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futile of human activities, action and speech, and the least tangible, and most ephemeral of man-made "products," the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable. The organization of the *polis*, physically secured by the wall around the city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws—lest the succeeding generations change its identity beyond recognition—is a kind of organized remembrance. It assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men, who outside the *polis* could attend only the short duration of the performance and therefore needed Homer and "others of his craft" in order to be presented to those who were not there.

According to this self-interpretation, the political realm rises directly out of acting together, the "sharing of words and deeds." Thus action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it. It is as though the wall of the *polis* and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilizing protection could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself. Not historically, of course, but speaking metaphorically and theoretically, it is as though the men who returned from the Trojan War had wished to make permanent the space of action which had arisen from their deeds and sufferings, to prevent its perishing with their dispersal and return to their isolated homesteads.

The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. "Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*": these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not

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merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.

This space does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them—like the slave, the forger, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world—do not live in it. No man, moreover, can live in it all the time. To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance. To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; "for what appears to all, this we call Being,"²⁸ and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality.²⁹

POWER AND THE SPACE OF APPEARANCE

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore precedes and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever. That civilizations can rise and fall, that mighty empires and great cultures can decline and pass away without external catastrophes—and more often than not such external "causes" are preceded by a

28. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1172b36 ff.

29. Heraclitus' statement that the world is one and common to those who are awake, but that everybody who is asleep turns away to his own (*Diels, op. cit.*, B89), says essentially the same as Aristotle's remark just quoted.

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less visible internal decay that invites disaster—is due to this peculiarity of the public realm, which, because it ultimately resides on action and speech, never altogether loses its potential character. What first undermines and then kills political communities is loss of power and final impotence; and power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. Where power is not actualized, it passes away, and history is full of examples that the greatest material riches cannot compensate for this loss. Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.

Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence. The word itself, its Greek equivalent *dynamis*, like the Latin *potentia* with its various modern derivatives or the German *Macht* (which derives from *mögen* and *möglich*, not from *machen*), indicates its “potential” character. Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse. Because of this peculiarity, which power shares with all potentialities that can only be actualized but never fully materialized, power is to an astonishing degree independent of material factors, either of numbers or means. A comparatively small but well-organized group of men can rule almost indefinitely over large and populous empires, and it is not infrequent in history that small and poor countries get the better of great and rich nations. (The story of David and Goliath is only metaphorically true; the power of a few can be greater than the power of many, but in a contest between two men not power but strength decides, and cleverness, that is, brain power, contributes materially to the outcome on the same level as muscular force.) Popular revolt against materially strong rulers, on the other hand, may engender an almost irresistible power even if it foregoes the use of violence in the face of

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materially vastly superior forces. To call this “passive resistance” is certainly an ironic idea; it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cleared of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men.

The only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people. Only where men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them, and the foundation of cities, which as city-states have remained paradigmatic for all Western political organization, is therefore indeed the most important material prerequisite for power. What keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed (what we today call “organization”) and what, at the same time, they keep alive through remaining together is power. And whoever, for whatever reasons, isolates himself and does not partake in such being together, forfeits power and becomes impotent, no matter how great his strength and how valid his reasons.

If power were more than this potentiality in being together, if it could be possessed like strength or applied like force instead of being dependent upon the unreliable and only temporary agreement of many wills and intentions, omnipotence would be a concrete human possibility. For power, like action, is boundless; it has no physical limitation in human nature, in the bodily existence of man, like strength. Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with. For the same reason, power can be divided without decreasing it, and the interplay of powers with their checks and balances is even liable to generate more power, so long, at least, as the interplay is alive and has not resulted in a stalemate. Strength, on the contrary, is indivisible, and while it, too, is checked and balanced by the presence of others, the interplay of plurality in this case spells a definite limitation on the strength of the individual, which is kept in bounds and may be overpowered by the power potential of the many. An identification of the strength necessary for the production of things with the power necessary for action is conceivable

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only as the divine attribute of one god. Omnipotence therefore is never an attribute of gods in polytheism, no matter how superior the strength of the gods may be to the forces of men. Conversely, aspiration toward omnipotence always implies—apart from its utopian *hubris*—the destruction of plurality.

Under the conditions of human life, the only alternative to power is not strength—which is helpless against power—but force, which indeed one man alone can exert against his fellow men and of which one or a few can possess a monopoly by acquiring the means of violence. But while violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it. From this results the by no means infrequent political combination of force and powerlessness, an array of impotent forces that spend themselves, often spectacularly and vehemently but in utter futility, leaving behind neither monuments nor stories, hardly enough memory to enter into history at all. In historical experience and traditional theory, this combination, even if it is not recognized as such, is known as tyranny, and the time-honored fear of this form of government is not exclusively inspired by its cruelty, which—as the long series of benevolent tyrants and enlightened despots attests—is not among its inevitable features, but by the impotence and futility to which it condemns the rulers as well as the ruled.

More important is a discovery made, as far as I know, only by Montesquieu, the last political thinker to concern himself seriously with the problem of forms of government. Montesquieu realized that the outstanding characteristic of tyranny was that it rested on isolation—on the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from each other through mutual fear and suspicion—and hence that tyranny was not one form of government among others but contradicted the essential human condition of plurality, the acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization. Tyranny prevents the development of power, not only in a particular segment of the public realm but in its entirety; it generates, in other words, impotence as naturally as other bodies politic generate power. This, in Montesquieu's interpretation, makes it necessary to assign it a special position in the theory of political bodies: it alone is unable to develop enough power to remain at all in the space of appear-

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ance, the public realm; on the contrary, it develops the germs of its own destruction the moment it comes into existence.³⁰

Violence, curiously enough, can destroy power more easily than it can destroy strength, and while a tyranny is always characterized by the impotence of its subjects, who have lost their human capacity to act and speak together, it is not necessarily characterized by weakness and sterility; on the contrary, the crafts and arts may flourish under these conditions if the ruler is "benevolent" enough to leave his subjects alone in their isolation. Strength, on the other hand, nature's gift to the individual which cannot be shared with others, can cope with violence more successfully than with power—either heroically, by consenting to fight and die, or stoically, by accepting suffering and challenging all affliction through self-sufficiency and withdrawal from the world; in either case, the integrity of the individual and his strength remain intact. Strength can actually be ruined only by power and is therefore always in danger from the combined force of the many. Power corrupts indeed when the weak band together in order to ruin the strong, but not before. The will to power, as the modern age from Hobbes to Nietzsche understood it in glorification or denunciation, far from being a characteristic of the strong, is, like envy and greed, among the vices of the weak, and possibly even their most dangerous one.

If tyranny can be described as the always abortive attempt to substitute violence for power, ochlocracy, or mob rule, which is its exact counterpart, can be characterized by the much more promising attempt to substitute power for strength. Power indeed can ruin all strength and we know that where the main public realm is society, there is always the danger that, through a perverted form of "acting together"—by pull and pressure and the tricks of cliques—those are brought to the fore who know nothing and can do nothing. The vehement yearning for violence, so char-

30. In the words of Montesquieu, who ignores the difference between tyranny and despotism: "Le principe du gouvernement despotique se corrompt sans cesse, parcequ'il est corrompu par sa nature. Les autres gouvernements périsent, parceque des accidents particuliers en violent le principe: celui-ci périt par son vice intérieur, lorsque quelques causes accidentelles n'empêchent point son principe de se corrompre" (*op. cit.*, Book VIII, ch. 10).

acteristic of some of the best modern creative artists, thinkers, scholars, and craftsmen, is a natural reaction of those whom society has tried to cheat of their strength.³¹

Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearance, and as such it is also the lifeblood of the human artifice, which, unless it is the scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them, lacks its ultimate *raison d'être*. Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object; without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes. The melancholy wisdom of *Ecclesiastes*—"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. . . . There is no new thing under the sun, . . . there is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after"—does not necessarily arise from specifically religious experience; but it is certainly unavoidable wherever and whenever trust in the world as a place fit for human appearance, for action and speech, is gone. Without action to bring into the play of the world the new beginning of which each man is capable by virtue of being born, "there is no new thing under the sun"; without speech to materialize and memorialize, however tentatively, the "new things" that appear and shine forth, "there is no remembrance"; without the enduring permanence of a human artifact, there cannot "be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after." And without power, the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech in public will fade away as rapidly as the living deed and the living word.

Perhaps nothing in our history has been so short-lived as trust in power, nothing more lasting than the Platonic and Christian distrust of the splendor attending its space of appearance, nothing

31. The extent to which Nietzsche's glorification of the will to power was inspired by such experiences of the modern intellectual may be surmised from the following side remark: "Dem die Ohnmacht gegen Menschen, nicht die Ohnmacht gegen die Natur, erzeugt die desperatere Verbitterung gegen das Dasein" (*Wille zur Macht*, No. 55).

—finally in the modern age—more common than the conviction that "power corrupts." The words of Pericles, as Thucydides reports them, are perhaps unique in their supreme confidence that men can enact *and* save their greatness at the same time and, as it were, by one and the same gesture, and that the performance as such will be enough to generate *dynamis* and not need the transforming reification of *homo faber* to keep it in reality.³² Pericles' speech, though it certainly corresponded to and articulated the innermost convictions of the people of Athens, has always been read with the sad wisdom of hindsight by men who knew that his words were spoken at the beginning of the end. Yet short-lived as this faith in *dynamis* (and consequently in politics) may have been—and it had already come to an end when the first political philosophies were formulated—its bare existence has sufficed to elevate action to the highest rank in the hierarchy of the *vita activa* and to single out speech as the decisive distinction between human and animal life, both of which bestowed upon politics a dignity which even today has not altogether disappeared.

What is outstandingly clear in Pericles' formulations—and, incidentally, no less transparent in Homer's poems—is that the innermost meaning of the acted deed and the spoken word is independent of victory and defeat and must remain untouched by any eventual outcome, by their consequences for better or worse. Unlike human behavior—which the Greeks, like all civilized people, judged according to "moral standards," taking into account motives and intentions on the one hand and aims and consequences on the other—action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*.³³ Thucydides, or

32. In the above-mentioned paragraph in the Funeral Oration (ii. 27) Pericles deliberately contrasts the *dynamis* of the polis with the craftsmanship of the poets.

33. The reason why Aristotle in his *Poetics* finds that greatness (*megethos*) is a prerequisite of the dramatic plot is that the drama imitates acting and acting is judged by greatness, by its distinction from the commonplace (1450b25). The same, incidentally, is true for the beautiful, which resides in greatness and *taxis*, the joining together of the parts (1450b34 ff.).

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Pericles, knew full well that he had broken with the normal standards for everyday behavior when he found the glory of Athens in having left behind "everywhere everlasting remembrance [*mnēmōia aidia*] of their good and their evil deeds." The art of politics teaches men how to bring forth what is great and radiant—*ta megala kai lampra*, in the words of Democritus; as long as the *polis* is there to inspire men to dare the extraordinary, all things are safe; if it perishes, everything is lost.³⁴ Motives and aims, no matter how pure or how grandiose, are never unique; like psychological qualities, they are typical, characteristic of different types of persons. Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement.

It is this insistence on the living deed and the spoken word as the greatest achievements of which human beings are capable that was conceptualized in Aristotle's notion of *energeia* ("actuality"), with which he designated all activities that do not pursue an end (are *aitheis*) and leave no work behind (no *pon' autis ergon*), but exhaust their full meaning in the performance itself.³⁵ It is from the experience of this full actuality that the paradoxical "end in itself" derives its original meaning; for in these instances of action and speech³⁶ the end (*telos*) is not pursued but lies in the activity itself which therefore becomes an *entelechia*, and the work is not what follows and extrinques the process but is imbedded in it; the performance is the work, is *energeia*.³⁷ Aristotle, in his political philosophy, is still well aware of what is at stake in politics, namely, no less than the *ergon tou anthropou*³⁸ (the "work of man" *qua*

34. See fragment B157 of Democritus in Diels, *op. cit.*

35. For the concept of *energeia* see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a1-5; *Physics* 201b31; *On the Soul* 417a16, 431a6. The examples most frequently used are seeing and flute-playing.

36. It is of no importance in our context that Aristotle saw the highest possibility of "actuality" not in action and speech, but in contemplation and thought, in *theoria* and *nous*.

37. The two Aristotelian concepts, *energeia* and *entelechia*, are closely inter-related (*energeia . . . syntineti pros ten entelechian*): full actuality (*energeia*) effects and produces nothing besides itself, and full reality (*entelechia*) has no other end besides itself (see *Metaphysics* 1050a22-35).

38. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b22.

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man), and if he defined this "work" as "to live well" (*eu zēn*), he clearly meant that "work" here is no work product but exists only in sheer actuality. This specifically human achievement lies altogether outside the category of means and ends; the "work of man" is no end because the means to achieve it—the virtues, or *aretai*—are not qualities which may or may not be actualized, but are themselves "actualities." In other words, the means to achieve the end would already be the end; and this "end," conversely, cannot be considered a means in some other respect, because there is nothing higher to attain than this actuality itself.

It is like a feeble echo of the prephilosophical Greek experience of action and speech as sheer actuality to read time and again in political philosophy since Democritus and Plato that politics is a *technē*, belongs among the arts, and can be likened to such activities as healing or navigation, where, as in the performance of the dancer or play-actor, the "product" is identical with the performing act itself. But we may gauge what has happened to action and speech, which are only in actuality, and therefore the highest activities in the political realm, when we hear what modern society, with the peculiar and uncompromising consistency that characterized it in its early stages, had to say about them. For this all-important degradation of action and speech is implied when Adam Smith classifies all occupations which rest essentially on performance—such as the military profession, "churchmen, lawyers, physicians and opera-singers"—together with "menial services," the lowest and most unproductive "labour."³⁹ It was precisely these occupations—healing, flute-playing, play-acting—which furnished ancient thinking with examples for the highest and greatest activities of man.

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HOMO FABER AND THE SPACE OF APPEARANCE

The root of the ancient estimation of politics is the conviction that man *qua* man, each individual in his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action, and that these activi-

39. *Wealth of Nations* (Everyman's ed.), II, 295.