

Fall 2020

Concrete Thinking in Images: Art and image as a site for meaning in Hannah Arendt's *Life of the Mind*

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Recommended Citation

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Concrete Thinking in Images:
Art and image as a site for meaning in Hannah Arendt's Life of the Mind

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
December 2020

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my family— to my mom and dad for pushing my intelligence before I knew what that meant and for blessing me with the resources to pursue my curiosity.

Thank you to my friends— to my partner, Bek Florey, for the infinite coffee runs and dinners I didn't help prepare, to Jamie Toomey for his unpaid services as an editor and a tutor.

Above all, thank you to my advisors— to Michael Ives for his forgiveness when my work in poetry suffered, to David Shein for giving me a reason to believe that I was capable of thinking like a philosopher, to Thomas Wild for helping me to develop the origin of this project, and of course to Thomas Bartscherer for his wisdom, intelligence, encouragement, dedication, patience, and Bach's cello suite #1 in G.

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Introduction

As an introduction to *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt explains that there were two origins for the project. The first and most “immediate” was a question about the nature of evil: how do we understand evil that is not intended to be evil, but stems rather from thoughtlessness? For Arendt, this question occurred in response to the Eichmann trials, about which she spoke of “the banality of evil.” (*LOM* 3). Contrary to our “literary, theological, or philosophic” traditions, which claim that evil, “is something demonic; its incarnation is Satan, a ‘lightning fall from heaven’ (Luke 10:18) or Lucifer, the fallen angel” (*LOM* 3), she says,

I was struck by the manifest shallowness in the doer which made it impossible to trace the uncontested evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives. However monstrous the deeds were, the doer—at least one of them and a very effective one who now was on trial—was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous. In the absence of firm ideological convictions and also of specific evil motives, the only characteristic one could detect in his past as well as during the trial and in the preceding police examination was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but thoughtlessness.

In other words, Eichmann was not a man motivated by particularly evil intent, inability to understand right or wrong, or mental insanity. Yet, the consequences of his thoughtless actions were undoubtedly heinous.

The question which *The Life of the Mind* thus endeavors to answer becomes, “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing” (*LOM* 5)? That is, is there something inherent to the thinking activity which either prevents or conditions people to prevent evil-doing?

However, the question of thought’s relationship to morality raised, for Arendt, a number of questions which are much more difficult to answer, and betrayed “certain doubts” she had

since writing *The Human Condition*, an “inquiry into ‘The Vita Activa’ (LOM 5). Hence, in order to fully understand the relationship between thoughtlessness and evil, Arendt found a second origin, one which led her into an explanation of the thinking activity in its entirety.

The second origin is characterized by the question: what is the “Vita Contemplativa,” the philosopher’s way of life which Arendt says is characterized by this quote from Cato: “‘never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself’” (LOM 7)? Or, as she writes, “Assuming that Cato was right, the questions are obvious: What are we ‘doing’ when we do nothing but think? Where are we when we, normally always surrounded by our fellow-men, are together with no one but ourselves?”

My project has two origins of its own. My work with *The Life of the Mind* began as an investigation into her poetics of quotation, and a strange passage toward the end of *The Life of the Mind* which reads, “Let me now at the end of these long reflections draw your attention—not to my ‘method,’ not to my ‘criteria’ or, worse, my ‘values,’ all of which in such an enterprise are mercifully hidden to its author though they may be or rather seem to be quite manifest to listener and spectator—but let me tell you briefly what in my opinion is the basic assumption in this course” (LOM 211). It should strike the reader as strange that in Chapter 20, after about 200 pages of reflection, Arendt finds it appropriate to call attention to the “basic assumptions of the course.” Moreover, the chunk of text containing this quote occurs without a title and without warning, in a section otherwise devoted to finding the “location” of the thinker while he is thinking.

There are two of these “basic assumptions,” neither of which are particularly basic. The first basic assumption, which is concerned with politics and the communal world, claims that the philosophical/literary tradition has broken down.

I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now attempt to dismantle metaphysics and philosophy with all its categories as we have known them from its beginning in Greece until today. Such dismantling is possible only on the assumption that the thread of tradition is broken and that we shall not be able to renew it. Historically speaking, what actually has broken down is the Roman trinity which united for thousands of years religion, authority, and tradition (*LOM*, 212).

It is unclear what, exactly, the reader should do with this claim. It floats loosely, unsubstantiated by either evidence or theoretical explanation.

The matter is complicated by the fact that this breakdown is mentioned in several works, each time concerned with slightly different objects and effects. In *Between Past and Future*, she credits Marx as bringing tradition to its end: “Our tradition of political thought had its definite beginning in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. I believe it came to a no less definite end in the theories of Karl Marx. [...] 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, which he calls ‘society,’ through the emergence of ‘socialized men’” (*BPF* 17). The effect of this ending is the breakdown of authority in the modern world.¹ Similarly, she says in the *Life of the Mind* that the Roman trinity united “religion, *authority* and tradition.” Clearly, when one disappears, it takes the other, too. Indeed, the importance of the relationship between authority and tradition cannot be overstated; in *Men In Dark Times*, she says, “Insofar as the past has been transmitted as tradition, it

¹ “In order to avoid misunderstanding, it might have been wise to ask in the title: What was— and not what is— authority? For it is my contention that we are tempted and entitled to raise this question because authority has vanished from the modern world.” (*BPF* 91)

possesses authority; insofar as authority presents itself historically, it becomes tradition (*MDT* “Lessing” 193)”. So, the thread of tradition has broken, and whether it be by the destruction of the “Roman trinity,” Karl Marx, or something else entirely is irrelevant. What is important is the consequential elimination of authority. The message is clear: the past is no longer the stable, vertical figure that it once was.

She does not say much about the nature of the breakdown of tradition in her address on accepting the Lessing Prize. Still, Arendt says that Lessing understood well that tradition was breaking down.

For what was wrong [according to Lessing], and what no dialogue and no independent thinking could ever right, was the world. The ‘pillars of the best-known truths’ (to stay with his [Lessing’s] metaphor), which at that time were shaken, today lie shattered; we need neither criticism nor wise men to shake them any more. We need only look around to see that we are standing in the midst of a veritable rubble heap of such pillars (*MDT* “Lessing” 10).

Here, we see that instead of “tradition” or “authority,” she uses the word “truth.” That being said, the idea is the same: the past may still exist but it is in pieces. It has lost its integrity and completeness. Notice that the metaphor works in two ways: first, it communicates that truth, itself, has been shattered, that history cannot be trusted to give us guidance, and second, that even the stories themselves, regardless of their claim to truth, have become incoherent. The pieces of old truths that remain are nothing but shards, and the pillars have been reduced to heaps, organized only by their associations with each other.

This is true in the philosophical tradition, as well. The linear continuum of philosophy, which allowed each person to build upon the previous, has broken down. Arendt says, “What you then are left with is still the past, but a fragmented past, which has lost its certainty of evaluation” (*LOM* 212). Each fragment must then be evaluated anew.

The second basic assumption at the end of *Life of the Mind* is poetic and provides a mode for rescuing the history of philosophy, for pulling it out of the ruins and making it useful once again. Put simply, to deal with the fragments of the past, we must change our preference from that which was authoritative or “true,” to that which is beautiful, “rich and strange.”

Characteristically, she quotes Shakespeare’s *Tempest* in summary, which apparently says it “better and more densely than [she] could.”

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange. (*LOM* 212)

About this brief quote, she says, “It is with such fragments from the past, after their sea-change, that we have dealt here. If some of you should be tempted to try their luck at the technique of dismantling, let them be careful not to destroy the ‘rich and strange, the ‘coral and the pearls’ which probably can be saved only as fragments” (*LOM* 212). The “sea change” they have suffered is this breakdown in authority and tradition. And if someone should dive into the past, they would not be able to resurface a past unchanged if they wanted to. What is left is the “rich and strange,” or, as she refers to the beautiful or odd quotations she picks up throughout *The Life of the Mind*, the “out-of-order” moments.

And it is only the spectator to tradition who can achieve this. The pearl diver is not of the ocean, he is a visitor to it. In the same way, to truly understand and make useful those fragments tradition has left us, we must be onlookers and spectators, not participants. This mode of reading is perhaps best summated in Arendt’s note about her text, that its method, criteria, and values are all, “hidden to its author though they may be or rather seem to be quite manifest to listener and

spectator,” or, as she says earlier in the text, “Only the *spectator*, never the actor can know and understand whatever offers itself as a spectacle” (*LOM* 92), or again, about Kant, “As he [Kant] himself said, posterity often ‘understands an author better than he understood himself’” (*LKPP* 33).

Much of the theory behind these remarks is no longer relevant to this paper, although the spirit behind its initial inquiry certainly is. Much of my investigation was determined by this question: Assuming that Arendt would have us, as spectators to her investigations, turn the same sort of vision to her own work, what would we find? What is latent in *The Life of the Mind* that Arendt, herself, did not fully understand?

To sufficiently answer this question would require a lifetime of work. However, it leads me to the second origin of my own interest in *The Life of the Mind*, one such “out-of-order” moment which disrupts a major thesis of Arendt’s work. Thought, according to *The Life of the Mind*, occurs exclusively in language. Arendt sticks closely to this thesis and uses it to prove a number of things about thinking which are fundamental to the text. I will explain thought according to the Socratic paradigm, the “silent dialogue” between me and myself, in the first chapter of this project. This will provide a background for understanding how Arendt thinks about thought and its quest for meaning.

Perhaps the only exception to this thesis, that thought only occurs in language, is a brief moment where she detours into a discussion about hieroglyphic languages and the symbols which determine them. In just a few paragraphs, she points out that those who think in these languages must be doing it in a fundamentally different way from those of us who think in alphabetical languages, which are determined by the sound of the words rather than the sign

which represents them. The second chapter will consist of an analysis of this section, as well as some speculation into whether or not this visual thinking, which we know so little about, is interested in truth or meaning, a dichotomy which Arendt sets up early in *The Life of the Mind*. In this chapter, I will provide some reasons for believing that it deals with truth.

In the final chapter of this project, I will respond to the claims in the second, arguing instead that visual thinking has the capacity to deal with meaning and not with truth and that, moreover, it has the capacity to do this because the images it deals with are inherently meaningful.

1. Thinking and Language

What is thinking: Intellect and Reason, Truth and Meaning

In order to explain what thinking is and is not, Arendt draws on Kant's distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand*, which she translates as "reason" and "intellect" (rather than the common translation of *Verstand* as "understanding"). In short, "the intellect (*Verstand*) desires to comprehend what is given to the senses, but reason (*Vernunft*) wishes to understand its *meaning*" (*LOM* 57). Hence, we have two mental activities, one which is concerned with truth, fact, knowledge, and the other which is concerned with the meaning of something which we already take as true.

According to Arendt, Kant initially drew this distinction in response to what he called the "scandal of reason," namely that we think about multitudes of things which we could never have distinct answers to, yet are extremely pressing. And although he restricted the scope of reason to "God, freedom and immortality," Arendt explains that he also recognized that, "the urgent need of reason is different from and 'more than mere quest and desire for knowledge.' Hence, the distinguishing of the two faculties, reason and intellect, coincides with a distinction between two altogether different mental activities, thinking and knowing, and two altogether different concerns, meaning, in the first category, and cognition, in the second." (*LOM* 14).

And these two mental activities have two very different criteria for validity. As a result of its dealing with the appearing world, where it is manifestly the case that some things are true and some things are not, cognition aims for truth. This truth is not derived from what Kant would call "reason" and what Arendt will go on to call "thinking," but from sense evidence alone.

Cognition whose highest criterion is truth derives this criterion from the world of appearances in which we take our bearings through the perceptions of our senses whose testimony is self-evident, that is, unshakeable by argument and replaceable only by

another evidence... But that is by no means the case for meaning and for the faculty of thought which searches for it; the latter does not ask what something is or whether it exists at all—its existence is always taken for granted—*but what it means for it to be* (LOM 57).

So while cognition is concerned with what *is* and is guaranteed to be right or wrong by sense data rather than argument, thought always begins from the question, “If this is the case, then what does it mean?”

It is important to understand the nature of truth and its criterion. Truth is always factual and is evaluated simply via its factualness, i.e. observation. “In other words, there are no truths in addition to and above factual truths; all scientific truths are factual truths, those engendered by sheer brain-power and expressed in a specially designed sign-language not excluded, and only factual statements are scientifically verifiable” (LOM 61). In other words, we may argue about the meaning of a truth, but it makes no sense to argue the truthfulness of the truth itself; in a dispute about truth, one party will always be either lying or wrong.

Truth cannot be reasoned with, it must always be seen. However, this does not mean that Arendt is comfortable saying that we are never wrong about what is true, that we have some sort of objective perspective. Semblance, a word she uses to describe the state of appearances ruled by the law of “it-seems-to me,” or, in other words, limited and determined sensual aparati, is inherent to the world of appearing and sensing creatures.² That is, we cannot escape the subjectivity which is defined by the capacity of our senses. “Error is the price we pay for truth,

² “Semblance is inherent in a world ruled by the two-fold law of appearing to a plurality of sensitive creatures equipped with the faculties of perception. Nothing that appears manifests itself to a single viewer who could perceive it under all its inherent aspects. The world appears in the mode of it-seems-to-me, depending on particular perspectives that are determined by location in the world as well as by particular organs of perception. This mode produces not only error which I can correct by changing my location, drawing closer to what appears, or by improving my organs of perception with the help of tools and implements, or by using my imagination in order to take other perspectives into account; it also gives birth to true semblances, that is, to deceptive appearances which I cannot correct like an error since they are caused by my permanent location on the earth and remain bound up with my own existence as one of the earth’s appearances” (LOM 38).

and semblance is the price we pay for the wonders of appearance” (*LOM* 38). In fact, error is *essential* to truth, a feature of it rather than a failing. And the idea that we may see and thus believe something which we might later find to be untrue is not concerning to her. The two are so bound, and truth is so determined by authenticity and appearance rather than rational principles, that she does not consider truth and falsehood to be opposites. “Hence, the true opposite of factual, as distinguished from rational, truth is not error or illusion but the deliberate lie” (*LOM* 59). That is, truth and error anticipate each other. It is the inauthentic and deliberate lie that actually threatens the principles of truth.

While we may be wrong about what is true, we can only find out that we are wrong by literally seeing things from another perspective, either with the help of scientific technology or through the strongly theoretical sciences which may deal with invisibles (a characteristic fundamental to thought, rather than cognition) but do so for the sake of supplanting the existing cognitive paradigm with another.³ Given our limited perspective as small creatures bound, to a certain extent, to the Earth, we accept as a given that errors in our perception may occur. But the only way to rescue ourselves from error is through expanding our cognitive and sensual capacities. We must always see the truth in order for it to be true.

A full dissection of meaning, its relationship to thinking, and its criteria for evaluation are more difficult to understand. Arendt never explicitly defines meaning, allowing her reader a wide range of interpretation. I take this as a feature of the philosophy, rather than an oversight. To

³ “Thinking, no doubt, plays an enormous role in every scientific enterprise, but it is the role of a means to an end; the end is determined by a decision about what is worthwhile knowing, and this decision itself cannot be scientific. Moreover, the end is cognition or knowledge, which, once it is discovered, clearly belongs to the world of appearances; once established as truth, it becomes part and parcel of the world. Cognition and the thirst for knowledge never leave the world of appearances altogether; if the scientists withdraw from it in order to ‘think,’ it is only in order to find better, more promising approaches, called methods, toward it” (*LOM* 54).

define meaning is to narrow it, to enact thinking upon it. If one takes seriously the idea that thinking is in part a quest for meaning, to determine the “meaning” of this word is to posit something about the nature of thought. In other words, “What is meaning?” is itself a highly meaningful question, and as we will see, meaningful questions rarely or— perhaps never— have straightforward and unmoving answers. However, in order to deal with the idea of visual thinking, I will need to more sufficiently and explicitly deal with “meaning,” the quest of thought (or at least dialogical thought), than perhaps Arendt needed to. I will do my best to accomplish this while staying true to the freeness of Arendt’s own description of meaning.

To begin, I will split “meaning,” into two categories and deal with them separately. Through this, it will become clear that they are not more closely related than it first appears. Both deal with linguistic sense-making: the first dealing with something like “definition,” and the second dealing with something like “coherence” or “moral.”

The first and most straightforward understanding of meaning in *The Life of the Mind* relates to the literal definition of words. It is the answer one might give to the question, “what does the word ‘metaphysical’ mean?” Every word has meaning inherent to it, by virtue of the fact that language is meaningful.

The answer to this question is not cognitive, that is, not true or false. “Words as such are neither true nor false... words [are] meaningful in themselves” (*LOM* 98-99). So asking what a word means is not necessarily like asking about a designator in mathematics, for example, where the answer might be cognitive. The relationship between x and 4 in the equation $12=3x$ is not comparable to the relationship between “metaphysical” and the concept it represents, or even the word “cow” and the animal we understand is associated with it.

One reason for this is that words represent more than a capacity to communicate—language is far too complex and conceptual to be useful only for the appearing world. “Communication with our fellow-men would not necessitate human language with its intricate complexity of grammar and syntax” (*LOM* 98). If language was primarily a tool for communicating about the world around us, we would never need the wide range of possible verbal expressions that are available to us. In fact, our communication would probably look very similar to the communication we see in higher animals. In short, if language were just a means to an end, it would not retain the complexity or difficulty of modern languages.

Hence, language has a much higher purpose than communication. In speaking, we not only discuss the world around us, but we make it *meaningful*, we make it ours. “The sheer naming of things, the creation of words, is the human way of *appropriating* and, as it were, disalienating the world into which, after all, each of us is born as a newcomer and a stranger,” (*LOM* 100). By naming things, we give them their meanings, in the sense that we give them their place in the larger human story of the world. The word “cow” is not an arbitrary symbol that implies the object we associate with it. Instead, this word, as with all other words, is over-determined with meaning. Cows are meat, pets, caricatures, milk, rugs, hamburgers, children’s toys. All of these things are highly meaningful interpretations of, or impositions on, the original object the word was intended to describe. By naming, by speaking, we literally make things our own, thus making the world a place with both sense and meaning. In a beautiful line from her eulogy to Walter Benjamin, Arendt ascribes to him a position which we might take as similar to her own: “‘Not Plato but Adam,’ who gave things their names, was to him the ‘father of philosophy.’” (*MDT* 203).

The highly meaningful definitions of words are determined, in part, by their complex and often unknown history. Words, passed down through generations, carry with them the weight of tradition. “The Greek polis will continue to exist at the bottom of our political existence— that is, at the bottom of the sea— for as long as we use the word ‘politics’” (*MDT* 204). This example is not exceptional— Arendt says that “All philosophical terms are metaphors, frozen analogies as it were, whose true meaning discloses itself when we dissolve the term into the original relation which must have been vividly in the mind of the philosopher who first used it” (*LOM* 104).

Arendt does this “dissolving” on a number of ancient Greek philosophical terms, and to illustrate this concept I will look specifically at the word *nous* which will prove to be extremely important to this project. At the start of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt defines *nous* as the “Aristotelian... organ for seeing and beholding the truth” (*LOM* 6). We might think of it as the “mind’s eye,” to take the most famous formulation of this metaphor. Arendt says,

We know that *noemai* was first used in the sense of perceiving by the eyes, then transferred to perceptions by the mind in the sense of ‘apprehend,’ before it became a word indicating the highest form of thinking. Nobody, we might assume, thought that the eyes, the organ of vision, and the *nous*, the organ of thinking, were the same; but the word itself indicated that the relation between the eye and the seen object was similar to the relation between the mind and its thought-object—namely, yielded the same kind of evidence (*LOM* 104).

So *nous*, a word which is fundamental to *The Life of the Mind*, carries with it this trail of meaning and, as long as we use it to talk about the mind, we will be talking about the perceiving eyes and their capacity to apprehend truth.

One way of understanding meaning is by looking at it from the perspective of singular words and their definitions. However, as we saw, this perspective immediately implicates a much

broader understanding of “meaning,” one which requires an analysis of history and interpretation, which goes beyond the immediate needs of our lives in an appearing world.

A broader understanding, which relates linguistic sense-making, is comparable to moral or order, two characteristics proper to “story-telling.” We might also call it sense, coherence, significance. “‘Reason’s need’— the quest for meaning that prompts men to ask them— is in no way different from men’s need to tell the story of some happening they witnessed, or to write poems about it” (*LOM* 78). Stories have narrative, shape, coherence, and moral. And just as when we name, we appropriate worldly objects— things which existed before us and will exist after us— for ourselves, we do the same when we form sentences that describe or determine the nature of events. We give them meaning in the sense that we ascribe to them rational principles, beauty, or morality.⁴

And since thinking is a silent dialogue between me and myself, what Arendt will sometimes call “soundless speech,” when we turn from speaking publicly with our peers to speaking silently with ourselves in thinking, we do the same thing; search for meaning. “The function of the soundless speech—*tacite secum rationare*, to ‘reason silently with oneself,’ in the

⁴ The wide range of synonyms which I use to summarize the possibilities of meaning should, itself, show how difficult it is to pin this concept down. There is no synonym for meaning which could ever summarize all of its many capacities. This problem is made worse by Arendt’s tendency to blur the lines between truth and meaning. For example, she makes a claim that cognitive facts which are either lies or mistakes can, in themselves, be meaningful. “I can make a great many propositions about a ‘fact’ which say something quite meaningful without being necessarily true: ‘the sun turns about the earth’ or ‘in September 1939 Poland invaded Germany’—the one being an error, the other being a lie” (*LOM* 230). This obviously raises a question about whether one would consider either of these statements meaningful if they weren’t wrong in some way. If the answer to that question is no, they would not be meaningful if they were true, the question is then, what about their incorrectness makes them a site for meaning?

Without explicitly answering this question, I will point out another instance of a similar relationship between meaning and untruth. In analyzing a quote from Auden which reads “A true miracle, say I, for who is not certain that he was meant to be?” Arendt says, “this being ‘meant to be’ is not truth; it is a highly meaningful proposition” (*LOM* 61). Perhaps in these cases, it is something about the untruth and its capacity to betray, albeit unconsciously, something about us as truth-telling beings and the priorities which influence us that guarantees its meaningfulness. That is, the meaning may not be located in the propositions themselves, but in the commentary those propositions make about human nature.

words of Anselm of Canterbury—is to come to terms with whatever may be given to our senses in everyday appearances; the need of reason is to *give account, logon didonai*, as the Greeks called it with greater precision, of what ever there may be or may have occurred. This is prompted not by the thirst for knowledge—the need may arise in connection with well-known and entirely familiar phenomena—but by the quest for meaning” (*LOM* 99-100). Meaning is literally the “coming to terms with” or the “account of,” the world we live in. It is the remaking of the random, passing events which occur into a narrative that begins well before any individual man.

For the world around us to have meaning, we *must* think about it. Thought, the primary mental activity which strives for meaning, deals only with invisibles. “Thinking is not only itself invisible but also deals with invisibles, with things which are not present to the senses though they may be, and mostly are, also sense objects, remembered and collected in the storehouse of memory and thus prepared for later reflection” (*LOM* 51). Thought requires a stop, a withdrawal from the world. Hence the objects of thought could never be sensual ones. We replicate these sensual experiences in our mind in order to think about them. Before this representation and thought, these things are just data, they have no meaning.

In this way, to think about something is to tell a story about it, to represent it not just as it was, but with all of the meaningful details which make retellings a story.

The function of the soundless speech—*tacite secum rationare*, to ‘reason silently with oneself,’ in the words of Anselm of Canterbury—which, since Plato, we call thinking is to come to terms with whatever may be given to our senses in everyday appearances; the need of reason is to give account, *logon didonai*, as the Greeks called it in greater precision, of whatever there may be or may have occurred; and this is inspired not by the thirst of knowledge, since the need for it may arise out of very well known and entirely familiar phenomena, but by the quest for meaning (*LOM* 100).

Or, in other words, “The quest for meaning which prompts men to ask [unanswerable questions], is in no way different from men’s need to tell the story of some happening they witnessed, or to write poems about it” (*LOM* 78). Hence, to think is to give coherence, order, and meaning to the random events which occur.

For example, we might think about *The Life of the Mind* as a project that attempts, in part, to give meaning to Eichmann, the man who prompted her questions about thoughtlessness and evil. In reflecting on this man, in representing him to her own mind and subsequently writing about him, she imbues him and his actions with a meaning which was not necessarily there before. She tells a story about him, explains him, and gives an account of him.

Aside from its concern with invisibles, the second fundamental characteristic of meaning is that it is never permanent and it can never survive the activity of thinking.

And not only is the faculty of thought and the quest for meaning absent from and good for nothing in the ordinary course of human affairs, while its results remain uncertain and unverifiable, it also is somehow self-destructive. Kant in the privacy of his posthumously published notes, wrote: ‘I do not approve of the rule that if the use of pure reason has proved something, this result should later no longer be doubted as though it were a solid axiom’; and ‘I do not share the opinion ... that one should not doubt once one has convinced oneself of something. In pure philosophy this is impossible. Our mind has a natural aversion against it.’ From which it follows that the business of thinking is like the veil of Penelope; it undoes every morning what it had finished the night before. For the need to think can never be stilled by allegedly definite insights of ‘wise men,’ it can be satisfied only through thinking, and the thoughts which I had yesterday will be satisfying this need today only to the extent that I want and am able to think them anew (*LOM* 88).

Hence, to maintain a meaningful world, we must constantly be thinking about it. Meaning does not last, it cannot be kept for any length of time. Hence, we should think of it not as a product of thought the way that truth is a lasting, consistent product of cognitive investigation, at least until something new is discovered. The doer must constantly stop and think in order to maintain a meaningful world.

The Silent Dialogue

Because of the close relationship between language and meaning, it should come as no surprise that Arendt takes from Plato the idea that thinking is a dialogue we engage in with ourselves. Thought is a silent dialogue, specifically a Socratic one, where I, the thinker, am both questioner and interlocutor for myself. I am both Euthyphro— convinced that convicting his father for the murder of a rebellious slave is the pious thing to do— and Socrates, interrupting this certainty with incessant questions.

It is this *duality* of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity in which I am both the one who asks and the one who answers. Thinking can become dialectical and critical because it goes through this questioning and answering process, through the dialogue of *dialegesthai* which actually is ‘travelling through words,’ *a poreuesthai dia tôn logôn*, whereby we constantly raise the basic Socratic question: What do you mean when you say ...? (*LOM* 185)

Thus, my thought is nothing more than a conversation between me and myself, composed in language and metaphor. And I, just like Euthyphro, am often left less certain of myself after the critical dialectic activity than I was when I began.

This, however, does not include all types of communication. She treats language and its intellectual complexities as completely different from body language or other forms of more basic communication. This becomes important when Arendt discusses the difference between the soul and the mind. The soul and its emotional world, which is bodily, sensational, and phenomenal, cannot reveal itself as such. Hence, the most comfortable mode of communicating these sensations is similarly cognitive. “Conceptual metaphorical speech is indeed adequate to the activity of thinking, the operations of our mind, but the life of our soul in its very intensity is

much more adequately expressed in a glance, in a sound, in a gesture than in speech” (*LOM* 13). While body language is a perfectly adequate mode of communication, it cannot be considered in the same way that we must consider speech. “But the way they [emotions] become manifest without the intervention of reflection and transference into speech—by glance, gesture, inarticulate sound—is in no way different from the way the higher animal species communicate very similar emotions to each other as well as to men” (*LOM* 32).

We see that (1) speech, rather than communication, is something only humans have achieved and (2) our speech has transcended the modes of communication we would require simply to stay alive. “Thinking in its need of speech does not demand or necessarily presuppose auditors: communication with our fellow-men would not necessitate human language with its intricate complexity of grammar and syntax” (*LOM* 98). Speech transcends immediate necessity.

Thinking is similar to speech in that way— it goes above and beyond our needs for survival. And unlike the workings of the soul, thought requires speech, rather than body language, in order to exist. Because thought is a dialogue between me and myself, “Our mental activities, in contrast [to the soul’s activities], are conceived in speech even before being communicated” (*LOM* 32). If we are thinking, we are thinking in language. It follows that the two activities are mutually dependent. If I can speak, I can think, and vice versa. “‘They continually take one another’s place;’ they actually take each other for granted” (*LOM* 32). It is this pair of faculties, unique to humans, that sets us apart from the higher animals, who have no trouble communicating through “glance, gesture, inarticulate sound.”

Later in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt quotes Aristotle as saying that words and thoughts “resemble” each other: “Words, meaningful in themselves, and thoughts (*noemata*) resemble

each other (*eoiken*)” (LOM 99). This word “resemble” is important, because it captures something about their relationship that mutual dependence does not. Speaking and thinking not only require each other, they parallel each other in both capacities and function. The primary resemblance, as we see in the previous section, is their mutual concern with meaning. “For its [Aristotle’s book *De Interpretatione*] most interesting point is that the criterion for logos, coherent speech, is not truth or falsehood but meaning” (LOM 83).

Neither speech nor thinking comes before the other; their relationship is cyclical. “It is also noteworthy that nowhere in this discussion of the relation of language to thought does Aristotle raise the question of priorities; he does not decide whether thinking is the origin of speaking, as though speech were merely an instrument of communicating our thoughts, or whether thought is the consequence of the fact that man is a speaking animal. In any case, since wordcarriers of meaning-and thoughts resemble each other, *thinking beings have an urge to speak, speaking beings have an urge to think.*” (LOM 99). So although speech and thought require each other, neither conceived the other.

On the other hand, this does not mean that one cannot compel the other. Speech and thought both catalyze each other. In fact, their resemblance presupposes it, “Thinking beings have an urge to speak, speaking beings have an urge to think,” or, in other words, “... speech is meant to be heard and words are meant to be understood by others who also have the ability to speak, and this in the same way as a creature endowed with the sense of vision is meant to see and to be seen” (LOM 32). Humans are appearing beings, their thoughts are compelled into the appearing world by the urge to speak.

Mental activities, invisible themselves and occupied with the invisible, become manifest only through speech. Just as appearing beings living in a world of appearances have an urge to show themselves, so thinking beings, which still belong to the world of

appearances even after they have mentally withdrawn from it, have an urge to speak and thus to make manifest what otherwise would not be a part of the appearing world at all (*LOM* 96).

It is the urge to think which draws speaking beings out of the world of appearances, and the urge to appear, to speak, which brings them back. It is only by virtue of this relationship between thought and speech that the inner workings of our minds could ever be brought into the world.

Metaphor and Thought

Because as language and communication originated in response to the appearing world, words will always fall just short of being sufficient in themselves to respond to the complex and theoretical activities of the thinking ego. Our vocabulary was designed in response to phenomena, not to respond to the invisibles we use when thinking. “No language has a ready-made vocabulary for the needs of mental activity; they all borrow their vocabulary from words originally meant to correspond either to sense experience or to other experiences of ordinary life” (*LOM* 102). This borrowing takes place in the form of metaphor.

The Oxford dictionary definition of metaphor, which Arendt includes, reads, “the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that which it is properly applicable” (*LOM* 102). An important point of contention between Arendt and this definition is its use of the word *analogous*, meaning *comparable*.

According to Arendt, the work of the metaphor is to connect dissimilar objects. She says, “If therefore, as Shelly remarks, the poet’s language is ‘vitally metaphorical, [it is so to the extent that] it marks the before unapprehended *relations* of things and perpetuates their apprehension.’ Every metaphor discovers ‘an intuitive perception of similarity in dissimilars’” (*LOM* 103). But it is not simply that the metaphor anticipates a single similarity between two dissimilar objects.

She goes on to say, “But this similarity, for Aristotle too, is not a similarity present in otherwise dissimilar objects but a similarity of relations as in an *analogy* which always needs four terms and can be presented in the formula: $A:B = D:C$ ” (*LOM* 103).

That an analogy would require four terms is not intuitively true. Merriam-Webster defines analogy as “a comparison of two otherwise unlike things based on resemblance of a particular aspect” (MW “analogy”). Notice that this definition only has two terms, or significant objects⁵ (A and B , for example) and one characteristic (for example, x). Deconstructing this into symbolic notation, we would see something like,

If x characteristic is true of A object ($x \in A$) and x is true of B ($x \in B$) then A relates to B ($A:B$). Similarly, $A:B$ if $x \in A$ and $x \in B$.

Now we have two definitions of analogy (and metaphor, by extension). Arendt’s ($A:B=B:C$) and Merriam-Webster’s ($A:B$ if $x \in A$ and $x \in B$). There are two important points to notice. The first is that Arendt’s definition requires four significant objects (designated here with a capital letter), while Merriam-Webster’s only requires two. The second is that Merriam-Webster’s definition defines a specific x characteristic.

To explain this more fully, I will use one of Arendt’s examples: “A cup is in relation to Dionysus what a shield is in relation to Ares. The cup accordingly will be metaphorically described as ‘the shield of *Dionysus*’” (*LOM* 103). The metaphor, as we would read it in context, would say, “The cup is the shield of Dionysus.” Let’s first deconstruct this metaphor according to Arendt’s terms. Notice that we only have three clear significant objects: C (Cup), S (Shield), and D (Dionysus). Arendt provides us with the fourth in her explanation, A (Ares), but in a normal example, we would have to infer this fourth object. In Arendt’s words,

⁵ I use the word “objects” intentionally. The capital letters here designate *not* characteristics, but the objects which those characteristics describe.

The cup relates to Dionysus as a shield relates to Ares.

Hence,

$$C:D=S:A.$$

Notice that we never have to specify the relationship between either the cup and Dionysus or the cup and the shield (in Merriam-Webster's definition, the relationship is denoted by x characteristic). We simply say, (1) there is some relationship between the cup and Dionysus and this relationship is similar to that of the shield and Ares or (2) the cup and the shield are analogous objects because they both have an analogous relationship to a god.

However, if we were going by Merriam-Webster's definition of analogy ($A:B$ if $x \in A$ and $x \in B$), we would have to specify this x . In order to do this, we must first determine what A and B are. Because the metaphor is most directly comparing the cup and the shield, (C and S), these are the two significant objects we will use for Merriam-Webster's formulation of analogy.

Remember that Merriam Webster defines analogy as "a comparison of two otherwise unlike things based on resemblance of a particular aspect" (MW "analogy"). We have called this particular aspect x . So now we must determine what exactly x is. From the previous analogy, we know that the relationship between cup and shield comes from their individual analogous relationships to gods. However, at this point, we find it quite difficult to say exactly what that relationship is and why it is significant. Accurately putting words to this intuitive understanding of x is the project of another paper.

That x must be left undetermined to the metaphor retain its full power gives credence to Arendt's particular definition and is essential to her understanding of the metaphor's function: to make visible that which is invisible, to act as a bridge between the world of thought and the

world of appearance. “This speaking in analogies, in metaphorical language, is according to Kant the only way through which speculative reason, which here we call thinking, can manifest itself. The metaphor provides the ‘abstract,’ imageless thought with an intuition drawn from the world of appearances whose function is is ‘to establish the reality of our concepts’ and thus to undo, as it were, the mental withdrawal from the world of appearances and from realness which, as we saw, is a precondition of mental activities” (*LOM* 103). In order to use language to describe things for which we have no words, we use the metaphor because it can act as a bridge, a connector between the visible and the invisible which gives the invisible concept the same intuitive sense which is proper to visual ones.

Metaphor’s ability to sustain an undetermined but intuitive x allows it to transform thought into a tangible object. Arendt says, “At this point metaphor comes in. The metaphor achieves the ‘carrying over’ —*metapherein*— of a genuine and seemingly impossible *metabasis eis allo genos*, the transition from one existential state, that of thinking, to another, that of being an appearance among appearances, and this can be done only by *analogies*. ” (*LOM*, 103).

Take another well-known example: “The eyes are the windows to the soul.” As we saw in Arendt’s example, the fourth significant object is dropped, as the sayer assumes the relation is obvious enough. Hence, the metaphor does not say “The eyes are to the soul as windows are to buildings.” This, though, is the extended metaphor in terms of, “a perfect resemblance of two relations between totally dissimilar things” (*LOM*, 104). Notice, too, that in this example, the move from thought things to physical things is more obvious. We move from the abstract world of empathy— where no one can really see inside another, but one might have the sense of understanding, something impossible to communicate— to the extremely concrete. This

translation achieves something that pure description could never capture. Again, our undetermined x characteristic that links the eyes and windows is more complicated than anything which could be described without metaphor. And this is exactly what makes the metaphor useful.

Philosophy must make use of this property of metaphor, given that it is composed almost entirely of thought things. As we saw in the case of *nous*, Arendt believes that “All philosophical terms are metaphors, frozen analogies, as it were, whose true meaning discloses itself when we dissolve the term into the original context, which must have been vividly in the mind of the first philosopher to use it” (*LOM*, 104). Consider the word *edios*. This word started as “the shape or blueprint the craftsman must have in front of his mind's eye before he begins his work— an image that survives both the fabrication process and the fabricated object and can serve as model again and again, thus taking on an everlastingness that fits it for eternity in the sky of ideas...” (*LOM*, 104). Hence the metaphor “as the craftsman's mental image directs his hand in fabrication and is the measurement of the object's success or failure, so all materially and sensorily given data in the world of appearances relate to and are evaluated according to an invisible pattern, localized in the sky of ideas” (*LOM*, 104). This was Plato’s original metaphor, the one which remains frozen in the word which we understand, even before we understand the metaphor.

The visual deconstruction of a metaphor mirrors its purpose.

$$A:B=C:D.$$

On the right, we have the invisible system, on the left, we have the visible. Between the significant objects on either side of the equal sign (for example between A and B), we have a relation symbol, a symbol that is intuitive rather than definite. Between both sides, an equal sign,

denoting the similarity between the two worlds, despite being concerned with altogether different objects.

But here I should point out that the equal sign, which Arendt takes from Aristotle in the symbolic notation above, is misleading. The analogy only works one way. That is, the concrete and visible can tell us a lot about the abstract, but the reverse could never be true. Arendt says,

Think of these storms that you know so well, the poet seems to tell us, and you will know about grief and fear. Significantly, the reverse will not work. No matter how long somebody thinks about grief and fear, he will never find out anything about the winds and the sea; the comparison is clearly meant to tell what grief and fear can do to the human heart, that is, meant to illuminate an experience that does not appear (*LOM*, 106).

Metaphors are meaningful, and as such do not have the capacity to tell us anything truthful about the world of appearances from which we draw our metaphors.

Although thinking and its quest for meaning draw from the world of appearances in metaphor in order to give reality to its own abstract and invisible concepts, thinking itself takes place only in language. Thought, the silent Socratic dialogue I engage in with myself, is pure activity for itself which I can engage in only when I am alone, unbothered by appearance and my fellow-men.

2. Thinking and Image

Out of Order: Visual Thought

The following section consisted in a thorough explanation of the relationship between thought, meaning, and language, all of which are inseparable from each other and notably distinct from cognition, truth, and appearance. I transition, in this section, to the “out-of-order” moment which I spoke about briefly in my introduction, where she suggests the possibility of thought that is not determined by the spoken word but by the visual or written sign. Arendt says, “These observations on the interconnection of language and thought, which make us suspect that no speechless thought can exist, obviously do not apply to civilizations where the written sign rather than the spoken word is decisive and where, consequently, thinking itself is not soundless speech but mental dealing with images” (*LOM* 100). Here she calls it “mental dealing with images,” a misleading description for what she will go on to explicitly call “thinking in images.”

Notice that the dichotomy is not language versus image, it is spoken word versus written sign. Any analysis of the issue must originate from an understanding that what is fundamentally different about these two modes is the issue of speaking versus a visual image.

In Chinese, for example, Arendt says that “‘the power of words is supported by the power of the written sign, the image,’ and not the other way round as in the alphabetic languages where script is thought of as secondary, no more than an agreed-upon set of symbols for words” (*LOM* 100). I spoke, in the previous section, about arbitrary symbolism in the case of mathematics, and how this is not applicable to the relationship between the words and their objects. However, Arendt would say that the relationship between the spoken word and the written symbol which corresponds to it *is* arbitrarily symbolic. This is a fairly straightforward conclusion in alphabetic

languages, given that we use letters which describe sounds. Hence the appearance of the word “cow” is arbitrary in the visual sense; there is nothing about the essence of a cow which could be communicated through the visual apprehension of this sign. On the other hand, the construction of the word “cow” is filled with auditory meaning in the sense that each letter corresponds to sounds which ultimately creates the word, a verbal utterance which carries with it all of the meaning that we are accustomed to words having. The verbal expression of “cow” is not arbitrarily symbolic of the animal, but the written sign “cow” is arbitrarily symbolic of the spoken word cow.

In Chinese, however, the relationship between these three things is shuffled. It is the verbal expression which is arbitrarily symbolic of the written sign, and it is the written sign which is meaningfully symbolic of the concept or object. “For the Chinese, every sign visible what we would call a concept or an essence—Confucius is reported to have remarked that the Chinese sign for ‘dog’ is the perfect image of dog as such, whereas in our understanding ‘no image could ever be adequate to the concept’ of dog in general” (*LOM* 100). For example, the “image of two united hands serves for the concept of friendship” (*LOM* 101) In this mode of thought, the meaning of “friendship would no longer be discursive. Friendship simply is the image which represents it. “In other words, what for us is ‘abstract’ and invisible, is for the Chinese emblematically concrete and visibly given in their script” (*LOM* 101).

The difference between dialogical and visual thought are profound; the criteria for validity and the understanding of concepts are completely different. Certain questions and familiar modes of inquiry— for example, what Arendt calls the “typically Socratic” question,

“What is this?”-- which are the foundation of dialogical thought, make no sense in the paradigm of visual thought.

They think in images and not in words. And this thinking in images always remains ‘concrete’ and cannot be discursive, travelling through an ordered train of thoughts, nor can it give account of itself (*logon didonai*); the answer to a typically Socratic question, What is friendship? is visibly present and evident in the emblem of two united hands, ‘the emblem liberates a whole stream of pictorial representations’ according to plausible associations through which images are joined together. This can best be seen in the great variety of composite signs, when for instance the sign for ‘cold’ combines ‘all those notions which are associated with thinking of cold weather’ and the activities which serve to protect men against it (*LOM* 101).

Just as our words carry with them histories, contexts, implications, and associations, so does the Chinese sign. The difference is not in the basic function or purpose of the thought, but in the type of investigation which the type of thought presupposes. It makes little sense to discuss the meaning of any given sign in this kind of visual language and thinking, because the meaning of the sign is manifest in its image.

Arendt acknowledges that she has not dealt sufficiently with the issue of the differences between “concrete thinking in images” and “abstract dealing with verbal concepts,” and concludes by calling these differences “fascinating and disquieting” (*LOM* 101). As I will show, the differences are indeed fascinating and disquieting, particularly because Arendt so thoroughly removes the possibility of image and truth in dialogical thinking that is extremely difficult to understand what visual thinking might look like and what its relationship to dialogical thinking could possibly be.

If one takes for granted that there are two kinds of thought, one which is concrete thinking in images and one which is abstract dealing with verbal concepts, this raises the following question: is concrete thinking in images still a quest for meaning, as dialogical thought

is? That is, when one engages in concrete thinking in images, what is this kind of thinking searching for? As we have seen, abstract dealing with verbal concepts is predicated on a human need to “give an account of” some event or appearance, to tell a story about this thing. Yet, Arendt does not necessarily make the same claim of visual thought. In fact, meaning doesn’t come up in this section at all.

Arendt has thus far determined a very strict dichotomy between thought and cognition. Thought occurs in language which makes it meaningful (or, perhaps the other way around; thought occurs in language because it is meaningful) while cognition occurs in a burst of perception, thus guaranteeing its correlation with truth. Part of what makes concrete thinking in images an alarming possibility is that it blurs the line of this dichotomy— if we accept this as possible, we must also accept that either thought is capable of dealing with *truth* in a burst of sensory perception, or we must accept that thinking in images can be meaningful, that images themselves can be meaningful.

Visual Thinking and Truth

There are a number of compelling reasons to believe that visual thought might abandon the quest for meaning, and instead be interested in a very different kind of project, something which looks much more like the search for truth. Arendt says, “Only Wittgenstein, as far as I know, ever became aware of the fact that hieroglyphic writing would adequately correspond to a notion of truth understood according to the metaphor of vision. He writes: ‘In order to understand the essential of a proposition, we should think of hieroglyphic script, which depicts the facts that it describes’” (*LOM* 102). It is very possible that the metric for valid thought in a

paradigm of concrete thinking in images is not meaning or meaninglessness, but rather truth or untruth.

The following section will explore this possibility. This will all be highly speculative, compiled from various pieces of *The Life of the Mind* which talk around this issue, if not directly to it. In this chapter, I argue that visual thinking looks very much like cognition in that its dealings with concrete images, rather than abstract sentences, look much more like truth-making than meaning-making.

First, the criteria for a valid thought in a visual rather than dialogical thinking paradigm would be completely different. In dialogical thought, propositions are determined to be meaningful (valid) or meaningless (invalid) based on their capacity for linguistic meaning. In other words, the question, “Does the proposition make sense?” In a visual paradigm, as we will see, this criteria falls apart. Second, a visual thought would have a relatively stable meaning (in the literal sense), given that its meaning would be determined by an image whose limits are defined by space rather than time, as in a dialogical or verbal framework. This conflicts with a fundamental characteristic of meaning that Arendt makes clear, which is that it is never permanent or survivable after the fact of thinking, but rather constantly in need of reification. Third, the axiom of non-contradiction, the principle of dialogical thought, would be totally irrelevant to a paradigm of thinking where it is image and not dialogue which is decisive.

As I have shown, both thought and cognition have unique criteria for validity. Cognition is determined by truth, “which would compel the answers to the questions I raise with myself... as Intuition which compels with the force of sense evidence” (*LOM* 185). That is, truth appears to me as an intuition which has no logical or argumentative basis. Truth literally “compels” me

to believe it. Dialogical thought, on the other hand, is determined by linguistic sense-making. That is, if a proposition does not make narrative sense, it is rejected as meaningless. Arendt says, “There are, on the other hand, propositions which are inherently unacceptable, as for instance ‘the triangle laughs,’ which is neither a true nor a false statement, but a meaningless one. The only internal linguistic criterion for propositions is sense or nonsense” (*LOM* 230). This is a nonsensical proposition because the verb, “laughs,” is not proper to the subject, “triangle.” Hence, it makes no linguistic sense and we determine it meaningless.

If we accept that there is such a thing as concrete dealing with images, we must also accept that there must be some way to evaluate these images for valid or invalid propositions, and that this evaluation is likely some mix between the way dialogical thought (or a linguistic proposition) is evaluated based on its meaningfulness and the way that cognition or truth is evaluated based on its coherence to the object of its consideration, that is, to the sense evidence. I assume this because if we assume that this concrete thinking in images is related to hieroglyphic languages, it would make no sense to say that it *doesn't* have criteria for evaluation. Insofar as thinking beings have the impulse to communicate their thoughts, a point that Arendt is insistent on, thinking must have some kind of sense, or at least a mode of evaluation. We can say for certain that the sign for “friendship,” is not the same as the symbol for “dog.” Our question is then, how can we say this?

The criteria aren't obvious, partially because it is not dialectic or abstract. Let's take, for example, the concept of friendship which, as we saw before, is symbolized by two hands grasping each other. Hence, one sees, in both the visual and the knowledgeable sense, that friendship is grasping hands. Presumably, we can see this because of some relation between the

concept and the image which is satisfying to us. But how can we say that anything is or is not like this image? What I mean is this: I must be able to say that friendship is not two hands with the middle fingers raised, that this image does not cohere to the concept.

How would this work in the case of linguistic sense-making? Let's take an analogous example. If I said "friendship is when someone flips me off," the statement technically passes the test of linguistic sense making, but has questionable validity regardless. My interlocutor would likely be surprised, and would likely want to have a conversation with me about it. If, in the process of our dialogue, it became obvious that I just really like when my friends flick me off, this proposition might be accepted as strange, but sensical. If, however, in the process of our dialogue my interlocutor realizes that I have a fundamental misunderstanding of the word friendship, my proposition might be rejected as meaningless.

An analogous process of evaluation would have to occur in the case of concrete thinking in images, an evaluation of the relation between the visual sign and its concept. However, this determination would have to occur visually, concretely, and it could never be a dialogue. Hence, the most we could say is that one criteria for valid visual thought might be the coherence of the object with the concept, the ability to see that something is the case. In a moment of analysis of *nous*, an related (though, I will go on to argue, not identical) concept, Arendt describes the effect of understanding vision as the dominant metaphor for thought and how that changes thinking's evaluative criteria. She writes that the criterion for truth according to that metaphor is the, "agreement of knowledge with its object, *the aequatio rei et intellectus* understood as analogous to the agreement of vision with the seen object" (*LOM* 122). That is, in order for this kind of thought to be acceptable, the knowledge, or concept, must agree with its object, the image. This

idea, “seeing that something is the case,” yields very different results in terms of validity or invalidity than does linguistic evaluation.

For example, it might not make linguistic sense to say that a triangle laughs, but it makes visual sense in that I can close my eyes and see an image of this in my imagination.⁶ I see that it is the case that the triangle laughs. Even if this statement holds no great philosophical weight, it does seem valid in a visual sense. Certainly, in Wittgenstein’s words, we can understand the “essential” of the proposition. That is, we see an image which adheres to the concept, thus making it a visually valid proposition.

This is alarming because truth and untruth, two criteria for validity which for Arendt belong properly to cognition and fact rather than thought and meaning, are determined by the same operation: seeing that something is the case. “Cognition whose highest criterion is truth derives this criterion from the world of appearances in which we take our bearings through the sense perceptions, whose testimony is self-evident, that is, unshakeable by argument and replaceable only by another evidence” (*LOM* 57). That is, when something is true it is manifestly, concretely, and unarguably true. If the criteria for evaluating visual thought and

⁶ I will say that there is no reason to believe that the image I saw when I thought of the proposition “a triangle laughs,” is in any way related to the image my reader sees. Moreover, it might be the case that my reader could not see this image at all. This seems to me not a reason to believe that concrete thinking in images is not possible, but that this thinking is not dealing with truth. Truth in the world of appearances requires a common agreement between perceiving beings. “Seeming corresponds to the fact that every appearance, its identity notwithstanding, is perceived by a plurality of spectators” (*LOM* 21). Because my mental activities are private by nature, I could never be certain that you and I both see the same thing in response to even a very simple proposition, such as “The car is blue.” In all likelihood, we will imagine different cars.

This is not concerning to me in part because I (and, I assume, my reader) are working with an alphabetical language, in this case, where neither “car” nor “blue” have decisive signs and so propositions cannot be guaranteed to be identical as they might be in hieroglyphic languages. In addition, I would say that linguistic meaning is not determined by mutual agreement. We might both read a sentence and understand its meaning very differently. This is a pesky characteristic of thought in both dialogical and visual paradigms.

cognition are the same, this is a good reason to think that the two are more similar than visual thought and dialogical thought.

The second argument for why visual thinking might have criteria more similar to truth than to meaning is that cognition, like visual thought, is likely determined by space, while dialogical thought is determined by time. This is consequential because truth is lasting and permanent in the sense that once it is taken as true, it remains so beyond the cognitive activity and is only put in jeopardy by a new set of sense data. Meaning, on the other hand, cannot survive the thinking activity.

Dialogical thinking and its quest for meaning is unstable, that is, constantly moving and incapable of ending with a product. “Thinking is out of order because the quest for meaning produces no end result that will survive the activity, that will make sense after the activity has come to its end” (*LOM* 124). This is because thought is pure activity, an end-in-itself rather than an instrument to reach a goal. “The thinking activity belongs among those *energeiai* which, like flute-playing, have their ends within themselves and leave no tangible outside end-product in the world we live in” (*LOM* 130). We do not think to achieve meaning, although thought is a quest for meaning. That is, meaning is not a product or an end of thought, the end of thought is thinking itself, a motion which never ends. ““The activity of thinking [*energeia* which has its end in itself] is life,’ and its inherent law, which only a god can bear forever, man only sometimes, during which time he is god-like, is ‘unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle,’ that is, the only movement that never reaches an end or results in an end product” (*LOM* 124) Thinking turns on itself without ending or pausing, it is a dialogue which never stops to take a breath. No individual thought could be separated from the thought-train and remain intact, because the

thought-train does not consist of spatial objects but of temporal moments of soundless words, which, by definition, could never sustain.

Hence, its quest for meaning is never properly over. Thought has no product because the impulse of its reflection, a desire for meaning, is temporally determined and thus never lasts beyond the thinking activity. Meaning is the essence of thought, by thinking we give meaning and in order to have meaning we must think. However, meaning is never separable from the thinking activity, just as no thought is separable from the thought-train. In fact, the two are the same.

Because thinking is determined by unceasing motion, a dialogue which is always moving and never pauses to assert a product, its location is not in space, but in time. In order to explain this, Arendt returns to one of the fundamental questions of *The Life of the Mind*, one which I pointed out in the introduction to this project: “What are we ‘doing’ when we do nothing but think? Where are we when we, normally always surrounded by our fellow-men, are together with no one but ourselves” (*LOM* 8)? Arendt writes,

Perhaps our question, Where are we when we think?, was wrong because by asking for the topos, the location of this activity, we were exclusively spatially oriented—as though we had forgotten Kant’s famous insight that ‘time is nothing but the form of the inner sense, that is, of the intuition of ourselves and of our inner state,’ and that means for Kant that time has nothing to do with appearances as such—‘neither with shape nor with position’ as given to our senses—but only insofar as they affect our ‘inner state’ in which time ‘determines the relation of representations.’ And these representations—by which we make present what is phenomenally absent—are of course thought-things, that is, experiences or notions that have gone through the desensualizing operations by which the mind prepares its own objects and by ‘generalizing’ deprives them also of their spatial properties. Time determines the way these representations are related to each other by forcing them into the order of a sequence, and these sequences are what we usually call thought-trains (*LOM* 201).

When we think, we are not in space but in a tiny slice of time. In order for this to be the case, all of the representations we work with in thinking are despecialized into language, into a dialogue between me and myself, so that I can move through them in a logical sequence, in through-trains. Thought has no “shape nor position,” it only has order.

Thought’s need to de-sensualize and de-spatialize the objects it concerns itself with, to make them into abstract words that occur in the passing now of a moment, rather than in space, guarantees that we could only ever be in time when we think. ““All thinking is discursive, and insofar as it follows a train of thought it could by analogy be presented as ‘a line progressing to infinitude,’ that is, in the same way as we usually represent to ourselves the sequential nature of time. But in order to create such a line of thought we must transform the juxtaposition in which experiences are given to us into a succession of soundless words, the only medium in which we can think, and this means that we not only desensualize but de-spatialize the original experience” (*LOM* 201).

In order to illustrate this property, this “line progressing to infinitude,” Arendt uses a quote from Kafka, “He has two antagonists; the first presses him from behind, from his origin. The second blocks the road in front of him. He gives battle to both. Actually, 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” (*LOM* 202). The fact that thinking is determined by a war between the past and the future where the thinker must always mediate the conflict guarantees that it could never have a stable product, because it is always determined by a *passing* now, a moment which is over hardly before it has begun.

Through this parable which compares the past and future to antagonists which only the thinker can mediate, we return to a characteristic of meaning which I have discussed earlier. Thinking and its quest for meaning is always self-destructive. “The business of thinking is like Penelope's web; it undoes every morning what it has finished the night before” (*LOM* 88).

Visual thought, on the other hand, is spatial by definition. There are a few characteristics of visual thinking, which I take from a section about *nous*, which suggest that this reorganization from dialogical to spacial has important implications. Arendt draws the following analogies between sight in the world of appearances and *nous* from Hans Jonas. First, just as thought tends to distance itself from the world, sight requires distance from its object. “No other sense establishes such a safe distance between subject and object; distance is the most basic condition for the functioning of vision. ‘The gain is the concept of objectivity, of the thing as it is in itself as distinct from the thing as it affects me...’” (*LOM* 111).

The second is that sight creates a “co-temporaneous manifold,” meaning the sense that everything exists and can be perceived at the same time, to be engaged with at impulse of the seer. “[Sight] permits ‘freedom of choice... dependent on... the fact that in seeing I am not yet engaged by the seen object. ... [The seen object] lets me be as I let it be,’ whereas all other senses affect me directly” (*LOM* 112). Third, and “Most important in our context is the fact that seeing indeed necessarily ‘introduces the beholder,’ and for the beholder... the ‘present [is not] the point-experience of the passing now,’ but is transformed into a ‘dimension within which all things can be beheld... as a lasting of the same.’ ‘Only sight therefore provides the sensual basis on which the mind may conceive of the idea of the eternal, that which never changes and is

always present” (*LOM 112*). That is in a visual paradigm, the present becomes spatial, a “dimension,” where things can be “held,” rather than an experience of “passing now.”

This is a critical characteristic because it means that thoughts are no longer intangible and self-destructive moments within an endless parade of thought-trains, but tangible and lasting items, which relate to each other by virtue of their position in space. And because of the distance which sight allows between the seer and the seen along with its capacity to create a co-temporaneous manifold, visual thought might retain its objects past the moment of our attention.

Thus the condition which guarantees that dialogical thinking will never have a product, the condition of pure motion, is not applicable to visual thinking. Because it is determined by space rather than time, visual thinking is capable of creating a picture which it can pause on, which might be able to last beyond the thinking activity itself.

There are two important implications of this. The first is that if thought has a product, that is, an end, then it is no longer an activity for itself, but one which has an end outside itself. This is true of cognition, whose ultimate aim is not cognition itself but truth. The second implication is that those thought-products would be lasting, similar to truth in the sense that they would be irreplaceable but for more compelling thoughts.

The third reason to believe that visual thinking might be dealing with something like truth rather than meaning, is that visual thinking could never correspond or adhere to what Arendt calls the “mere form of thinking,” that is, the axiom of non-contradiction.

It is the axiom of non-contradiction which guarantees Arendt’s answer to the first origin of *The Life of the Mind*, the question: “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of

examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions or even actually ‘condition’ men in such a way that they abstain from evil-doing” (*LOM* 5)?

The axiom of non-contradiction is premised on the idea that thought is a Socratic dialogue between me and myself, where I am both Socrates and the interlocutor. “The only criterion of Socratic thinking is to agree, to be consistent with oneself, *homologeîn autos heautô*” (*LOM* 183). So unlike poor Euthyphro, who leaves the dialogue in a state of existential deconstruction, I, thinking being, must complete the activity. That is, upon reentry into the world of appearances, I must have come to an agreement with myself. “For its opposite, to be in contradiction with oneself, *enantia legeîn autos hautô*, actually means to become one’s own adversary” (*LOM* 183). The stakes here are high; once you have an adversarial relationship with yourself, an adversary can be the only person you are with when you are alone.

If you want to think, you must see to it that the two who carry on the thinking dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be *friends*. The partner who comes to life when you are alert and alone is the only one from whom you can never get away— except by ceasing to think. It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, because you can remain the friend of the sufferer; who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even another murderer. (*LOM* 187).

Thus, the axiom compels with the force of self-hatred. Not the Catholic kind, which incites shame and grandiose self-flagellation, but the mundane kind which we usually feel toward others who are our enemies, or perhaps the other in an unhappy marriage. “Better to be at odds with the whole world than be at odds with the only one you are forced to live together with when you have left company behind” (*LOM* 188). That is, if we dare to make some heinous action, we await our own anger when we are finally alone, able to think.

Moreover, it is because we understand thought as a dialogue, which uses *language* rather than image that speaking about the axiom of non-contradiction makes sense at all. In fact, sight could *never* abide by the axiom of noncontradiction. Neither could Plato's nous. This is because appearance is prone to what Arendt calls semblance, what we might think of as user error.

Semblance Is inherent in a world ruled by the twofold law of appearing to a plurality of sensitive creatures each equipped with the faculties of perception. Nothing that appears manifests itself to a single viewer capable of perceiving it under all its inherent aspects. The world appears in the mode of it-seems-to-me, depending on particular perspectives determined by location in the world as well as by particular organs of perception. This mode not only produces error, which I can correct by changing my location, drawing closer to what appears, or by improving my organs of perception with the help of tools and implements, or by using my imagination to take other perspectives into account; it also gives birth to true semblances, that is, to deceptive appearance, which I cannot correct like an error since they are caused by my permanent location on the earth and remain bound up with my own existence as one of the earth's appearances. (*LOM* 38).

Our world is populated by multitudes of things which we cannot see, or at least cannot see at first. We may see things which are even contradictory, impossible, and assume that this is simply a reasonable product of our limited scope. "Error is the price we pay for truth, and semblance is the price we pay for the wonders of appearance. Error and semblance are closely connected phenomena; they correspond with each other" (*LOM* 38).

One obvious example of this is our inability to phase out the paired phrases "the sun goes down," and "the sun comes up," from our vocabulary, despite many years of understanding that we are the ones rising and falling, not the sun. After all, we may know that this is true and still know that, from Earth, the sun both rises and sets. And this knowing is not meaningful, stuck in the realm of invisibles, it is cognitive and truthful.⁷ This apparent contradiction is un concerning to us— things may seem to be one way and, in fact, turn out to be another. Through all our

⁷ "Moreover, the end [of scientific investigation] is cognition or knowledge, which, having been obtained, clearly belongs to the world of appearances; once established as truth, it becomes part and parcel of the world" (*LOM* 54).

scientific pursuits, we have become well acquainted with the idea that our visions may be both true and untrue at the same time. Because sight and truth can be contradictory without an issue, and the “mere form of thinking,” the axiom of non-contradiction is predicated on the assumption that thought *won't* contradict itself, the argument for visual thinking dealing with truth rather than meaning looks quite persuasive.

3. Visual Thinking and Meaning Production

These inquiries into the quest of visual thought which make us think that visual thought might be interested in truth rather than meaning, also suggest that “visual thinking,” proper to hieroglyphic languages, is no different from Aristotle’s *nous*. This would obviously be problematic, particularly given that Arendt has already thoroughly dealt with the issue of *nous* by dismissing it as a mistaken conflation between truth and meaning. She says,

What recommended sight to be the guiding metaphor in philosophy—and, along with sight, intuition as the ideal of truth— was not just the "nobility" of this most cognitive of our senses, but the very early notion that the philosopher's quest for meaning was identical with the scientist's quest for knowledge. Here it is worth recalling the strange turn that Aristotle, in the first chapter of the *Metaphysics*, gave to Plato's proposition that *thaumazein*, wonder, is the beginning of all philosophy. But the identification of truth with meaning was made, of course, even earlier. For knowledge comes through searching for what we are accustomed to call truth, and the highest, ultimate form of cognitive truth is indeed intuition (*LOM* 121).

So in the case that we find ourselves with an explication of visual thought which suggests that its quest is indeed for truth and not for meaning, it looks as though we have simply talked ourselves into a circle, arriving at *nous* through a back-road which will inevitably lead us to Arendt’s original thesis, that there is no thought which is not conceived in language.

However, there are two ways that visual thought may be rescued from this position, both of which correspond to two distinct and striking similarities between concrete thinking in images and *nous*, the mind’s eye. The first is that they both deal with images, the second is that they both appear to deal with truth. In response to these points, I will first show that even if it is true that visual thought deals with truth, rather than meaning, there is still reason to believe that it is fundamentally different from *nous*. Second, I will show that there are, in fact, reasons to believe that visual thinking is dealing with meaning either alongside or instead of truth.

To the first point, I'm not sure that Arendt would say that *nous* deals with images, only that it yields the same kind of evidence as the activity of seeing, that is, truth. *Nous* is a metaphor for thought, one which properly expanded takes this form: truth is to thinking as sight is to its object. From this we get the quote from Arendt that the *nous* is the "organ for seeing and beholding the truth" (*LOM* 6) which comes so early in *The Life of the Mind*. Remember that *nous* is a frozen metaphor where the comparison between thought/truth and vision/object is made in order to make a point about the nature of thinking and truth, not necessarily to make a point about thinking and vision. That is, *nous* does not claim that truth comes to the thinking ego *literally* as an image, only that truth comes to the thinking ego in with the burst of clarity and reality which is generally ascribed to the relationship between sight and the object it beholds. "The word itself [*nous*] indicated that the *relation between the eye and the seen object was similar to the relation between the mind and its thought-object*—namely yielded the same kind of evidence" (*LOM* 105, my italics). The operative word here is "relation" To see with the mind's eye is not to literally see, but to apprehend the truth.

Moreover, the kind of apprehension which the *nous* is an organ for comes, according to Plato, at the end of dialogical thought. Arendt quotes from the *Seventh Letter*,

'But if in thinking we carry out this dialogue with ourselves, it is as though we were writing words in our souls'; at such times, 'our soul is like a book,' a book, however, which no longer contains words; a second craftsman who comes after the writer intervenes when we are thinking and he is a 'painter' who paints in our souls those images which correspond to the written words. 'This happens when we have drawn away these opinions and spoken assertions from sight or any other perception so that we now somehow see the images of what we first opined and spoke about' (*LOM* 116).

That is, the apprehension of truth, personified here as the "painter," comes after the dialogue which takes place in words. But language is meaningful and hence could never be translated into

truth. So the metaphor, *nous*, which claims that the truth appears to the thinker after the fact of their dialogue with themselves, fails to apprehend the purpose of language and dialogical thought.

The idea that thought is a dialogue between me and myself, on the other hand, is *not* a metaphor. The experience of dialogue in the appearing world is in no way a sensual vehicle for a comment about what's going on when we think. Instead, dialogue is very literally occurring during the thinking activity. I interrogate myself, talk things over with myself. By calling thinking a silent dialogue, Arendt posits nothing about the nature of truth or meaning, just that thinking is very literally silent speaking. Similarly, when we talk about thinking concretely in images, we do not mean to say that the apprehension of an image is a metaphor for the apprehension of truth in the mind's eye. Instead, we mean very literally that thought is occurring in images which we can see in our minds, rather than in a silent dialogue between me and myself. This is the fundamental difference between concrete thinking in images and *nous*: the latter is a metaphor, the former is not.

In response to my own claim, that thinking may deal with truth instead of meaning, I suggest that if we abandon, for a moment, the linguistic sense-making criteria which is so essential to linguistic meaning-making and focus rather on a broader understanding of what meaning-making is for, that is "appropriating," and "disalienation," the world, we might change our minds.

There are two reasons to believe that, even in our paradigm of alphabetical language and thus dialogical thought, we are capable of thinking meaningfully in image. The first is the existence of art and its clear rejection of truth for the sake of meaning. The second is the use of

metaphors which utilize images that are not in the world, but rather created for the purpose of the metaphor.

Arendt describes the naming of things as “the human way of appropriating and, as it were, disalienating the world into which, after all, each of us is born as a newcomer and a stranger,” (*LOM* 100) and for all of her resistance to saying explicitly what the definition or purpose of meaning is, I believe this is a fairly astute and all-encompassing definition. By re-presenting objects to ourselves in the activity of thinking, we make them human objects.

If we push this definition, and with it the idea of taking objects or the world and appropriating them for ourselves, we see that an analogous, if not identical, process is happening when we produce works of art. In a brief note about the consequences of losing our capacity to think and thus to ask questions we will never be able to answer, Arendt says, “It is more than likely that men, if they ever should lose this appetite for meaning which we call thinking and cease to ask unanswerable questions, would lose not only the ability to produce those thought-things which we call works of art but also the capacity to ask all the answerable questions upon which every civilization is founded” (*LOM* 62). Here, she explicitly calls art a “thought-thing,” a moment which subtly betrays her strict thesis that thought is only ever dialogical.⁸ Art and the asking of unanswerable questions which are so inherent to the dialogical thinking process, are fundamentally concerned with the same question. That is, “What is this?” I do not mean “What is this made of,” or “what do I call this,” Rather, my question is something like, “What is the meaning of this? What is its purpose or nature?” If the driving question of

⁸ She actually does this more than once. In a discussion about what guarantees the reality of sensual objects, she says in an odd parenthetical, “Art therefore, which transforms sense-objects into thought-things, tears them first of all out of their context in order to de-realize and thus prepare them for their new and different function” (*LOM* 49).

thinking and its quest for meaning is “What does it mean for this to be,” works of art suggest that a possible answer to this question comes in the form of interpreted and intentional presentation which turns the alien objects in its sight into human ones.

Take, for example, this passage about the plurality of objects, where Arendt analyzes various works of art which depict singular objects which seem to lose their reality in the intense focus of singularity.

To take a mere thing out of its context with other things and to look on it only in its ‘relation’ to itself (*kath’ hauto*), that is, in its identity, reveals no difference, no otherness as being different from; together with its relation to something it is not, it loses its realness and acquires a curious kind of eeriness. As such, it often appears in works of art, especially in Kafka’s early prose pieces or in some paintings of van Gogh where a single object, a chair, a pair of shoes, is represented. But these art works are thought-things, and what gives them their meaning—as though they were not just themselves but for themselves—is precisely the transformation they have undergone when thinking took possession of them (*LOM* 184).

There are a few aspects of this quote which are extremely useful for understanding what it would mean for visual thinking to be meaningful. The first is that she again refers to works of art as “thought-things” and takes a step farther to explicitly voice the unstated premise behind this claim: that works of art deal with meaning and not with truth. And the thing that “gives them their meaning,” is a “transformation” which the thinking process does to them. That is, the images we see in art are not just regurgitations of things which belong to the world of appearance. They are transformed by thought into meaningful objects.

Arendt also claims that the depictions in these works of art are, “not by themselves but for themselves.” That is, they aren’t instrumental the way that the products of cognition are. Just as thought is activity for itself, works of art are objects and thought-things for themselves.

But here I should point out an obvious counter-argument. A work of art could be meaningful, but only insofar as it prompts an internal dialogue with myself about it. That is, the meaningfulness of art is not necessarily guaranteed by anything inherent to the art, but by something inherent to the thinking ego which compels dialogical thinking upon exposure to it. Hence, to more thoroughly show that images can be meaningful and thus that thinking in images is a meaningful endeavor, I will explain why I believe that meaningful images are inherent to the thinking process, even to those of us who engage in thought through a silent dialogue.

To do this, I will return to Arendt's construction of metaphor, particularly the idea that the power of the metaphor is not reversible. Remember that the metaphor is a bridge from the concrete and visible (image) to the abstract and theoretical (language). In many metaphors, the concrete image is taken from some worldly phenomena which is distinct from humanity. This is the case in the example Arendt uses which I have previously quoted,

Think of these storms that you know so well, the poet seems to tell us, and you will know about grief and fear; whereby it is decisive that the reverse would not work. No matter how long one may think about grief and fear, he will never find out anything about the winds and the sea; the onslaught of the winds on the sea is obviously meant to tell you what grief and fear can do to the human heart, that is to illuminate an experience which does not 'appear' (*LOM* 106).

Here, thinking about the abstract and theoretical will tell us nothing about the concrete and visible. When the concrete and visible image properly belongs to the world of appearances, this will always be the case because the appearing world is not meaningful. Metaphors deal with meaning, not fact. And insofar as the appearing world deals with fact, questions about meaning are "meaningless" to our inquiries into it. We can learn nothing factual about the world of appearances from a meaningful metaphor.

The same, however, is not the case for two metaphors which Arendt uses, both of which use images that are not necessarily representations of the world as it is, but highly interpreted manifestations of thought. I argue that because Arendt's metaphors utilize images which are closer to works of art than they are to naturally appearing phenomena, the principle that the metaphor isn't reversible doesn't hold true. From this, we can say that the images are meaningful in themselves.

The first metaphor I use to illustrate this idea is one that we have already touched on—Kafka's parable which features the thinker caught between two antagonists, the past and the future.

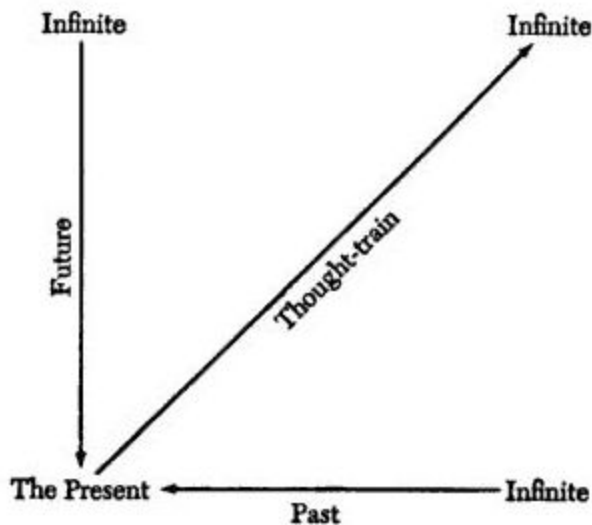
He [the thinker] has two antagonists; the first presses him from behind, from his origin. The second blocks the road in front of him. He gives battle to both. Actually, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in 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, it must be admitted, 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 (*LOM* 202).

Deconstructing this metaphor according to Arendt's $A:B=B:C$ relation, we have, "The past and the future relate to the thinker as two antagonists relate to "he" who gives battle to them. Clearly, as in the case of the winds and the sea, the concrete image should tell us something about the abstract thought. For this metaphor, that means that the image of the two antagonists should tell us something about the relationship between the thinker and time. And according to Arendt's rule, the metaphor should not be reversible. That is, analyzing the past and the future should tell us nothing about the image of the antagonists. But this does not seem intuitively true. That is, the

image of the two antagonists giving battle to the thinker seems to have meaning in itself, meaning which is elucidated by the analysis of this image.

Arendt refines this metaphor further as she gets deeper into the spatial metaphor for time's relation to the thinker. She includes this image, which shows the past, future, and thought trains as vectors which represent force and movement. The future and the present come toward each other perpendicularly, bouncing off each other at a 45 degree angle as a thought-train. The thinker is located at the meeting point, labeled "the present," and their thought-train shoots out from their location. Arendt writes about this image,

Ideally, the action of the two forces that form our parallelogram of forces should result in a third force, the resultant diagonal whose origin would be the point at which the forces meet and upon which they act. The diagonal would remain on the same plane and not jump out of the dimension of the forces of time, but it would in one important respect differ from the forces whose result it is. 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 (*LOM* 209).



Here, too we see that the image which grounds the metaphor is not factual, that is, doesn't exist in the appearing world. And while it is obvious that the metaphor works in the expected

direction— the vectors which represent movement tell us a significant amount about the way that Arendt expects that time works with thinking— we can also see that the comparison works in the opposite direction. That is, reading the metaphor will tell us a significant amount about the image.

The reversibility of these two metaphors, their capacity to meaningfully describe the images which they are constructed around, indicate that the nature of these images is fundamentally different from the nature of the truthful image. A metaphor which utilizes appearing phenomena can never work backwards because the quest for meaning is “meaningless” to the appearing world. However, the reversibility of this metaphor suggests that the metaphor’s quest for meaning is highly relevant to the images themselves. This could only be the case if the images themselves are meaningful, that is, concerned with the same questions as the metaphor itself.

Conclusion

The reason for the extremely speculative nature of the final two chapters of this project, as well as my insistence on sticking so closely to Arendt's philosophy rather than calling on the infinite resources which could have been instrumental in proving the existence of "concrete thinking in images," has more to do with a deep interest in the idea that the reader could know the author better than she knows herself, and that it is only the spectator who can make meaning of the spectacle than it does any need to prove, once and for all, the existence of visual thinking. In the name of that pursuit, I suppose that my conclusion has more to do with Arendt than it does visual thinking.

This project has made clear to me, more than anything, the difficulty in saying that thinking is any one thing, even if one has as compelling a proof as Arendt's. I believe I have shown clearly that Arendt had her own doubts about the silent dialogue thesis, and that these doubts are latent in *The Life of the Mind*. I have speculated about some ways to formalize these doubts and given an argument for my own instinct, which is to say that concrete thinking in images is not only possible but common. Moreover, it goes hand in hand with dialogical thinking, although not in the way that Plato anticipated. The two work together, aid each other, fill in the gaps the other leaves. Neither can produce the certainty of truth in the world of appearances, although concrete thinking in images may look very similar.

What is the purpose of all of this speculation? Perhaps its only purpose was to attempt a mode of reading and response which takes seriously the idea that the text is not an object, but something which is living, a friend or an interlocutor. In the spirit of this idea, I will conclude with a quote from Arendt's *Denktagebuch*, "Das Interpretieren, das Zitieren — doch nur, um

Zeugen zu haben, auch Freunde” (Denktagebuch 156) (The interpreting, the quoting, only to have witnesses and friends).

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