disappearance, and the entire present discussion of thinking, should be considered as running in parallel with the convincing and eye-opening argument of Dean Hammer in "Freedom and Fatefulness: Augustine, Arendt and the Journey of Memory," *Theory, Culture & Society* 17.2 (2000): 83-104. In this piece, Hammer sets out to retrieve and reveal the Augustinian roots for much of Arendt's 'thinking about thinking.' Rather than appearance and disappearance, however, the key terms for his exposition are worldliness and worldlessness; the paradox of withdrawal is, however, central to both vocabularies. Hammer writes: "What Arendt drew from Augustine, the contours of which remain in her later work, is a journey of memory in which reflection, as it removes us from the world, paradoxically reveals us as inserted, through birth, into this world. […] It is this Augustinian journey of memory […] that continued to guide Arendt's thinking in developing a political ethic that shared with action the ontological foundation of beginning" (84). For Arendt as for Augustine, the paradox of withdrawal is resolved by "a two-step process of isolation from and return to the world, a journey of memory made possible by our being born into this world. It is in this return that we reconstitute our relationship to the world and our responsibilities to each other" (85; see also 90-92). By examining Arendt's reformulation of Augustine's theological categories into philosophical and political ones, Hammer reaches conclusions comparable to those of the present discussion on the relation of thinking and acting.

its meaning. Meaning is quite literally the way we ‘re-member’ a thing, how we reconstruct its presence when it is absent: “The meaning of what actually happens and appears while it is happening is revealed when it has disappeared; remembrance, by which you make present to your mind what actually is absent and past, reveals the meaning” (*LM* 132). In spite of the fact that a thing and its meaning, in Arendt’s reckoning, both represent *appearances* in equal measure, they each apparently belong to orders of appearance so different in nature as to be mutually exclusive. In purely practical terms, furthermore, it seems that the withdrawal and dis-appearance that characterize the thinking activity only rebel against immediate, sensible appearance in order to reinstate an augmented and intensified tyranny of appearances on another plane. Just as Carl von Clausewitz famously wrote that war is politics continued by other means, so one could say that, for Arendt, thinking is appearing continued by other means. In thinking, “the mind learns how to deal with things that are absent and prepares itself to ‘go further,’ toward the understanding of things that are always absent, that cannot be remembered because they were never present to sense experience” (LM 77). Thinking does not seek to do away with Appearance for the sake of Being – on the contrary; in shrugging off and reaching beyond whatever appearances have been or will be given to the senses at any point in space or time, the thinker aims to acquire *more* appearances, to find more intense, more powerful, more controllable, more *meaningful* appearances. If thinking itself is, as Heidegger claims, “out of order,” then it forces the thinker’s normal experience of presence and absence, space and time, to go completely “out of order” as well:

> What is near and appears directly to our senses is now far away and what is distant is actually present. While thinking I am not where I actually am; I am surrounded not by sense-objects but by images that are invisible to everybody else. […] Thinking annihilates temporal as well as spatial distances. I can

> anticipate the future, think of it as though it were already present, and I can remember the past as though it had not disappeared. (*LM* 85)[41]

In effect, thinking as dis-appearance and absence ironically places us in the thick of appearance and presence – but an appearance and a presence liberated from the chains of mere empirical facticity, freed from the limits of the given, boldly and energetically moving, as it were, outside their usual bounds.

If Arendt's idea of thinking does in fact coincide in main outline with my own idea of interpretation, as I have argued, we can thus claim with good reason that insofar as interpretation seeks to make the meaning of its object immediately present to the interpreter, the activity of interpretation must of necessity leave behind the 'mere' immediate presence of the object itself and instead 're-present' the now-absent object in the mind. In a sense, then, every interpretive response must be fundamentally *apostrophic* in character: the interpreter can only respond, can only offer a counter-address to the object that addresses her when the object itself is absent. This condition of the interpretive situation, which defines both the risks and the responsibilities of thinking-interpreting specifically in relation to its object, by no means leaves the interpreter herself untouched either. As if by accident, it is in the endangerment of the thinker-interpreter's relationship to herself through thought that we first stumble upon the deep ties between the activity of thinking and the strange new form of life that distinguish Arendt's argument. The specific stakes of this endangered life for the thinker-interpreter find expression in Arendt's language through a final modulation of the vocabulary rooted in presence-absence, or in appearance-disappearance – namely, through its radicalization into a language of life and death. The thinker's voluntary disappearance from the appearing world, as Arendt writes,

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[41] The reader of German literature cannot help but be struck by the almost exact correspondence between this passage from Arendt, writing in the 1970s, and the closing lines of the dedicatory poem ("Zueignung") that precedes Goethe's *Faust der Tragödie erster Teil* from 1828/29: "Was ich besitze, seh'

> can be understood – from the perspective of the natural and of our common-sense reasoning – as the anticipation of our final departure, that is, our death. […] The metaphor of death, or, rather, the metaphorical reversal of life and death – what we usually call life is death, what we usually call death is life – is not arbitrary, although one can see it a bit less dramatically: If thinking establishes its own conditions, blinding itself against the sensorily given by removing all that is close at hand, it is in order to make room for the distant to become manifest. […] Everything present is absent because something actually absent is present to his mind, and among the things absent is the philosopher's own body. (*LM* 84)

If the quest for meaning undertaken in thought demands the willful absencing of an object present to the thinker's senses, it demands by the very same token the willful absencing of the thinker herself from herself and from others. Recalling the language I used in previous portions of the project, we might say that the *integration* achieved between the thinking subject and the meaning of her object entails any number of *dis-integrations* in the subject's relation to herself, to others, or even to the object at hand. In terms of either absence or dis-integration, what I have called the apostrophic quality of thinking thus seems to apply not only to the object, but also to the subject of thought – and in such a way as to suggest the sharply paradoxical character of the *life* invoked in Arendt's 'life of the mind.' For the thinker in thinking anticipates or, as it were, partially imitates the form that self-absencing ultimately assumes for everyone, whether they think or not: namely, the final absence, disappearance or dis-integration of the subject in death.

This is not to say, of course, that whenever someone withdraws from the world of appearances in order to respond to that world and discover its meaning, he actually risks his own death. Much more to the point: the "metaphorical reversal of life and death" that Arendt describes as an essential part of the thinker's experience in fact dramatically

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ich wie im Weiten, / Und was verschwand, wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten" ("What I [now] possess, I view as if from a distance, / And what has disappeared turns to [present] realities").

destabilizes the life-death opposition itself and proposes an entirely new set of standards by which life and death might be defined: “Seen from the perspective of the immediacy of life and the world given to the senses, thinking is, as Plato indicated, a living death. […] From the viewpoint of the thinking ego, […] a life without meaning *is* a kind of living death” (*LM* 87).[42] Just as thinking deploys dis-appearance and absence in order to liberate appearance and presence from their sensible limits, so too does it recast the metaphorical death willingly undergone by the thinker as a fuller, richer, and certainly stranger form of life – the life that can only be lived in the tenuous and elusive presence of meaning. In the last analysis, nonetheless, the thinker’s sustained contact with this meaning entails that his response to the world – the response that engenders meaning, intensifies presence, and renews *life* – goes hand in hand with his endangerment by the same response – which by the same token limits meaning, intensifies absence, and anticipates *death*. The life of interpretation consists in this choice to endanger one’s life *qua* interpreter.

If we keep in mind these peculiar characteristics of Arendt’s discourse of dis-appearance and absence in her treatment of thinking as we turn to its analogue in her treatment of acting, we are likely to be struck by an uncannily consistent inversion of this discourse. However, for as much as Arendt opposes it to thinking, acting nonetheless converges with its opposite where its mode of life is concerned: for Arendt, both of them represent equally necessary and complementary modes of endangered life. Now, many volumes have been written on the significance of appearance in Arendt’s concept of political action, spanning the whole history of Arendt's critical reception since her death.[43] I do not intend to intervene in the complex and long-standing debates surrounding this issue, most of which lie beyond the scope of my project, except by showing how even a fairly uncontroversial interpretation of some of her key texts on action and appearance can be illuminated and transformed when we perceive how the value of endangered life is as central to them as it is to her texts on thinking.

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[42] Arendt’s passing reference to Plato as one of the original sources for the metaphorical reversal she describes suggests that at least in this instance, she is not guilty of the flat-footed reading of Plato for which she is often indicted: I would go so far as to argue that the metaphorical reversal of life and death she

One of the most significant byproducts of action in Arendt's thought is generally referred to as the 'self-disclosure of the actor': any authentically political action *reveals* (or, under certain readings, even *creates*) the identity of the actor responsible for it.[44] A vital group of passages from *HC* explains this characteristic of action in more detail, highlighting action as a kind of deliberate choice to appear, a willed self-revelation on the part of the actor within a world governed by just such appearances and revelations:

> With word and deed [i.e., with action] 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. […I]ts 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. […T]he primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: "Who are you?" […] 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 the sound of the voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (*HC* 176f., 178, 179)

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describes is, in fact, the governing motif for both the dramatic structure and the figurative language of the *Phaedo*.

[43] For some influential and characteristic examples of scholarly viewpoints in this debate, see Canovan, *Reinterpretation*, 110-116, 130-141; Passerin d'Entrèves, *Political Philosophy*, 65-71, 76-79; Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 107-113; and especially Villa, "Arendt, Nietzsche, and the 'Aestheticization' of Political Action," in: *Arendt and Heidegger* (Ch. 3), 80-109.

[44] Bonnie Honig, among others, strikes precisely this post-Nietzschean stance by arguing that the actor comes into existence through the act, not *vice versa*: "Action produces its actors; episodically, temporarily, we are its agonistic achievement." Bonnie Honig, "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," in Williams (ed.), Vol. 2, 366. See also Passerin d'Entrèves, *Political Philosophy*, 72f. on the disclosure of the agent in action.

In terms of modes of life, it is important to note how Arendt describes action as the moment in which the actor "confirm[s]" and "take[s] upon" himself "the naked fact of [his] original physical appearance," that is, the appearing body and voice which he possesses *de facto* as conditions of given biological life, and which, more importantly, constantly perpetuate "the beginning which came into the world when [he was] born" by continuing to appear in visible space. Action becomes the point at which the actor confirms, responds to, and, as it were, repeats his initial appearance in the world through birth. In a perceptive and influential discussion that seeks to appropriate certain aspects of Arendt's political thought for a feminist politics, Bonnie Honig elaborates precisely these paradoxical and kindyneutic aspects of action in relation to the life of the actor:

> A life-sustaining, psychologically determined, trivial, and imitable biological creature in the private realm, [the actor's] self attains identity – becomes a 'who' – by acting. For the sake of 'who' it might become, it risks the dangers of the radically contingent public realm where anything can happen, […and] forsakes the comforting security of 'what' it is, the roles and features that define (and even determine) it in the private realm […]. (Honig 362)

Precisely like the thinker, the actor liberates appearing things and appearance as such from the limits of the empirically given by negating, turning against, and moving beyond 'mere' life and 'mere' appearance in the moment of acting. In a sense, then, acting allows the actor simultaneously to affirm and to overcome his own birth, his own life. This connection between action and birth, incidentally, constitutes the aspect of action that Arendt elsewhere calls *natality*: action, like birth, initiates something new, something unforeseeable and unpredictable in the world.[45] In a sense, then, we can say that the actor constantly affirms his own first appearance in birth by figuratively giving birth to himself, over and over again, through the initiating and self-disclosing aspects of his actions.

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[45] See *HC* 8f.

In the same moment as the actor figuratively affirms and overcomes the physical appearance of his own living body on earth, he also affirms and overcomes the apparently supreme value of this life by choosing to disclose his unique identity – “who” as opposed to “what” he is – the value and content of which necessarily transcend whatever is given in his sensible appearance. As we have seen with the thinker, furthermore, the actor enthusiastically asserts the omnipotence of appearance against even the limits of sensible appearance itself, bearing forth a whole progeny of brilliant surfaces rooted not in the presence of empirical particulars to the senses, but in a virtually infinite range of absent things: namely, the ideas, images, and stories that his actions make manifest and assemble in the public eye. What could quite literally be called the actor’s re-presentation of himself to others in public thus forms a precise analogue to the way the thinker re-presents a whole range of absent things to himself, in the inner arena of his thought. Both thinker and actor respond to, and thus take responsibility for, their own appearance on earth and the rule of appearance as such, albeit through ways of life that seem to diverge completely in their attitudes towards appearance *per se*. Just as considerable risk is involved, furthermore, in the thinker’s death-like withdrawal from himself and from others, so a comparable risk is involved in the actor’s self-disclosure – and it concerns his relation to the very identity he discloses:

> [The actor’s identity] can be hidden in complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a wilful purpose, as though one possessed and could dispose of this “who” in the same manner he has and can dispose of his qualities. On the contrary, it is more than likely that the “who,” which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimōn* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters. (*HC* 179f.)

The actor cannot *intend* the disclosure of his identity in action, nor can he *intend* to disclose a certain definite identity thereby; he can neither undertake action with the aim of revealing himself, nor choose in advance which self, which “who” he will prove to be in the eyes of others, in the moment of his word or deed. As George Kateb has memorably characterized Arendt's thought on this point, the identity revealed by the actor as uniquely his own always proves to be "self-surprising."[46] The identity that the actor discloses through action, in short, forever eludes the knowledge or control of its possessor, in the same way that one can never see one's face the way another person sees it. Peter Fuss' brilliantly concise definition of Arendtian action captures the mixture of self-endangerment and self-disclosure that is vital to the concept for Arendt: "Action manifests itself in the initiation of unprecedented processes whose outcome is uncertain and unpredictable and whose meaningfulness lies in the disclosure of the identities of the agents themselves."[47]

The dangerous and paradoxical aspect of the actor's self-disclosure in Arendt's thinking once again finds its sharpest expression through a radical relativization of the life-death dichotomy similar to the one we saw in the case of thinking. Nowhere does this relativization appear in starker relief than in Arendt's brief but pithy gloss on the ancient commonplace *nemo ante mortem beatus esse dici potest* ("Call no man happy before he is dead"), an idea that largely defies modern common sense where life, death, and human identity are concerned:

> Th[e] unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and speaker's life; but as such it can be known, that is, grasped as a palpable entity only after it has come to its end. In other words, human essence – not human nature in general (which does not exist) nor the sum total of qualities and shortcomings in the individual, but the essence of who somebody is – can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story. (*HC* 193)

Both the sharp contrast and the impeccable symmetry with Arendt's discourse on thinking could not be more marked. Whereas the thinker's withdrawal from the appearing world into thought, with its figurative resemblance to death, clarified and intensified his life through the revelation of meaning, the actor's literal death becomes the prerequisite for the complete illumination of his identity *to others* – certainly not to himself. The actor's final dis-appearance from the real world of appearances, in other words, allows his life and character to appear in their unity and totality to his survivors, to be *re-membered* by them as a story with beginning, middle, and end. At the price of his real, living presence, the actor has himself become a pure object of others' remembrance – he has at last achieved the luminous absence which, as we have seen, belongs strictly to objects of thought and of interpretation. Indeed, only at the utmost risk-taking extremity of action – that is, in actions where the actor willingly meets his end in death – does Arendt allow him any possibility of deciding the "who" he will prove to be in the remembrance of others. If the "essence" of a given individual lies precisely in the revelation of this "who", as Arendt suggests in the passage quoted above, then

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[46] I borrow this term from George Kateb's *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984).

> whoever consciously aims at being "essential," at leaving behind a story and an identity which will win "immortal fame," must not only risk his life but expressly choose […] a short life and premature death. Only a man who does not survive his one supreme act remains the indisputable master of his identity and possible greatness, because he *withdraws into death* from the possible consequences and continuation of what he began. (*HC* 193f., emphasis mine)

Nowhere does the subtle inherent logic of Arendt's language of appearance and dis-appearance, presence and absence, or life and death display itself more clearly, and nowhere does the paradoxical intimacy and alienation forged by this language between acting and thinking manifest itself more strikingly than at just such extreme points of these two enterprises. Just as the appearing and present world only reveals its meaning to the thinker at the threshold of dis-appearance and absence, whereby the world and the thinker alike suffer endangerment, so only the actor who endangers his appearing, present

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[47] Peter Fuss, "Hannah Arendt's Conception of Political Community," in: Hill (ed.), 159.

life – that is, makes literal the withdrawal into death that still remains figurative for the thinker – can gain for his life the surfeit of meaning that will render it, in Arendt's parlance, "essential."[48] That the definition of this 'essence' depends on subsequent processes of interpretation is unmistakable: "in theorizing action," as Dana Villa argues, "Arendt provides us with nothing less than a phenomenology of meaning itself: its sources, conditions, modes of presencing, and possibilities for permanence" (*Arendt and Heidegger,* 11). In their common relationship to meaning and to life, thinking is "only the other side" of acting ("UP" 322) after all, but in a way no one could have expected. Both activities do arise from one and the same "passion," but a passion for which we still have no name – a passion for the endangerment of life, undertaken for the sake of meaningful life. If given life grants each human being definite appearance and limited presence, then the mode of human existence achieved in both thinking and acting reaches beyond the boundaries established for 'given' life in order *both* to endanger this life *and* to live it more intensely. In doing so, this life seeks to dwell in greater proximity to the meaning that stands at the center of what for Arendt is the properly human life, the life of interpretation.

## 7. Openings to the World: *Doxa*, Disclosure, and the Socratic Way of Life

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[48] In an influential article, George Kateb suggests, but does not quite fully articulate, these implications of Arendt's apotheosis of the actor – that is, the transformation of the actor's life into a meaningful "essence" – when he writes: "[T]he revelations of action are perfected only in art, the great poems, plays, epics, histories. The story about the virtuoso or persona or principled actor is the last word about who he was. Stories thus contribute, as nothing else can, to the illumination of human existence. The best stories are about public words and deeds that shine, that compel further attention by their beauty. Arendt comes close to saying that we exist in order to be turned into stories, and that we are justified by the stories we provoke or inspire writers to tell; and the stories provoke and inspire others to act. […] *This is not to justify life as an esthetic phenomenon, but to define human life as intelligible meaning.*" George Kateb, "Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 5.2 (1977): 154, emphasis mine.

Meaning holds what can only be called a threshold-position in Arendt's discourse of thinking and acting; that is to say, meaning paradoxically appears only in and through dis-appearance and is present only in and through absence.[49] Whether it makes itself manifest as the singular identity of an actor revealed to a spectator in the public arena of appearances, or as the general significance of a phenomenon revealed to the thinker in the private arena of thought, meaning for Arendt remains intimately tied to the experience of *disclosure*.[50] Of course, we have just encountered this term as shorthand for the way the actor endangers himself through action – namely because he lacks all certainty about what he will actually disclose in the end. Nonetheless, disclosure describes equally well the way the thinker, who likewise gives up all certainty about what he, too, will ultimately disclose, endangers both the objects of his thought and himself. By relating endangerment and disclosure in this way, Arendt compels us to think of interpretive disclosure not simply as the drawing-back of a veil that obscures or conceals a definite truth. Rather, we must think of it quite literally as the *dis-closure* of an object, as the *un-closing* or even *re-opening* of the apparently settled nature of a thing such that the thing appears as a bundle of questions or problems addressed directly to us, the spectators of its dis-closure. Drawing on an image from Xenophon's Socrates, Arendt in "TMC" compares the capacity of thinking to dis-close the meaning of its object to the power of a strong wind – a force which, while remaining invisible, changes or sets into motion everything it encounters, picking up what it once laid down and dispersing what it once brought together:

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[49] Although I have left open in this discussion the questions raised by Arendt's use of the term 'meaning,' many of these questions have yet to be addressed in detail by contemporary scholarship. An early treatment can be found in J. Glenn Gray, "The Winds of Thought," *Social Research* 44.1 (1977): 44-62, where Gray interprets Arendt's 'meaning' as a form of what he calls 'belonging.' According to him, Arendt insists that thinking "reveals to us a different world in which *meaning as belonging and not truth* is the issue [...]. Though she did not develop at length [...] what she intended by the concept of belonging as the substance of thinking, it is clear that the attempt is *our incessant and never completed effort to find our place and role in creation*. [...] As the search for truth is an inquiry into the way things are with its purpose and goal knowledge, so the quest for meaning as belonging is the endless occupation of thinking with no goal or purpose outside itself" (51f., emphases mine). His account is tantalizing, but remains ultimately unsatisfactory, despite his overture to the role of dialogue in the idea of meaning as belonging. Gray argues that Arendt "neglected to consider those admittedly rare occasions of 'the marriage of true minds' when meditative thinking can be concerted. Such dialogue is a thinking aloud, as it were, and the discovery of meaning as belonging is rendered concrete by the reality of friendship. [...] Sometimes only a lover or friend can make clear to us what we *mean*. [...] A friend […] does not merely clarify our thinking for us. His very being can itself provide assurance that *I belong in existence where and when I chance to be*" (55, emphasis mine).

[50] Arendt's debt to Heidegger's thought is particularly clear in her explorations of the 'disclosive' or revelatory character of action; see, for instance, section 43 of *Being and Time* (cited in Villa, "Arendt, Heidegger, and the Tradition," 987). Not only would it take me too far afield from my narrower concern to consider this historical and intellectual debt in detail, however, it would also turn me aside somewhat from the argument I pursue here, which seeks to expand the significance of 'disclosure' as a pivotal term in Arendt's thought beyond the idea of revealing a preexisting reality.

> Socrates himself, very much aware that thinking deals with invisibles and is itself invisible, lacking all the outside manifestation of other activities, seems to have used the metaphor of the wind for it: 'The winds themselves are invisible, yet what they do is manifest to us and we somehow feel their approach.'[51] […] The manifestations of the invisible wind of thought are those concepts, virtues and 'values,' with which Socrates dealt in his examinations. The trouble […] is that this same wind, whenever it is aroused, has *the peculiarity of doing away with its own previous manifestations. It is in its nature to undo, unfreeze as it were, what language, the medium of thinking, has frozen into thought* – words (concepts, sentences, definitions, doctrines) […]. These frozen thoughts, Socrates seems to say, come so handy you can use them in your sleep; but if the wind of thinking, which I shall now arouse in you, has roused you from your sleep and made you fully awake and alive, then *you will see that you have nothing in your hand but perplexities, and the most we can do is share them with each other.* ("TMC" 24, emphases mine; see also *LM* 104, 109)

The wind of thought dis-closes the meaning of all it touches – not because it uncovers something formerly unseen, but because it forces open, and keeps open, all the seams and gaps in our experience such that reality itself takes on the open-ended, unsettled, indeterminate character of a question about ourselves, addressed to ourselves. If a certain quantum of risk for the thinker or actor always accompanies such disclosure, then the endangerment of life by this dis-closure of its meaning – the re-opening of its paradoxes and dilemmas – is the constitutive characteristic of what is, for Arendt, the properly human mode of life that appears in thought or action, our way of being "fully awake and alive."

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[51] Arendt cites Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, IV.iii.14.

The pivotal significance Arendt gives to disclosure, furthermore – an idea that seamlessly combines the hermeneutic and the phenomenological elements of her thinking just as much as it bridges the apparent gap between her philosophical and her political concerns – is what gives the figure of Socrates his peculiarly rich, evocative, and paradoxical status in her writing. Socrates, for Arendt, is the first practitioner – and Socratic dialogue the first practice – of a disclosure which has not yet decomposed into the mutual alienation of thinking and acting, philosophy and politics, that has marked the Western tradition ever since.[52] In the remarkable and only recently published essay "Philosophy and Politics,"[53] Arendt presents a provocative vision of Socrates as the thinker-actor who formed a whole way of life around the peculiarly Greek concept of *doxa*. This word, a common enough term in Plato's language, usually translates simply as "opinion," but Arendt draws on the entire, varied field of its signification in the Greek language in a way that brings it very close to the concept of disclosure as I have just elaborated it here. In Arendt's hands, the *doxai* that form Socrates' lifelong concern in dialogue – whether with himself or with others – combine in a single entity both the *self*-disclosure that marks Arendt's language of action and the *world*-disclosure that marks her language of thinking. Let us begin by considering the latter aspect of Socratic *doxa* for Arendt, namely, how she believes Socrates approached the (mere) 'opinions' of his interlocutors as so many different ways in which the *world* discloses its meaning to them as thinking subjects:

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[52] For related discussion of this point, see Canovan, *Reinterpretation*, 253-264, and Philip B. Hansen, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, History and Citizenship* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993), 50-88.

[53] Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *Social Research* 57.1 (1990): 73-103. A slightly different version of this essay has even more recently been published as "Socrates" in Arendt/Kohn, *Promise*, 5-39; in the present discussion, I cite the *Social Research* version, hereafter "P&P". As the editorial note accompanying this work in *Social Research* notes, "Philosophy and Politics" presents an edited version of a lecture that Arendt delivered at the University of Notre Dame in 1954, but which never appeared in print until 1990. I should also note here that both George Kateb, in "Arendt and Individualism," *Social Research* 61.4 (1994): 765-794, and Dana Villa, in "Arendt and Socrates," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 53.208 (1999): 241-257, argue that Arendt's approach to Socrates in "Philosophy and Politics" differs fundamentally from her treatment of him in much later pieces such as "Thinking and Moral Considerations." Kateb takes this tack in relation to the problems of citizenship, self-examination, and individualism. Villa, on the other hand, goes further in order to argue that "even at her most seemingly Socratic, Arendt remains fundamentally un- (even anti-) Socratic" and puts "his philosophical activity in the service of a Periclean (that is to say, manly and civic-minded) aestheticism. Placed within these limits, the urgency of the Socratic demand for moral integrity is lost, as is the force of his relentless negativity" (Villa, "Arendt and Socrates," 243). While the consistency of Arendt's approach to Socrates is not an explicit concern of the present argument, I do think the evidence I present suggests at least a fundamental continuity in the role she ascribes to Socrates for thinking and acting in the Western tradition. Despite this pair of arguments for a fundamental shift in Arendt's construction of Socrates, Kateb, at any rate, makes points similar to my own where the decisive status of thinking and acting in relation to a specifically human way of life is concerned: "She is not content to say merely that thought may precede, guide, explain, and justify action, she also holds that thought and action are united by their common dependence on speech. The implication is that action and thought (not only, not especially, philosophical

> To Socrates, as to his fellow citizens, *doxa* was the formulation in speech of what *dokei moi*, that is, of what appears to me. This *doxa* had as its topic not what Aristotle called the *eikos*, the probable, the many *verisimilia* (as distinguished from the *unum verum*, the one truth, on the one hand, and the limitless falsehoods, the *falsa infinita*, on the other), but comprehended the world as it opens itself to me. It was not, therefore, subjective fantasy and arbitrariness, but also not something absolute and valid for all. The assumption was that the world opens up differently to every man, according to his position in it; and that the 'sameness' of the world, its commonness (*koinon*, as the Greeks would say, common to all) or 'objectivity' (as we would say from the subjective viewpoint of modern philosophy) resides in the fact that the same world opens up to everyone and that despite all differences between men and their positions in the world – and consequently their *doxai* (opinions) – "both you and I are human." (P&P 80, emphasis mine)

For Arendt, the kind of *doxai* that were examined and interrogated by Socrates in dialogue arose from the convergence between the viewpoint of a specific person and a world shared by all, between a subject that 'opens itself' to the world through the activity of interpretation and a world that 'opens itself' to that subject. The interpretive character of *doxa* as Arendt describes it depends on its intermediate position between completely arbitrary invention or subjective fantasy on the one hand and the monotonous, dictatorial voice of the absolute on the other – both of which fall outside the realm of meaning precisely because the mutual 'opening' of subject and object that is the *sine qua non* of

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thought) are closer to each other than either is to anything else in the whole range of human activities and are set apart as consummately human" (Kateb, "Arendt and Individualism," 767).

meaning never takes place in these extreme cases.[54] In effect, the world becomes an object truly held in common, gains its 'objectivity,' at the same moment in which the human viewpoints we take up on it reveal their mutual differences, or even their points of incommensurability, in conversation. To *live* in and through this world-disclosing function of *doxa*, as Socrates did, means constantly renewing both the 'commonness' of the common world and the 'uncommonness' of each individual opening on to that world – constantly reinvigorating these qualities of experience, ironically, by constantly endangering them.

The disclosure of any given *doxa*, furthermore, unavoidably entails the disclosure of the subject who holds this particular *doxa* and no other. As a result of bringing out and making palpable a person's *doxa* as a realization of the viewpoint or, indeed, of the way of life that belongs to that person alone, Socratic dialogue necessarily reveals the person himself, the individual and irreplaceable life of the person in its singularity. Socratic *doxa* thus both combines and realizes, as two sides of the same coin, what we have called a certain mode of world-disclosure with a certain mode of self-disclosure: a person discloses *himself*, and indeed, dis-closes or re-opens himself as well, in the very same moment as he discloses his unique *doxa* in dialogue.[55] Just as the world-disclosure enacted in interpretive thinking grounds the non-appearing activity of thought in an appearing world, so the self-disclosure enacted in a dialogue between subjects renders Socratic philosophy intensely and uniquely political for Arendt:

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[54] Incidentally, Arendt distinguishes very strongly between what she understands as (the historical) Socrates' enthusiastic embrace of *doxa* and "Plato's furious denunciation" of it, "which not only ran like a red thread through his political works but became one of the cornerstones of his concept of truth. Platonic truth, even when *doxa* is not mentioned, is always understood as the very opposite of opinion. […] The opposition of truth and opinion was certainly the most anti-Socratic conclusion that Plato drew from Socrates' trial." (P&P 74, 75)

> The word *doxa* means not only opinion but also splendor and fame. As such, it is related to the political realm, which is the public sphere in which everybody can appear and show who he himself is. To assert one's own opinion belonged to being able to show oneself, to be seen and heard by others. [...] Socrates, who refused public office and honor, never retired into his private life, but on the contrary moved in the marketplace, in the very midst of these *doxai*, these opinions. (P&P 80f.)

In disclosing to others the way the world discloses itself to us, we necessarily disclose ourselves in more than one sense. We not only make ourselves "seen and heard by others," we also add our perspectives and our positions to the repertoire of possibilities upon which they can draw freely in present and future interpretation and conversation. In a sense, then, each participant in a conversation makes the common world 'more open' for every other participant, intensifying its power of disclosure and augmenting the plurality of its meanings.[56] By the same token, nonetheless, each interlocutor also 're-opens' her *doxai* and herself as one re-opens a heretofore settled decision and puts it on the agenda for examination: the mutual confrontation of *doxai* in dialogue invigorates disclosure as such just as it puts each specific mode of disclosure, each unique *doxa*, in a position of question and challenge, and ultimately one of risk. Here Arendt perceives a kind of back-door to public existence, as it were, manifesting itself in the midst of Socrates' self-avowedly private life and a decaying Athenian democracy: the disclosure

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[55] For an excellent account of self-disclosure in Arendt's concept of action, see Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 76-84.

[56] These characteristics of dialogic disclosure bear a transparent relation to the peculiar kind of impartiality Arendt defines as essential to political discourse and narrative remembrance, an impartiality which depends upon the spectator's capacity to inhabit a number of viewpoints simultaneously and evaluate the same phenomenon according to a number of different standards. As Lisa Jane Disch writes, "Political impartiality is not secured by means of detachment from politics but by fostering public deliberation that depends on the ability 'to look upon the same world from one another's standpoint. [...]' Thucydides' work[, for instance,] fosters political impartiality by an artistic (though not fictional) creation of plurality by his representation of speeches from the multiple, divergent perspectives that constitute the public realm. […] This account of political impartiality, characterized not by abstraction but by the interplay among a plurality of perspectives, anticipates the conception of impartiality that Arendt discern[s] in Kant's description of the 'enlarged mentality' in the *Third Critique*. […] Enlarged thought, in her terms, is situated rather than abstract. She calls it training 'one's imagination to go visiting,' which involves evoking or telling yourself the multiple stories of a situation from the plurality of conflicting perspectives that constitute it." Disch, "More Truth Than Fact," 681f., 686. Under the heading of 'situated impartiality,'

of the common world to each individual, and the self-disclosure of each individual to others, are public and political events by default, even if they are only shared by two individuals in conversation. “The city,” George Kateb writes, “is thus made up of speakers learning to speak and helping one another to speak; the real city is a city in words” (Kateb 1994, 769).[57] To make your *doxa* public in the fullest sense means disclosing not only the way the common world opens and manifests its meaning to you, but also the way you open and manifest your own meaning to that world, and to the others who share it with you.[58] “Our very ability to experience the specific realness of another, an event, not to speak of ourselves,” writes Kimberley Curtis, “depends on mutual responsiveness to the particularity of others—and by extension to ourselves and plural voices within ourselves” (Curtis 25).

The combinatory logic of world-disclosure and self-disclosure that governs Arendt’s analysis of Socratic *doxa* seems dualistic or paradoxical to us only because it disregards to a certain degree the mutual alienation of thinking and acting, of philosophy and politics that we inherit from our tradition. If we, like Arendt, are willing to put down this inheritance from a tradition already at an end, just as Arendt’s Socrates, who exists before the beginning of the same tradition, has not yet taken it up, we can see how the logic of the concept seamlessly dictates Arendt’s otherwise puzzling exposition of the art

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Disch synthesizes the interplay in Arendt’s thinking between these varying sources and influences on the question of political objectivity.

[57] Although Kateb takes this argument to an extreme, characterizing the Socratic ‘city of interlocutors’ as Arendt’s “loveliest utopia” (Kateb, “Arendt and Individualism,” 769).

[58] Kateb pushes Arendt’s presentation rather too far towards agonism, I believe, by overemphasizing the role of personal identity in the formation of *doxa* and by construing dialogue as tolerant mutual indulgence rather than a deliberate joint pursuit: “One’s *doxa* is what one is peculiarly fit or enabled to see and say. One’s *doxa* is what one is, in one’s individual uniqueness; and to be able to assert one’s opinion is the reason to want an opportunity to show oneself to others, while patiently allowing others to show themselves similarly. […] Her concept of *doxa* implies such a close tie between one’s opinion and one’s

of Socratic dialogue. From what we have already seen, it is not too far-fetched to say that the primary experiences of ‘opening’ in which our *doxai* are first formed, precisely because they require a certain reciprocity of *response* between subject and object, are already dialogic in the deepest sense for Arendt. In fact, Michael Denneny’s early and eloquent exploration of Arendt’s thought articulates a concept of responsibility that bridges thinking and acting by appealing to the interpretive faculties of response and disclosure inherent in both:

> Etymologically speaking, [...] the word *responsibility* has three distinct but tightly connected elements of meaning: to declare the presence of that which is present; to declare oneself present; and to declare a bond between oneself and that which is present to one. In common language we may say to face the facts and to stand up and be counted, which together mean to respond to the facts, to declare ourselves in regard to them. (Denneny in Hill (ed.), 1979, 269)

Nonetheless, our *doxai* only betray this dialogic provenance – that is, their basically partial, perspectival, and contingent nature as responses – when they are brought into reinvigorating and endangering conversation, when they enter the process by which both the commonness of the world that forms their shared object and the idiosyncrasies of the individuals who take up viewpoints on that world are jointly thrown into sharp relief. The primary dialogic process of mutual ‘opening’ between subject and object crystallized in *doxa*, then, can only be revealed as such by a secondary dialogic process of ‘opening’ between subjects and their *doxai* in conversation proper. This principle of Socratic dialogue, what might be called the disclosure of disclosure itself, guides the gradual process by which individual *doxai* attain, not truth, but the quality that Arendt calls “truthfulness.” For Arendt, the singular impulse to engender truthfulness in those around him guides Socrates’ entire endeavor – and this impulse takes the figurative form of bringing new life into the world of the city:

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person that it is difficult to imagine breaking out of oneself, except falsely. [...] What citizens truly learn

> What Plato later called *dialegesthai*, Socrates himself called maieutic, the art of midwifery: he wanted to help others give birth to what they themselves thought anyhow, to find the truth in their *doxa*. […] Every man has his own *doxa*, his own opening to the world, and Socrates therefore must always begin with questions; he cannot know beforehand what kind of *dokei moi*, of it-appears-to-me, the other possesses. He must make sure of the other's position in the common world. Yet, just as nobody can know beforehand the other's *doxa*, so nobody can know by himself and without further effort the inherent truth of his own opinion. Socrates wanted to bring out this truth which everyone potentially possesses. If we remain true to his metaphor of maieutic, we may say: Socrates wanted to make the city more truthful by delivering each of the citizens of their truths. The method of doing this is *dialegesthai*, talking something through, but this dialectic brings forth truth not by destroying *doxa* or opinion, but on the contrary reveals *doxa* in its own truthfulness. The role of the philosopher, then, is not to rule the city but to be its 'gadfly,' not to tell philosophical truths but to make citizens more truthful. (P&P 81)

Our *doxai* can only give birth to the truthfulness with which they are continually pregnant, in a sense, when we who possess these *doxai* willingly undergo the ardent – and often arduous – labor of dialogue, in which they are endlessly endangered and reinvigorated. The truthfulness of which Arendt speaks here, then, must be clearly distinguished from truth in the same way that disclosure must be distinguished from revelation. The dialogic process of disclosure, which culminates in truthfulness, makes the commonness of the world and the plurality of perspectives on that world mutually dependent even as they remain mutually conflicting; the monologic process of revelation, which culminates in truth, can only yield a common world at the price of human plurality. This is the reason why Arendt's Socrates becomes an exemplary figure for both philosophy and politics, possessed with equal passion for both thinking and acting:

> Socrates did not want to educate the citizens so much as he wanted to improve their *doxai*, which constituted the political life in which he too took part. To Socrates, maieutic was a political activity, a give and take, fundamentally on a basis of strict equality, the fruits of which could not be measured by the result of arriving at this or that general truth. It is therefore obviously still quite in the Socratic tradition that Plato's early dialogues frequently conclude inconclusively, without a result. To have talked something through, to have talked about something, some citizen's *doxa*, seemed result enough. (P&P 81f.)

In approaching *doxa* as an artifact of the experience in which the world discloses its meaning to and for an individual, Arendt's Socrates thus not only establishes dialogue as

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from one another is how much difference exists in their world." (Kateb, "Arendt and Individualism," 771).

the activity in which *doxai* are dis-closed and re-opened to each other, but also reveals how the specifically human mode of life, the life of thought and action, depends in the first instance on just such dialogue between and disclosure of interpretations.

For Arendt, then, to enter into the human mode of life constituted by Socratic dialogue means submitting to the uncertainty and contingency of a *process* that unfolds simultaneously on the levels of both thought and action. Within the bounds of this thinking-acting process, the thoughts and actions of any given subject necessarily forego complete sovereignty, just as interlocutors in a conversation must make themselves complicit in a regime of terms and categories that they hold in common even though none of them can claim it as his own. Just as the world- and self-disclosure that lie at the root of every *doxa* do not posit a specific, absolute truth, but rather confirm the plurality of relative meanings, so the process of dialogue does not culminate in any specific end product, but rather realizes its full significance only in the endless, fertile interplay among the 'openings' that enter into it – that is, in the immanent *life* that is realized in and through the process. As Arendt writes:

> The meaning of what Socrates was doing lay in the activity itself. Or to put it differently: *To think and to be fully alive are the same,* and this implies that thinking must always begin afresh; it is an activity that accompanies living and is concerned with such concepts as justice, happiness, virtue, offered us by language itself as expressing the meaning of whatever happens in life and occurs to us while we are alive. […] *Thinking accompanies life and is itself the de-materialized quintessence of being alive;* and since life is a process, its quintessence can only lie in the actual thinking process and not in any solid results or specific thoughts. A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence – it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. (*LM* 178, 191, emphases mine; see also *LM* 123, 124)

This passage comes as close as any in Arendt's *oeuvre* to expressing what I have termed the kindyneutic nature of Socratic dialogue and, indeed, of the unique philosophical spirituality at work in the language of Plato's dialogues. The distinctly human life for Arendt inheres in the restless momentum of the wind of thought, continually dissolving and re-forming the “solid results” in which it momentarily crystallizes but never persists, a movement that continually begins again, casts itself in doubt, puts itself in danger. The activity of dialogue, the actual doing of interpretive thought for Arendt never seeks the closure of a predetermined end-form for either its subject or object. The Socratic life of dialogue, the interpretive way of life *par excellence*, seeks out precisely the broadest, richest, and most dangerous *dis*-closure for the world and the self, for thinker and actor alike – the utmost risk for the sake of the utmost intensity. For Arendt’s Socrates, at least, the examined life is only examined and, indeed, is only *lived* to the extent that our thinking and our acting constantly re-open both the question of our world and the question of ourselves, constantly returning us to the perennial task of conversation.

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# CONCLUSION

## HIS MASTER'S VOICE

> No, surely he was no deceiver, and how could that voice deceive? It was so calm and yet so agitated; it sounded from an inwardness, the depth of which I could scarcely suspect, as if it were breaking a path through masses of rock. Can that voice deceive? What is the voice, then – is it a stroke of the tongue, a noise that one can produce as one wishes? But it must have a home somewhere in the soul; it must have a birthplace. And that it did, in the innermost recesses of his heart it had its home; there he loved me, there he loves me. To be sure, he had another voice also; it was cold, chilling; it could murder every joy in my soul, squelch every joyous thought, make even my kiss cold and abhorrent to me. Which was the true voice? He could deceive in every way, but this I feel – that tremulous voice in which his whole passion throbbed – that was no deceit; it is impossible. The other was a deception. Or there were evil forces that gained control of him. No, he was no deceiver; that voice that has shackled me to him forever – that is no deception.[1]
>
> – Kierkegaard

What is the voice? And which, among these many voices we speak, is the true voice? Marie Beaumarchais' desperate question looms large at the end of this inquiry precisely because, as we have seen, the language spoken by the interpreter turns the voice out from its secure home in the personality and sets it adrift in a wilderness of homelessness, distraction, and dispersion, where it attaches itself to all and none. Does Galileo speak in his own voice when he describes what he sees through the telescope – any more than his rivals do when they mouth their unwieldy Latin? And what would it mean for Socrates to speak in his own voice, when his whole life seems to offer elaborate proof that the attainment of such a voice is both the one worthwhile task of thought and something entirely unthinkable? If language begins and ends as indirect discourse, the language of the interpreter appears to awaken us to an authentic, immediate, inalienable speech that corresponds to the true meaning of things: a voice for everything that does not yet have a voice, a direct discourse at last. But this only seems to be the case – for in fact the interpreter's voice deepens our error as well as his own, puts the final seal on the deception that envelops us as well as him. In Marie's case, only we can see that the dark charm of the interpreter's voice seduces the seducer along with the seduced. This knowledge forever eludes Marie – because she cannot go on, as we do, to read *Diary of a Seducer* and hear the equally unhappy Cordelia describe the voice of her seducer as “a matchless instrument, always sensitive; he had a range such as no other instrument has. […] He could roar like an autumn storm; he could whisper inaudibly. […] With an indescribable but cryptic, blissful, unnameable anxiety, *I listened to this music I myself had evoked and yet did not evoke*” (Kierkegaard 310, emphasis mine). Who is the player, and who the played? In the process of interpretation, each of us necessarily inhabits both positions simultaneously: the moment we open our mouths to speak sense, we put ourselves and our hearers at risk. And far from deterring us from speech, this risk is the native habitat for all the pleasures we derive from interpretation.

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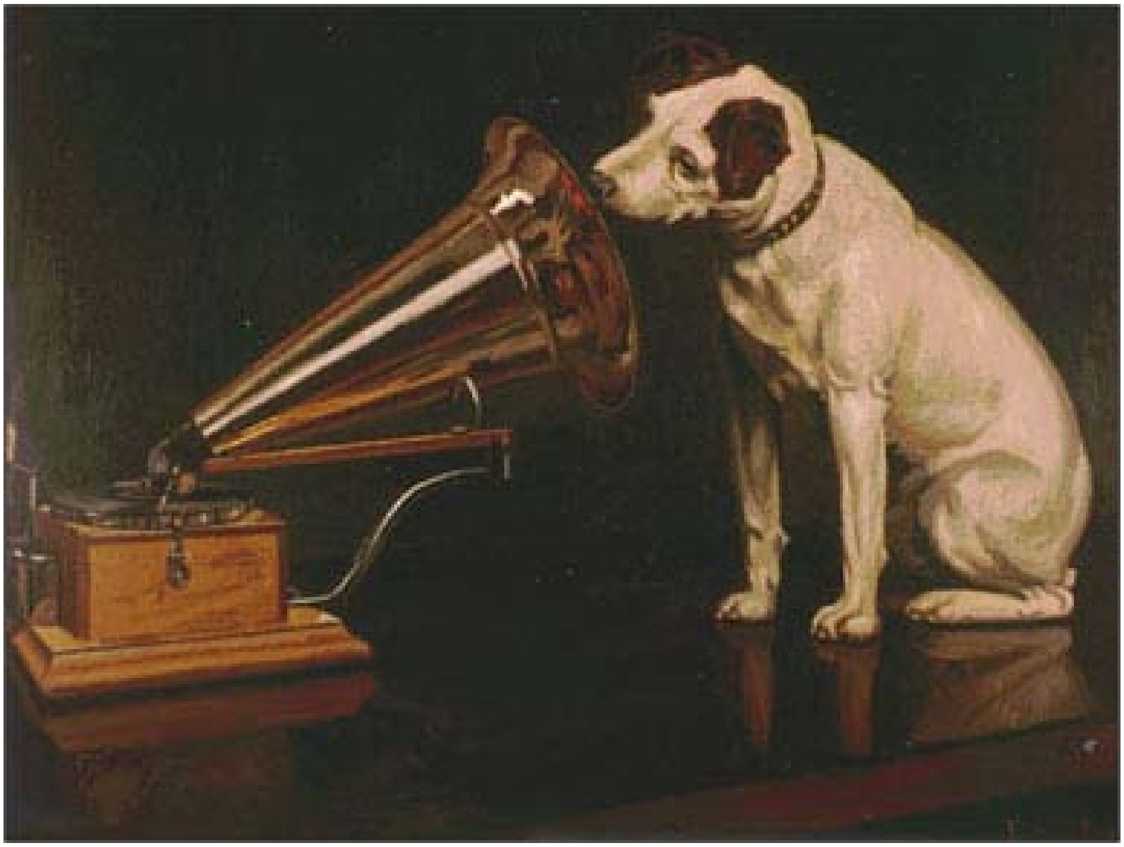
[1] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I: Kierkegaard's Writings, Volume III* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987),188.

And what about *this* deceiving voice, the one you think you hear in your mind as you read these very words, the voice you think belongs to someone with my name who is saying these things? Even if you carefully worked through the dense thicket of metaphors that allows you to think this peculiar thought, could you say who exactly is deceived by it, and who does the deceiving? How can you believe that I, as an interpreter, am speaking the truth to you when it is not I who am speaking now at all? Is it not our willingness to participate in a shared delusion, our decision to endanger ourselves, our thoughts, our ways of life one more time in reading, that even allows this transaction to take place across a page? My dear Marie: don't I stand to win or lose just as much from listening to myself as you do? – And isn't that a reason to rejoice?



Francis Barraud, *His Master's Voice*, 1900.