



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

*Rethinking the Political beyond Nihilism:  
Tragedy and «Aesthetic» Politics  
in the work of Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt*

BY  
SAMANTHA NOVELLO

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of  
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Florence, April 2005.

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TRAGEDY AND «AESTHETIC» POLITICS  
IN THE WORK OF ALBERT CAMUS AND HANNAH ARENDT**

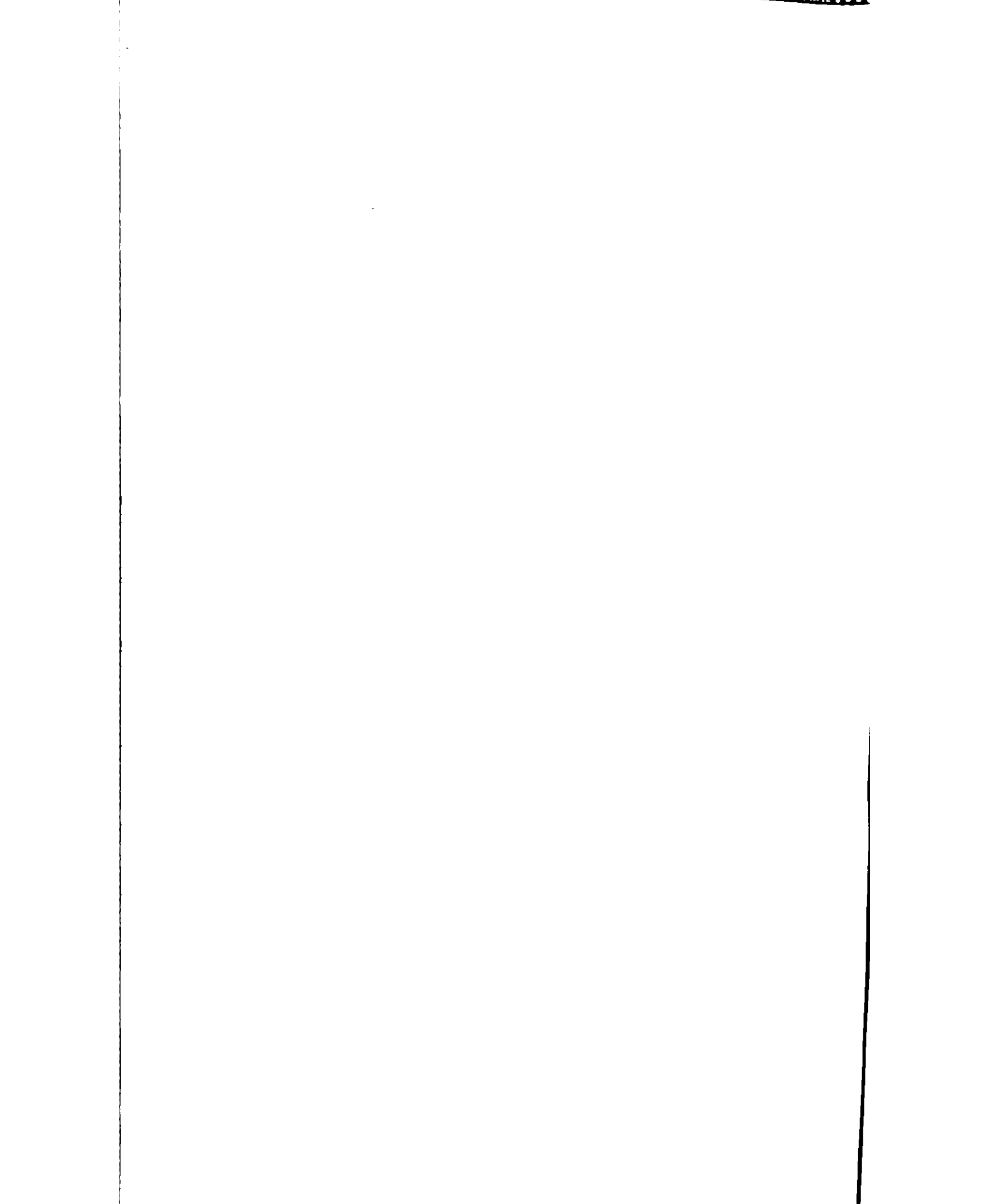
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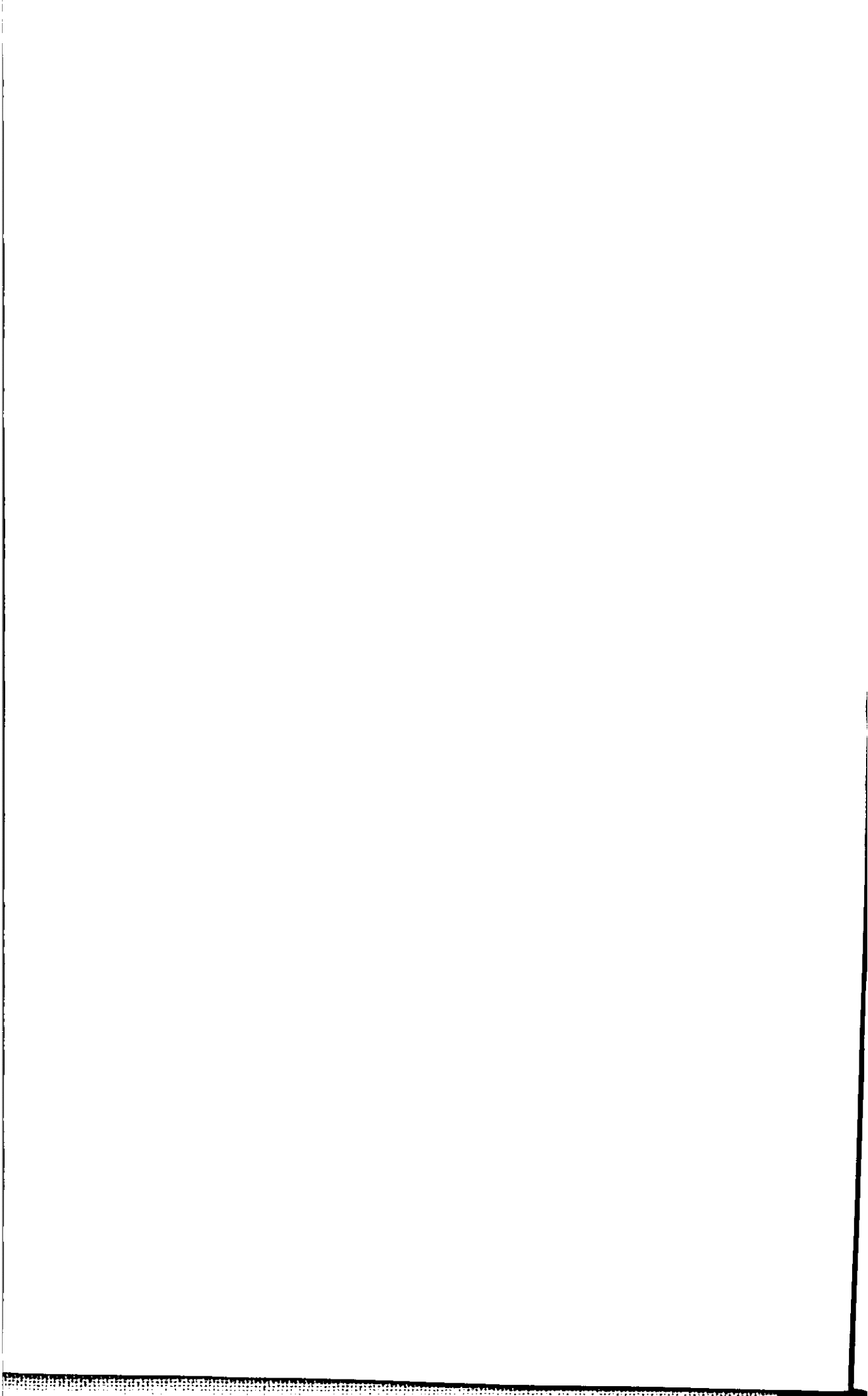
Examining jury:  
Prof. Peter Wagner, SPS, supervisor  
Prof. Martin van Gelderen, EUI, HEC  
Prof. Simona Forti, Università del Piemonte Orientale, Alessandria  
Prof. Maurice Weyembergh, (co-supervisor), Free University, Brussels

Firenze, April 2005



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## INTRODUCTION

Thematized in the last two decades by a certain strand of Continental political philosophy, the question of Nihilism has recently been brought to the fore in non-academic political debates – talk-shows and newspapers<sup>1</sup> - as well as in a number of publications which touch upon the problem of the «end of the political».<sup>2</sup> It is in questioning the possibility of freedom and peace within the nihilistic horizon, announced by Nietzsche, of the «post-modern condition», that Vattimo has recently drawn the attention, with a renewed and positive accent, to the «aesthetic» inclination of the so-called post-modern civilization as the condition for (political) freedom against and beyond the proliferation of religious and ideological fundamentalism.<sup>3</sup>

What this thesis focuses upon is, more precisely, the relationship between nihilism and the «aestheticization» of the political, which, against the backdrop of the more radical question of the possibility of re-thinking the political *beyond* nihilism, attempts to provide a contribution, in the line of the studies of authors such as Jean-Luc Nancy and Roberto Esposito, to a reflection on the different «aesthetic» declinations of the political.

The key to the plural dimension of the «aesthetic» inclination/declination of the concept of politics and the political is provided, as Vattimo points out, in Nietzsche's aphorism 356 in the fifth book of the *Gay Science*, where the increasing «aestheticization» of European society is pictured in the decline of the figure of the “architect”, of the great *builder*

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<sup>1</sup> On 29 September 2001, the newspaper *La Repubblica* published an article by André Glucksmann entitled “Terrorism and nihilism are not invincible”. A leading figure, with French philosopher Bernard-Henry Lévy, of the movement of the “Nouveau Philosophes” in the 1970's, Glucksmann had contributed to the reintroduction of the notion of 'totalitarianism' in the political and intellectual debate in France (Traverso, 705-706). Glucksmann's argument attempts to explain the Terrorist attack of the 11 September within the framework of a nihilist “culture of death”, tracing back to de Sade's reveries of perpetual crime. Individual terrorism is described as the logical outcome of nihilism, and is identified with the 20<sup>th</sup> century delirium of destruction foreseen by Dostoevskij in his *Demons*. Glucksmann's understanding of the notion of nihilism as comprehending religious ideologies of collective suicide, in contrast with a more common-sense definition of the term as 'absence of belief', is not original, but, as I intend to show, echoes the argument of Albert Camus's *L'Homme révolté*.

<sup>2</sup> From A. Gnoli, “Mille voci per raccontare la fine della politica”, interview with Esposito and Galli in *Repubblica* (15 April 2000). With the precise intention of bringing different ways of thinking the political into focus, Roberto Esposito and Carlo Galli introduce the term nihilism in the political lexicon of their *Enciclopedia del pensiero politico* (2000). In the same year Esposito, Galli and Vitiello devoted a collection of essays (*Nichilismo e politica*, Laterza, Bari, 2000) to the relationship between nihilism and the Political, which they dedicated to a project of rethinking the relationship between philosophy and the political outside the horizon of “political philosophy” (Ivi, p. VII). The collection included a translation of three fragments by Jean-Luc Nancy on Nihilism and the Political dated between 1994-95.

<sup>3</sup> Along with Nietzsche, Vattimo identifies nihilism as the loss or retreat from a unitary meaning (*telos*) of history, conceived as rational objectivity. Nietzsche defines nihilism as the awareness of the meaninglessness, aimlessness and absence of a logical development of becoming: the “death of God” is neither a theory nor the “truthful” discovery of the objective structure of the world. Vattimo's interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, precisely, emphasizes the image of the “tourist” in the garden of History, in other words, the capacity to replace the perspective of the *will to truth* with an *aesthetic*, i.e., an antifoundational and perspectivist look upon different cultures (see G. Vattimo, “Libertà e pace nella condizione post-moderna”, in *Nichilismo ed emancipazione. Etica, politica, diritto*, Garzanti, 2003, p.p. 59-68).

of the political body – *societas* in the traditional sense of a construction, which is founded on human matter, sacrificed to the tremendous power of making calculations and promises, and of programmatically foreseeing the future – and is overshadowed by the emergence of the comedians or play-actors. Replacing the belief in the capacity to *last* – which was common to the Athenians of the age of Pericles and to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans – to be able to play all roles, the comedian is the embodiment of the truth that «We», Europeans *and* Nihilists, are no longer *matter* for a society.

The artistic/architectural metaphor, as the mark of the *poietic* and teleocratic paradigm of the political, has been the object of extensive research into the (self-)representation of Nazism,<sup>4</sup> since Brecht and Benjamin coined the formula of the «aestheticization of politics» or the «politicization of art» in 1935-36.<sup>5</sup>

Arendtian scholars are well acquainted with the critique of the fabrication (*poietic*) paradigm of political action, structured around the Platonic metaphor of the statesman as artisan, which emerges from Hannah Arendt's exploration into the “elements” of Totalitarianism in the Fifties. Dana Villa's work, in particular, has brought into focus the existence, in Arendt's writings, of two distinct «aesthetic» models of the political, the “productionist”/architectural and the performative/theatrical.<sup>6</sup>

Although Villa relates Arendt's “aestheticization” of the political, especially through an interrogation of her appropriation of the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger, to nihilism, which is identified with the break-down of the tradition, and the loss of the moral and religious guideposts for human action (loss of authority and the retreat of the world); the problem of nihilism retains, among the Arendtian scholarly critique, an unquestioned moral connotation, which relegates it almost automatically to the margins of political theory, as a problematical, or even disturbing, concept-limit of the political.

In this thesis, I take the (critique of the) question of nihilism as the essential link between Arendt's political reflection and Albert Camus' philosophical work. Beside the «disparate comments [which] are indicative of some personal and intellectual affinities and connections between Arendt and Camus»,<sup>7</sup> which Jeffrey Isaac essentially traces back to the

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<sup>4</sup> J.P. Stern, “Nazisme et représentation”, *Critique*, Tome XLIII, n. 487, décembre 1987, pp. 1019- 1034.

<sup>5</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe devotes a chapter, in his book on Heidegger and the fiction of the political, to the «artistic politics» of National-Socialism (H. Brenner) and the Nazi identification of the Third Reich with a work of *total art* (see P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *La finzione del politico. Heidegger, l'arte e la politica*, op. cit., pp. 79-ff.)

<sup>6</sup> Dana Villa, “Beyond Good and Evil. Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action”, *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 2, May 1992, 274- 308; D. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger. The Fate of the Political*, Princeton UP, 1996, and *Politics, Philosophy, Terror. Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Princeton UP, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> J. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1992, pp. 17-18.

political debate promoted by Nicola Chiaromonte and Dwight MacDonald in *Partisan Review* and *Politics* in the Forties and Fifties,<sup>8</sup> I suggest that nihilism constitutes an essential element, which is still largely overlooked in a comparative analysis of the work of these two authors, and which can throw further light on their contribution to 20<sup>th</sup> century political thought.

It is significant that two major works by these two authors, Albert Camus' *L'Homme révolté* and Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, were both published in 1951, and that in both these texts the term "nihilism" is recurrent in its designation of the totalitarian form of terror and (total) domination. Heinrich Blücher's letter to Hannah Arendt in June 1952, drawing the latter's attention to Camus HR as essential for the critique of nihilism,<sup>9</sup> provides, in my view, the evidence that, around that time, Arendt – who had expressly met the French writer in Paris to discuss the essay in April of the same year – may have been brought to question further the meaning and political significance of nihilism as a result of her researches into the elements of totalitarianism. It is my precise intention to explore this link, by reading the works by these two authors side by side, in order to bring forth their specific contribution toward a re-thinking of the political, in the aftermath of the collapse of the totalitarian systems, and of their disquieting heritage,<sup>10</sup> which will take into account, and think through the problem of nihilism.

In this sense, the thesis places itself in the continuum of a line of research, disclosed by Jeffrey C. Isaac's "pioneering" study on *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (1992) – at present, the only comparative analysis of the political thought of these two authors – although, in a certain sense, it reverts the emphasis or the «antecedence».

Approaching the political question from an inquiry into the problem of Nihilism – rather than the other way round, i.e., resorting to the (rather nebulous and ideologically laden) concept of nihilism to sanction the condemnation of a certain political situation, as was often the case in the Totalitarianism debate from the Thirties to the Fifties – I deliberately start from

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<sup>8</sup> A friend of Camus since 1941, the anti-Fascist writer Nicola Chiaromonte became an important *trait-d'union* of the French author's work with the American post-war debate, and especially with Mary McCarthy and Dwight MacDonald, who, as Stephen Withfield points out, did much to shape the American definition of totalitarianism in the decade prior to the publication of Arendt's *Origins* (*Into the Dark: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism*, Philadelphia, 1980, p. 11). As one of the editors of *Partisan Review*, and the founder of *Politics* (1944), MacDonald translated and drew attention to the work of Albert Camus. The selection published in *Partisan Review* is significant: two chapters from the *Mythe de Sisyphe*, translated by William Barrett, in vol. 13, n. 2, 1946; *Between Yes and No* (the title suggests a translation of the essay «Entre Oui et Non» from the collection *L'Envers et l'endroit* published in Algeria in 1937) in vol. 16, n. 11, 1949; the chapter on *Art and Revolt* from *L'Homme révolté*, translated by J. Frank, in vol. 19, n. 3, 1952, and *A Writer and His Time*, in vol. 22, n. 3, 1955.

<sup>9</sup> H. Arendt, *Within Four Walls*, op. cit., 190.

<sup>10</sup> For the debate on the totalitarian heritage, see, in particular, Roberto Esposito, «Il Nazismo e noi», *MicroMega. Almanacco di Filosofia*, 5/2003, pp. 165-174, Paolo Flores d'Arcais, «Hannah Arendt e il totalitarismo nelle democrazie», *Ivi*, pp. 110-135, Simona Forti, «Spettri della totalità», *Ivi*, pp. 198-209.

a careful examination of Camus' work, for whom the question of nihilism had been a pivotal concern throughout his life, and, who, as I intend to show, stands at the margins of so-called «essentialist» philosophical approaches to totalitarianism.<sup>11</sup>

As early as 1960, Nicola Chiaromonte traced the meaning of the French author's (political) engagement in the question of nihilism and the absurd (two terms which are by no means the same). But it is only in more recent times that critics have started to question the problem of nihilism in Camus' writings seriously, mainly referring to the 1951 essay on revolt (Isaac, 1992),<sup>12</sup> which Franco Volpi describes as «uno tra gli studi più illuminati e profondi sul problema del nichilismo».<sup>13</sup> What, I argue, is missing in the scholarly critique of Camus' political thought is a systematic exploration of the notion of nihilism, which would shed some light on the numerous shifts and developments of the author's ethical-political reflection. This thesis attempts to provide a contribution in this sense, by exploring the emergence and the evolution of the question of nihilism between 1942 and 1952, as developing in parallel, and informing the author's political thought from *Combat* to *l'HR*.

In Chapter 1 I attempt to reconstruct, through a close textual reading, the different acceptations of the term 'nihilism', disclosed in the Camus' *prière d'insérer* to the *Mythe de Sisyphe* in September 1942. This text is particularly significant for it provides the key to the reading of the philosophical essay on the absurd, defined by its author as «un essai de définition passionnée» of *modern nihilism* (E, 1666). What I suggest is that the (declared) attempt to define modern nihilism does not exhaust the meaning and intention of the MdS, but, rather, that this essay contains *another* dimension beyond the «historical» one, that is, beyond the reconstruction of what he defines as the sensibility of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Admitting that this *modern* sensibility, to which Camus refers as an *absurd* sensibility, resumes the so-called *modern nihilism*, the MdS is *also* and, I would argue, more importantly, the author's attempt to *think in the margins* of the latter: «Il s'agit de savoir si l'on peut définir un *bon nihilisme*» (E, 1666).

My reading of the MdS challenges the possibility of defining a *good* form of nihilism in the essay on the absurd. I argue that the successive dismissal of a qualitative distinction between *good* and *bad* nihilism - in 1951 he wrote: «Il n'y a pas un bon et un mauvais nihilisme, il n'y a qu'une longue et féroce aventure dont nous sommes tous solidaires. Le

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<sup>11</sup> See, also, S. Forti, *Il totalitarismo*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2001, pp. 67-ff.

<sup>12</sup> An exception in this sense is D. Crosby's *The Specter of the Absurd. Sources and Criticisms of Modern Nihilism*, State University of New York Press 1988. I will come back to this text, from which I distance myself in the interpretation of Camus' "philosophy of the absurd", in Chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup> Volpi, Franco, *Il nichilismo*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1999, p. 84.



courage consiste à le dire clairement et à réfléchir dans cette impasse pour lui trouver une issue» (E, 734-735) – develops *in the wake* of the thought disclosed by the original proposal, as the refusal of a certain concept of nihilism, identified with a deviation (from the *right* path) or with an exogenous disease to be *expelled* from the healthy body of the community.

I suggest that it is precisely through the method of thinking outlined in MdS that the problem of nihilism is identified by Camus, between 1943 and 1950, as lying at the core of the political as touching upon the definition of human action under the finite conditions of the *absurd*.

In Chapter 1, I analyse the *écriture de l'absurde*, that is, the metaphoric constellations through which Camus conveys the feeling and the notion of the absurd in the MdS: in Section 1.1., I argue that the metaphoric definition of the absurd brings forth a stylistic and textual correspondence with the work and thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. The reconstruction, through the only two existing inventories (Arnold, 1979 and Favre, 2004) of Camus' readings of the work of the German philosopher, and the comparative study of the French editions of Nietzsche's works, which Camus took up at different moments of his life, is essential in order to trace the emergence and development of the conception of nihilism in the French writer's political reflection.

The textual analysis confirms the generally acknowledged affinity between the *raisonnement absurde* and Nietzsche's anti-foundational «perspectivism».<sup>14</sup> But it also suggests that in the short “gap” between the *mise au point* of the philosophical essay in 1941 (where the term “nihilism” is remarkably absent) and the 1942 *prière d'insérer*, where the notion eventually makes its first appearance to describe the MdS, Camus may have read, and drawn upon the acceptation(s) of nihilism in Nietzsche's posthumous fragments. This source, I argue, is essential not only to confirm and elucidate the identification of the «*sensibilité absurde*» evoked in the MdS as/with *modern* nihilism, but also sheds further light on Camus' declared attempt to think *in the margins* of the latter.

In the light of Nussbaum's illuminating remarks on tragic poetry, I suggest that, for Camus' work, as for the Greeks, the content is not separable from its (poetic) style, «[s]tylistic choices – the selection of [...] certain patterns of image and vocabulary – are taken to be closely bound up with a conception of the *good*».<sup>15</sup> This is strongly pointed out by Marie-

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<sup>14</sup> Luigi Rustichelli, *La profondità della superficie. Senso tragico e giustificazione estetica dell'esistenza in F: Nietzsche*, Milano, Mursia, 1992, and Tracy B. Strong, “Nietzsche's Political Aesthetics”, in M.A. Gillespie and T.B. Strong (Eds.), *Nietzsche's New Seas. Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics*, University of Chicago Press, 1988, 159.

<sup>15</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, op. cit., p. 15.

Louise Audin in her pivotal study of the semiotics of the MdS, and is confirmed by Camus' scattered notes on the aesthetics of the absurd, which link *l'écriture de l'absurde* to «*l'imagination précise*», among the faculties of human thought that are the "closest" to sensory experience, and are thus the most "faithful" to the anti-metaphysical (Nietzschean) perspective disclosed by modern nihilism.

Without ignoring the plurivocity of the notion of the absurd throughout Camus' work, and the author's undeniable shifts in both the language, and in the thought between 1938 and 1950, what I suggest is that on a close textual reading, the metaphoric definition(s) of the absurd in the MdS bring to the fore a number of elements which allow us to identify Camus' concept of «*good*» (whose meaning must still be defined) in the author's emphasis on the liminal experience of the sensory exposure of man-to-the-world and the world-to-man – which I define, borrowing Nancy's terminology, as the *aesthetic* dimension of the absurd (Section 1.2.).

The focus on the sensory *con-tact* (*aisthesis*) as *one dimension* of Camus' understanding of the absurd, from the 1938-39 lyrical essays to the MdS, brings forth the notion of limit as already inscribed in a certain - «honest» or lucid – thought opened by/to the absurd, namely, as being constitutive of the judgment of *la chair* which de-fines man's finitude.

Without wishing to reduce the different aspects of Camus' thinking of the absurd to a univocal and simplifying interpretation, which would attempt to "square the circle" of the author's *open* contribution as a *finite* thought of the finite, the (more modest) aim of the thesis is to draw attention to a series of elements contained in the pages of MdS, which can be grouped in the constellation of *aisthesis*, which concur, in my view, a) in the definition of Camus' «good», and consequently, b) in his understanding of a «good» nihilism against the backdrop of the modern «desease», and, finally, c) which constitute a sort of *fil rouge* between the 1942 essay and his later ethico-political thought.

The «good» disclosed by the metaphoric treatment of the absurd in MdS, and brought forth by the emphasis on the positive moment of the *aesthetic* experience, as liminal, finite awareness of man's exposedness here and now touches upon and sheds further light on the identification of the absurd and nihilism. What I argue in Section 1.3. is that Camus' definition of the absurd cannot be reduced to a mere loss of *signification* - to which the problem of nihilism is traditionally reduced. While incorporating the modern experience of a *loss* or *absence* of a transcendent meaning (*retreat of the world*), identified in the historically situated *sentiment de l'absurdité* (*modern nihilism*), the metaphors of the absurd expose a

meaning (*sens*) – not absolute and transcendent, but a finite meaning, which is disclosed in/as *sentir* (*aisthesis*). By taking place in/as *aesthetic* judgement (the “*révolte de la chair*”), the absurd *is* (already) meaning(ful).

The focus on the *aisthetic* moment of the absurd reasoning adopted in the thesis allows us, in my view, to trace in Camus’ notion of absurd creation (of Nietzschean memory), seen as a peculiar kind of *praxis-poiesis*, the anti-foundational horizon for a («aesthetic») way out of the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of transcendent values. It is significant, in this sense, that in MdS Camus chose the conqueror, the actor and the artist – three figures that recur in the French edition of Nietzsche’s *La Volonté de Puissance* - <sup>16</sup> to illustrate the *absurd* man.

The aim of Section 1.3. is to reconstitute the line of argument (*absurd logic*) – without attempting to assess its validity, nor pretending to provide an exhaustive presentation of Camus’ life-long and tormented re-thinking over these matters - which links the *aisthetic* awareness of the absurd revolt of *la chair* to the lucid action as *passion passive*, and to creation, as touching upon the possibility of moral action beyond (transcendent) morality.

As I intend to show, in the MdS, Camus conceives the possibility of a *transfiguration* of the absurd evidence of the transcendent meaninglessness and valuelessness of the world (*modern nihilism*) into a norm of action or moral conduct which is mediated through the concept of *creation* – as a kind of *discipline*. I suggest that the notion of creation highlights in the coincidence of the finite thought (of the finite) and the useless action of the *absurd* man a normativeness, which is *in* the act (of existing).

The thesis challenges the existence in the work of Camus and Arendt of different declinations of *creation* which are seen as developing out of their reflection on a *certain form* (namely, absolute or radical) of nihilism. The emergence of a positive acceptance of creation in the MdS, and the shifts in Camus’ understanding of the relationship between art/the artist and the political from 1941 to 1957 are read next to Arendt’s reflection on the «aesthetic» dimension of the political or public space drawn by action: from OT, where the term is employed to designate the relationship between boundless action and totalitarian omnipotence (*hubris*), to the 1956/58 use of the term *creative art* to address the specific reifying dimension concealed in the philosophical concept of the political, and to her efforts to re-think *creative* action outside the vertical power structure of dominion. The comparative textual analysis highlights an affinity between Camus’ conception of revolt as *creative* (act) in HR and

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<sup>16</sup> VP11, § 657, fr. 1883-1887.

[REDACTED]

eventually discloses the irreparable breakdown of Cartesianism and of the metaphysical fallacy of the un-conditioned Ego, in which he traces the Nazi *loss of lucidity* as an *incomplete* or *inconsequent* form of nihilism.

Camus' diagnosis of the Nazi attitude seems to suggest that the *lucid* thought - as a possible, although not the only, outcome of the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of traditional values, which he designates in the MdS as an *honest* thought, i.e., *consistent* with the absurd premises - is not only an attempt to think in the margins of modern (nihilistic) thinking, in the sense of a *good use* of nihilism, i.e., coherent with the evidence of the absurd, but, also, that he might have conceived this *consistent* or *coherent* nihilism as taking over the Nietzschean heritage of an *active* or *complete* nihilism.

Thus the thesis challenges Camus' belief in the possibility in 1943 «de lier à une philosophie absurde une pensée politique soucieuse de perfectionnement humain et plaçant son optimisme dans le *relatif*» (E, 1423), by reading the author's recurring themes of *bonheur* (*tragique*), *amour*, *beauté* - which belong to the absurd constellation of *aisthesis* - against the association, dramatized in the novel *La Peste*, of the murderous powers of abstraction with the totalitarian politics of *achievement*. Moreover, the *aesthetic* dimension of Camus' definition of the absurd provides, in my view, the key to the author's main objection to Sartre's existentialist philosophy, and of philosophy *tout court* as generally identified with the Hegelo-Marxian Philosophies of History.

Rejecting the title of *philosophe*,<sup>17</sup> Albert Camus places himself at the margins of political philosophy, while at the same time remaining an "outsider" of professional philosophy and of professional politics,<sup>18</sup> who was profoundly critical of the "organic" intellectual, and of the Sartrian «esprit de système» -<sup>19</sup> «Pourquoi suis-je un artiste et non un

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<sup>17</sup> «Je ne suis pas un philosophe. Je ne crois pas assez à la raison pour croire à un système. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de savoir comment il faut se conduire. Et plus précisément comment on peut se conduire quand on ne croit ni en Dieu ni en la raison» (Interview to *Servir*, 20th December 1945, E, 1427). Also E, 743, 753.

<sup>18</sup> As Jeanyves Guérin points out, «[il] est capital que Camus ait été étudiant non pas à la Sorbonne mais à la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger. Si René Poirier a dirigé son Diplôme d'études supérieures, c'est Jean Grenier qui lui a tenu lieu de père. Sans l'*Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie*, aurait-on pu lire *Ni Victimes ni bourreaux* ou *L'Homme révolté*? Choisir de passer la licence de philosophie, c'est suivre cet éveillé qui s'intéresse à l'hindouisme, au taoïsme et à l'islam et, dans ses cours, fait la part belle aux écrivains et aux peintres. Il écrit à *La Nouvelle revue française* depuis la fin des années 1920 et si [...] il finira sa carrière en Sorbonne, c'est comme titulaire de la chaire d'esthétique. Il a consacré sa thèse à Lequier. À ses étudiants il fait lire Kierkegaard, Palante, Chestov. *Sa philosophie n'est pas la philosophie des professeurs.*» (J. Guérin, «Camus, philosophe pour classes terminales?», in *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, PUF, Paris, 1997, p. 86).

Moreover, Camus' anti-conformism toward party politics and directives emerges as early as 1935-37 during his problematic engagement in the PCA.

<sup>19</sup> Jeanyves Guérin, «Les hommes politiques français lecteurs de Camus», in *Camus et la politique*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1986, p. 25.

philosophe? C'est que je pense selon les *mots* et non selon les idées » (CII, 146).<sup>20</sup> As he added in his notebooks a few months before his death: « Je suis un écrivain. Ce n'est pas moi mais ma plume qui *pense*, se *souvient* ou *découvre* » (CIII, 275). As an *author*, he is, according to Hannah Arendt's definition, a *public* figure (MDT, 95), and it is precisely this peculiar position - to use Galli's effective description of Arendt's own work,<sup>21</sup> which is radically inside and partially outside (rather than against) modern political thought - that, on the one hand, makes his perspective relevant for an inquiry into the relationship between Nihilism and the Political, while, on the other, it requires it to be dealt with with a particular attention.

This partly justifies the greater detail in the analysis of the French writer's work in a comparative inquiry into the political thought of Camus and Arendt: as Isaac correctly points out, while the work of the latter has undergone a significant revaluation in the last thirty years, and is widely studied by scholarly critics in political theory, Camus is «excluded altogether from [the] canon» of academic political theory, together with thinkers such as Simone Weil, Ignazio Silone, George Orwell and Walter Benjamin.<sup>22</sup>

By exploring Camus' approach to the problem of Nihilism, the thesis attempts to make a contribution toward the re-interpretation and revaluation of the author's political thought, in the light of the writer's *défi* to «professional» political philosophy,<sup>23</sup> which takes into account the author's effort to re-think philosophy, as the exercise of thought, *in the margins* of the Platonic philosophical tradition: «On ne pense que par image. Si tu veux être philosophe, écris des romans» (CI, 23). This explains the specific focus of the thesis on the «aesthetic» dimension: my aim is to explore the political implications of the figure of the artist, as *creator*, and of the author's conception of the work of art, as emerging and developing consistently with the finite method traced in the Mds.

I argue that, in Camus' reflection, the artist situates himself *at the limit*, and exposes the paradoxes of nihilism(s) as touching upon a twofold «aesthetic» paradigm of the political - what I define in Chapter 2 as the *fabrication* paradigm of the (traditional) politics of *achievement*, which Camus traces from the 1944 articles of the journal *Combat* at the core of

<sup>20</sup> «Je ne suis pas un philosophe, en effet, - he wrote in 1952 - et je ne sais parler que de ce que j'ai vécu. J'ai vécu le nihilisme, la contradiction, la violence et le vertige de la destruction.» (E, 753).

<sup>21</sup> Carlo Galli, "Hannah Arendt e le categorie politiche della modernità", in R. Esposito (Ed.), *La pluralità irrepresentabile. Il pensiero politico di Hannah Arendt*, Urbino, Quattroventi, 1987, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> J. Isaac, op. cit., p. 12. Roberto Esposito ranges Weil and Benjamin, as well as Arendt, in the «Impolitical» tradition of political thinking, as parallel and alternative to the Western tradition of political philosophy and the authoritative «canon» of modern political thought (see R. Esposito, C. Galli, Ed., *Enciclopedia del pensiero politico*, Laterza, 2000, p. 335).

<sup>23</sup> Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, « Si tu veux être philosophe... », *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, op. cit., p. 22.

the power policies of Nazism and of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Philosophies of History, and the paradigm of *creation*, delineating a politics of *dignity* and freedom.

The numerous affinities with the Arendtian critique of the *poietic* model of political action, and her emphasis on (a certain reading of) Kant's "aesthetic" judgment to rethink the political beyond totalitarian terror, are spelt out in detail in Sections 2.1. and 2.2. The emergence of a politics of *dignity* between 1944 and 1949, described in the articles in the journal *Combat* and in the American conferences, as an *alternative* way of conceiving the political, which Camus developed against the backdrop of the European moral and political vacuum in the aftermath of the collapse of the Nazi regime, and which stemmed from the author's personal engagement in the French Resistance, comes close to Arendt's pages on political action in HC.

As Vattimo recently pointed out, in the contemporary post-metaphysical horizon disclosed by nihilism, which does away with the (transcendent) Foundation, ethics can only be re-thought in the sense of a radical *aestheticism*, in the sense that the *will to Truth* is replaced by *coherence*:<sup>24</sup> I argue that both Arendt and Camus are deeply aware of the ambiguity and the dangers inherent in introducing the aesthetic perspective of consistency/coherence (as opposed to the philosophical, i.e. Platonic, perspective of adequacy, as founding the principle of non-contradiction) in the political realm. By reading Camus' HR next to Arendt's essay on Hermann Broch in MDT, I attempt to show that the French writer's critique of *romanticism*, in the pages on de Sade and the Dandies, coincides with the critique of a *certain project of aestheticization* of the political, which historically culminated in the totalitarian identification of Politics with Total Art, as the re-making (*poiesis*) of the world according to the iron consistency of the aesthete (as the Architect)'s abstract system – as illustrated in the ideological fabrication of the «objective enemy».

The focus on the *aesthetic* dimension (Chapter 1) allows us, in my view, to trace two conflicting «aesthetic» constellations of the political; the first is structured around achievement/domination/abstraction, as related to the idea of the fabrication of the political community as work of art, and to the making/changing of the finite human condition through a systematical reduction (terror) of men into things; and the second is articulated around the terms creation/freedom/dignity/*la chair*, which, I argue, is founded on Camus' (Nietzschean)

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<sup>24</sup> «[...] il primo nome che mi viene in mente è quello di Michel Foucault, per il quale la moralità è in fondo la costruzione della propria vita come una coerente opera d'arte, senza alcuna implicazione decadentistica o dannunziana, ma piuttosto con la preoccupazione di una scelta di stile o di una coerenza che non è affatto meno obbligatoria di un imperativo etico nel senso corrente della parola» (Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilismo ed emancipazione. Etica, politica, diritto*, Garzanti, 2003, p. 65.

notion of *grand style* (Section 2.4.). Tracing an affinity between Arendt's storytelling, as a response to men's striving for immortalizing, and Camus' pages on art and revolt, I suggest that the latter's Libertarian political thought be read in the light of the artist's *grand style* (as disclosing, and in a way anticipating, the «aestheticizing» solution to the moral *tabula rasa* of nihilism defined by Vattimo) as an attempt to think an *alternative* politics - what I have defined as a politics of *transfiguration*, as opposed to the totalitarian politics of *transformation* - which would take over the *moral* heritage of the Resistance.

For Camus, as for Arendt, to (re-)think the world, beyond the break-down of the tradition and the contemporary loss of meaning and value (*modern nihilism*), is to *name it*, that is, to provide the world with a *language*. The political relevance of language is what justifies, in my view, a focus on tragedy, against the more obvious choice of the novel.

As I intend to show, tragedy represents the «irrepresentability» of freedom, that is, the murderous outcomes of all attempts to *make* or *realize* freedom as total *presence*, as the absolute object or truth to be *achieved* according to a superior Idea, which silences and de-peoples the plural and living world of men (*«le cercle de la chair»*). In this sense, Caligula in Camus' 1941 version of the homonymous tragedy, makes visible the ambiguity of the figure of the artist, which is played at the core of the absurd freedom of the MdS («la liberté [...] du condamné à mort»):<sup>25</sup> identified with the aesthetic trope of the architect/maker/pedagogue, it exposes the tragic relation between art and the political.

I argue that tragedy is, in this sense, the *absurd* "space", disclosed by *la chair* as the finite horizon of the *aesthetic present* (hic et nunc), and aesthetically founded, in the Nietzschean sense of drawn out or de-limited, by a (tragic) language in which the question of man's *aesthetic* drives - traced at the core of revolt, and identified with his metaphysical desire for unity - is played on the fragile *limit* or threshold in which a consistent, *good*, nihilism is endlessly exposed to the risk of slipping into its reverse, of falling into the metaphysical fallacy of an inconsistent or *absolute* nihilism - in this sense, *Caligula* is defined as «une tragédie de l'intelligence», «l'histoire de la plus humaine et de la plus tragique des erreurs» (T, 1730).

Section 2.3.2. is devoted to the analysis of the sources of the notion of *absolute* nihilism, as a third acceptance of the term, which makes its appearance in the analysis of totalitarian terror in HR, in relation to the revolutionary «apocalypticism» (whose parentage

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<sup>25</sup> CAC4, 31.



with the dandy's aestheticizing attitude is suggested by Camus' metaphoric treatment in the chapter on «La révolte historique»).

Camus' appropriation of Rauschning's thesis in the French edition of *La révolution du nihilisme* must be reconsidered, in my view, in the light of the author's reading of Berdiaev's *Sources et sens du communisme russe* in 1947. As I intend to show, this work by the Russian philosopher, in exile in Paris, plays a crucial part in the shaping of Camus' interpretation of the notion of «*totalitarian revolution*» in HR, and for his critique of the Communist philosophy of History, and offers some important insights into the author's appropriation of the (Conservative) «*secular religions*» thesis. Absolute nihilism, as the mark of the totalitarian ideology of «*l'immortalité de l'espèce*» (HR, 649) can thus be conceived, in a Nietzschean sense, as an *incomplete* form of nihilism, which brings about the *will* to power as «*frénésie historique*» (HR, 629).

The comparative analysis of Berdiaev and Rauschning's works as sources for Camus' argument on the relationship between *absolute* nihilism and the totalitarian mass fabrication of corpses and the terrorist manipulation of the human condition in HR, provides the link, and the essential backdrop, to Arendt's argument in OT. In Chapter 3, the systematic exploration of the manifold acceptations of the notion of nihilism, from the OT to the 1954 *Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought*, brings to light the relevance of the critique of nihilism in the development of Arendt's political thought between 1949 and 1958, by tracing the notion – against all reductive dismissal as being a mere *moral* problem, and thus, marginal for a political inquiry – at the core of the Western concept of the political.

What I attempt to argue through a close textual analysis of the different parts of OT, is that the question of nihilism in Arendt's work cannot be exhausted, as J. Isaac seems to argue in his book, by a critique of the cynical *divertissements* of the intellectual elite of the so-called “Front generation”, rooted in the post-war «atmosphere in which all *traditional values and propositions had evaporated* (after the nineteenth-century ideologies had refuted each other [...])». <sup>26</sup> Such a reading, by failing to give an adequate account of the *nuances* in Arendt's use of the term ‘nihilism’, is ultimately incapable of avoiding a certain embarrassment when trying to explain the author's recourse to this notion – of which Conservative political thinkers were particularly fond of in the Forties and Fifties – in her analysis of totalitarian domination.

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<sup>26</sup> J. C. Isaac, *Ivi*, p. 95.

I argue, in contrast, that Arendt distinguishes (at least) two main concepts of nihilism, which emerge from the various scattered passages in which the term 'nihilism' recurs, and around which it is possible to organize her political reflection.

In Part II of OT "nihilism" designates a «vulgar *superstition of doom*», which replaced the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Idealistic and Positivistic) belief in progress - «[that] preached automatic *annihilation* with the same enthusiasm that the fanatics of automatic progress had preached the irresistibility of economic laws» - and was particularly conspicuous in France at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in Germany in the 1920's (OT,144). By relating this acceptance of nihilism to the modern concept of history, and thus to the Historicist faith at the root of the bourgeois philosophy of power at the turn of the century, Arendt traces the bourgeoisie's attraction to the *political principles* of the mob, namely to its cynical "realism", by resorting to a second acceptance of nihilism as *freedom from all principles*. As I intend to show, the nihilist «antihumanist, antiliberal, anti-individualist, and anticultural instincts [...] brilliant and witty praise of violence, power and cruelty» of the literary élite of the '20's - as a third occurrence of nihilism, also pointed out by Isaac - is simply a restatement of the second acceptance, which Arendt identifies with the 19<sup>th</sup> century principle that «*everything is permitted*», and traces in the attitude of the mob as the *nihilistic* offspring of the bourgeois power policy, stripped of its hypocritical double morality.

I argue that to reduce *nihilism*, as Isaac seems to do, to the question of the moral bankruptcy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century would entail, from an Arendtian perspective, judging that historical moment from the Archimedean (god-like) standpoint of some transcendent (moral) values, which is precisely what prevents, in her view, the «spokesmen of humanism and liberalism» from grasping the *political* significance of this peculiar concept of nihilism, which is summed up in the totalitarian «*everything is possible*» *as related to emergence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of an entirely new and unprecedented concept of power and of reality* (OT, 417).

I suggest that the distinction between the two concepts of nihilism - between the «*everything is permitted*» of an *early* nihilism, and the «*everything is possible*» of totalitarian nihilism - is inseparable in Arendt's argument from the definition of two distinct concepts of power: the *material* power of (traditional) liberal political thought, as related to the (bourgeois) utilitarian reasoning and calculation of material interests, in which Arendt roots the cynical principle that «*everything is permitted*»; and the *organizational* power of totalitarian systems, as a de-materializing production of «*force through organization*», which explodes the utilitarian categories of modern liberal thinking.

In the Concluding Remarks to OT Arendt traces the key to *organizational omnipotence*, as the essential principle of totalitarian domination, in a radical *resentment* against mere existence, in other words, against the unique and unchangeable singularity of what is given by birth - which she refers to as the *psychological basis of contemporary nihilism*. The relationship between *resentment* against mere existence and the political notion of *organization* - which Arendt identifies in terms that anticipate HC as the «aesthetic» capacity of men to produce a common world by acting together *with equals* (OT, 301) - brings forth the difficulties inherent in her definition of totalitarian omnipotence as the conviction that everything can be done through *organization* (the *nihilistic* belief that «everything is possible»), and in the totalitarian identification of (political) organization with the police.

I suggest that by interpreting the figure of the *alien*, the stateless masses through which *mere existence* erupted on the political scene in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century - «one of the oldest *perplexities of political philosophy*» - in the light of the (Nietzschean) notion of *resentment* of mere givenness in OT, the problem of nihilism is brought to the very core of the Western concept of the political, as founded, since the Greek, on the notion of *organization*. The focus on the relationship between nihilism as *omnipotence* and *total organization* of life under the totalitarian police regimes - as replacing the *homo faber's* limited *mastership* of the world by the measureless and boundless (hubristic) notion of *creation* - brings forth the twofold logic of incorporation-dematerialization which lies at the core of totalitarianism.

Roberto Esposito has similarly drawn the attention to the co-implication of the logics of (in)corporation and of incorporeality («*scorporazione*») at the core of Western (political) philosophy, which, in his view, is exposed and exploded by the collapse of the totalitarian regimes.<sup>27</sup>

Between 1949 and 1954, through the gestation of Part III of OT in her research on the Western tradition of political philosophy, which culminated in her political theory in HC, Arendt develops her critique of nihilism, and finally dismisses a *certain* use of the term: in the 1954 *Tradition and the Modern Age*, Arendt distinguishes the 19<sup>th</sup> century «rebellions against tradition» - that echo Camus' pages on Metaphysical revolt in HR - from the 20<sup>th</sup> century «*denial of everything given*», which she defines as a *radical nihilism* (BPF, 34), against the vulgarizations of the term, commonly used to designate the (Nietzschean) dismantling of the

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<sup>27</sup> «[...] un movimento di oscillazione fra una spinta alla corporazione ed un'altra, simmetricamente contraria, alla scorporazione che al contempo le si oppone e la riproduce, [...] dialettica apparentemente inesauribile di scorporazione e reincorporazione» (R. Esposito, *Immunitas*, op. cit., pp. 142-143).

Tradition. What I suggest is that the critique of nihilism in Arendt's writings between 1952 and 54 opens up a meta-critique of a *certain* concept of the political: by exploring the Platonic shift from the (political) striving for *immortalizing* to the philosophic concept of *immortality*, Arendt traces the (Nietzschean) concept of *resentment* against mere existence at the core of the philosophers' concept of the political at the roots of the Western tradition of political thought.

It is in challenging the relationship between totalitarianism and the tradition of political philosophy that Arendt's attention is drawn to the «aesthetic» paradigm at the core of the Platonic conception of political action, which is structured on the model of fabrication or craftsmanship (*poiesis*) as justification of a vertical relation of dominion ruler/ruled, and entails a strong emphasis on reification – the state as *work of art* and as «One man of gigantic dimensions» (*incorporation*). In this sense the lecture on *Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought* provides an important link between Arendt's inquiry into the Platonic work-model of action and her analysis of totalitarian ideology and terror developed after 1953: the association of terror to the notion of (ideological) *consistency* brings into focus the relationship between the *aestheticization* of the political – of what Arendt rejects as the fallacy of the identification of politics as art, and of government as work of art (BPF, 153), as pointed out in the essay on Hermann Broch in MDT – and the *unprecedented concept of reality* brought about by totalitarian omnipotence.

I suggest that in the extermination camps, as “laboratories” where changes in human nature, i.e., the annihilation of human dignity, spontaneity and unpredictability, were tested for the sake of the consistency of an ideological *super-sense*, the totalitarian «everything is possible» (*radical nihilism*) brings the *poietic realization* of the philosopher's Idea (logic of incorporation) to the extreme point where *creation* – identified in the Western tradition with the political artefact - «changes polarity», giving way to its reverse, that is, to the erosion of *reality* (what I have addressed as the *interiorization* or *de-materializing* of the political).

This is where, I suggest, Camus' and Arendt's critiques of nihilism, although proceeding from and reflecting different philosophical backgrounds and perspectives, ultimately converge in bringing forth the co-implication of (a certain understanding of) creation and omnipotence *as internal* to political action *qua* potentially boundless. I argue that the comparative reading of their attempts to re-think the (Nietzschean) notion of creative action in the political horizon incised by the experience of totalitarianism and war exposes a *radical* understanding of the problem of nihilism, which exceeds the traditional (moral)

approaches, particularly conspicuous in the post-war political debate, and situates the two authors among the contemporary thinkers who, rejecting the shortcomings of restoration, have challenged the possibility of an «aesthetic» politics *beyond* nihilism.

From this perspective, I argue, the attempt to consider Arendt's own project of «aestheticization» of political action<sup>28</sup> in the sense of a «politique esthétique [...] *sans la réification* de l'action narrative en «œuvres»»,<sup>29</sup> by doing away with the dimension of *incorporation*, which is implicit in the aesthetic-*poietic* paradigm of political action of the philosophical tradition, would, nevertheless, leave unquestioned the other dimension, brought forth in our analysis of totalitarian omnipotence – namely, the *de-realizing* logic at the core of the notion of *creation*.

Chapter 4 focuses on Arendt's re-thinking of the notion of (political) creation, and reads the latter next to Camus' own appropriation of the Nietzschean concept in his reflection on revolt and art. It is in the light of the Nietzschean «aestheticization of action» that I suggest we read, with Dana Villa,<sup>30</sup> Arendt's solution to the question of meaninglessness (*What is Freedom?*) as a shift from the fabrication paradigm of the political – illustrated by the Platonic model of “creative” arts (BPF, 153) – to a *performative* approach to action. Socrates' exercise of critical thinking, on the one hand, provides, in the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, an example of *art*, in the sense of a *sheer performance* with undeniable political implications, as alternative and opposed to the (Platonic) plastic art trope of the political; on the other, I attempt to reconsider Arendt's appropriation of the pre-philosophic or tragic/theatrical focus on *praxis* (Aristotle), as an alternative «aesthetic» approach to the political, on the backdrop of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*.

The rejection of the figure of the *ruler* as *artist* – and, I argue, Nietzsche's «artist of violence» is to the philosopher's genealogy of moral categories, what the *ruler* as craftsman is to Arendt's genealogy of the political categories of the Western Tradition, as rooted in the Platonic *productionist* model of action – goes together, in my view, with Arendt's genealogical reconstruction, from HC to OR, of the *origin* of political freedom in *an-archè*, as men's acting and speaking together under conditions of *no-rule*, that is, *inter pares*. By reading Arendt's emphasis on the faculty of promise and remembrance in HC next to Nietzsche's pages on the conduct of free men *inter pares*, and especially in the light of the

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<sup>28</sup> Dana Villa, «Beyond Good and Evil. Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action», in *Political Theory*, vol. 20, No. 2, May 1992, 274-308. Developed in Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger. The Fate of the Political*, Princeton UP, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Le génie féminin. I. Hannah Arendt*, Fayard, Paris, 1999, p. 356.

<sup>30</sup> Cf., Villa, FP, 81.

relationship between freedom, creation and the *sovereign* individual (as opposed to the master), I argue that the *Genealogy* provides Arendt with the elements to re-think, in the anti-foundational horizon of modern and radical nihilism, the moral question as *inherent* in political action, as *creative* action.

I propose to interpret Arendt's *tragic* or "dramaturgical" model of political action in HC, extensively analysed by the scholarly critique,<sup>31</sup> together with her scattered remarks on tragedy, as an attempt to think of an *alternative* paradigm of *aesthetic politics*, which opposes the *poietic* constellation of a politics of *achievement* with the *performative* constellation of a politics of *dignity*. This, I argue, is where Arendt's reflection meets Camus' political project, in expressing a common effort to replace a political perspective of the *what* with a political perspective of *whoness*. It is, precisely, in the identification of the (Homeric) "hero" with the (moral) *person*, as disclosing in words and deeds the *who* of the actor, that tragedy acquires, in Arendt's OR as well as in Camus' political reflection, a twofold significance within the project of the «aestheticization» of the political beyond the impasse of (modern and radical) nihilism.

The comparative analysis of Arendt's reflection on absolute goodness and the French Terror in Melville's *Billy Budd* and Camus' pages on tragedy in the 1955 conference *Sur l'avenir de la tragédie* allows us, in my view, to trace the *moral* framework in tragedy to think free political action under conditions of equality, as acting *and speaking* together, outside and against the simplifying terrorist «alibi of the (Evil) Enemy».<sup>32</sup>

In his ambitious attempt to systematize Arendt's scattered references on tragedy and theatricality into the definition of a «politics of tragedy»,<sup>33</sup> Pirro fails, in my view, to situate the former in the specific (historico-political) context of the author's argument. What I intend to show is that, in HC and in OR, the two texts on which I focus my analysis, the reference to tragedy is textually contiguous with, and acquires its full meaning on, the backdrop of Arendt's critique of Historicism, whose *nihilistic* implications in sustaining an «aesthetic» (Platonic) politics of *achievement* (what Cavarero defines as a politics of the *what*)<sup>34</sup> she stresses repeatedly.

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<sup>31</sup> See for instance, Allen Speight, "Arendt and Hegel on the tragic nature of action", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 28, N. 5, pp. 523-536. For a sociological approach see also Ramón Ramos Torre, "Homo tragicus", *Política y Sociedad*, 30 (1999), Madrid, pp. 213-240.

<sup>32</sup> Paolo Flores d'Arcais, "Hannah Arendt e il totalitarismo nelle democrazie", *Micro-Mega*, Almanacco di Filosofia, 5/2003, p. 135.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Pirro, *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Tragedy*, Northern Illinois University Press, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Adriana Cavarero, "Politicizing Theory", *Political Theory*, August 2002.

The moral-and-political dimension of language is brought forth in the literary genre of tragedy, as related to Arendt and Camus' common concern with the possibility of recovering an alternative «tradition», conceived in the sense of the Weilian notion of *enracinement*, as the capacity of *striking roots* against and beyond the 20<sup>th</sup> century break-down of the Tradition.

In the conclusions, I thus propose to interpret Arendt's and Camus' appropriations of tragedy as challenging the traditional approaches to the question of (political) representation,<sup>35</sup> and shedding further light on the «new republicanism» of the former and the «measured anarchism» of the latter, as consistent with their attempt to re-think an «aesthetic» politics beyond the *radical* nihilism brought forth in the plastic art trope of the political. Ankersmit's recent attempt to define an *aesthetic* approach to the question of political representation allows us, in this respect, to measure the originality of Camus and Arendt's own efforts to re-think the political *in the margins* of the three main traditions of contemporary political philosophy – which Ankersmit outlines in «the liberal tradition (as exemplified by Rawls or Dworkin), that of republicanism (as exemplified by John Pocock), and that of communitarianism (as exemplified by Alisdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, or Amitai Etzioni)» -<sup>36</sup> and disclosing, through the notions of *grand style* and political creative action, an aesthetic or *tragic* perspective of the (political) community against and beyond the impasse of the totalitarian bio-political programme.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> R. de Aguila suggests that the tragic tension between necessity and liberty be interpreted in the sense of a political conflict between two opposite models: the rules of necessity in the “reason of state”, aiming «to overcome the tensions and contradictions of political action» on the one hand, and the *virtù* (as knowledge and courage) of the political actor acting in plurality and competition on the other. Identifying the “path of necessity” with the emancipatory tradition, from Jacobinism to Leninism, and the radical movements (nationalism, fascism), de Aguila remarks that «this way of thinking about politics has attained security and certainty at the expense of liberty». The latter can be secured, he suggests, only in a political context of plurality and competition, which open the space for what he defines as “tragic choice”, in the sense of a capability of conceiving alternative courses of action. (R. de Aguila, op. cit., pp. 16-ff.)

<sup>36</sup> F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics. Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value*, Stanford UP, California, 1996, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> R. Esposito, «Il Nazismo e noi», *Micro-Mega. Almanacco di Filosofia*, 5/2003, op. cit., p. 165-174.

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CHAPTER 1. THINKING IN THE MARGINS OF MODERN NIHILISM: FOR A DEFINITION OF TRAGIC THOUGHT.

In the *prière d'insérer* to the MdS in September 1942, Camus uses the term "nihilism" for the first time to describe a psychological state ("*désarroi*") caused by, and related to the unbearableness of, a profound change in the comprehension of the world:

*L'intelligence moderne souffre de nihilisme. Pour guérir, on lui propose d'oublier son mal et de revenir en arrière. Ce sont les « retours » : au Moyen-Âge, à la mentalité primitive, à la vie dite « naturelle », à la religion, à l'arsenal des vieilles solutions. Mais pour accorder à ces baumes une ombre d'efficacité, il faudrait nier l'apport de plusieurs siècles, simuler l'ignorance de ce que nous savons, feindre de n'avoir rien appris, effacer ce qui est ineffaçable. Cela est impossible. Cet essai [Le Mythe de Sisyphe] tient compte au contraire des lumières que nous avons prises de notre exil. Il propose à l'esprit de vivre avec ses négations et d'en faire le principe d'un progrès. Vis-à-vis de l'intelligence moderne, il fait acte de fidélité et de confiance. Dans ce sens, on ne peut le considérer que comme une mise au point, la définition préalable d'un « bon nihilisme » et, pour tout dire, une préface.<sup>1</sup>*

The textual analysis allows us to highlight a threefold conceptual distinction: modern intelligence suffers from *nihilism*, identified in a note in the *Carnets* with the loss of traditional metaphysical standpoints (a); *vis-à-vis* this phenomenon, the MdS is defined as the "preliminary definition" of a *good* nihilism (b), which «fait acte de fidélité et confiance» to modern thought. Camus conceives the position developed in MdS as being, at the same time, distinct from, and opposite to, a generalised tendency in contemporary thought towards the systematic "removal" of the *loss of meaning*, addressed in the intellectual debate as « nihilism ».

The adjective "*good*" suggests that there be an opposite - a "*bad*" - form of nihilism (c), which, as will be examined, historically appears under the two forms of a total negation of meaning (E, 865) and the total affirmation of an absolute and transcendent meaning - «Ce

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<sup>1</sup> O. Todd, op. cit, p. 303. A draft in the *Carnets* (mars 1942) attests of another version of the same text which sheds further light on the former: « L'intelligence moderne est en plein *désarroi*. La connaissance s'est distendue à ce point que le monde et l'esprit ont perdu tout point d'appui. C'est un fait que nous souffrons de nihilisme. Mais le plus admirable sont les prêches sur les « retours ». Retour au Moyen-Âge, à la mentalité primitive, à la terre, à la religion, à l'arsenal des vieilles solutions. Pour accorder à ces baumes une ombre d'efficacité, il faudrait faire comme si nos connaissances n'existaient plus - comme si nous n'avions rien appris - feindre d'effacer en somme ce qui est ineffaçable. Il faudrait rayer d'un trait de plume l'apport de plusieurs siècles et l'indéniable acquis d'un esprit qui finalement (c'est son dernier progrès) recrée le chaos pour son propre compte. Cela est impossible. Pour guérir, il faut s'arranger de cette lucidité, de cette clairvoyance. Il faut tenir compte des lumières que nous avons pris soudain de notre exil. L'intelligence n'est pas en *désarroi* parce que la connaissance a bouleversé le monde. Elle est en *désarroi* parce qu'elle ne peut pas s'arranger de ce bouleversement. Elle ne « s'est pas faite à cette idée ». Qu'elle s'y fasse et le *désarroi* disparaîtra. Il ne restera que le bouleversement et la connaissance claire que l'esprit en a. C'est toute une civilisation à refaire. » (CII, 26).

sont les « *retours* » : au Moyen-Age, à la mentalité primitive, à la vie dite « naturelle », à la religion, à l'arsenal des vieilles solutions ». This distinction, repeatedly overlooked by the critiques of Camus' thought, has its premises in the absurd argument in the MdS and, I argue, is essential for an understanding of the author's ethical and political reflection, culminating in the "genealogy of nihilism" of L'HR.

It is nevertheless significant that all attempts to detect an explicit use, as well as a systematic exploration, of the notion of "nihilism" in the 1942 philosophical essay – as developed, by contrast, almost ten years later in HR – would prove unsuccessful.

In discussing the argument of the MdS in his letter to Francis Ponge in January 1943,<sup>2</sup> Camus would insist on « la possibilité d'être tout à fait personnel, c'est-à-dire de *penser en marge* de ce nihilisme moderne dont *le Mythe* est très exactement un essai de définition passionnée. Quoiqu'il n'y paraisse pas, cette étude [le MdS] a un aspect historique et, pour bien la juger, il faut *aussi* se placer sur ce plan. » (E, 1666). The « historical aspect » of the MdS is resumed in the « passionate definition » of *modern nihilism*, and what we can draw from these lines is as follows: firstly, that, in the 1942 philosophical essay, the problem of *modern nihilism* is addressed as, and may be identified with, what Camus defines as the *absurd sensibility* or the (modern) *feeling of absurdity* (*sentiment de l'absurdité*, MdS, 101) – « Les pages qui suivent traitent d'une sensibilité absurde *qu'on peut trouver éparse dans le siècle* – et non d'une philosophie absurde que notre temps, à proprement parler, n'a pas connue » (MdS, 97);<sup>3</sup> secondly, that there is something in the MdS which exceeds this historical dimension: as I intend to argue, the so-called *modern nihilism* evoked in the text does not exhaust, in Camus's own view, an interrogation on the question of nihilism – « Je l'ai dit dans ma prière d'insérer: "Il s'agit de savoir si l'on peut définir un *bon nihilisme*" » (E, 1666).

What I intend to provide in the present section is a "genetic" reconstruction of Camus's understanding of nihilism through a comparative analysis of the MdS with other texts, letters and notes, dated between 1942-45, which, by taking M.L. Audin's invaluable study into the semiotics of the essay on the absurd into account,<sup>4</sup> brings forth the French

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<sup>2</sup> « Lettre au sujet du *Partis pris* de Francis Ponge » (27th January 1943), E, 1662-1668.

<sup>3</sup> (My italics). As Comte-Sponville points out, the absurd in the MdS is at the same time clearly situated as a feeling (E, 97), and carefully defined as a notion (E, 119-120), André Comte-Sponville, « L'absurde dans *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* », in A.-M. Amiot, J.-F. Mattéi (Eds.), *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, Paris, PUF, 1997, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> M.-L. Audin, *Pour une sémiotique du Mythe de Sisyphe de Camus: thèmes et métaphores au service de l'absurde*. Thèse de doctorat d'état en Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de Nancy II, 1984/85.

writer's indebtedness to Nietzsche's work, and the "parentage" between the *raisonnement absurde* of the MdS and the German philosopher's notes on nihilism.

### 1.1. CAMUS AND NIETZSCHE: TRACING AN "AESTHETIC" PARENTAGE.

The issue at stake in the MdS is formulated in the opening lines:

Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide. Juger que la vie vaut ou *ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue*, c'est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie. Le reste, si le monde a trois dimensions, si l'esprit a neuf ou douze catégories, vient ensuite. Ce sont des jeux; il faut d'abord répondre. [...] Si je me demande à quoi juger que telle question est plus pressante que telle autre, je réponds que c'est aux actions qu'elle engage. [...] beaucoup de gens meurent parce qu'ils estiment que la vie *ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue*. J'en vois d'autres qui se font paradoxalement tuer pour les idées ou les illusions qui leur donnent une raison de vivre (ce qu'on appelle une raison de vivre est en même temps une excellente raison de mourir). Je juge donc que le *sens de la vie* est la plus pressante des questions. (MdS, 99)<sup>5</sup>

The philosophical question lies in the relationship between two judgements, the first concerning the senselessness of life («*la vie n'a pas de sens*»), the second stating the worthlessness of living, which implies an experience of a *loss of value*, and brings in the problem of suicide (the truism «on se tue parce que la vie *ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue*»).<sup>6</sup> Now, in his letter to Pierre Bonnel (18<sup>th</sup> March 1943), Camus defined the *absurd* problem - as illustrated in the first section of the MdS - *in its initial movement* as a process of annihilation («l'absurdité parfaite serait le *silence*», E, 1423), which brings about an active *extraction* of all meaning and value from the world - «Et pourquoi pas? Mais à ce compte on *retire* du monde ce qui *en vaut la peine* [...]» (E, 1423).

The metaphoric constellation of the absurd, employed in the MdS to convey «*l'absence de toute raison profonde de vivre, le caractère insensé de cette agitation quotidienne et l'inutilité de la souffrance*» (MdS, 101), offers an essential insight into Camus's approach to the question of loss of meaning and value.<sup>7</sup>

In order to describe the feeling of absurdity, Camus resorts to a metaphor *in praesentia*, which associates two paradigms, of destruction (divorce) and play/acting (*jeu*):

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<sup>5</sup> My italics.

<sup>6</sup> « En vérité, *il n'y a aucune mesure forcée entre ces deux jugements*. [...] L'absurde commande-t-il la mort, il faut donner à ce problème le pas sur les autres [...]. La réflexion sur le suicide me donne alors l'occasion de poser le seul problème qui m'intéresse : *y-a-t-il une logique jusqu'à la mort ?* » (MdS, 103). My italics.

<sup>7</sup> Focusing on the MdS as a symbolic work, M.L. Audin insists on the "signifying", not merely decorative, value of the images that weave the text. She therefore suggests a five-level reading of the essay: linear or syntagmatic; retroactive ("re-lecture mémorielle"); intertextual; paradigmatic; and "non-classic" (through the recourse to the Index Hiérarchique and the Index Alphabétique de l'Institut National de la Langue Française), in M. L. Audin, op. cit., pp. 65- 84.

«Ce divorce entre l'homme et sa vie, l'acteur et son décor, c'est proprement le sentiment de l'absurdité » (MdS, 101). "Divorce", as the break of a (formal) union, introduces a particular form of negativity, which, as Audin carefully underlines,<sup>8</sup> operates against a *certain kind of* unity: *not* against the unity between man and life *tout court*, but between man and *his* life. The syntagmatic dependence from the couple actor/scene-painting (*décor*) underscores the artificial, counterfeited, character of the latter.<sup>9</sup>

This is confirmed in what follows: «Un monde qu'on peut expliquer même avec des mauvaises raisons est un monde familier. Mais au contraire, dans un univers soudain privé d'illusions et de lumières, l'homme se sent un étranger» (MdS, 101)<sup>10</sup>. Depending on «*lumières*», which translate the intellectual guiding points for the mastering of experience, the term "*familier*", logically linked to "*expliquer*", evokes a unity between man and universe, which bestows a total meaning on existence.

Now, the traditional positive connotation of these terms is reversed by their association with "*mauvaises raisons*" and the metaphor *in absentia* "*illusions*" (also belonging to the constellation of *jeu*), which evoke the *fictive* nature of the original situation. The notions of rupture and loss thus associated to the metaphor-definition of the absurd, and repeated in the satellite-metaphors ("*étranger*", "*exil*"), acquire an actively positive connotation, which convey the deconstruction of a counterfeited symbiosis between man and *his* (illusory and familiar) world, and the opening up of a *new* positive condition.<sup>11</sup>

The intertextual study of the metaphors in the MdS allows us to shed further light on *l'écriture* of the absurd, and reveals a striking correspondence with the metaphoric constellations that recur in the works of the German philosopher F. Nietzsche, whose «*affinity*» with the French author's writings has been repeatedly pointed out,<sup>12</sup> but whose influence is far from having been fully explored.

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<sup>8</sup> See M.L.Audin's analysis of the metaphor in her *Pour une sémiotique du MdS*, op. cit., pp. 122-139.

<sup>9</sup> According to Audin, the metaphorical constellation of "game" (*jeu*) is negatively connoted from the beginning of the MdS (E, 99): associated with the notions of «*dilettantisme*» - «*distanciation*» - «*désengagement*», «*jeu [de l'esprit]*» denotes an intentional treachery and lie, confirmed in the relation *jeu-acteur-décor*. While evoking a notion of unity (the universe of the stage), *décor* states an illusion of reality (the painted scenes), which, through the complicity of the actor, turns the latter into a deceiver («*spéculateur de mensonges*»). As we will see further on in the text, the sub-group in the linguistic constellation of "game" concerning theatre escapes this devaluation; see Audin, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>10</sup> My italics.

<sup>11</sup> M.L.Audin, op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Weyemberg, «*Camus et Nietzsche. Évolution d'une affinité*», in *Albert Camus ou la mémoire des origines*, De Boeck&Larcier, Paris, Bruxelles, 1998, pp. 41- 62.

Integrating and annotating James Arnold's catalogue of the works by and on Nietzsche in the French writer's private library,<sup>13</sup> Frantz Favre has recently confirmed that « Camus fut en effet un lecteur, et un lecteur attentif, de Nietzsche. Le grand nombre de soulignements et d'annotations, que comportent les ouvrages de Nietzsche, qui figurent dans sa bibliothèque, suffirait à nous en persuader ».<sup>14</sup> The comparative study of the inventory of the various editions of Nietzsche's work, all in French translation,<sup>15</sup> that were in Camus's possession, with the reading notes in the *Carnets*, offers some important elements to trace the sources and the genesis of the French writer's conception of nihilism, which, as I intend to show, plays a crucial role in the development of Camus's political thought.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A. James Arnold, « Camus lecteur de Nietzsche », in *Albert Camus 9. La revue des lettres modernes*, Paris, Minard, 1979, pp. 95-99.

<sup>14</sup> F. Favre, « Quand Camus lisait Nietzsche », *Albert Camus 20, « Le premier homme » en perspective*, La revue des lettres modernes, Paris, Minard, 2004, p. 197.

<sup>15</sup> As Frantz Favre points out, with regards to the important Nietzschean documentation in Camus's possession, « [on] ne saurait [...] souscrire au reproche que Sartre adressait à Camus : « Mais quelle manie vous avez de n'aller pas aux sources ». Un recours aux sources qui restait néanmoins limité chez Camus, parce que son ignorance de l'allemand ne lui permettait pas d'apprécier l'exactitude des traductions. », in F. Favre, « Quand Camus lisait Nietzsche », *Albert Camus 20*, op. cit., p. 197.

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| <p><i>Works by Nietzsche found in Camus's library - editions ante 1941:</i></p>       | <p><i>Ecce homo</i>, Translation Henri Albert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1921. <i>Highlightings</i><br/> <i>L'Origine de la tragédie</i>, Translation J. Marnold et J. Morland, Paris, Mercure de France, 1923. <i>Highlightings</i><br/> <i>Le Crépuscule des idoles</i>, Translation Henri Albert. Paris, Mercure de France, 1920. <i>Highlightings</i><br/> <i>Aurore</i>, Translation Henri Albert. Paris, Mercure de France, 1930. <i>Highlightings and annotations.</i><br/> <i>Humain, trop humain</i>, Part I. Translation A.-M. Desrousseaux. Paris, Mercure de France, 1899.<br/> <i>La Naissance de la tragédie à l'époque de la tragédie grecque</i>. Translation by Geneviève Bianquis, Paris, Gallimard, 1938.<br/> <i>Œuvres posthumes</i>. Translation H.J. Bolle, Paris, Mercure de France, 1934. <i>Highlightings and annotations.</i><br/> <i>La Volonté de puissance</i>, Tomes I and II. Translation by Henri Albert. Paris, Mercure de France, 1923. <i>Highlightings and annotations.</i><br/> <i>La Volonté de puissance</i>. Translation Geneviève Bianquis, Paris, Gallimard. Tome I : 1935 ; Tome II : 1937. <i>Highlightings and annotations</i><br/> <i>Lettres choisies</i>, Paris, Stock, 1931.</p> |
| <p><i>Works by Nietzsche in Camus's library- published between 1941 and 1947:</i></p> | <p><i>Par de-là le Bien et le Mal</i>. Translation Henri Albert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1941.<br/> <i>Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra</i>. Translation Maurice Betz, Paris, Gallimard, 1942.<br/> <i>Memorandum</i>. Maximes et textes recueillis par Georges Bataille, Paris, Gallimard, 1945.</p>  |

According to the notebooks, Camus completed the MdS in 1941; the draft of a preface to the essay, in which the term “nihilism” first recurs, dates between January and August 1942 (CII, 26). As James Arnold points out, «[d]ans la plupart des cas il est impossible de dire à quel moment Camus lisait ou annotait ces volumes [de Nietzsche]». <sup>17</sup> The bibliographical notes to the juvenile *Essai sur la musique*, a critical review of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche’s aesthetics, published in the Algerian review of literature and art *Sud* in June 1932, attest that at that date Camus had read *La Cas Wagner* and *Nietzsche contre Wagner*, and had only «consulted» *La naissance de la tragédie*. Even though we cannot exclude that Camus came into possession of, and (re)-read, his copy of *L’Origine de la tragédie* after ’32, it is interesting to observe that

«[l]es phrases soulignées se trouvent exclusivement dans «l’essai d’une critique de soi-même» et notamment à la 5ème section [...], presque toute une page. Notons en particulier cette phrase : « [...] *cette singulière proposition, que l’existence du monde ne peut se justifier que comme phénomène esthétique* » (p.10). Et encore : « [...] un dieu purement artiste, absolument dénué de scrupule et de morale, pour qui la création ou la destruction, le bien ou le mal sont des manifestations de son caprice indifférent et de sa tout-puissance ; qui se débarrasse, en fabriquant des mondes, du *tourment* de sa plénitude et de sa *pléthore*, qui se délivre de la souffrance des contrastes accumulés en lui-même [...] » (p. 10). Ces phrases sont soulignées, contrairement à l’habitude de Camus, à l’encre, très soigneusement, d’une main très ferme ». <sup>18</sup>

The only significant exception is represented by the copy of *Ecce Homo*, which is signed by Camus and dated 1932. That same year, the young author also carefully signed and dated the manuscripts of his first (inedited) collection of essays, under the Bergsonian heading of *Intuitions*. This would suggest that Camus accorded a particular importance to Nietzsche’s autobiographical work in the development of his own thought at a *date-charnière*, which marks the beginning of his literary production.

It is significant to observe, with James Arnold, that among the pages of *Ecce Homo* underlined by Camus, there is a passage from the *Crépuscule des Idoles*, concerning the psychology of the tragic poet: « L’affirmation de la vie meme dans ses problèmes les plus étranges et les plus ardues ; la volonté de vie [...] – c’est ce que j’ai appelé dionysien, c’est en cela que j’ai cru reconnaître le fil conducteur qui mène à la psychologie du *poète tragique* ». <sup>19</sup> There are plausible reasons to believe that Camus was reading and annotating the *Crépuscule*

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| Works by Nietzsche in Camus' library- editions post 1947: | <i>La généalogie de la morale</i> , Translation Henri Albert, Paris, Mercure de France, 1948.<br><i>Poésies complètes</i> , Translation G. Ribemont-Dessaignes, Paris, Seuil, 1948. |
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<sup>17</sup> A. James Arnold, « Camus lecteur de Nietzsche », art. cit., p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, pp. 97-98. My italics.

<sup>19</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, Mercure de France, Paris, 1909, p. 92.

*des Idoles* between 1938 and '39. A page number in a note in the *Carnets*, dated August 1938, allows us to trace, in the *Mercure de France* edition of Nietzsche's work, the source of Camus' reflection on *conscious* death, which plays an important part in the lyrical essays of *Noces*, and in the *MdS*, whose redaction dates precisely around this time:

Sur la mort consciente, cf. Nietzsche. *Crépuscule des Idoles*, p. 203.

C'est aux âmes les plus spirituelles, en admettant qu'elles soient les plus courageuses, qu'il est donné de vivre les tragédies les plus douloureuses. Mais c'est bien pour cela qu'elles tiennent la vie en honneur, parce qu'elle leur oppose son plus grand antagonisme. [...] (CI, 119).<sup>20</sup>

The Nietzschean echoes in Camus's «*certitude consciente d'une mort sans espoir*» (E, 63) in *Le vent à Djémila* offer an essential insight in the understanding of the absurd argument in *MdS*:

Mais Djémila...et je sens bien alors que le vrai, le seul progrès de la civilisation [...], c'est de *créer des morts conscientes*. [...] les hommes meurent malgré eux, malgré leurs *décors*. On leur dit : « Quand tu seras guéri... », et ils meurent. Je ne veux pas cela. [...] Pour moi, devant ce monde, je ne veux pas mentir ni qu'on me mente. Je veux porter ma lucidité jusqu'au bout et regarder ma fin avec toute la profusion de ma jalousie et de mon horreur. [...] *Créer des morts conscientes, c'est diminuer la distance qui nous sépare du monde, et entrer sans joie dans l'accomplissement* [...]. (E, 64-65) [My italics]

The rejection of hope (in some-thing beyond this world, in *another* life after this one), as an artificial screen which separates man from the world, and counterfeits his finite sensory exposedness, is inscribed in the lucid experience of the sensual "eternal" present, of which the Algerian nature is the symbolic reference.<sup>21</sup>

In analogous terms, hope (*espoir/espérance*) is defined in the *MdS* as "*l'esquive mortelle*", «tricherie de ceux qui vivent non pour la vie elle-même, mais pour quelque grande idée qui la dépasse, la sublime, lui donne un sens et la trahit» (*MdS*, 102-103). The opposition between the metaphorical constellation of *espoir/décors/ sens illusoire* and that of *absurde/divorce* – which, in the text, is reinforced by the semantic constellation of light/vision (lucidity, clairvoyance),<sup>22</sup> as the unveiling *insight* which dismantles all artificial and illusory meaning («[...] les décors s'écroulent », *MdS*, 106) – compels us to consider, as Camus

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<sup>20</sup> The page number cited by Camus in the notebooks corresponds to the passage in the 1899 edition of the *Crépuscule des Idoles* by "Mercur de France": « Pour amour de la vie on devrait désirer une mort [...] libre et consciente » (in « Morale pour médecins », p. 203).

<sup>21</sup> «Il faut sans doute vivre longtemps à Alger pour comprendre ce que peut avoir de desséchant un excès de biens naturels. Il n'y a rien ici pour qui voudrait apprendre, d'éduquer ou devenir meilleur. Ce pays est sans leçons. Il ne promet ni ne fait entrevoir. Il se contente de donner, mais à profusion. *Il est tout entier livré aux yeux et on le connaît dès l'instant où l'on en jouit*. Ses plaisirs n'ont pas de remèdes, et ses joies restent *sans espoir*. Ce qu'il exige, ce sont des âmes *clairvoyantes*, c'est-à-dire *sans consolation*. Il demande qu'on fasse un acte de *lucidité* comme on fait un acte de foi. » (E, 67). [My highlighting]

<sup>22</sup> According to Audin the use of the metaphors of light suggests a positive connotation of the absurd experience as «authentic» (in M.-L. Audin, op. cit., p. 139).

himself suggests in the MdS, the question of meaning in the light of Zarathustra's announcement that «God is dead»: «Par hasard, c'est la plus vieille noblesse du monde. Je l'ai rendue à toutes les choses quand j'ai dit qu'au-dessus d'elles aucune volonté éternelle ne voulait» (MdS, 114).

I argue that the *raisonnement absurde* inscribes itself in, and can be fully grasped only in the light of the author's personal appropriation of Nietzsche's anti-foundational perspective, generally addressed in terms of *aestheticism*,<sup>23</sup> and that the latter plays a pivotal part in the definition of Camus's *absurd* or finite thought. It is not surprising to observe a close textual correspondence between this passage of the MdS and the sixth chapter of Nietzsche's *Crépuscule des Idoles*:

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| <p>«L'homme a projeté en dehors de lui ses trois « faits intérieurs », ce en quoi il croyait fermement, la volonté, l'esprit, le moi – il déduisit d'abord la notion d'être de la notion du moi, il a supposé les « choses » comme existantes à son image, selon sa notion du moi en tant que cause. Quoi d'étonnant si plus tard il n'a fait que retrouver toujours, dans les choses, <i>ce qu'il avait mis en elles ?</i>»<br/>(<i>Crépuscule des Idoles</i>, LES QUATRES GRANDES ERREURS, §3) [My highlighting]</p> | <p>«L'hostilité primitive du monde, à travers les millénaires, remonte vers nous. Pour une seconde, nous ne le comprenons plus puisque pendant des siècles nous n'avons compris en lui que les figures et les dessins que préalablement nous y mettions, puisque désormais les forces nous manquent pour user de cet artifice. Le monde nous échappe parce qu'il redevient lui-même. Ces décors masqués par l'habitude redeviennent ce qu'ils sont. [...] cette épaisseur et cette étrangeté du monde, c'est l'absurde.»<br/>(MdS, 108) [My highlighting]</p> |
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Now, it is possible to highlight a close textual correspondence between Camus' MdS and the German's philosopher posthumous fragments, concerning the question of the finite and *aesthetic* character of human knowledge:

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| <p>La philosophie ne peut plus à présent qu'insister sur le caractère <i>relatif</i> de toute connaissance, sur son caractère <i>anthropomorphique</i> et sur la force partout présente de l'<i>illusion</i>. [...] Pour nous <i>seul le jugement esthétique fait loi</i>. (VPI, §559, « Le problème de la vérité »).<sup>24</sup> [My highlighting]</p> <p>L'homme, en dernière analyse, <i>ne retrouve dans les choses que ce qu'il y a mis lui-même</i>; ce qu'il retrouve s'appelle science, ce qu'il introduit s'appelle art, religion, amour [...] (VII, §135, p. 314).</p> | <p>Comprendre le monde pour un homme, c'est le réduire à l'humain, le marquer de son sceau. [...] Le truisme : « <i>Toute pensée est anthropomorphique</i> » n'as pas d'autre sens. (MdS, 110) ) [My italics]</p> <p>[...][nous ne] comprenons plus [le monde] puisque pendant des siècles nous n'avons compris en lui que les figures et les dessins que préalablement nous y mettions, [...] » (MdS, 108) [My italics]</p> |
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<sup>23</sup> See Luigi Rustichelli, *La profondità della superficie. Senso tragico e giustificazione estetica dell'esistenza in F: Nietzsche*, Milano, Mursia, 1992. On Nietzsche's *aesthetic* approach to the problem of attaining collective and individual understanding, see also Tracy B. Strong, "Nietzsche's Political Aesthetics", in M.A. Gillespie and T.B. Strong (Eds.), *Nietzsche's New Seas. Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics*, University of Chicago Press, 1988, 159.

<sup>24</sup> I will return later on the *Volonté de Puissance* as a source for Camus's s thought.



Ramener quelque chose d'inconnu à quelque chose de connu allège, tranquillise et satisfait l'esprit, et procure en outre un sentiment de puissance. L'inconnu comporte le danger, l'inquiétude, le souci – le premier instinct porte à supprimer cette situation pénible. [...] la première représentation par quoi l'inconnu se déclare connu fait tant de bien qu'on la tient pour vraie.» (*Crépuscule des Idoles*, § 5. EXPLICATION PSYCHOLOGIQUE).

Illusion de croire qu'une chose est connue, parce que nous en tenons la formule mathématique. La chose est désignée, décrite, rien de plus ! (VPI, §203, p. 100)

Absurdité de la « chose en soi ». Si je supprime par la pensée toutes les relations, toutes les « qualités », toutes les « activités » d'une chose, la chose disparaît ; car la qualité de chose est une fiction introduite par nous, pour des besoins logiques, afin de pouvoir désigner et comprendre [...]. (VPI, § 178)

Notre intellect n'est pas organisé pour concevoir le devenir, il tend à démontrer la fixité universelle, puisqu'il tire son origine des images. (VPI, §104, p. 67).

Pourtant toute la science de cette terre ne me donnera rien qui puisse m'assurer que ce monde est à moi. Vous me le décrivez et vous m'apprenez à le classer. [...] Vous m'expliquez ce monde avec une image. Je reconnais alors que vous en êtes venus à la poésie : *je ne connaîtrai jamais*. [...] Ainsi cette science qui devait tout m'apprendre finit dans l'hypothèse, cette lucidité sombre dans la *métaphore*, cette incertitude se résout en *œuvre d'art*. (MdS, 112) [My italics]

The textual evidence produced above brings the question of the limits of knowledge to our attention. I suggest that Camus, like Nietzsche, recurs to the semantic constellation of art/jeu ('figure', 'dessin', 'image', 'imagination', 'décor', 'artifice', 'illusion', 'idée/idéal') in order to express the relative and limited character of human thought:

Nous ne pouvons comprendre que des processus intellectuels : nous ne connaissons de la matière que ce qui est (ou peut devenir) visible, audible, sensible ! C'est-à-dire : nous comprenons nos transformations dans l'action de voir, d'entendre, de toucher. Les réalités, pour la perception desquelles nous ne possédons pas de sens, n'existent pas pour nous [...]. Il en va de même des passions et des instincts : nous n'en saisissons que le processus intellectuel qui les accompagne. Nous n'en comprenons pas l'essence psychologique, mais seulement les rares sensations qui se rattachent à eux. Faire de tout une question de volonté – déformation bien naïve ! [...] (ŒP, 119)<sup>25</sup>

De qui et de quoi en effet puis-je dire : 'Je connais cela !' Ce cœur en moi, je puis l'éprouver et je juge qu'il existe. Ce monde, je puis le toucher et je juge encore qu'il existe. Là s'arrête toute ma science, le reste est construction. Car si j'essaie de saisir ce moi dont je m'assure, si j'essaie de le définir et de le résumer, il n'est plus qu'une eau qui coule entre mes doigts. (MdS, 111)

<sup>25</sup> In Camus' s private library A. James Arnold found a copy of the 1934 French edition of the *Œuvres Posthumes* (« Mercure de France »). Although it is not possible to know without doubt whether Camus had read this work before 1942, we nevertheless observe interesting affinities between the MdS and Nietzsche's fragments.

The strong positivisation of sensory experience, which emerges in Camus' emphasis on the the sensual *hic et nunc* in the lyrical essays and in the MdS, finds an important source in Nietzsche's work for exploring the link between the *raisonnement absurde* and its anti-metaphysic and anti-foundational conclusions. We read in *Le Crépuscule des Idoles*:

[...] le mensonge de l'unité, le mensonge de la réalité, de la substance, de la durée...[...] *Les sens ne mentent pas en tant qu'ils montrent le devenir, la disparition, le changement...Mais dans son affirmation que l'être est une fixation* Héraclite gardera éternellement raison. *Le « monde des apparences » est le seul réel : le « monde-vérité » est seulement ajouté par le mensonge* » (LA « RAISON » DANS LA PHILOSOPHIE, § 2)

[...] Aujourd'hui nous ne possédons de science qu'en tant que nous nous sommes décidés à accepter le témoignage des sens. (Ivi, § 3). [My italics]

In the MdS, understanding is defined as an inexhaustible attempt of *reductio ad unum* of the dispersed and senseless «*éclats miroitants*» of sensory experience in order to satisfy the human «*exigence de familiarité, appétit de clarté*»: «Quels que soient les jeux de mots et les acrobaties de la logique, comprendre c'est avant tout unifier. [...] Cette nostalgie d'unité, cet appétit d'absolu illustre le mouvement essentiel du drame humain» (MdS, 110).

The paradoxes and contradictions of human reason unveil its impossibility to discover «dans les miroirs changeants des phénomènes, des relations éternelles qui les puissent résumer et se résumer elles-mêmes en un principe unique» (MdS, 110). The initial metaphor of the divorce between «l'homme et sa vie» (MdS, 101) recovers its full meaning here: the ordinary well-ordered, familiar and meaningful, life of *l'habitude* - associated to the metaphor of scene-painting (*décor*) - discovers its fictional character, pointing out man's *artistic* or *poietic* drive towards the *creation* of an artificial unity.<sup>26</sup>

The association between *décor* and *mensonge* leads us to reconsider the question of meaning in the light of the couple *espoir-tricherie*, as the restless attempt of human thought to escape the confines of sensory evidence («la vie elle-même») by means of a pure (abstract) construction (some «*grande idée qui la dépasse, la sublime, lui donne un sens et la trahit*», MdS, 103). For Camus, as for Nietzsche, «[l]'homme cherche 'la vérité' : un monde qui ne puisse se contredire, ni tromper, ni changer, un monde *vrai* – un monde où l'on ne souffre pas [...]» (VP II, 10, § 6A): «'Une chose en soi' – absurdité égale au 'sens en soi', à la 'signification en soi' [...]» (VPI, §204-206) «Le monde apparent et le monde mensonger,

<sup>26</sup> «Devant cette contradiction inextricable de l'esprit, nous saisissons justement à plein le divorce qui nous sépare de nos propres créations. Tant que l'esprit se tait dans le monde immobile de ses espoirs, tout se reflète et s'ordonne dans l'unité de sa nostalgie. Mais à son premier mouvement, ce monde se fêle et s'écroule [...]» (MdS, 111). [My italics]

c'est là l'antagonisme. Ce dernier s'est appelé jusqu'ici le « monde vrai », la « vérité », « Dieu ». C'est celui-là qu'il nous faut détruire » (VPI, §210). Camus wrote in similar terms :

Je ne sais pas si ce monde a un sens qui le dépasse. Mais je sais que je ne connais pas ce sens et qu'il me impossible pour le moment de le connaître. Que signifie pour moi une signification hors de ma condition ? je ne puis comprendre qu'en termes humains. Ce que je touche, ce qui me résiste, voilà ce que je comprends. (MdS, 136)

It is in the light of Nietzsche's thought that we fully grasp the meaning of Camus' methodological instructions in the opening pages of the essay: in approaching the problem of suicide, that is, of the relation between senselessness and valuelessness of existence, the author points out that «[s]ur tous les problèmes essentiels [...] il n'y a probablement que deux méthodes de pensée, celle de La Palisse et celle de Don Quichotte. » (MdS, 99). These two characters trace the finite "perimeter" of the absurd thought,<sup>27</sup> replacing the will to truth by the aesthetic notion of *coherence*:<sup>28</sup> it is precisely in the « équilibre de l'évidence et du lyrisme » (Id.), symbolically de-limited by La Palisse and Don Quixotte, that the author defines his own method of thought as «une méthode [...] d'analyse et non de connaissance [...] [qui]confesse le sentiment que toute vraie connaissance est impossible. Seules les apparences peuvent se dénombrer et le climat se faire sentir » (E, 106) - "true" knowledge being the knowledge of a transcendent Principle, which is not *there*, and does not take place in the *here-and-now* of sensory existence.<sup>29</sup>

In the MdS, the rejection of a foundational approach, entailed by the absurd awareness of the un-attainability of the "essence" of existence,<sup>30</sup> leads to the substitution of the logic of

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<sup>27</sup> « Au seuil de MdS, Camus dresse deux sentinelles, deux gardes en armes: d'un côté, La Palisse, vêtu de l'armure de l'évidence ; de l'autre, Don Quichotte, muni de l'épée ou de la flèche du lyrisme. La réflexion, et donc le texte, ont à passer entre ces gardiens opposés et complémentaires. [...] si la signification symbolique de chacun de ces héros délibérément antithétiques est parfaitement explicite, l' « évidence » et le « lyrisme » sont considérés moins comme modes d'expression, que comme des « méthodes de pensée », permettant de définir la relation de l'être au monde, à la mort, et à sa propre vie. », Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, « Entre La Palisse et Don Quichotte », *Camus et le lyrisme*, Paris, SEDES, 1997, p. 35. Camus noted in his *Carnets* in 1939: « Don Quichotte et La Palisse. La Palisse: « Un quart d'heure avant ma mort, j'étais encore en vie. Ceci suffit à ma gloire. Mais cette gloire est usurpée. *Ma vraie philosophie est qu'un quart d'heure après ma mort, je ne serai plus en vie* ». Don Quichotte: « Oui, j'ai combattu des moulins à vent. Car il est profondément indifférent de combattre les moulins à vent ou les géants. Tellement indifférent qu'il est facile de les confondre. *J'ai une métaphysique de myope* ». (C I, 185) (My italics).

<sup>28</sup> The key question of MdS being « y a-t-il une logique jusqu'à la mort ? » (MdS, 103), « honnêteté », « véritable effort » (MdS, 104), « ténacité » (Id.) in maintaining the absurd premises define coherence as the (anti-foundational) logic of the « raisonnement absurde ».

<sup>29</sup> Camus uses the expression «*polythéisme abstrait*» to address the ideas or essences of metaphysical thought: «Kierkegaard s'abîmait dans son Dieu, Parménide précipitait la pensée dans l'Un. Mais ici la pensée se jette dans un polythéisme abstrait. Il y a mieux : les hallucinations et les fictions font partie elles aussi des « essences extra-temporelles ». Dans le nouveau monde des idées, la catégorie de centaure collabore avec celle, plus modeste, de métropolitain » (E, 131).

<sup>30</sup> « Le contraste qu'on trouve ici [dans la *Naissance de la tragédie*] n'est pas entre un monde vrai et un monde apparent ; il n'y qu'un seul monde et il est faux, cruel, contradictoire, captieux, absurde... Un monde ainsi fait

*explanation*, implicit in the reconciliatory narratives of traditional metaphysics, with an *aesthetic* approach, that is, one that points out the “descriptive” and “creative” capacity of thought *vis à vis* the fragmentary plurality of phenomena.<sup>31</sup> Echoing Nietzsche, Camus writes in his notebooks in 1942 : « Le monde absurde ne reçoit qu’une justification *esthétique* » (CII, 65).<sup>32</sup>

The awareness of the *poetic/poietic* power of the intellect, brought forth by the unveiling of the metaphysical “illusions”, opens the way to a finite, “*perspective*”, understanding: « La seule pensée qui ne soit pas *mensongère* est donc une *pensée stérile* », that is, aware of the « murs absurdes » that de-limit its claims, a thought that makes « *tabula rasa* » of the delusory « maisons d’idées », choosing the « route *aride et desséchée* de l’effort lucide » (MdS, 137) – « L’absurde, c’est la raison lucide qui constate ses limites » (MdS, 134):

Tout ce que je puis dire, c’est qu’en effet cela passe ma mesure. Si je n’en tire pas une négation,<sup>33</sup> du moins je ne veux rien fonder sur l’incompréhensible. [...] On me dit encore que l’intelligence doit ici sacrifier son orgueil et la raison s’incliner. Mais si je reconnais les limites de la raison, je ne la nie pas pour autant, reconnaissant ses pouvoirs relatifs. Je veux seulement me tenir dans ce *chemin moyen où l’intelligence peut rester claire*. Si c’est là son orgueil, je ne vois pas de raison suffisante pour y renoncer. Rien de plus profonde, par exemple, que la vue de Kierkegaard selon quoi le désespoir n’est pas un fait mais un état : l’état même du péché. Car le péché c’est ce qui éloigne de Dieu. L’absurde, qui est l’état métaphysique de l’homme conscient, ne mène pas à Dieu. [...] l’absurde, c’est le péché sans Dieu. (MdS, 127-8) [My italics]

But, in order to clarify in what sense the anti-foundational perspective, which informs the *raisonnement absurde* of the MdS, provides, in Camus’s own words, a « passionate definition » of *modern nihilism*, we need to take an additional source into account.

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est le monde vrai. *Nous avons besoin du mensonge* pour triompher de cette réalité, de cette « vérité », c’est-à-dire pour vivre... Que le mensonge soit nécessaire à la vie, cela même fait partie de ce caractère effroyable est suspect de l’existence.

La métaphysique, la morale, la religion, la science sont considérées dans ce livre comme des formes diverses du mensonge [...]. « Il faut que la vie inspire confiance » : le problème ainsi posé est monstrueux. Pour le résoudre, il faut que l’homme soit déjà menteur par nature, il faut qu’il soit avant tout un *artiste*. Et il l’est en effet : la métaphysique, la religion, la morale, la science sont autant de produits de sa volonté artiste, de sa volonté de mentir, de fuir la « vérité », de nier la ‘vérité’. [...] la faculté qu’il a de maîtriser la réalité par le mensonge, cette faculté artiste par excellence [...]. » (VPIL, §8, p. 269).

<sup>31</sup> Mathieu Kessler (*Nietzsche ou le dépassement esthétique de la métaphysique*, PUF, 1999) and Luigi Rustichelli (*La profondità della superficie. Senso del tragico e giustificazione estetica dell’esistenza in F. Nietzsche*, Milano, Mursia 1992) both employ the expression « aesthetic perspective » to define an approach that refuses the absolute cognitive and moral values of the metaphysical tradition in favour of an *artistic* conception of man as *creator* of meaning and values in a provisional and plural context.

<sup>32</sup> « Je me suis toujours efforcé de me démontrer l’*innocence* du devenir [...]. Ma première solution a été de tenter la *justification esthétique de l’existence* » (F. Nietzsche, VPIL, § 465, p. 175).

<sup>33</sup> As Camus himself points out further on about the absurd and God, the negation (of God or a Principle which would transcend the limits of sensory evidence) would still entail its affirmation. Camus’ method of thought echoes in many respects Husserl’s *epoché*, suspending all judgement beyond the reach of the senses. By doing so it opens up an *aesthetic* “space” in which the absurd thought is ex-posed to/in its limits.

According to James Arnold, in his earlier reading of *Ecce homo* Camus had devoted a particular attention to the chapter on *La Naissance de la Tragédie* (in “*Pourquoi j’écris de si bons livres*”):

[...] relevons surtout cette phrase, soulignée et rappelée dans la marge par une double barre : « [...] les Grecs parvinrent à en finir avec le pessimisme [...] La tragédie précisément est la preuve que les Grecs n’étaient pas des pessimistes. [...] Socrate y est présenté [dans *l’Origine de la Tragédie*] pour la première fois comme l’instrument de la décomposition grecque, comme le décadent-type. La « raison » s’y oppose à l’instinct. La « raison » à tout prix apparaît comme une puissance dangereuse, comme une puissance qui mine la vie. Dans le livre tout entier, il y a un silence profond et hostile pour tout ce qui touche le christianisme. Celui-ci n’est ni apollinien ni dionysien ; il nie toutes les valeurs esthétiques, les seules que reconnaisse *l’Origine de la tragédie* ; il est nihiliste au sens le plus profond [...] ». <sup>34</sup>[My italics]

In this passage, carefully underlined by the young reader, Nietzsche uses the term “*nihilist*” to address the Christian- *moral* and metaphysical attitude *as opposed to* the tragic or Dionysian “yes-saying” (affirmation) to life.<sup>35</sup>

What I suggest is that it is *not* in this acceptance that, between 1941 and September 1942, Camus resorts to the term “nihilism” in order to describe the *absurd* argument in the MdS, but that he draws upon a different source in order to address the problem of the loss of transcendent meaning and the anti-foundational *tabula rasa* of all traditional value, namely, to Nietzsche’s posthumous fragments, published in the French editions of the *Œuvres Posthumes* and *La Volonté de puissance*. One month after finishing the MdS, Camus noted in his *Carnets* (March 1941): «L’Absurde et le Pouvoir – à creuser (cf. *Hitler*)» (CI, 225).<sup>36</sup> It is plausible that he resorted to Nietzsche’s posthumous texts in order to elucidate this relation.<sup>37</sup>

Echoing Nietzsche’s posthumous notes in *La Volonté de puissance*, in which the term *nihilism* is related to a process of introduction/extraction of (man-created) values in/from the world (*antropomorphism*), brought forth by the (modern) decline of the traditional highest values, and which disclose the possibility for a *transvaluation* of values in contemporary time;

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<sup>34</sup> A. James Arnold, art. cit., 96.

<sup>35</sup> The term “nihilism” recurs in this same acceptance, as synonym of “Christian” and “will-negating” (with reference to Schopenhauer), in § 21 of “Flaneries Inactuelles” in *Crépuscule des Idoles* – which, according to the *Carnets*, Camus was reading in 1938.

<sup>36</sup> This short note suggests that Camus might have been reacting to an idea that was probably circulating in the intellectual clandestine debate in Occupied France, concerning the political implications of the anti-metaphysical and anti-foundational argument of the Absurd, in other words, of Nihilism. See *Cahiers Albert Camus 4, Caligula*, suivi de *La poétique du premier Caligula*, A. James Arnold Ed., Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. 169.

<sup>37</sup> We know that Camus was in possession of two copies of *La Volonté de puissance*, in the “*Mercur de France*” edition, translated by Henri Albert (1923), and in the Gallimard edition, edited in two volumes (1935; 1937) by Friedrich Würzbach and translated into French by Geneviève Bianquis, as well as of the first edition of Nietzsche’s *Œuvres posthumes* (1934), a collection of 893 fragments from the Kröner edition, translated by Henri Jean Bolle. Although the date of the editions in his possession does not allow us to say precisely *when* Camus actually read these texts for the first time, we cannot exclude that he was already acquainted with these works around 1942-43. Frantz Favre’s article does not exclude this hypothesis (cf., Frantz Favre, «Quand Camus lisait Nietzsche», in *Albert Camus 20*, La Revue des Lettres Modernes, Paris, Minard, 2004, p. 201).

in a letter to Pierre Bonnel (March 1943), Camus identifies the question of the *absurd* with an analogous process of *extraction* of all meaning and value from the world (E, 1423) - « L'effort de la pensée absurde (et gratuite), c'est l'expulsion de tous les jugements de valeur au profit des jugements de fait » (*ibid.*).

Que signifie le nihilisme? Que les valeurs supérieures se déprécient. Les fins manquent ; il n'est pas de réponse à cette question : « A' quoi bon ? ». <sup>38</sup>

In sections A and B of Nietzsche's fragment on the *Fall of cosmological values* (November 1887-March 1888), <sup>39</sup> *cosmological* refers to (all) "higher" values, in that they determine the sphere of becoming and transiency in which human life is inscribed. The de-valuation of *cosmological* values, grounding and bestowing value upon everything that *is*, brings about the de-valuation of what is, of being as a whole: nihilism thus coincides with the *feeling* that everything is devoid of value, the feeling of the *nothingness* of the universe. Nihilism as the de-valuation of the highest values is identified with the emergence of a *feeling* of total loss of value – nihilism as a *psychological* state:

Le nihilisme, en tant qu'état psychologique, se manifestera en premier lieu quand nous aurons cherché dans tous les faits le "sens" qu'ils ne comportent pas ; tellement que le chercheur en perdra courage. [...] Ce « sens de la vie » aurait pu consister à découvrir dans tout le devenir « l'accomplissement » de quelque canon moral élevé, l'ordre moral de l'univers ; ou un accroissement d'amour et d'harmonie entre les êtres ; ou l'approche d'un état de félicité universelle ; ou même l'élan vers un néant universel – une fin quelle qu'elle soit est tout de même un *sens*. Le trait commun de toutes ces conceptions, c'est que le processus tend vers un terme ; et de nos jours on a compris que le devenir ne tend à rien, n'atteint rien...La déception au sujet d'une prétendue *fin du devenir* est donc une des causes du nihilisme ; [...]

Le nihilisme psychologique se manifeste en deuxième lieu quand on a supposé une *totalité*, une *systématisation*, voire une *organisation* à l'intérieur des faits et entre tous les faits [...]. On imagine une manière d'unité, une forme quelconque de « monisme » [...] « Le bien général exige le dévouement de l'individu »...mais voici que *cette généralité n'existe pas!* Au fond, l'homme a perdu la foi dans sa valeur propre dès qu'à travers lui ce n'est pas une collectivité précieuse qui agit ; c'est dire qu'il a imaginé cette collectivité afin de pouvoir croire à sa propre valeur.

Le nihilisme psychologique a encore une *troisième et dernière forme*. Une fois ces deux faits admis, que le devenir est sans but et qu'il n'est pas dirigé par quelque grande unité dans laquelle l'individu puisse plonger totalement comme dans un élément de valeur suprême, il reste une *échappatoire* possible : c'est de condamner tout ce monde du devenir comme illusoire, et d'inventer un monde situé au-delà, qui serait le monde *vrai*. Mais dès que l'homme découvre que ce monde n'est bâti que sur ses propres besoins psychologiques [...], on voit se dégager la dernière forme de nihilisme qui implique *la négation du monde métaphysique* et qui s'interdit de croire à un monde *vrai*. Parvenu à ce stade, on avoue que la réalité du devenir est la *seule* réalité, on s'interdit tous les chemins détournés qui ramèneraient la croyance à d'autres monde et à des faux dieux – mais *on ne supporte pas ce monde que l'on n'a déjà plus la volonté de nier...* <sup>40</sup>

By identifying the first condition for the emergence of nihilism as *psychological* state in man's quest for a *meaning* or *end (sens)* in all that *happens*, the dominion of nihilism is

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, VP, II, p. 50, § 100.

<sup>39</sup> Cf., Martin Heidegger, *Il nichilismo europeo*, Milano, Adelphi, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> F. Nietzsche, *La volonté de puissance*, II, texte établi par Friedrich Würzbach, traduit par G. Bianquis, Paris, Gallimard, 1995, pp. 54-55. [My italics]

equated to the dominion of the *absence of meaning (sens)*, which Nietzsche uses interchangeably in the sense of *absence of value*.

Now, we are inclined to see a correspondence between the *absurd* argument in the MdS and the “intermediate phase” of the *third and last* form of nihilism, as the *negation of the meta-physical world*, that is, of the belief in a *true* supra-sensory world *beyond* this one. The *true* world is “unmasked” as illusory artefact, fabricated through the insertion of the categories of meaning, unity and truth in sheer becoming; the sensory/sensual evidence of this world remains the only *reality* (the *innocence* of becoming).

At this stage, the “nihilistic” thought rejects all *escape* («on s’interdit tous les chemins détournés qui ramèneraient la croyance à d’autres mondes et à des faux dieux») - <sup>41</sup> what Camus addresses in the MdS as *l’esquive mortelle*,<sup>42</sup> rejected by the lucid thought of the absurd. But, as it *is* - that is, deprived of meaning and value – the world is felt to be *unbearable*. In a note in the *Carnets*, dated between February and May 1943, we read:

Imaginons un penseur qui dit: « Voilà, je sais que cela est vrai. Mais finalement les conséquences m’en répugnent et je recule. *La vérité est inacceptable même pour celui qui la trouve.* » On aura ainsi le penseur absurde et son perpétuel malaise. (CII, 82) [My italics]

The « unbearable truth » can easily be identified in the MdS with the *absurd feeling* in face of the evidence of the meaninglessness and strangeness of a world in-different to the categories of reason.<sup>43</sup> It is around September 1943 that James Arnold dates the famous sentence from the tragedy *Caligula*,<sup>44</sup> «Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux» (T, 16).<sup>45</sup> This sentence is inserted in the dialogue between Caligula and Hélicon (Act I, scene 4), which in the definitive version of the play is preceded by Caligula’s words: «*Ce monde, tel qu’il est, n’est pas supportable. J’ai donc besoin de la lune, ou du bonheur, ou de l’immortalité, de quelque chose qui soit dément peut-être, mais qui ne soit pas de ce monde* » (T, 15).

The unbearableness of the *absurd* “truth” (MdS, 121), expressed by Caligula, elucidates the relationship between nihilism as a *psychological state*, i.e., as a the *feeling* of

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<sup>41</sup> F. Nietzsche, VII, § 111 A, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> « L’esquive mortelle qui fait le troisième thème de cet essai [MdS], c’est l’espoir. Espoir d’une autre vie qu’il faut « mériter », ou tricherie de ceux qui vivent non pour la vie elle-même, mais pour quelque grande idée qui la dépasse, la sublime, lui donne un sens et la trahit » (MdS, 102-103).

<sup>43</sup> « Il faut se décider à introduire dans les choses de la pensée une distinction nécessaire entre philosophie d’évidence et philosophie de préférence. Autrement dit, on peut aboutir à une philosophie qui répugne à l’esprit et au cœur *mais qui s’impose*. Ainsi ma philosophie d’évidence c’est *l’absurde* [...] » (CII, 82).

<sup>44</sup> CAC4, p.189, n. 42.

<sup>45</sup> A. James Arnold places the «revision de l’attitude de Camus envers Nietzsche» around 1943, in particular of the “Nietzscheanism” of his juvenile writings, which may presumably have coincided with the reading of the posthumous notes on nihilism.

the meaninglessness and nothingness of the universe,<sup>46</sup> and pessimism - « Ce qui découle du pessimisme, c'est la doctrine de l'absurdité de l'existence, l'idée que la douleur et le plaisir n'ont aucun sens, que l'ἡδονή ne peut être principe. C'est pour le siècle prochain. Doctrine de la grande lassitude : « À quoi bon ? Rien n'en vaut la peine ! ». ».<sup>47</sup> «Le pessimisme, forme préliminaire du nihilisme ».<sup>48</sup>

Nietzsche's notes on nihilism as a psychological state not only shed further light on the relationship between ultimate meaninglessness (loss or retreat of the world) and the problem of suicide, identified in the MdS with the judgement that life is *worth/not worth* living (MdS, 99) as the fundamental question of philosophy, but also help to elucidate further Camus's sentence in the *Carnets*:

L'intelligence moderne est en plein désarroi. La connaissance s'est distendue à ce point que le monde et l'esprit ont perdu tout point d'appui. C'est un fait que nous souffrons de *nihilisme*. (CII, 26)

By evoking the feeling of absurdity (*sentiment de l'absurdité*), and treating «une sensibilité absurde qu'on peut trouver éparse dans le siècle» (MdS, 97), the MdS may be described as a *passionate definition* of modern nihilism. However, what I suggest is that Camus's metaphorical treatment of the absurd in the MdS refutes all pessimistic «doctrine of the absurdity of existence».

## 1.2. FOR AN AESTHETIC APPROACH TO THE ABSURD.

Camus resorts to the metaphor of divorce in order to introduce the notion of the absurd:

Si j'accuse un innocent d'un crime monstrueux, si j'affirme à un homme vertueux qu'il a convoité sa propre sœur, il me répondra que c'est absurde [...]. L'homme vertueux illustre par cette réplique l'antinomie définitive qui existe entre l'acte que je lui prête et les principes de toute sa vie. « C'est absurde » veut dire : « c'est impossible », mais aussi : « c'est contradictoire ». Je vois un homme attaquer à l'arme blanche un groupe de mitrailleuses, je jugerai que son acte est absurde. Mais il n'est tel qu'en vertu de la disproportion qui existe entre son intention et la réalité qui l'attend. [...] l'absurdité sera d'autant plus grande que l'écart croîtra entre les termes de ma comparaison. [...] le sentiment de l'absurdité ne naît pas du simple examen d'un fait ou d'une impression mais [...] [qu']il jaillit de la comparaison entre un état de fait et une certaine réalité, entre une action et le monde qui la dépasse. L'absurde est essentiellement un *divorce*. Il n'est ni dans l'un ni dans l'autre des éléments comparés. Il naît de leur confrontation. (MdS, 119-120) [My italics]

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<sup>46</sup> It is difficult not to notice a resemblance between this definition of psychological nihilism and Camus' prologue to the MdS - «les pages qui suivent traitent d'une *sensibilité absurde* qu'on peut trouver éparse dans le siècle» A variant of the manuscript reads: « Il y a du provisoire dans les pages qui suivent. Elles traitent d'une *sensibilité éparse dans les gestes et les actes de notre temps*. » (E, 1430, note 2 to p. 97). [My italics]

<sup>47</sup> F. Nietzsche, VP II, § 99 (III-XII 1884), p. 50.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, § 92, p. 48.



As the author emphasises in the opening lines of the chapter, «[l]e sentiment de l'absurde n'est pas pour autant la notion de l'absurde. Il la fonde, un point c'est tout. Il ne s'y résume pas, sinon le court instant où il porte son jugement sur l'univers. Il lui reste ensuite à aller plus loin. Il est vivant, c'est-à-dire qu'il doit mourir ou retentir plus avant.<sup>49</sup> » (MdS, 119) It is at the intersection between *sentiment* and *notion* of the absurd that we can, in my view, grasp the meaning and the implications of Camus' definition of the absurd, *vis-à-vis* the traditional acceptations of the term,<sup>50</sup> as *beginning (commencement)*, a liminal experience, which shatters the regime of necessity, represented by the unity/uniformity of a "*vie machinale*" (MdS, 107).

It is in this « *court instant où [le sentiment de l'absurde] porte son jugement sur l'univers* » - in which, according to the author, the feeling is fully comprehended in the notion of the absurd - that the meaning of the latter is made visible,<sup>51</sup> not as mere *absence* of meaning, but rather as an inaugurating «event», as *surprise* («Le sentiment de l'absurdité au détour de n'importe quelle rue peut frapper à la face de n'importe quel homme», MdS, 105) or *beginning* («commencement»), which *opens up* time, provoking «*le mouvement de la conscience*» (MdS, 107):

Il arrive que les décors s'écroulent. Lever, tramway, quatre heures de bureau ou d'usine, repas, tramway, quatre heures de travail, repas, sommeil et lundi mardi mercredi jeudi vendredi et samedi sur le même rythme. cette route se suit aisément la plupart du temps. *Un jour seulement, le « pourquoi » s'élève et tout commence dans cette lassitude teintée d'étonnement.* (MdS, 106-107). [My italics]

It is in/as this « *syncope* » in/of temporality,<sup>52</sup> conceived as succession and as *necessity*, that Camus defines the absurd through a second metaphor *in praesentia*:

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<sup>49</sup> My italics.

<sup>50</sup> As A. Nicolas points out, «Les critiques ont eu tendance à ramener l'absurde camusien à l'absurde classique, qui est un constat de non-signification» (quoted by M.L.Audin, op. cit., p. 34).

<sup>51</sup> «Jusqu'ici, c'est par l'extérieur que nous avons pu circonscrire l'absurde. On peut se demander cependant ce que cette notion contient de clair et tenter de retrouver par l'analyse directe sa signification d'une part et, de l'autre, les conséquences qu'elle entraîne » (MdS, 119).

<sup>52</sup> I suggest that we read these passages next to Jean-Luc Nancy's analysis of the relation between time and surprise: « La surprise [...] offre dans le "cours" lui-même le retrait du cours du temps [...]. La surprise est déjà inscrite au cœur de toutes les analyses philosophiques de la temporalité, et singulièrement des analyses de l'instant présent : sur la limite entre l'avoir-déjà-été et le ne-pas-être-encore, le présent s'est toujours avéré aussi bien comme limite de présence [...]. Ce qui est la structure de la surprise (et celle-ci formerait donc l'exact revers de la structure du présent) : elle a lieu sans être arrivée ; elle n'aura donc pas eu lieu, mais elle aura ouvert le temps [...]. Le temps ouvert pourra être le temps de l'étonnement, du bouleversement, ou celui de l'interrogation, de l'explication. [...] Mais ce temps qu'on prendra [pour répondre à la question : « Pourquoi ? »] n'aura été ouvert que par la surprise [...] » (J.-L. Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, Galilée, Paris, 1983, p. 147). A similar intuition may be found, in my view, in Camus' definition of the absurd as "beginning", opening up the temporal succession of "*la vie machinale*" - the time of «l'habitude» expressed by metaphor of the «chain» (MdS, 107) - and disclosing a time of astonishment ("*lassitude teintée d'étonnement*") and for questioning: «La suite, c'est le retour inconscient dans la chaîne, ou c'est l'éveil définitif» (MdS, 107). A focus on the moment of wonder, as the mark of surprise, would, thus, allow to read «les origines de l'absurde» (MdS, 107) in the sense

De même et pour tous les jours d'une vie sans éclat, le temps nous porte, Mais un moment vient toujours où il faut le porter. Nous vivons sur l'avenir : « demain », « plus tard », « quand tu auras une situation » [...] Ces inconséquences sont admirables, car enfin il s'agit de mourir. Un jour vient pourtant et l'homme constate ou dit qu'il a trente ans. Il affirme ainsi sa jeunesse. Mais du même coup, *il se situe par rapport au temps. Il y prend sa place. Il reconnaît qu'il est à un certain moment d'une courbe qu'il confesse devoir parcourir. Il appartient au temps et, à cette horreur qui le saisit, il y reconnaît son pire ennemi.* Demain, il souhaitait demain, quand tout lui-même aurait dû s'y refuser. *Cette révolte de la chair, c'est l'absurde.* (MdS, 107) [My italics]

The experience of the absurd, which *takes place* as a time opened up for and by questioning (the original “*why?*”), situates the individual *in relation to time*; in other words, by interrupting “ordinary” time, it opens up a “space”, the *hic et nunc* of the body, in which the living being is “positioned” in the exposedness of his existing.<sup>53</sup>

Now, the “*mise en position*”, brought forth in/as the experience of the absurd, expressed by the second metaphor *in praesentia* (MdS, 107), short-circuits the phenomenological understanding of *le corps* as the objective correlate of a subject (*conscience*). Without being reduced to the mere “presence” of sheer physicality, in the sense of an unreflective and unrelated immanence, I argue that the «*chair révoltée*» entails, always and already, what Nietzsche addresses as an *aesthetic judgement*:<sup>54</sup>

Le beau, le répugnant, etc., voilà le premier jugement. Dès qu'il prétend à la *vérité absolue*, le jugement esthétique se transforme en *exigence morale*.

Dès que nous *nions* la vérité absolue, il nous faut renoncer à toute espèce *d'exigence absolue* et nous retrancher dans des *jugements esthétiques*. *Voici la tâche* : créer une foule de *jugements esthétiques également justifiés*, dont chacun soit pour un individu la réalité dernière et la norme des choses.

Réduction de la morale à l'esthétique !! (VP11, §437, and CEP, §497)

Thus, Camus' notion of the absurd must be understood - at least in its *initial* moment, that is, in that « court instant où [le sentiment de l'absurde] porte son jugement sur l'univers » - as *aesthetic judgement*, in the sense of Nietzsche's fragment. This is confirmed by the opening lines of the chapter «Les murs absurdes» in the MdS:

Comme les grandes œuvres, les sentiments profonds signifient toujours plus qu'ils n'ont conscience de le dire. La *constance d'un mouvement ou d'une répulsion* dans une âme se retrouve dans des habitudes de faire ou de penser, se poursuit dans des conséquences que l'âme elle-même ignore. Les grands sentiments promènent avec eux leur univers, splendide ou misérable. Ils éclairent de leur passion un monde exclusif où ils retrouvent leur climat. [...] Un univers, c'est-à-dire une métaphysique et une attitude de l'esprit. Ce qui est vrai des sentiments déjà spécialisés le sera plus encore pour *des émotions à leur base aussi indéterminées, à la fois aussi*

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of «[c]e qui «arrive» sans arriver, c'est-à-dire sans provenir d'une origine mais en pro-venant ou en sur-venant à l'origine (comme le cri, peut-être, surviendrait à l'orifice d'origine de la bouche, et n'en proviendrait pas) [...]» (J.-L. Nancy, op. cit., p. 147)

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J.-L. Nancy, op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>54</sup> « Il me faut renoncer non seulement au dogme du *péché*, mais à celui du mérite (de la vertu). Ce qui subsiste, ce sont, comme dans la nature, les jugements *esthétiques*.» (VP11, §459)

*confuses et aussi « certaines », aussi lointaines et aussi « présentes » que celles que nous donne le beau ou que suscite l'absurde. (MdS, 105) [My italics]*

The anti-foundational perspective outlined in the *raisonnement absurde* prevents the attentive reader from falling into the (linguistic) pitfall of a substantialist interpretation of the absurd; the meaning of the absurd as a peculiar kind of (*aesthetic*) judgement is further elucidated by another passage:

*Dans l'attachement d'un homme à la vie, il y a quelque chose de plus fort que toutes les misères du monde. Le jugement du corps vaut bien celui de l'esprit et le corps recule devant l'anéantissement. Nous prenons l'habitude de vivre avant d'acquiescer celle de penser. Dans cette course qui nous précipite tous les jours un peu plus vers la mort, le corps garde cette avance irréparable. (MdS, 102) [My italics]*

I suggest that we interpret the opposition *vivre/penser* in the light of the author's (Nietzschean) rejection of all «fiction», identified with the meta-physical or meta-sensory products (*artefacts*) – and denoted as «les décors masqués» (MdS, 108), «les jeux de mots et les acrobaties de la logique» (MdS, 110) - of the abstract powers of human thought. This idea is further elucidated in a short note in the *Carnets* in 1938: «La pensée est toujours en avant. Elle va trop loin, plus loin que le corps qui est dans le présent. Supprimer l'espérance, c'est ramener la pensée au corps. Et le corps doit pourrir.» (CI, 128).<sup>55</sup>

«*La révolte de la chair*» would, thus, coincide with the awareness of the man's being *exposed* to the sensory limit, which de-fines existence in the “here-and-now” of physical/sensual presence (*aisthesis*).<sup>56</sup> As we read in another note in the *Carnets*:

*Dans les chemins au-dessus de Blida, la nuit comme un lait et une douceur, avec sa grâce et sa méditation. Le matin sur la montagne avec sa chevelure rase ébouriffée de colchiques, - les sources glacées. - l'ombre et le soleil, - mon corps qui consent puis refuse. L'effort concentré de la marche, l'air dans les poumons comme un fer rouge ou un rasoir affilé, - tout entier dans cette application et ce surpassement qui l'efforcent à triompher de la pente, - comme une connaissance de soi par le corps. Le corps, vrai chemin de la culture, il nous montre nos limites. (CI, 90). (17<sup>th</sup> October 1937) [My italics]*

Camus's understanding of the absurd exceeds sheer absurdity, which also recurs in Nietzsche's posthumous fragments as the irrationality and meaninglessness of the world and of man's mortal condition. It is precisely through the experiences of absurdity – above all, the

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<sup>55</sup> My italics.

<sup>56</sup> «Ce cœur en moi, je puis l'éprouver et je juge qu'il existe. Ce monde, je puis le toucher et je juge encore qu'il existe. Là s'arrête toute ma science, le reste est construction. [...] Entre la certitude que j'ai de mon existence et le contenu que j'essaie de donner à cette assurance, le fossé ne sera jamais comblé. Pour toujours, je serai étranger à moi-même. En psychologie comme en logique, il y a des vérités mais point de vérité. Le « connais-toi toi-même » de Socrate a autant de valeur que le « soi vertueux » de nos confessionnaires. Ils révèlent une nostalgie en même temps que d'une ignorance. Ce sont des jeux stériles sur des grands sujets » (MdS, 111)

inexperience of death,<sup>57</sup> as the elementary , sensory evidence «[de] ce corps inerte où une gifle ne marque plus» (MdS, 109) – that the *aesthetic* dimension of the absurd is brought forth:

Je disais que le monde est absurde et j'allais trop vite. Ce monde en lui-même n'est pas raisonnable, c'est tout ce qu'on en peut dire. *Mais ce qui est absurde, c'est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l'appel résonne au plus profond de l'homme. L'absurde dépend autant de l'homme que du monde. Il est pour le moment leur seul lien. Il les scelle l'un à l'autre comme la haine seule peut river les êtres.* (MdS, 113) [My italics]

The “absurd” relation between man and the world can be fully grasped in the 1939 lyrical essay *Noces à Tipasa*:

Aux mystères d'Éleusis, il suffisait de contempler. Ici même [à Tipasa], *je sais que jamais je ne m'approcherai assez au monde. Il me faut être nu* et puis plonger dans la mer, encore tout parfumé des essences de la terre, laver celles-ci dans celles-là, et nouer sur ma peau l'étreinte pour laquelle soupirent lèvres à lèvres depuis si longtemps la terre et la mer. Entré dans l'eau, c'est le saisissement, la montée d'une glu froide et opaque, puis le plongeon dans le bourdonnement des oreilles, le nez coulant et la bouche amère [...]; la course de l'eau sur mon corps, cette possession tumultueuse de l'onde par mes jambes – et l'absence d'horizon. Sur le rivage, c'est la chute dans le sable, *abandonné au monde, rentré dans ma pesanteur de chair et d'os* [...] Il n'y a qu'un seul amour dans ce monde. Éteindre un corps de femme, c'est aussi retenir contre soi cette joie étrange qui descend du ciel vers la mer. Tout à l'heure, quand je me jetterai dans les absinthes pour me faire entrer le parfum dans le corps, *j'aurai conscience, contre tous les préjugés, d'accomplir une vérité qui est celle du soleil et sera aussi celle de ma mort.* (E, 57-58) [My italics]

I suggest that the sensual experience of being «abandonné au monde», described in these pages, allows us to re-interpret the absurd in the sense of what Jean-Luc Nancy defines as the «près-ence de la présence sensible»,<sup>58</sup> that is, as a “closeness” between, or a *touching-upon* (*toucher-à*), of man-to-the-world and to-himself, that exposes the unbridgeable liminality inherent in the sensory (*aesthetic*) relationship of *sentant/senti* (*aisthesis* = ‘perception’), which «dans l'unité espaçante de son *contact*, implique le rapport, sous la forme de l'être-affecté-par, et par conséquent de *l'être-affectable-par*, ou de *l'être-passible-de* (dont l'intellection, et le sens intelligible, ne sont après tout qu'une modulation ou une modalisation, voire une affection de l'affect lui-même ».<sup>59</sup>

It is from this perspective that the rich metaphorical texture of Camus's writing, in the lyrical essays as well as in the 1942 philosophical essay, acquires its full meaning.

We read in the lyrical essays of *Noces*:

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<sup>57</sup> «C'est qu'en réalité, il n'y a pas d'expérience de la mort. Au sens propre, n'est expérimenté que ce qui a été vécu et rendu conscient. Ici, c'est tout juste s'il est possible de parler de l'expérience de la mort des autres » (MdS, 108).

<sup>58</sup> J.-L. Nancy, *Le Sens du monde*, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>59</sup> J.-L. Nancy, lvi. It is precisely in the awareness of *l'être-affecté-par* that we recognize Camus's notion of *passion passive* in the *Carnets* (CI, 83), as the convergence of suffering, the lucid *awareness* of the absurd man, and revolt (*défi*), which provides, as we will show, the bridge between the MdS and the political notes and writings of 1943-44.

À Tipasa, je vois équivaut à je crois, et je ne m'obstine pas à nier *ce que ma main peut toucher et mes lèvres caresser*. Je n'éprouve pas le besoin d'en faire une œuvre d'art, mais de raconter, ce qui est différent. Tipasa m'apparaît comme ces personnages qu'on décrit *pour signifier indirectement un point de vue sur le monde*. Comme eux, elle témoigne, et virilement. Elle est aujourd'hui mon personnage et il me semble qu'à le caresser et le décrire, mon ivresse n'aura plus de fin. Il y a un temps pour vivre et un temps pour témoigner de vivre. [...] Il me suffit de vivre de tout mon corps et de témoigner de tout mon cœur. (E, 59) [My italics]

What the Algerian nature of Tipasa and Djémila « signifie », in Camus's work, is precisely an *aesthetic* perspective, from which the experience of duality (*l'envers et l'endroit*) and the nostalgia for a Plotinian Unity (E, 75) are re-comprised in the sensory/sensual *être-au-monde*. The motif of union/fusion (*noces*) with the world (E, 76) describes the being-brought-to-the-limit, which is inscribed in the *aesthetic present* (here-and-now) as the mutual exposedness (*toucher-à*) of man and world:<sup>60</sup>

Comme le galet verni par les marées, j'étais poli par le vent, usé jusqu'à l'âme. J'étais un peu de cette force selon laquelle je flottais, puis beaucoup, puis elle enfin, confondant les battements de mon sang et les grands coups sonores de ce cœur partout présent de la nature. Le vent me façonnait à l'image de l'ardente nudité qui m'entourait. [...] Ce bain violent de soleil et de vent épuisait toutes mes forces de vie. À peine en moi ce battement d'ailes qui affleure, cette vie qui se plaint, cette faible révolte de l'esprit. Bientôt, répandu aux quatre coins du monde, oublié, oublié de moi-même, je suis ce vent et dans le vent, ces colonnes et cet arc, ces dalles qui sentent chaud et ces montagnes pâles autour de la ville déserte. Et *jamais je n'ai senti, si avant, à la fois mon détachement de moi-même et ma présence au monde*.

Oui, je suis *présent*. Et ce qui me frappe à ce moment, c'est que *je ne peux aller plus loin*. Comme un homme emprisonné à perpétuité – et tout lui est présent. (E, 62). [My italics]

In the pages of *Noces*, we observe a link between the notion of absurdity and the *aesthetic* unity of world and man: « Cette union que souhaitait Plotin, quoi d'étrange à la retrouver sur la terre? *L'Unité s'exprime ici en termes de soleil et de mer. Elle est sensible au cœur par un certain goût de la chair qui fait son amertume et sa grandeur* » (E, 75).<sup>61</sup> Here again « *la chair* » declares the impassable confines of existence (« je ne peux aller plus loin », « comme un homme emprisonné à perpétuité »), experienced in the *aesthetic* « patrie de l'âme où devient sensible la parenté du monde, où les coups de sang rejoignent les pulsations violentes du soleil de deux heures » (E, 75) :

Entre ce ciel et ces visages tournés vers lui, rien où accrocher une mythologie, une littérature, une éthique ou une religion, mais *des pierres, la chair, des étoiles et ces vérités que la main peut toucher*. [...] Tout ce qui exalte la vie, *accroît en même temps son absurdité*. (E, 74-75) [My highlightings]

<sup>60</sup> See J.-L. Nancy, *Le Sens du monde*, op. cit., pp. 196-ff. As F. Noudelmann confirms: « Le corps à corps amoureux de l'homme et de la terre met naturellement en valeur le *toucher* [...]. La main touche le monde et le monde la touche dans ce toucher. Merleau-Ponty définira plus tard ce chiasme des mains à la fois touchantes et touchées, afin d'approcher l'entrelacs du corps humain et de la chair du monde. Ce que reçoit la main est aussi ce qu'elle est, chair contre chair, D'où l'accueil des humeurs, des sucs dont les choses regorgent. Le narrateur de *Noces* apprend à goûter ces écoulements [...] » (F. Noudelmann, « Camus et Sartre : le corps et la loi », *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, op. cit., p. 145-6).

<sup>61</sup> My italics.

Now, it is precisely the *aesthetic* present of *la chair consciente* which allows us to grasp the meaning of the absurd as that «*présence commune [et] seul lien qui [...] unisse [l'homme et le monde]*» (MdS, 120) - the continuity between the lyrical essays and the MdS being visible in the recurring association of *conscience-clairvoyance-chair-mort*. We read in *Le désert* :

Ce sont les cortèges étincelants qui mènent les mystes dionysiens à Éleusis. C'est dans la joie que l'homme prépare ses leçons et, parvenue à son plus haut degré d'ivresse, *la chair devient consciente* et consacre sa communion avec un mystère sacré dont le symbole est le sang noir. [...] *Double vérité du corps et de l'instant*, au spectacle de la beauté, comment ne pas s'y accrocher comme on s'agrippe au seul bonheur attendu, qui doit nous enchanter, *mais périr à la fois*. [...]. (E, 82) Mais qu'est-ce que le bonheur sinon le simple accord entre un être et l'existence qu'il mène ? Et quel accord plus légitime peut unir l'homme à la vie sinon *la double conscience de son désir de durée et son destin de mort* ? On y apprend du moins à ne compter sur rien et à considérer *le présent comme la seule vérité* qui nous soit donnée par « surcroît ». (E, 85) [My highlighting]

The aesthetic moment («*spectacle de la beauté*»), described in the pages of the essay, recalling «*l'air raréfié de la beauté*» of Fiesole and Florence (E, 84-85), brings forth the *aesthetic* “truth” of the *hic-et-nunc*, which de-limits the material “space” of *la chair devenue consciente* of its finitude (*destin de mort*).<sup>62</sup> What already emerges in the lyrical essays, and is fully developed in the MdS, is Camus' attempt to define a *finite* thought of finitude.

In the philosophical essay, the *absurd* conscience (*clairvoyance*) is not so much the “conscience” of *some-thing* (the Absurd) but can, instead, be traced in the very touching-upon-the-borders of man *to* the world, and of man *to* himself («*les murs absurdes*» - MdS, 105).<sup>63</sup>

It is by putting the *aesthetic* dimension of the absurd into focus that we grasp the meaning of a note in 1943:

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<sup>62</sup> Camus writes in *Le désert* : « Le matérialisme le plus répugnant n'est pas celui qu'on croit, mais bien celui qui veut nous faire passer des idées mortes pour des réalités vivantes et détourner sur des mythes stériles l'attention obstinée et lucide que nous portons à ce qui en nous doit mourir pour toujours » (E, 82-83). I suggest that we read this passage next to Nancy's definition of «*la finitude concrète*» : «La naissance et la mort *espacent*, définitivement, un temps singulier. [...] il a lieu [...] comme une matérialité singulière, inappropriable, d'un ici-maintenant. Disons : comme une jouissance» (J.-L. Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, op. cit., p. 39).

<sup>63</sup> «Un degré plus bas et voici l'étrangeté: s'apercevoir que le monde est « épais », entrevoir à quel point une pierre nous est étrangère, nous est irréductible, avec quelle intensité la nature, un paysage peut nous nier. Au fond de toute beauté gît quelque chose d'inhumain et ces collines, la douceur du ciel, ces dessins d'arbres, voici qu'à la minute même, ils perdent le *sens illusoire* dont nous les revêtions, désormais plus lointains qu'un paradis perdu. [...] *cette épaisseur et cette étrangeté du monde, c'est l'absurde*. Les hommes aussi secrètent de l'inhumain. Dans certaines heures de lucidité, l'aspect mécanique de leurs gestes, leur pantomime privée de sens rend stupide tout ce qui les entoure. [...] *l'étranger* qui, à certaines secondes, *vient à notre rencontre dans une glace*, le frère familier et pourtant inquiétant que nous retrouvons dans nos propres photographies, *c'est encore l'absurde.*» (MdS, 107-8) [My italics]

Le monde absurde *d'abord* ne s'analyse pas en rigueur. Il s'évoque et il s'imagine. Ainsi ce monde est le produit de la pensée en générale, c'est-à-dire de l'imagination précise. C'est l'application à la conduite de la vie et à l'esthétique d'un certain principe moderne. Ce n'est pas une analyse. (CII, 81).<sup>64</sup> [My italics]

Reconsidered from the perspective of the intentional application of a *modern principle* – which we could identify, in the light of the letter to Ponge (1943), with *modern nihilism*, as the anti-foundational and post-metaphysical “*aestheticization*” of the world, in other words, with the unmasking of metaphysical constructions, and the extraction of *all* (man-made) absolute meanings and *moral values* - *l'écriture de l'absurde* in the MdS can be seen as developing in/as the *aesthetic* moment - «*l'imagination précise*» represents, in Camus' reflection, the faculty of human thought that is *closest* to sensory experience, and therefore more *concrete*, with words and images prolonging the sensory/sensual *touching-upon* (E, 59).<sup>65</sup>

I argue that the *lucid* or *absurd* conscience, in the MdS as well as in the lyrical essays, is the aesthetic *être-à* (*face à face*) of man-to-the-world: «Et qu'est-ce qui fait le fond de ce conflit, de cette fracture entre le monde et mon esprit, sinon la conscience que j'en ai? Si donc je veux le maintenir, c'est par une conscience perpétuelle, toujours renouvelée, toujours tendue.» (MdS, 136).

Beyond the apparent Kantian terminology, the metaphysical presumption inherent in the subject-object dualism is shattered:<sup>66</sup> there is no *objective correlate* to a subjective pole of consciousness, properly speaking, and the *evidence* of *ex-istence* is all that offers itself in/as the aesthetic *toucher-à*. Thus, I argue, the *absurd* is brought forth as the *-à* of that finite and sensory *être-à*.

*Éprouver, toucher* de-limit the finite thought (“*pensée humiliée*”), defining the existence of the world-to-man and of man himself to-himself: «L'esprit arrivé aux confins doit porter un jugement et choisir ses conclusions. [...] À ce point de son effort, l'homme se

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<sup>64</sup> «Mais une fois ce monde tracé à grands traits, la première pierre (il n'y en a qu'une) posée, philosopher devient possible – ou plus exactement, si on a bien compris – devient nécessaire. L'analyse et la rigueur sont exigées et réintroduites. C'est le détail et la description qui triomphent. [...] – D'où une étude précise et rigoureuse – sans conclusions – sur la révolte.» (CII, 81).

<sup>65</sup> According to Nancy, «[dans la littérature], l'existence [...] des pierres *n'est pas* le rapport de celles-ci à une subjectivité. C'est l'inverse : une subjectivité se distend, dans l'écriture, jusqu'à *toucher*, comme du bout du doigt, *cela* sans quoi il n'y aurait rien à écrire, et qui reste *dehors*, et qui est le monde, et qui pourtant, c'est vrai, ne se présente « existant » que dans ce geste d'écriture.» (J.-L. Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, op. cit., n. 1, p. 25).

<sup>66</sup> « Ce cœur même qui est le mien me restera à jamais indéfinissable. Entre la certitude que j'ai de mon existence et le contenu que j'essaie de donner à cette assurance, le fossé ne sera jamais comblé. Pour toujours, je serai étranger à moi-même. En psychologie comme en logique, *il y a des vérités mais point de vérité*. Le « connais-toi toi-même » de Socrate a autant de valeur que le « sois vertueux » de nos confessionnaux. [...] Ce sont des jeux stériles sur des grands sujets. » (MdS, 111). « Je veux délivrer mon univers de ses fantômes et le peupler seulement des *vérités de chair* dont je ne peux nier la présence » (MdS, 179).

trouve devant l'irrationnel. Il *sent* en lui son désir de bonheur et de raison. L'absurde naît de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde ». <sup>67</sup>

The notion of the absurd is defined as «la première de mes vérités», that is, of the finite, relative (E, 75) and *aesthetic* truths: «L'unique donnée est pour moi l'absurde» (MdS, 121), not so much in the sense in which something is given, as an *object* to a subject, but rather in the sense that the *aesthetic* conscience of the absurd *is* (in) the *con-tact* of man-and-world, in their mutual ex-position.

It is not possible to understand Camus' critique of the nihilistic drifts in contemporary thought without fully acknowledging the relationship between his definition of the absurd and what we have called the *aesthetic* here-and-now (*lucidity*). It is in the *aesthetic* present that the absurd is "given" as the "appearance" of that *être-à* which constitutes the *ex-* (ex-position, existence) of the finite:<sup>68</sup>

[...] l'absurde n'est pas dans l'homme (si une pareille métaphore pouvait avoir un sens), ni dans le monde, mais dans leur présence commune. Il est pour le moment le seul lien qui les unisse. Si j'en veux rester aux évidences, je sais ce que veut l'homme, je sais ce que lui offre le monde et maintenant je puis dire que je sais encore ce qui les unit. [...] La singulière trinité qu'on met ainsi à jour n'a rien d'une Amérique soudain découverte. [...] Le premier de ses caractères à cet égard est qu'elle ne peut se diviser. Détruire un de ses termes, c'est la détruire tout entière. Il ne peut y avoir de l'absurde hors d'un esprit humain. Ainsi l'absurde finit comme toutes choses avec la mort. Mais il ne peut non plus y avoir d'absurde hors de ce monde. (MdS, 120-121).

Contrary to André Compte-Sponville's definition, according to whom «l'absurde est dans *l'homme-au-monde* ou dans *le monde-avec-l'homme*, et c'est par quoi il est comme le troisième terme qui, au cœur de cette dualité (et la transformant [...] en « singulière trinité » [...]), <sup>69</sup> the emphasis on the *aesthetic* moment allows to trace the absurd in the *-à* of the

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<sup>67</sup> According to Arnaud Corbic, «définir l'absurde comme ce qui "naît de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde », c'est penser le monde comme devant avoir un sens *a priori*, ce qui est discutable » (A. Corbic, *Camus, L'absurde, la révolte, l'amour*, Éditions de l'atelier, Paris, 2003, pp. 51-52). I would argue that Camus' definition of the absurd precisely rejects such presupposition: Nancy's work provides in this sense a better key for understanding the man-world relation in MdS, as his analysis of the question of the world, centred around the notion of *entendement*, shows to be closer to Camus' argument (E, 136): «Et si [...] il ne faut pas étendre *l'existence* (l' "ek-sistence") [...] au-delà de l'homme, la comprendre plus largement que comme seulement humaine. Question difficile [...] que Heidegger n'a pas envisagée. C'est au fond la question de *l'existence du monde*. Non pas seulement « quel est le sens de l'existence (humaine) ? », mais, si le monde n'est pas séparable de celle-ci, s'il n'est pas le contexte contingent d'une existentialité, mais le lieu même de l'existentialité, « pourquoi y-t-il le monde, en sa totalité ? » [...] A ce compte, il fait bien avouer que « la pierre à même la pierre » peut difficilement être réduite à une immanence « pure », ou bien il faut pouvoir reconnaître que toute « immanence » est aussi en quelque manière « à soi ». Alors, la pierre n'est pas une essence (et sinon, comment sa dureté se ferait-elle *sentir* dure ?), et il n'y a d'essence que pour *l'entendement* [...]. » (J.-L. Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, op. cit., p. 24, n. 1).

<sup>68</sup> « Quello che Camus chiama l'assurdo, altro non è che il finito, dunque. L'esistenza che è separata dal tutto e collocata nell'orizzonte del tempo chiuso », P. Flores d'Arcais, "L'assurdo e la rivolta: Albert Camus filosofo del finito", in *Micro-Mega. Almanacco di Filosofia*, 1996, p. 203.

<sup>69</sup> André Compte-Sponville, *L'absurde dans le Mythe de Sisyphe*, art. cit., p. 162.



*être-au-monde* of man, which is at the same time the *être-à-l'homme* of the world, and which is an *être-avec* exclusively in the sense of an appearing-together (*com-pearance*).

Therefore, the absurd should be understood not so much as a third term or “entity” between man and world, but rather, as the limit or threshold on which the *ex-* of existence is immediately and irreparably exposed in/as the *cum-* (what Camus repeatedly addresses as “*contradiction*”) of the *con-tact* to the absurd walls (MdS, 113).<sup>70</sup> It is in this sense that I suggest we interpret Camus’s third metaphor of the (notion of the) absurd in the chapter on “*Le suicide philosophique*”: «La singulière trinité [homme-monde-absurde] qu’on met ainsi à jour n’a rien d’une Amérique soudain découverte. Mais elle a ceci de commun avec les données de l’expérience qu’elle est à la fois infiniment simple et infiniment compliquée » (MdS, 120).

This reading of the absurd in the MdS is confirmed by Camus’ notes on love.<sup>71</sup> In the lyrical essays and the MdS, love is not previous to but co-original with the absurd: both lie in the fragility of the sensory contact (*aisthesis*),<sup>72</sup> in which the *ex-* of existence is experienced as «intimate exteriority».<sup>73</sup> He notes in his *Carnets* in 1940 :

L’amour est-il si loin lorsque, dans la grande maison carrée au-dessus de la mer, les deux corps se rejoignent et se pressent après être montés dans le vent et que, du fond de l’horizon, la respiration sourde de la mer monte jusqu’à cette chambre isolée dans le monde? Nuit merveilleuse où l’espoir d’amour ne se sépare pas de la pluie, du ciel et des silences de la terre. Juste équilibre de *deux êtres unis par l’extérieur* et rendus semblables par une *commune indifférence* à tout ce qui n’est pas *ce moment dans le monde* » (CI, 196). [My italics]

Love is not defined as the indistinct and total fusion of the lovers: the sensual union, as a finite union « *par l’extérieur* », that exposes, in the fragile nakedness of their *ex-*istence, the

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<sup>70</sup> «c’est *par l’extérieur* que nous avons pu circonscrire l’absurde» (MdS, 119).

<sup>71</sup>The position I hold is opposed to Arnaud Corbic’s : «[...]n’oublions pas que l’amour, comme consentement à la vie sous-jacent à la révolte, faisait objet des deux premières œuvres de Camus [*L’Envers et l’endroit* et *Noces*]. L’amour y apparaissait déjà comme antérieur à l’expérience de l’absurde, et il occupait, comme nous l’avons signalé, la position d’origine par rapport à l’absurde qui constitue un commencement à proprement parler» (A. Corbic, op. cit., p. 124). The focus on Camus’ *aesthetic* perspective collapses the distinction between love (origin) and absurd (commencement), rejecting the thesis of as a discontinuity between the lyrical essays and the MdS.

<sup>72</sup> He notes in his *Carnets* in Mai ’36: «Tous les contacts= culte du Moi? Non. Culte du moi présuppose amateurisme ou optimisme. Deux foutaises. Non pas choisir sa vie, mais *l’étendre* » (CI, 38). [My italics]

<sup>73</sup> «Infatti gli amanti percepiscono appieno la fragilità del loro comparire. E poiché nella fragile gloria dell’esistente il *cum* della loro comunità è qui anche un affidamento reciproco – fidando l’uno nel tocco dell’altra – essi si affidano. [...] questo è la comunità: una relazione che costituisce l’esistente in quanto intima esteriorità», Adriana Cavarero, “Nascita, orgasmo, politica”, in *MicroMega, Almanacco di Filosofia* 1996, p. 146.

irreducible distinctiveness (unicity) of the lovers,<sup>74</sup> and takes place in *hic et nunc* of the *aesthetic* present, proclaiming its irreparable finitude:<sup>75</sup> «Plus on aime et plus l'absurde se consolide» (MdS, 152).

It is not surprising that Don Juan figures as one of the « illustrations » of the absurd:

On ne comprend bien Don Juan qu'en se référant toujours à ce qu'il symbolise vulgairement : le séducteur ordinaire et l'homme à femmes. Il est un séducteur ordinaire. A cette différence près qu'il est conscient et c'est par là qu'il est absurde. Un séducteur devenu lucide ne changera pas pour autant. Séduire est son état. [...] Mais on peut dire qu'à la fois rien n'est changé et tout est transformé. Ce que Don Juan met en acte, c'est une éthique de la quantité, au contraire du saint qui tend vers la qualité. *Ne pas croire au sens profond des choses, c'est le propre de l'homme absurde.* Ces visages chaleureux ou émerveillés, il les parcourt, les engrange et les brûle. *Le temps marche avec lui. L'homme absurde est celui qui ne se sépare pas du temps.* Don Juan ne pense pas à « collectionner » les femmes. Il en épuise le nombre et avec elles les chances de vie. Collectionner, c'est être capable de vivre de son passé. Mais lui refuse le regret, cette autre forme de l'espoir. Il ne sait pas regarder les portraits. (MdS, 154) [My italics]

Don Juan embodies the lover - but «[i]l est ridicule de le représenter comme un illuminé en quête de l'amour total. Mais c'est bien parce qu'il les aime avec un égal emportement et chaque fois avec tout lui-même, qu'il lui faut *répéter ce don* et cet approfondissement » (MdS, 152). Not an absolute and ideal (transcendent) love, but the finite, sensual love that is consumed and infinitely *repeated* in the *aesthetic* "present" of the lovers' naked being-exposed to, and *touching upon* each other. The rejection of an ultimate, transcendent meaning («sens profond des choses») divests life of the "qualities" (metaphysical, social, personal) that diverts man from *time* (the "here-and-now" of the lucid "*pensée ramenée au corps*"). In the *aesthetic* present, ex-istence is restored to its naked *in-difference* and fragility.<sup>76</sup> Repetition in the present - as opposed to "collection", which

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<sup>74</sup> « Perchè la sola distinzione in atto è ora invece quella di due irripetibili unità, le quali, comparando insieme, appunto si distinguono. Non c'est dunque alcuna fusione degli amanti nell'unità, nonostante la fabula che da millenni abbiamo sentito raccontare. [...] La mitica comunità perfetta, che divora l'individuo, è di nuovo all'opera. Le due esistenze, fondendosi nell'uno-tutto, scompaiono così nel gorgo del nessun luogo: proprio lo stesso luogo, dice una notissima variante della fabula, da cui erano venuti, ossia la madre. Nascita e morte, nell'eterna seduzione dell'inorganico, sarebbero dunque la stessa cosa. Purché il finito, qualora gli sia concesso un qualche rapido splendore, bruci nell'atto della sua annichilazione. [...] Ma, a dispetto della fabula antica, gli amanti non vogliono affatto morire l'una nell'altro. Essi vogliono invece il pieno splendore del finito secondo la reciproca unicità che li espone e li distingue nel *cum*. Ammandosi, essi semplicemente rinascono alla fragilità inaugurale e relazionale della loro esistenza. [...] Essi non tornano nel ventre della madre, anzi, escono di nuovo nella nudità inaugurale dell'apparenza. » (A. Cavarero, "Nascita, orgasmo, politica", art. cit., pp. 144-5). See Camus' note in 1936 (CI, 23).

<sup>75</sup> Residing in the *aesthetic* «*dénuelement*» (CI, 46-47), the physical nakedness in which the lucid man experiences his bareness («l'homme délivré de l'humain»), Camus' notion of love is associated with the image of an «accord de la main et des fleurs» which, brings the emphasis on the unbridgeable liminality and fragility of the relation: love confirms, rather than overcomes, the finitude. See also *Noces* (E, 60).

<sup>76</sup> The "ethics of quantity" embodied by Don Juan's repetition of the act of love can be read, with A. Cavarero, in the sense of the *nakedness* and *in-difference* of existence experienced by the lovers in the *aesthetic* "here-and-now" of sensual union. The latter strips the lovers of their personal and social qualities, repeating the *dénuelement* of birth and making their finitude visible: «Il rito sessuale, dunque, non è quello della fusione che annienterebbe l'unicità, vanificando l'atto stesso. E', se mai, il rito di ripetere l'inizio: esponendo ancora la nuda esposizione,

requires a retrospective look, which is necessarily inattentive to the *hic et nunc* – characterises the fragility of the lovers' appearing-together,<sup>77</sup> as an infinitely being-born and dying in the *aesthetic* «espacement» of their finite unicity:<sup>78</sup>

Don Juan sait et n'espère pas. Il fait penser à *ces artistes qui connaissent leur limites*, ne les excèdent jamais et, dans cet intervalle précaire où leur esprit s'installe, ont toute la merveilleuse aisance des maîtres. Et c'est bien là le génie : *l'intelligence qui connaît ses frontières*. Jusqu'à la frontière de la mort physique, Don Juan ignore la tristesse. Depuis le moment où il sait, son rire éclate [...]. Il fut triste dans le temps où il espéra. Aujourd'hui, sur la bouche de cette femme, il retrouve le goût amer et réconfortant de *la science unique*. (Mds, 152) [My highlighting]

The «unique science» of the *absurd* man is our key to the question of the *loss* or absence of meaning, introduced in the first chapter of the Mds as the problem of the absurd:

Cette raison universelle, pratique ou morale, ce déterminisme, ces catégories qui expliquent tout, ont de quoi faire rire l'homme honnête. Ils n'ont rien à voir avec l'esprit. Ils nient sa vérité profonde qui est d'être enchaîné. Dans cet univers indéchiffrable et limité, le destin de l'homme *prend désormais son sens*. (Mds, 113) [My italics]

Don Juan's resonant laugh is the laugh of the *honest* man, whose *unique* knowledge lies in the *finite* thought (*le savoir de ne pas savoir*) of the finitude of ex-istence – the *absurd walls*, as boundaries or limits, experienced in/as the *aesthetic* present.

The terms absurd/absurdity employed in the Mds disclose two distinct levels of analysis, which are essential in order to grasp the complexity of the author's investigation into the question of nihilism. If Audin and Comte-Sponville agree in pointing out that in the Mds the absurd cannot be reduced to the traditional acceptance of the term of “*absence of*

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non ancora coperta da alcunché, che inaugura l'apparire dell'esistenza. A saperlo guardare, infatti, *il nuovo nato è il prototipo stesso dell'esistenza senza qualità*. [...] *Comparendo nell'indifferenza verso le loro qualità – indifferenza che si fa massima nell'orgasmo – gli amanti, dunque, vengono a ripetere l'inizio della loro esistenza*. [...] È infatti proprio l'esperienza dell'orgasmo ad essere spesso identificata con la morte in quanto comunità perfetta: dove il piacere coinciderebbe appunto con l'annichilirsi dell'individuo nella logica autonoma e impersonale della carne. Tuttavia, *ciò che qui muore, anzi, è già morto, non è nient'altro che il soggetto paludato delle sue qualità. La perdita di senso di cosa uno è e sa di essere, ossia la totale dimenticanza delle proprie qualità personali e delle proprie qualificazioni sociali* viene così scambiata con la morte di sé. Eppure si tratta di una ripetizione della nascita, esperita da un sé senza qualità che, proprio per questa magnifica spoliazione, può improvvisamente ricordare l'originario coincidere di vita ed esistenza. Il prevalere del corpo è qui infatti soltanto inerza dell'esistente ad esso: ossia spiritualità della carne e carnalità dello spirito, che fanno della loro in distinzione il miracolo dell'unicità. Gli amanti si sono spogliati per accarezzare il loro corpo nudo: e tuttavia solo nell'orgasmo *la nudità dell'esistente è veramente tale in quanto non vestita di alcuna qualità*.» (A. Cavarero, “Nascita, orgasmo, politica”, art. cit., pp. 145-6) [My highlighting]

<sup>77</sup>« [Don Juan] apporte avec lui tous les visages du monde et son frémissement vient de ce qu'il se connaît périssable. Don Juan a choisi d'être rien.» (Mds, 155). «Tutta la fragilità del finito, infatti, è di nuovo qui: nell'interezza dell'esistente che rifiuta, anzi, irride ogni distinzione interna fra la sua carne e il suo spirito e *tocca* un altro esistente. Perché la sola distinzione in atto è ora invece quella di due irripetibili unicità, le quali, comparendo insieme, appunto si distinguono.» (A. Cavarero, “Nascita, orgasmo, politica”, art. cit., p. 144).

<sup>78</sup>«[...] L'homme absurde multiplie encore ici ce qu'il ne peut unifier. [...] Il n'y a d'amour généreux que celui qui se sait en même temps passager et singulier. Ce sont toutes ces morts et toutes ces renaissances qui font pour Don Juan la gerbe de sa vie. C'est la façon qu'il a de donner et de faire vivre. Je laisse à juger si l'on peut parler d'égoïsme.» (Mds, 155).

meaning”, properly speaking, the absurd cannot be defined as “contradictory meaning”:<sup>79</sup> the error would be to fall back into a substantialist approach to the *raisonnement absurde*, which, I argue, contradicts its anti-foundational premises. There is an essential difference between stating, with Comte-Sponville, that the meaning of the absurd is contradictory, and saying, as Camus does in ‘45, that the absurd is «contadictoire *en existence*»:

[L’absurde] exclut en fait les jugements de valeur et les jugements de valeur sont. Ils sont parce qu’ils sont liés au fait même d’exister. (E, 1696-97)

The 1950 essay *L’Énigme* sheds further light on this point:

[...] *il n’y a pas de nihilisme total*. Dès l’instant où l’on dit que tout est non-sens, on exprime quelque chose qui a du sens. Refuser toute signification au monde revient à supprimer tout jugement de valeur. Mais vivre, et par exemple se nourrir, est en soi un jugement de valeur. On choisit de durer dès l’instant qu’on ne se laisse pas mourir, et l’on reconnaît alors une valeur, au moins relative, à la vie. (E, 865).

Defined as the « *cette confrontation* »<sup>80</sup> entre l’appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde » (MdS, 117-118),<sup>81</sup> we have traced the absurd in the *aesthetic* awareness of the *être-à*, which coincides with the lucid unmasking of the fictitious *décors* that traditionally comprehended the world in a familiar unity – that is, that *gave* its meaning to existence. The echoes of Nietzsche’s *aestheticism* resound in Camus’ identification of the absurd with the *lucid* awareness of the *absence* of meaning: of the ultimate meaning or foundation *il n’en est rien*, it does not *take place*, it is *not (nihil)* in the sense of the sensory *espacement* “here-and-now” which delimits the evidence of the absurd thought.

One first meaning of *nihilism* in the MdS can thus be traced in the *finite* thought of the finite. From the *aesthetic* perspective – which, as we have shown, pervades the lyrical essays of *Noces*, and is developed by Camus in the 1942 philosophical essay - existence lacks

<sup>79</sup> « [l]’absurdité n’est [...] *pas l’absence de sens*: ces expressions ont bien un sens (c’est bien parce qu’elles ont un sens qu’elles peuvent être absurdes), mais ce sens est contradictoire. De même quand un homme se jette sabre au clair contre un nid de mitrailleuses : son acte peut bien avoir un sens, et même il en est sans doute un, mais il n’en sera pas moins jugé absurde « en vertu de la disproportion qui existe entre son intention et la réalité qui l’attend, de la contradiction que je puis saisir entre ses forces réelles et le but qu’il se propose » (MdS, 120). Qui dit absurde dit donc dualité, rencontre (mais rencontre impossible ou paradoxale), affrontement [...] » (A. Comte-Sponville, « L’absurde dans le *Mythe de Sisyphe* », op. cit., p. 161).

<sup>80</sup> « [...] l’absurdité naît d’une comparaison. Je suis donc fondé à dire que le sentiment de l’absurdité ne naît pas du simple examen d’un fait ou d’une impression mais qu’il jaillit de la comparaison entre un état de fait et une certaine réalité, entre une action et le monde qui la dépasse. L’absurde est essentiellement un divorce. Il n’est ni dans l’un ni dans l’autre des éléments comparés. Il naît de leur confrontation. » (MdS, 120).

<sup>81</sup> « Le monde pour [l’esprit absurde] n’est ni aussi rationnel ni à ce point irrationnel. Il est déraisonnable et il n’est que cela » (E, 134) : the term « déraisonnable » contains the mutual *toucher-à* of man, with his desire for clarity, and world. Comte-Sponville correctly points out that « [q]ui dit absurde dit donc dualité, rencontre (mais rencontre impossible ou paradoxale), affrontement » (art. cit., p. 161), but this duality can only be apprehended in the *être-à* of the terms, in their *con*-tact that makes their exposition visible.

nothing.<sup>82</sup> In the *absurd* argument of the MdS, the reduction to the so-called «factual judgements» has no other meaning than the replacement of explanation - the will to truth as *reductio ad unum*, drawing the dispersed multiplicity of the *éclats miroitants* of experience into the pre-sentation of some Un-presentable – with a modest effort of description or enumeration of appearances within the limits of the *aesthetic* experience (MdS, 106, 112). In this sense, the finite thought of the MdS is not

une pensée de l'abîme et du néant, mais une pensée de l'in-fondement de l'être : de cet « être », le seul, dont l'existence épuise toute la substance et toute la possibilité.

Une pensée de l'absence de sens comme le seul gage de la présence de l'existant. [...] il n'y a pas de sens final, mais un sens fini, du sens fini, des sens finis, une multiplication d'éclats singuliers de sens prélevés sur aucune unité ni substance.<sup>83</sup>

The *aesthetic* refusal, implicit in Camus' definition of the absurd, to appeal to an absolute principle or meaning - *ab-solutus* from sensory experience, but nevertheless to be *found* in the world - excludes the hypostatisation of *this* absence (*total nihilism*).

To derive from the *aesthetic nihil* of a transcendent meaning the conclusion of the total meaninglessness of existence, in this sense, would be to “dishonestly” take one step *beyond* the absurd as defined in the MdS. This is why the finite thought developed by Camus in the 1942 essay, questioning the problem of meaning, cannot be ranged among those «pensées abattues, égarées ou déprimées, pensées du peu-ou-pas-de-sens».<sup>84</sup> For Camus, there can be no “honest” thought of *little* or *no* meaning: as he points out in *l'Énigme*, the very *act* of existence *means* that we accord life a *meaning*, as a philosophical position *total nihilism* is inconsistent, and refuted by the very fact of living.<sup>85</sup>

But the value that we accord to life in and by the act of existence is not less *absolute* – that is, fundamental and unquestionable – because it is *relative*. I suggest that we trace the meaning of the term “*relative*” (E, 865), once again, back to the *aesthetic* awareness of the *hic et nunc* which constitutes *existence* as the being-exposed to the limits (*absurd*). In this sense, the *relativity* of the value of life coincides with the lucid awareness of the *infinite* finitude of

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<sup>82</sup> Which is not to deny that man does not feel the lack of an ultimate foundation - «la nostalgie de l'unité profonde de l'univers, la nostalgie de la parole qui résumerait tout [...], du verbe enfin qui illumine.» (E, 1666) [My italics]– which is inscribed in the very definition of the absurd as *relation*: the absence of meaning or foundation is precisely what constitutes the *ex-* of existence as the incessant *toucher-à* of a man and a world «*arc-butant* l'un sur l'autre».

<sup>83</sup> J.-L. Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>84</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>85</sup> « [...] il se fait que nous existons, et que nous “comprenons” que cela (nous-mêmes) n'est pas l'in-sensé d'une signification résorbée, annulée. Dans la détresse et dans la nécessité, nous «comprenons» que «nous», ici, maintenant, est encore, à nouveau, responsable d'un sens singulier. » (J.-L. Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, op. cit., p. 31).

existence, made visible in the liminality (*être-à*) of the *aesthetic* living here-and-now,<sup>86</sup> which suspends all question about the ultimate ground.

Thus, if Camus' argument of the absurd in the MdS develops a *nihilistic* thought in the very specific acceptance that we have tried to outline above of an "aesthetic", that is, finite and anti-foundational, perspective, it does not, however, justify an *absurdist* position.<sup>87</sup> As defined in the MdS, the absurd is *relative*: it is the *lien* between man and world (as their *toucher-à* and *être-à*) that constitutes existence as finite; in this sense, it cannot be absolutized nor substantialized. This, I argue, is the key to Camus' critique of Existential philosophies in the chapter on "philosophical suicide".

### 1.3. CREATION AND TRAGIC THOUGHT.

According to the author, the so-called *philosophies existentielles* – from Kierkegaard to Chestov, to Jaspers and Heidegger, to the phenomenologists and Scheler – have diagnosed the absurd,<sup>88</sup> but «[p]ar un raisonnement singulier, partis de l'absurde sur les décombres de la raison, dans un univers fermé et limité à l'humain, ils divinisent ce qui les écrase et trouvent une raison d'espérer dans ce qui les démunit » - « [...] toutes, sans exception, me proposent l'évasion » (MdS, 122).

Alien to philosophical language,<sup>89</sup> the term « hope » (*espoir/espérer*) acquires a precise metaphysical dimension in the MdS by virtue of its semantic opposition to the constellation of the Absurd. From the opening pages of the essay, the traditional positive connotation of the term is reversed into an absolute negativity: «L'esquive mortelle qui fait le troisième thème de cet essai, c'est l'espérance» (MdS, 102).

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<sup>86</sup> As Nancy points out, « une pensée du sens fini est essentiellement une pensée "matérielle" de la "matérialité" de l'accès au sens. Parce que le sens est fini, on n'y accède pas hors de ce monde. Parce qu'il n'y a pas de « dehors », on n'accède pas. » (*Une pensée finie*, op. cit., p. 35). The stress on the *aesthetic* dimension in Camus' absurd thought, as a "pensée matérielle", supports the interpretation of the author's use of the term *relative* to characterize the value of life in the sense of a *finite* meaning within the « material » limits of sensory experience.

<sup>87</sup> On this point I agree with F. H. Willhoite Jr., in *Beyond Nihilism, Albert Camus's Contribution to Political Thought*, Louisiana State UP, Baton Rouge, 1968, p. 27.

<sup>88</sup> «[...] sur le plan logique et sur le plan moral, toute une famille d'esprits, parents par leur nostalgie, opposés par leur méthodes ou leur buts, se sont acharnés à barrer la voie royale de la raison et à retrouver les droits chemins de la vérité. [...] tous sont partis de cet univers indicible où règnent la contradiction, l'antinomie, l'angoisse ou l'impuissance » (E, 114).

<sup>89</sup> As M.L.Audin points out, the term *espoir* is associated, through the indirect evocation of a Promised Land, to the transient and transitional character of death as disclosing another life (*Pour une sémiotique...*, op. cit., p. 160).

Identified with 'esquive',<sup>90</sup> hope is integrated in the metaphoric constellation of *jeu*, as 'illusion' (*mensonge*), «*tricherie de ceux qui vivent non pour la vie elle-même, mais pour quelque grande idée qui la dépasse [...]*» (MdS, 102-3). Hope is associated to suicide, as «*jeu mortel qui mène de la lucidité en face de l'existence à l'évasion hors de la lumière*» (MdS, 100) – where «*lumière*» designates a specific type of knowledge : «*Cet essai [Le Mythe de Sisyphe] tient compte au contraire des lumières que nous avons prises de notre exil*». Man is exiled in a “disenchanted” world,<sup>91</sup> the “lights” of modern thought coinciding with the anti-foundational awareness of the *absurd walls* that de-limit the finitude of existence. From this perspective, hope is characterized as a form of intellectual cowardice, as an “*escamotage*” to evade the absurd «*univers fermé et limité à l'humain*» of the finite.

What Camus points out in authors such as Shestov, Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Husserl is a common “mystical” reversal of the absurd argument,<sup>92</sup> from the initial evidence of the *échec* of human reason, to the positive affirmation of the “essence” of existence («*l'être de l'expérience et le sens supra-humain de la vie*», MdS, 122). From this perspective, Camus insists that:

[...]le raisonnement que cet essai poursuit laisse entièrement de côté l'attitude spirituelle la plus répandue dans notre siècle éclairé: celle qui s'appuie sur le principe que tout est raison et qui vise à donner une explication au monde. Il est naturel d'en donner une vue claire lorsqu'on admet qu'il doit être clair. Cela est même légitime, mais n'intéresse pas le raisonnement que nous poursuivons ici. Son but, en effet, c'est d'éclairer la démarche de l'esprit lorsque, parti d'une philosophie de la non-signification du monde, il finit par lui trouver un sens et une profondeur. (MdS, 129) [My italics]

Husserl's rationalistic «*métaphysique de consolation*» (MdS, 132), which «*restitue sa profondeur à l'expérience*» (MdS, 131) by grounding the dispersed *miroitement* of appearances, brought forth by phenomenological thought, in a plurality of «*essences extra-temporelles*» (Id.),<sup>93</sup> figures in the MdS as one side of the spectrum of philosophical *escamotage*, which has its opposite extreme in Shestov and Kierkegaard's irrationalistic solutions, and finds an almost caricatural illustration in Jaspers.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup>“Esquive” = “Esquiver”, du haut allemand “avoir peur” (italien: “fuir”); utilisé dans la terminologie sportive (terme de boxe, 1922); «*Action d'éviter avec adresse*» (Grand Larousse), «*Eviter habilement un attaque*» (Trésor de la Langue Française). In M.L. Audin, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>91</sup> See P. Flores d'Arcais, «*L'assurdo e la rivolta: Albert Camus filosofo del finito*», art. cit., p. 208.

<sup>92</sup> «*Cet espoir forcé est chez tous d'essence religieuse*» (MdS, 122). «*La pensée mystique nous a familiarisé avec ces procédés*» (MdS, 123).

<sup>93</sup> «*Il n'y a plus une seule idée qui explique tout, mais une infinité d'essences qui donnent un sens à une infinité d'objets. [...] le réalisme platonicien devient intuitif, mais c'est encore du réalisme. [...] ici la pensée se jette dans un polythéisme abstrait.*» (MdS, 131) [My italics]

<sup>94</sup> «*Mais Jaspers va nous fournir, poussé jusqu'à la caricature, un exemple de cette attitude. [...] On le laisse impuissant à réaliser la transcendant, incapable de sonder la profondeur de l'expérience et conscient de cet univers bouleversé par l'échec. [...] Pourtant, sans justification, il le dit lui-même, il affirme d'un seul jet à la*

According to Camus, Shestov and Kierkegaard<sup>95</sup> turn the feeling of absurdity into the ontological proof of a transcendent Being,<sup>96</sup> and dissolve the notion of the absurd,<sup>97</sup> by hypostatizing it in the «griserie de l'irrationnel et la vocation de l'extase»: «Dès l'instant où [la] notion [de l'absurde] se transforme en tremplin d'éternité, elle n'est plus liée à la *lucidité humaine*» (MdS, 124).

As a notion, the absurd is “relative”, thus «[s]i absurde il y a, c'est dans l'univers de l'homme» (Id.), that is, in that confrontation of man's elementary hopes and desires, his appetite for clarity, and the un-reasonable opacity of the world. It is in this confrontation that man *creates* the absurd universe (MdS, 121), in the sense that the absurd *is* this confrontation (MdS, 124).

Vivre, c'est faire vivre l'absurde. Le faire vivre, c'est avant tout le regarder. Au contraire d'Eurydice, l'absurde ne meurt que lorsqu'on s'en détourne. L'une des seules positions philosophiques cohérentes, c'est ainsi la révolte. Elle est un affrontement perpétuel de l'homme et de sa propre obscurité. Elle est l'exigence d'une impossible transparence. Elle remet le monde en question à chacune de ses secondes. (MdS, 138)

I argue that the movement of revolt,<sup>98</sup> evoked in the MdS as an act of *défi* and protest against the *absurd walls* that de-limit and de-fine existence, refusing all meta-physical hope, nonetheless recovers a meaning – thus, refuting total nihilism - in a way that can be thought, with Jean-Luc Nancy, in the following terms:

*Et pourtant, on n'a pas tort non plus, bien au contraire, de protester qu'il faut bien qu'il y ait quelque chose comme un sens du monde (ou comme du sens au monde) [...]. Cette protestation ne viendrait-elle – et elle vient, nécessairement, elle est déjà là [...] – que de ce qu'on appelle un « sentiment », cela même nous reconduit au sens dans la plus grande généralité sémantique du sentir.<sup>99</sup> C'est-à-dire, à nouveau, du rapport à ou de l'être-à-quelque chose, cette chose ne pouvant donc être qu'autre chose. Ainsi, « être au monde », si cela a lieu (mais*

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fois le transcendant, l'être de l'expérience et le sens supra-humain de la vie en écrivant : « L'échec ne montre-t-il pas, au-delà de toute explication et de toute interprétation possible, non le néant mais l'être de la transcendance ». Cet être qui, soudain et par un acte aveugle de la confiance humaine, explique tout, il le définit comme « l'unité inconcevable du général et du particulier ». Ainsi l'absurde devient dieu (dans le sens le plus large de ce mot) et cette impuissance à comprendre, l'être qui illumine tout » (MdS, 122).

<sup>95</sup> «[Kierkegaard] fait de l'absurde le critère de l'autre monde alors qu'il est seulement un résidu de l'expérience de ce monde. « Dans son échec, dit Kierkegaard, le croyant trouve son triomphe ». » (MdS, 126).

<sup>96</sup> « Cela passe, dit-on, la mesure humaine, il faut donc que cela soit surhumain. Mais ce « donc » est de trop. Il n'y a point ici de certitude logique. Il n'y a point non plus de probabilité expérimentale. Tout ce que je puis dire, c'est qu'en effet cela passe ma mesure. Si je n'en tire pas une négation, du moins je ne veux rien fonder sur l'incompréhensible. Je veux savoir si je puis vivre avec ce que je sais et avec cela seulement. » (MdS, 127).

<sup>97</sup> « Nous savons qu'il [l'absurde] ne vaut que dans un équilibre, qu'il est avant tout dans la comparaison et non point dans les termes de cette comparaison. Mais Shestov justement fait porter tout le poids sur l'un des termes et détruit l'équilibre. [...] Tout est sacrifié ici à l'irrationnel et l'exigence de clarté étant escamotée, l'absurde disparaît avec un des termes de sa comparaison. » (MdS, 124-5).

<sup>98</sup> « De même que le danger fournit à l'homme l'irremplaçable occasion de la saisir, de même la révolte métaphysique étend la conscience tout le long de l'expérience. Elle est cette présence constante de l'homme à lui-même. Elle n'est pas aspiration, elle est sans espoir. Cette révolte n'est que l'assurance d'un destin écrasant, moins la résignation qui devrait l'accompagner. » (MdS, 138).

<sup>99</sup> The echoes of Camus's fourth LAA are here apparent : « Je continue à croire que ce monde n'a pas de sens supérieur. Mais je sais que quelque chose en lui a du sens et c'est l'homme, parce qu'il est le seul être à exiger d'en avoir. » (E, 241). [My italics]



cela a lieu) est pris dans le sens bien avant toute signification. Cela fait sens, cela demande ou propose sens en deçà ou au-delà de toute signification. Si nous sommes *au monde*, s'il y a de l'être-au-monde en général, c'est-à-dire s'il y a du monde, il y a du sens. Le *il y a* fait sens par lui-même et comme tel. [...] Ainsi, *monde* n'est plus seulement corrélatif de *sens*, il est structuré comme *sens*, et réciproquement, *sens* est structure comme monde. En définitive, « le sens du monde » est une expression tautologique.

Toute la question, désormais, est de savoir si cette tautologie se réduit à la répétition, sous deux signifiants d'un même manque de signification (c'est le nihilisme), ou bien si elle énonce cette différence du même par laquelle le sens ferait monde et le monde ferait sens, mais tout autrement que par le renvoi à une signification.<sup>100</sup>

Borrowing Nancy's terminology, I suggest that Camus' understanding of the absurd exceeds the reference to (the sheer loss of) *signification*, to which the problem of nihilism is traditionally reduced: while incorporating the modern experience of a *loss* or *absence* of a transcendent meaning (*retreat of the world*) – identified in the historically situated *sentiment de l'absurdité* (*modern nihilism*) – the metaphors of the absurd, always and already, touch upon *le sens* in the acceptation of «*sensu*»/ *sentir* (*aisthesis*). Thus, by taking place in/as *aesthetic* judgement (“*révolte de la chair*”), the absurd *is* always and already disclosing a meaning.

As Camus points out in a letter to Pierre Bonnel in March 1943:

L'effort de la pensée absurde (et gratuite), c'est l'expulsion de tous les jugements de valeur au profit des jugements de fait. Or, nous savons, vous et moi, qu'il y a des jugements de valeur inévitables. Même par-delà le bien et le mal, il y a des actes qui paraissent bons ou mauvais et surtout il y a des spectacles qui nous paraissent beaux ou laids. [...] L'absurde, apparemment, pousse à vivre sans jugements de valeur et *vivre, c'est toujours, de façon plus ou moins élémentaire, juger.* (E, 1423) [My italics]

It is interesting to observe that, in the *Carnets* in September 1937, revolt is associated with an anti-metaphysical, anti-foundational attitude – a “no” to everything that transcends the irreducible contradictoriness of a finite condition («*Non et révolte* devant tout ce qui n'est pas les larmes et le soleil», CI, 77) - which is intimately related to a passionate “yes” to life, which has the form of the *aesthetic* “confrontation” of the lucid man to his finitude.<sup>101</sup>

This relation is confirmed in another note in the *Carnets*, taken from Kierkegaard's *Rien Philosophiques*:

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<sup>100</sup> J.-L. Nancy, *Le Sens du monde*, op. cit., p. 18. [My italics]

<sup>101</sup> In a note in the *Carnets* dated 15 september 1937, Camus situates revolt in the lucid awareness of what we have defined above as the *aesthetic* present: «Cette présence de moi-même à moi-même, mon effort est de la mener jusqu'au bout, de la maintenir devant tous les visages de ma vie [...]. Ne pas céder : tout est là. Ne pas consentir, ne pas trahir. Toute ma violence m'y aide et le point où elle me porte mon amour m'y rejoint et, avec lui, la furieuse passion de vivre qui fait le sens de mes journées. [...] Vie au visage de larmes et de soleil, vie sans le sel et la pierre chaude, vie comme je l'aime et je l'entends, il me semble qu'à la caresser, toutes mes forces de désespoir et d'amour se conjugueront. Aujourd'hui n'est pas comme un halte entre oui et non. Mais il est oui et il est non. Non et révolte devant tout ce qui n'est pas les larmes et le soleil. Oui à ma vie [...] » (CI, 76-77).

Le langage a raison dans le mot *passion* d'insister sur la souffrance de l'âme ; alors que l'emploi du mot *passion* nous fait penser plutôt à l'impétuosité convulsive qui nous étonne, et oublier ainsi qu'il s'agit d'une souffrance (orgueil – *défi*).

*Id.* L'acteur (de vie) parfait c'est celui qui « est agi » - et qui le sait, - la *passion passive*. (CI, 83) [My italics]

In the MdS, the *lucid* or *absurd* man's *aesthetic* conscience entails an act of *défi*, or *tension* by which the absurd is maintained, not as a "reality" to be looked upon – an *objective* fracture (Sub-stans) between man and the world - but as the *aesthetic* touching-upon-the-limit, which constitutes the finiteness of *ex*-istence.

By linking revolt to the *aesthetic judgement* of the *absurd* man, the question of meaning is reformulated within an *aesthetic*, *i.e.*, anti-foundational, horizon, disclosing, within the realm of *praxis*, a way out of the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of transcendent values:<sup>102</sup>

*Cette révolte donne son prix à la vie.* Étendue sur toute la longueur d'une existence, elle lui restitue sa grandeur. Pour un homme sans œillères, il n'est pas *de plus beau spectacle* que celui de l'intelligence aux prises avec une réalité qui le dépasse. *Le spectacle de l'orgueil humain est inégalable.* [...] L'homme absurde ne peut que tout épuiser, et s'épuiser. L'absurde est sa tension la plus extrême, celle qu'il maintient constamment d'un effort solitaire, car il sait que, *dans cette conscience et dans cette révolte au jour le jour, il témoigne de sa seule vérité qui est le défi.* (MdS, 139) [My italics]

The *praxis* in question, illustrated by the lucid «*acteur de vie*», is defined within the limits of a finite, anti- or post-metaphysical thought, as *passion passive*.<sup>103</sup> The lucid awareness of "being acted" (*passivity*) should not be confused with a profession of heteronomy, which subjects the absurd man to a superior necessity.<sup>104</sup>

[...] je n'ai rien à faire avec le problème de la liberté métaphysique. Savoir si l'homme est libre ne m'intéresse pas. Je ne puis éprouver que ma propre liberté. Sur elle, je ne puis avoir de notions générales, mais quelques aperçus clairs. Le problème de la « liberté en soi » n'a pas de sens. Car il est lié d'une tout autre façon à celui de Dieu. Savoir si l'homme est libre commande qu'on sache qu'il peut avoir un maître. [...] la notion même qui rend possible le problème de la liberté lui retire en même temps tout son sens. Car devant Dieu, il y a moins un problème de la liberté qu'un problème du mal. [...] je ne puis pas me perdre dans l'exaltation ou la simple définition d'une notion qui m'échappe et perd son sens à partir du moment où elle déborde le cadre de mon expérience individuelle. Je ne puis comprendre ce que peut être une liberté qui me serait donnée par un être supérieur. *J'ai perdu le sens de la hiérarchie. Je ne puis avoir de la liberté que la conception du prisonnier ou de l'individu moderne au sein de l'État.* La seule que je connaisse, c'est la liberté d'esprit et d'action. Or si l'absurde annihile toutes mes chances de liberté éternelle, il me rend et exalte au contraire ma liberté d'action. (MdS, 139-140) [My italics]

<sup>102</sup> MdS, 136-137.

<sup>103</sup> Passivity acquires its full meaning in the sense of the "sterility" of the finite (absurd) thought: «La seule pensée qui ne soit pas mensongère est donc une pensée stérile» (MdS, 151). I suggest that we read this passage with Nancy's *L'expérience de la liberté*, Galilée, Paris, 1988, pp. 22-23.

<sup>104</sup> Which is strongly excluded in the opening lines of the chapter on «Absurd Freedom» (MdS, 136).

Death makes the absurd perfectly visible (CI, 141) in the irreparable finitude of existence. A note in the *Carnets* in August 1938 allows us to link Camus' reflection on freedom to Nietzsche's *aesthetic* transvaluation of moral values:<sup>105</sup>

La seule liberté possible est une liberté à l'égard de la mort. L'homme vraiment libre est celui qui, acceptant la mort comme telle, en accepte du même coup les conséquences – c'est-à-dire *le renversement de toutes les valeurs traditionnelles de la vie*. Le « *Tout est permis* » d'Ivan Karamazov est la seule expression d'une liberté cohérente. Mais il faut aller au fond de la formule. (CI, 118-119) [My italics]

The freedom of the prisoner sentenced to death coincides with the lucid reduction to the *aesthetic present*, to the "here-and-now" of existence which erases all transcendent illusion – « Avant de rencontrer l'absurde, l'homme quotidien vit avec des buts, un souci d'avenir ou de justification (à l'égard de qui ou de quoi, ce n'est pas la question). Il évalue ses chances, il compte sur le plus tard, [...]. Il croit encore que quelque chose dans sa vie *peut se diriger*. [...] Cette idée que « je suis », ma façon *d'agir comme si* tout a un sens (même si à l'occasion, je disais que rien n'en a), tout cela se trouve démenti d'une façon vertigineuse par l'absurdité d'une mort possible » (MdS, 140).<sup>106</sup>

In the MdS, the absurd awareness that "I am acted" (*passive*) acquires its full meaning in the light of a rejection of teleological thinking - the delusory idea that I can *direct* (my) life, *actively* acting it toward an aim - whose *acting as if* is shattered by the "mathematical" evidence (CI, 141) and irrevocability of death. Passivity, in this sense, coincides with the re-opening of man's *availability of/to* action (MdS, 140).<sup>107</sup>

Fettered by the absurd "chains" of finiteness (MdS, 113), the only *reasonable* freedom,<sup>108</sup> for a *lucid* thought, is the « divine disponibilité du condamné à mort [...], cet incroyable désintéressement à l'égard de tout, sauf de la *flamme pure de la vie* » - « l'homme absurde se sent dégagé de tout ce qui n'est pas cette *attention passionnée* qui cristallise en lui » (MdS, 142).

L'homme absurde entrevoit ainsi un univers brûlant et glacé, transparent et limité, où rien n'est possible mais tout est donné, passé lequel c'est l'effondrement et le néant. Il peut alors décider d'accepter de vivre dans un tel univers et d'en tirer ses forces, son refus d'espérer et le témoignage obstiné d'une vie sans consolation. (MdS, 142).

<sup>105</sup> On the same page is the note on lucid death from Nietzsche's *Crépuscule des Idoles*.

<sup>106</sup> My italics.

<sup>107</sup> In September 1939, that is, in the immediate aftermath of the declaration of the Second World War, Camus wrote in his *Carnets*: « Il y a une fatalité unique qui est la mort et en dehors de quoi il n'y a plus de fatalité. Dans l'espace de temps qui va de la naissance à la mort, rien n'est fixé: on peut tout changer et même arrêter la guerre et même maintenir la paix, si on le veut assez, beaucoup et longtemps » (CI, 171).

<sup>108</sup> « [...] la seule liberté raisonnable: celle qu'un cœur humain peut éprouver et vivre » (MdS, 142).

This « passionate attentiveness » of the lucid man toward the finitude of his condition, illustrated in the image of generalized death sentence, is what characterizes revolt as *passion passive*, within which all action is inevitably recognized as «useless»: «Il n'y a qu'une action utile, celle qui referait l'homme et la terre. Je ne referais jamais les hommes» (MdS, 166).

The figure of the conqueror in the MdS embodies the metaphysical revolt of the *lucid* man against his finitude, whose freedom is (in) his restlessly repeated being-at-the-limit.<sup>109</sup>

Human action is *useless* because it is finite – everything is *not* possible, because, although man's hubristic attempts at mastering and changing nature may seem to be stretchable *ad infinitum*, the latter inexorably clash with the finitude of existence: human action cannot re-make men because it cannot eliminate death and evil. The conqueror's action is *passive*, that is, it takes place within the anti-metaphysical and anti-foundational limits of *aisthesis: la chair* is his only (finite) evidence (Id.).

It is in the conqueror's identity of finite *thought* of the finite and *passive* or useless *action*,<sup>110</sup> that, I suggest, we find the key to Camus' later political writings and, in particular, to his critique of ideologies.<sup>111</sup> The concept of *creation*, as formulated in the pages of the MdS, is essential, in my view, to grasp Camus' understanding of *action*, and plays a pivotal part in the development of the author's ethical and political reflections between 1943 and 1957.

It is significant that the conqueror - together with the actor and the artist, one of Camus' three illustrations of the absurd man – figures in Nietzsche's *La Volonté de Puissance*.<sup>112</sup> In the MdS, the conqueror and the artist (*créateur*) are defined as «*esprits parents*» (MdS, 192), which share a common (*absurd*) awareness of the uselessness of creation – «Ainsi je demande à la création absurde ce que j'exigeais de la pensée, la révolte, le liberté et la diversité. Elle manifesterait ensuite sa profonde inutilité » (Id.). According to Camus,

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<sup>109</sup> «[...] en face de la contradiction essentielle, je soutiens mon humain contradiction. J'installe ma lucidité au milieu de ce qui la nie. J'exalte l'homme devant ce qui l'écrase et ma liberté, ma révolte et ma passion se rejoignent alors dans cette tension, cette clairvoyance et cette répétition démesurée » (MdS, 166).

<sup>110</sup> «Non, dit le conquérant, ne croyez pas que, pour aimer l'action, il m'a fallu désapprendre à penser. Je puis parfaitement au contraire définir ce que je crois. Car je le crois avec force et je le vois d'une vue certaine et claire » (MdS, 164).

<sup>111</sup> «Un cœur si tendu se dérobe à l'éternel et toutes les Églises, divines ou politiques, prétendent à l'éternel. Le bonheur et le courage, le salaire ou la justice, sont pour elles des fins secondaires. C'est une doctrine qu'elles apportent et il faut y souscrire. Mais je n'ai rien à faire des idées ou de l'éternel. Les vérités qui sont à ma mesure, la main peut les toucher. Je ne puis me séparer d'elles. Voilà pourquoi vous ne pouvez rien fonder sur moi : rien ne dure du conquérant et pas même ses doctrines » (MdS, 167).

<sup>112</sup> «Les degrés de la force créatrice: 1. L'acteur faisant de soi une certaine figure [...], 2. le poète, le sculpteur, le peintre ; 3. le maître, - Empédocle ; 4. le conquérant ; 5. le législateur (le philosophe) [...] » (VII, § 657, fr. 1883-1887).

[p]our tous ces personnages, leur œuvre les définit au moins autant qu'elle en est définie. Le comédien nous l'a appris : il n'y a pas de frontière entre le paraître et l'être. [...] Sur le chemin de cette liberté, il est encore un progrès à faire. Le dernier effort [...] est de savoir se libérer aussi de leurs entreprises : arriver à admettre que l'œuvre même, qu'elle soit conquête, amour ou création, peut ne pas être ; consommer ainsi l'inutilité profonde de toute vie individuelle. Cela même leur donne plus d'aisance dans la réalisation de cette œuvre, comme d'apercevoir l'absurdité de la vie les autorisait à s'y plonger avec tous les excès. (Mds, 192). [My italics]

Freed from the necessity of the *work of art* as product, the objective correlate of teleological thinking, *creation* is identified in the Mds with a form of discipline or *askesis*.<sup>113</sup> In the light of Camus' pages on freedom, absurd creation is not, properly speaking, a *poiesis* in that its useless action does not *make* anything. In the life-span of an individual there is nothing given or pre-determined, except the unique fatality of death that de-limits the material (finite) "space" of (infinite) possibilities.<sup>114</sup> What is "pro-duced" is exclusively the agent (*acteur de vie*) – in this sense absurd creation is a kind of *praxis*: «Créer, c'est ainsi donner une forme à son destin» (E, 192).<sup>115</sup>

À ce point, le problème est inversé. Il s'agissait précédemment de savoir si la vie devait avoir un sens pour être vécue. Il apparaît ici *au contraire* qu'elle sera d'autant *mieux* vécue *qu'elle n'aura pas de sens*. Vivre une expérience, un destin, c'est l'accepter pleinement. Or on ne vivra pas ce destin, le sachant absurde, si on ne fait pas tout pour maintenir devant soi cet absurde mis à jour par la conscience. Nier l'un des termes de l'opposition dont il vit, c'est lui échapper. Abolir la révolte consciente, c'est éluder le problème. (Mds, 138) [My italics]<sup>116</sup>

What emerges is a co-implication, mediated through *aisthesis*, of meaning and value : «La croyance au sens de la vie suppose toujours une échelle de valeurs, un choix, nos préférences» (Mds, 142-143). The lucid awareness of what Camus metaphorically describes as the *absurd walls* of the finite, which bring about the *tabula rasa* of (transcendent) value, «la croyance à l'absurde revient à remplacer la *qualité* des expériences par la *quantité*» (Mds,

<sup>113</sup> «Dans cet effort quotidien où l'intelligence et la passion se mêlent et se transportent, l'homme absurde découvre une discipline qui fera l'essentiel de ses forces. L'application qu'il y faut, l'entêtement et la clairvoyance rejoignent ainsi l'attitude conquérante.» (Mds, 192). [My italics]

<sup>114</sup> Nancy uses the term *chora* to define «non pas lieu indéterminé, mais possibilité de lieux, ou plutôt pure matière-à-lieux» (J.-L. Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, op. cit., p. 112).

<sup>115</sup> I suggest that we understand the discipline of the *absurd* creation in the sense of what Nancy calls *praxis* as "schematization": «C'est ainsi que l'existence est réellement au monde. Ce qui est "à faire" ne se situe pas sur le registre d'une *poiesis*, comme une œuvre dont le schème serait donné, mais sur le registre de la *praxis*, qui ne «produit» que son propre agent ou son propre acteur, et qui ressemblerait donc plutôt à l'action d'une schématisation [...]» (J.-L. Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, op. cit., p. 39). This interpretation is confirmed by my analysis of the pages on revolt and art in HR (see Chapter 2.4).

<sup>116</sup> We can say, with Nancy, that in the Mds, «[...] le motif du sens [est] désormais placé sous cette exigence : penser sa finitude, ne pas la combler ni l'apaiser, et pas non plus selon le mouvement insidieux d'une théologie ou d'une ontologie négatives, où l'insensé finit, à l'infini, par boucler le sens même. Mais penser l'inaccessibilité du sens comme l'accès même au sens, et de nouveau, en toute *rigueur*, cet accès n'ayant pas lieu, n'accédant pas à quelque inaccessible, mais ayant lieu, in-accédant à lui-même, à ce suspens, à cette fin, sur cette limite où simultanément il se défait et se conclut, sans médiation de l'un à l'autre geste. Une pensée finie est une pensée qui reste sur cette im-médiation.» (J.-L. Nancy, *Le Sens du monde*, op. cit., p. 29). Paolo Flores d'Arcais uses the expression «ethics of the finite» to describe this normative dimension in Camus' analysis of the absurd (in «L'assurdo e la rivolta : Albert Camus filosofo del finito», art. cit., p. 209).

143), « quality » designate here a number of experiences *organized* toward an *end*, producing a *meaningful* life.

Thus, the *ethics of quantity* defines the attitude of the *absurd* man, illustrated by Don Juan - as opposed to the *quality-oriented* attitude of the *saint* (MdS, 154) – as grounded in the anti-metaphysical refusal of Foundation,<sup>117</sup> which reduces “*sens*” (end/ meaning) to a man-made means for ordering and unifying the dispersed chaos of becoming:<sup>118</sup> «Là où la lucidité règne, l'échelle des valeurs devient inutile» (MdS, 144).

Si je me persuade que cette vie n'a d'autre face que celle de l'absurde, si *j'éprouve* que tout son équilibre tient à cette perpétuelle opposition entre ma révolte consciente et l'obscurité où elle se débat, si j'admets que ma liberté n'a de sens que par rapport à son destin limité, alors je dois dire que ce qui compte n'est pas de vivre le mieux mais de vivre le plus. [...] Une fois pour toutes, les jugements de valeur sont écartés ici au profit des jugements de fait. [...] J'ai seulement à tirer les conclusions de ce que je puis *voir* [...]» (MdS, 143) [My italics]

Now, according to Camus, it is the absurd «et sa *vie contradictoire*» (MdS, 144) which re-open the possibility for a *new* meaning: a *longer* experience, that is, a greater *amount* of experience, is what *changes* the table of values within the framework of a modern life-condition - <sup>120</sup> «Il nous faut imaginer cet aventurier du quotidien qui par simple quantité des expériences battrait tous les records (j'emploie à dessein ce terme sportif) et *gagnerait ainsi sa propre morale*.<sup>121</sup> [...] Battre tous les records, c'est d'abord et uniquement *être en face du monde le plus souvent possible*» (MdS, 144), that is, to maintain the absurd in/as the *aesthetic present* - «*Le présent et la succession des présents devant une âme sans cesse consciente, c'est l'idéal de l'homme absurde*» (MdS, 145).

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<sup>117</sup> The play-actor, as the second illustration of the *absurd* man, embodies Nietzsche's word: “Ce qui importe [...] ce n'est pas la vie éternelle, mais l'éternelle vivacité” (MdS, 162). The manuscript of the chapter attests that Camus took this sentence from Nietzsche's *Opinions et Sentences mêlées* (Aph. 408), see E, 1445, n. 1 to p. 162.

<sup>118</sup> « L'homme absurde multiplie [...] ce qu'il ne peut pas unifier » (MdS, 155).

<sup>119</sup> « [...] ma règle ici est de m'arranger de l'évidence immédiate » (MdS, 143).

<sup>120</sup> «[...] les conditions de la vie moderne imposent à la majorité des hommes la même quantité d'expériences et partant la même expérience profonde. [...] Je vois alors que le caractère propre d'une *morale commune* réside moins dans l'importance idéale des principes qui l'animent que dans la *norme* d'une expérience qu'il est possible de calibrer. En forçant un peu les choses, les Grecs avaient la morale de leurs loisirs comme nous avons celle de nos journées de huit heures. » (E, 143). A note in the *Carnets* in October 1941 sheds further light on Camus' use of the term “morale commune” as norm of conduct: «*Contradiction dans le monde moderne*. A' Athènes, le peuple ne pouvait vraiment exercer son pouvoir que parce qu'il y consacrait la plus grande partie de son temps, et des esclaves, tout le jour, faisaient les travaux qui restaient à faire. A' partir du moment où l'esclavage est supprimé, on met tout le monde au travail. Et c'est à cette époque où la prolétarisation de l'Européen est le plus avancée que l'idéal de souveraineté populaire se fait plus fort : cela est impossible » (CI, 247-248). This aspect, also pointed out by Nietzsche in his aphorism on compulsory and free work in *Human, all too human*, I, 439, plays a pivotal role in Hannah Arendt's analysis of the political in the *Human Condition*.

<sup>121</sup> The figure of the adventurer as the embodiment of the absurd thought recurs in the *Carnets* (July 1937): «L'aventurier. A le sentiment net qu'il n'y a plus rien à faire en art. Rien de grand ou nouveau n'est possible [...]. Il ne reste que l'action. Mais qui porte *une grande âme n'entrera dans cette action qu'avec désespoir* » (CI, 58)

Camus does not seem to be afraid of «faire comme tant de ces hommes dont je parlais plus haut, choisir la forme de vie qui nous apporte le plus possible de cette matière humaine, introduire par là une échelle de valeurs que d'un autre côté on prétend rejeter [...]» (MdS, 144). The nihilistic, i.e., anti-foundational and anti-metaphysical, perspective opened up by the evidence of the absurd is here preserved in the idea that, within the finite limits of the human condition, lucidity, as a form of sensory/sensual (*aesthetic*) awareness («être conscients»), *transfigures* the table of values and makes it *useless*: «Sentir sa vie, sa révolte, sa liberté, et le plus possible, c'est vivre et le plus possible» (Id.).<sup>122</sup>

Car l'erreur est de penser que cette quantité d'expériences dépend des circonstances de notre vie quand elle ne dépend que de nous.<sup>123</sup> (MdS, 144)

[...] Par le seul jeu de la conscience, je transforme en règle de vie ce qui était invitation à la mort – et je refuse le suicide. (MdS, 145-146) [My italics]

It is significant that Camus quotes Nietzsche in order to elucidate the meaning of this «transformation», or *transvaluation* of the nihilistic evidence into a new *norm of conduct*, morality thus being the result of a persistent and perseverant action in «*the same direction*», which brings about a value – something for which life is “made” worth living:

Quand Nietzsche écrit: « Il apparaît clairement que la chose principale au ciel et sur la terre est d'obéir longtemps et dans une même direction : à la longue il en résulte quelque chose pour quoi il vaille la peine de vivre sur cette terre comme par exemple la vertu, l'art, la musique, la danse, la raison, l'esprit, quelque chose qui transfigure, quelque chose de raffiné, de fou ou de divin », il illustre la règle d'une morale de grande allure. Mais il montre aussi le chemin de l'homme absurde. Obéir à la flamme, c'est à la fois ce qu'il y a de plus facile et de plus difficile. Il est bon cependant que l'homme, en se mesurant à la difficulté, se juge quelquefois. Il est le seul à pouvoir le faire. (MdS, 146) [My italics]

From the *antropomorphic/aesthetic* perspective of *modern nihilism*, Camus relates the transfiguration of the absurd evidence of the meaninglessness and valuelessness of the world into a *norm* or *rule* (“règle de combat”, MdS, 173), to the concept of *creation*. He, thus, resumes the Nietzschean *motif* of the unbearableness of absurd - «L'art et rien que l'art, dit Nietzsche, nous avons l'art pour ne point mourir de la vérité» (MdS, 173).<sup>124</sup>

<sup>122</sup> It is in this perspective that we fully grasp the meaning of Camus' note on the idea of the *nihil* or *nothingness* (*néant*), which is approached from the psychological viewpoint: «Dans l'expérience psychologique du néant, c'est à la considération de ce qui arrivera dans deux mille ans que notre propre néant prend véritablement son sens. Sous un de ses aspects, le néant est fait exactement de la somme des vies à venir qui ne seront pas les nôtres» (MdS, 145, note 1). [My italics]

<sup>123</sup> « Disons que le seul obstacle, le seul « manque à gagner » est constitué par la mort prématurée. [...] La folie et la mort, ce sont ses [de l'homme absurde] irrémédiables. L'homme ne choisit pas. L'absurde et le surcroît de vie qu'il comporte ne dépendent donc pas de la volonté de l'homme, mais de son contraire qui est la mort » (MdS, 144-145).

<sup>124</sup> The motif of “obedience” also recurs in the *Carnets* (January-February 1942): «À opposer « Le grand danger est de se laisser accaparer par une idée fixe » (Gide) et l' « obéissance » nietzschéenne.» (CII, 14).

Toutes ces vies maintenues dans l'air avare de l'absurde ne sauraient se soutenir sans quelque pensée profonde et constante qui les anime de sa force. Ici même ce ne peut être qu'un singulier sentiment de fidélité. [...] Il y a ainsi un *bonheur métaphysique* à soutenir l'absurdité du monde. La conquête ou le jeu, l'amour innombrable, la révolte absurde, ce sont des hommages que l'homme rend à sa dignité dans une campagne où il est d'avance vaincu.

Il s'agit seulement d'être fidèle à la règle du combat. [...] la *joie absurde* par excellence, c'est la *création* [...]. (Mds, 173) [My italics]

The absurd is developed around the opposition between two metaphoric poles, *nuit/aveugle*, designating the finiteness of a limited thought, as well as the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of meaning and value, and *flamme/lumière/lucidité*. Through the emphasis on «obéir à la *flamme*», which explicitly refers to the absurd, constantly designated in the essay through the metaphoric constellation of *vision* (thus, associated to light/lucidity/*clairvoyance*), Camus overturns the negative understanding of obscurity/blindness, associated with the nihilistic *loss of meaning*, as the necessary starting point of «*honest*» thinking:

[...] il faut que l'esprit rencontre la nuit", répondent les mystiques et les existentiels. Certes, mais non pas cette nuit qui naît sous les yeux fermés et par la seule volonté de l'homme – nuit sombre et close que l'esprit suscite pour s'y perdre. S'il doit rencontrer une nuit, que ce soit plutôt celle du désespoir qui reste lucide, nuit polaire, veille de l'esprit d'où se lèvera peut-être cette clarté blanche et intacte qui dessine chaque objet dans la lumière de l'intelligence. À ce degré, l'équivalence rencontre la compréhension passionnée. (Mds, 146)

It is interesting to observe a correspondence between the metaphor of the absurd, «*nuit polaire*»,<sup>125</sup> and the Nietzschean image of the «*traveller of the arctic pole*» in the *Genealogy of Morals* (III, 26), who represents the nihilistic culmination of the ascetic ideal. The latter

<sup>125</sup> As M.L.Audin points out, in the metaphor of the "polar night", the geographical element (*polaire*) amplifies the harshness and endlessness of a condition of darkness (*nuit*), which bears in itself the birth/rebirth of an endless day/light, traceable in *le grand Midi* (in Marie-Louise Audin, *Pour une sémiotique du Mythe de Sisyphe*, op. cit., p. 460). This idea is confirmed by Audin's reading of the metaphor of the desert: Camus' desert, as the Biblical one, expresses a transitory stage, a pathway leading the absurd man to the safe shores of the Island (*île*) (*Idib.*, p. 438-440). As Roger Quillot points out, the image of the isle «*chère à Nietzsche (le Gai Savoir, aph. 372; Ainsi parlait Zarathustra, "Les Iles bienheureuses")*», est au centre de l'oeuvre de Camus. Voir la Préface qu'il a donnée en 1959 à la réédition du livre de Jean Grenier, *Les Iles*» (E, p. 1447 n. 174). The metaphor of the *desert* recurrently used by Camus to describe the absurd experience of a world rendered to its primeval strangeness and meaninglessness (E, 116), in association to the notions of illusion and "mensonge" (E, 113), can already be found in a fragment dated 1885 in the French edition of Nietzsche's *La Volonté de Puissance*: «*Nous savons que la disparition d'une illusion ne crée pas tout de suite une vérité, mais un nouveau fragment d'ignorance, un élargissement de notre 'espace vide', un accroissement de notre 'désert'*» (VII, «*Le problème de la modernité*», §118). Furthermore, the link with the *Genealogy of Morals* seems to be suggested also by a note in Camus's *Carnets* (15 December 1942): «*Le beau, dit Nietzsche après Stendhal, est une promesse de bonheur. Mais s'il n'est pas le bonheur même, que peut-il promettre ?*» (CII, 60). This quotation echoes the *Généalogie de la morale*, III, § 6 where Nietzsche writes: «*Est beau – dit Kant – ce qui provoque un plaisir désintéressé. 'Désintéressé' : comparez avec cette définition cette autre, d'un véritable 'spectateur' et d'un artiste – Stendhal, qui appelle quelque part la beauté une promesse de bonheur. En tout cas, ici est récusé et rayé le seul aspect du fait esthétique que Kant mette en relief : le désintéressement.*». Kant's error, according to Nietzsche, consisted of approaching the aesthetical problem from the «*spectator*»'s viewpoint instead of the artist's (the creator's) experience, an idea with which the young Camus seemed to be already familiar in 1931. This is all the more significant if we consider that part III of the *Genealogy* provides the link between the 'aestheticism' of the *Crépuscule des Idoles* (which Camus read between '38 and '39), and the question of nihilism in the posthumous fragments, as man's will to *nothingness*.



coincides with a harsh and resolute sight directed *beyond*, in a deserted landscape where life is speechless (*le mutisme* of a world devoid of reasons) and only the « "À quoi bon?" "En vain!" "Nada!" » resound. It is precisely the «*ascetic ideal*» that closes the argument of the MdS, the philosophical essay conceived by its author as a "passionate definition" of modern nihilism.

In the chapter on *La création sans lendemain*, Camus insists on the relationship between the attitude of the *absurd* creator and the *negative* thought (*pensée négative*) described in the first part of the MdS, as a finite, anti-foundational and anti-metaphysical thought of the finite.<sup>126</sup> Now, the *absurd* work of art cannot be confused with the sheer attempt to *escape* or to find a comfortable *way out* of the unbearable view of the absurd "truth" (MdS, 174)

Exposing the nihilistic renouncement of all attempts to «surajouter au décrit un sens plus profond qu'elle [la pensée lucide] sait illégitime», the absurd work of art cannot provide an end, a meaning or consolation to the *absurd* life (MdS, 176):

L'œuvre absurde illustre le renoncement de la pensée à ses prestiges et sa résignation à n'être plus que l'intelligence qui met en œuvre les apparences et couvre d'images ce qui n'a pas de raison. Si le monde était clair, l'art ne serait pas. (MdS, 177)

In a note in the *Carnets* in November '42, Camus corrects this sentence, disavowing the implicit substantialist perspective in favour of the "modest" perspective of a finite thought of the finite:

Je n'aurais pas dû écrire : si le monde était clair, l'art ne serait pas – mais *si le monde me paraissait avoir un sens* je n'écrirais pas.<sup>127</sup> (CII, 54)

In the MdS, the artist, or the *creator*, is defined as the most *absurd* of the *lucid* characters (MdS, 170), in that he is *aware of the limits* of human thought – the question is no longer to explain but to feel (*éprouver*) and describe. It is in the *aesthetic present*, opened up by the discovery of the absurd,<sup>128</sup> that the *lucid* creation acquires its full meaning as the

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<sup>126</sup> «L'existence tout entière, pour un homme détourné de l'éternel, n'est qu'un mime démesuré sous le masque de l'absurde. La création c'est le grand mime. Ces hommes [*absurdes*] savent d'abord, et puis tout leur effort est de parcourir, d'agrandir et d'enrichir l'île sans avenir qu'ils viennent d'aborder. Mais il faut d'abord savoir» (MdS, 174).

<sup>127</sup> « Il y a des cas où il faut être personnel, par modestie. [...] C'est une vérité brillante, sans fondement » (CII, 54-55).

<sup>128</sup> « Car la découverte absurde coïncide avec un temps d'arrêt où s'élaborent et se légitiment les passions futures » (MdS, 174).

attempt to “transfigure” the nihilistic « *mort* d’une expérience » into the repetition and multiplication of *aisthesis*.<sup>129</sup>

The artistic transfiguration of a meaningless world, despoiled of the categories of human reason, does not attempt, however, to negate the *absurd* evidence from which it starts, and from which it gains its own “derisory” *meaning* (MdS, 179). On the one hand, the work of art attests the «renoncement de l’intelligence à raisonner le concret», or the metaphysical *échec* of a “humiliated” reason, and the consequent *aesthetic* «triomphe du *charnel*» (MdS, 176), as the visible *près-ence* of the finiteness of the human condition;<sup>130</sup> on the other hand, the *absurd* work of art is in itself the *futile* protest against this condition (MdS, 192).<sup>131</sup>

The *objectiveness* of the work of art is dissolved in the *aesthetic* awareness of the absurd – which does not mean that its sensory dimension is denied,<sup>132</sup> but rather that from the “useless”, *i.e.*, nihilistic, anti-foundational perspective (“*gratuité*”) of a finite thought reduced to *la chair*, work (“*œuvre*”) as such, generally designating all human enterprise, *makes sense* exclusively in the light of the constant *effort*, which constitutes the «attitude *créatrice*», as «l’une des celles qui peuvent compléter l’existence absurde» (MdS, 189).

What allows us to *complete* the absurd existence is, in Camus’ view, the *will* to maintain the *conscience* in which, and through which, the absurd exposes itself – the will not to *elude* the absurd evidence of the finite:

L’effort de *domination* est ici considérable. Mais l’intelligence humaine peut suffire à bien plus. Elle démontrera seulement *l’aspect volontaire de la création*. J’ai fait ressortir ailleurs que la volonté humaine n’avait d’autre fin que de maintenir la conscience. Mais cela ne saurait aller sans *discipline*. De toutes les écoles de la patience et de la lucidité, la création est la plus efficace. (MdS, 190). [My italics]

In the concluding pages of his essay Camus draws the elements of an *ascesis*, made visible in the absurd creation «without tomorrow» (*sans lendemain*), which is entirely grounded on the constant effort to maintain the awareness («*conscience surhumaine*», MdS, 190) of its uselessness («Travailler et créer «pour rien» [...]» - MdS, 189) and finiteness («il

<sup>129</sup> « Le cœur apprend ainsi que cette émotion qui nous transporte devant les visages du monde ne nous vient pas de sa profondeur mais de leur diversité. L’explication est vaine, mais la sensation reste, et, avec elle, les appels incessants d’un univers inépuisable en quantité. On comprend ici la place de l’œuvre d’art. » (MdS, 174).

<sup>130</sup> « [...] la suite [des] œuvres [de l’homme absurde] n’est qu’une collection d’échecs. Mais si ces échecs gardent tous la même résonance, le créateur a su répéter l’image de sa propre condition, faire retentir le secret stérile dont il est détenteur » (MdS, 190).

<sup>131</sup> He writes in his *Carnets* in November 1943: «Pour que l’œuvre soit *défi*, il faut qu’elle soit terminée (d’où la nécessité du « sans lendemain »). Elle est *le contraire de la création divine*. Elle est terminée, bien limitée, claire, *pêtrie de l’exigence humaine*. L’unité est dans nos mains ». (CII, 113). « [...] la création humaine, faite à partir du monde, est toujours pour finir tourné contre le monde. [...] C’est l’art et l’artiste qui refont le monde, mais toujours avec une arrière-pensée de *protestation*. » (CII, 116). [My italics]

<sup>132</sup> « La pensée abstraite rejoint enfin son support de chair. » (MdS, 178).

n'est pas de vraie création sans secret» - MdS, 190), and freed from the reifying dimension of the work of art and its logic of achievement – as sheer performance (MdS, 192):

[La création] est aussi le bouleversant témoignage de la seule dignité de l'homme : la *révolte* tenace contre sa condition, la persévérance dans un effort tenu pour stérile. Elle demande un *effort quotidien, la maîtrise de soi, l'appréciation exacte des limites du vrai, la mesure et la force*. Elle constitue une *ascèse*. Tout cela « pour rien », pour répéter et piétiner. [...] la grande œuvre d'art a moins d'importance en elle-même que dans l'épreuve qu'elle exige d'un homme et l'occasion qu'elle lui fournit de surmonter ses fantômes et d'approcher d'un peu plus près sa réalité nue. (MdS, 191) [My italics]

In March 1942 Camus notes in his *Carnets*:

Parvenu à l'absurde, s'essayant à vivre *en conséquence*, un homme s'aperçoit toujours que la conscience est la chose du monde la plus difficile à maintenir. Les circonstances presque toujours s'y opposent. Il s'agit de vivre la lucidité dans un monde où la dispersion est la règle.

Il s'aperçoit ainsi que le vrai problème, *même sans Dieu*, est le problème de l'unité psychologique ( le travail de l'absurde ne pose réellement que le problème de l'unité métaphysique du monde et de l'esprit) et la paix intérieure. Il s'aperçoit ainsi que celle-ci n'est pas possible sans une *discipline* difficile à concilier avec le monde. *Le problème est là*. Il faut justement la concilier avec le monde. Ce qu'il s'agit de réaliser c'est la *règle dans le siècle*. [...] (CII, 19-20) [My italics]

It is significant that in the Appendice to MdS on "*L'espoir et l'absurde dans l'œuvre de Franz Kafka*", first published in the review *Arbalète* in 1943, Camus would praise Nietzsche as «le seul artiste à avoir tiré les conséquences extrêmes d'une esthétique de l'Absurde, puisque son ultime message réside dans une *lucidité stérile et conquérante et une négation obstinée de toute consolation surnaturelle* » (MdS, 210).<sup>133</sup>

It is precisely in the pages on the absurd creation that we measure the terms of Camus' confrontation with Nietzsche. Camus defines *thinking* as the *will to create* or to *(de-)limit* (our) world (MdS, 177): starting from the absurd experience of the *divorce* between man and his condition, it is the attempt to find «un terrain d'entente selon sa nostalgie, un univers corseté de raisons ou éclairé d'analogies qui permette de résoudre le divorce *insupportable*. Le philosophe, même s'il est Kant, est *créateur*» (MdS, 177).<sup>134</sup>

Stemming from man's quest for *unity*,<sup>135</sup> *creation* plunges us to the heart of the problem of Nihilism, as exposed by Nietzsche in his posthumous fragments:

Développement de l'absurde:

- 1) si le souci fondamental est le besoin d'unité ;
- 2) si le monde (ou Dieu) n'y peuvent satisfaire.

C'est à l'homme de se *fabriquer* une unité, soit en se détournant du monde, soit à l'intérieur du monde. Ainsi se trouvent restituées une morale et une ascèse qui restent à préciser. (CII, 57)<sup>136</sup>

<sup>133</sup> My italics. E, 210.

<sup>134</sup> Camus is repeating here the (Nietzschean) idea that «toute pensée est antropomorphique» (MdS, 110).

<sup>135</sup> In a note in August '42: «Nostalgie de la vie des autres. C'est que, vue de l'extérieur, elle forme un tout. Tandis que la nôtre, vue de l'intérieur, paraît dispersée. Nous courons encore après une illusion d'unité » (CII, 39-40).

*Ascesis* can be understood, in a post-metaphysical sense, as a kind of intra-mundane self-discipline: what I suggest is that, in the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of meaning and value, disclosed by the absurd experience, another kind of morality, namely an *aesthetic* morality in the Nietzschean sense, emerges in Camus' work, as is made visible in the concept of *style de vie*.

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In order to elucidate the relationship between creation and (aesthetic) morality, it is useful to focus our attention on Camus' interpretation of Nietzsche's *Over-Man*. In a note in the *Carnets* in August 1942, Camus wrote:

Littérature. Se méfier de ce mot. Ne pas le prononcer trop vite. Si l'on ôtait la littérature chez les grands écrivains on ôterait ce qui probablement leur est plus personnel. *Littérature = nostalgie. L'homme supérieur de Nietzsche, l'abîme de Dostoïevski, l'acte gratuit de Gide, etc., etc.* (CII, 35) [My italics]

Again in March 1943: «Nietzsche connaît aussi la *nostalgie*. Mais il ne veut rien demander au ciel. Sa solution : ce qu'on ne peut demander à Dieu, on le demande à l'homme : c'est le *surhomme*» (CII, 87).

Camus appraises Nietzsche's *Over-Man* in the light of his own aesthetic reflection on the *absurd* creation, which is itself inscribed within the *nihilistic* overcoming of Metaphysics, as the de-valuation of superior values, exposed in Nietzsche's posthumous fragments. What he seems to suggest is that the *Over-Man* is literature, in the sense of the expression of Nietzsche's desire for unity (*nostalgie*). Thus, it is exclusively within the (finite) limits of the *absurd* work of art that it should be understood, against the Nazi (mis)appropriation.

In Camus' view, it is in the *Over-Man*, - as the *solution* to the philosopher's ontological nostalgia, which takes over the place left vacant by God as *the* highest value - that the tragic paradox of the absurd, and of *modern* nihilism, is exposed. As he had already observed about Dostoyevsky's work in the MdS, what defines the *modern* character is the interrogation on the *meaning of life*, and what distinguishes the *modern* sensibility from the classic, ancient, one is the *metaphysical* concern of the former, as distinguished from the *moral* concern of the other (MdS, 182). The question is spelt out in its most extreme form in Dostoyevsky's novels: «L'existence est mensongère *ou* elle est éternelle» (Id.).

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<sup>136</sup> November-December 1942. (My italics).

<sup>137</sup> «*Sans lendemain*. "Qu'est-ce que je médite de plus grand que moi et que j'éprouve sans pouvoir le définir? Une sorte de marche difficile vers une sainteté de la négation - un héroïsme sans Dieu - l'homme pur enfin. Toutes les vertus humaines, y compris la solitude à l'égard de Dieu. Qu'est ce qui fait la supériorité d'*exemple* (seule) du christianisme? Le Christ et ses saints - la recherche d'un *style de vie*. Cette œuvre comptera autant de formes que d'étapes sur le chemin d'une perfection sans récompense. L'Étranger est le point zéro. *Id.* Le Mythe. [i.e. MdS] [...]» (March 1942, CII, 31). See also CII, 28.

In his fragment on the de-valuation of cosmological values, Nietzsche posed the *quest for meaning* as the fundamental condition for the possibility of nihilism,<sup>138</sup> which culminates, in its third and last phase, in the negation of the metaphysical world, of the *true*, supra-sensory and therefore *eternal*, world of the Platonic-Christian metaphysics, as *fiction* («nous avons mesuré la valeur du monde d'après des catégories qui ne s'appliquent qu'à un monde purement fictif», VP II, 55) or *lie* («le caractère de l'existence n'est pas d'être «vraie», mais d'être fausse...», *Id.*).

The question of *lie* (*mensonge*) as metaphysical problem recurs in another fragment in the French edition of *La Volonté de Puissance*:

*Journal du nihiliste.* – Terreur d'avoir découvert la « fausseté » de tout.

Le vide ; plus de pensée ; les fortes passions tournant autour d'objets *sans valeur* ; être le spectateur de ces absurdes mouvements pour et contre [...]. La force plus énergique ne sait plus à quoi elle sert. Tout est là, mais il n'y a plus de fins. L'athéisme, ou manque d'idéal.

Phase de la négation passionnée en paroles et en actes ; ainsi se soulage le besoin accumulé d'affirmation, d'adoration...

Phase du mépris même envers la négation...même envers le doute...même envers l'ironie...même envers le mépris...

*Catastrophe* : le mensonge ne serait-il pas une chose divine ? La valeur de toute chose ne consisterait-elle pas à être fausse ?...Ne devrait-on pas croire en Dieu, non parce qu'il est vrai, mais parce qu'il est faux ? Le désespoir ne serait-il pas simplement la suite d'une foi dans la divinité de la vérité ? Qui sait si le mensonge justement et la falsification, l'introduction artificielle d'un sens, ne seraient pas une valeur, un sens, une fin ?...

XI 1887-III 1888 (VP II, § 107, 52-53)

What emerges in this fragment is precisely the question of the “*place*” of the highest values: nihilism is the active *extraction* of all (supra-sensory and bestowing meaning upon the sphere of appearances) values from *this* world. The meta-physical “*place*”, or the *true eternal* world in which the values had been projected (*second form* of nihilism), therefore remains *empty* - «La sphère où nous avons placé nos valeurs reste hors de notre atteinte – de ce fait, l'autre sphère, celle où nous vivons, n'a *nullement* gagné en valeur» (VP II, § 106, 52).<sup>139</sup>

Now, the “*catastrophe*” of nihilistic thought lies precisely in the overturning of the value of truth into its opposite, or rather, in the hypostatisation of the negation of all traditional metaphysical values (the awareness of «le mensonge [...] et la falsification, l'introduction artificielle d'un sens»): falsehood becomes the new highest (*divine*) value, meaning and end of the world, and the transcendent sphere («la foi dans la divinité de la vérité»), thus, remains intact.

<sup>138</sup> VP II, § 111, 54. Cfr., M. Heidegger, *Il Nichilismo Europeo*, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>139</sup> As Heidegger observes, Nietzsche's *transvaluation* of values, as a new *position* of values beyond “*complete*” Nihilism, cannot take place by simply re-placing the old values by filling the space left vacant by the nihilistic destruction of traditional idols.

This question is immediately related to the problem of the self-divinisation of man, as the logical consequence of the «metaphysical crime» of nihilism, which is addressed by Camus in his commentary on Dostoïevski's *Possédés* in the MdS:

«Si Dieu n'existe pas, je suis dieu ». Devenir dieu, c'est seulement être libre sur cette terre, ne pas *servir* un être immortel. C'est surtout, bien entendu, tirer toutes les conséquences de cette douloureuse indépendance. Si Dieu existe, tout dépend de lui et nous ne pouvons rien contre sa volonté. S'il n'existe pas, tout dépend de nous. Pour Kirilov comme pour Nietzsche, tuer Dieu, c'est devenir dieu soi-même – c'est réaliser dès cette terre la vie éternelle dont parle l'Évangile. (MdS, 184) [My italics]

In the MdS, Kirilov represents the extreme outcome of the nihilistic death of God – or of the *logical suicide* or *superior suicide* (MdS, 183): «Si Dieu n'existe pas, Kirilov doit [...] se tuer pour être dieu. Cette logique est absurde, mais c'est ce qu'il faut» (Id.). Kirilov kills himself for a superior *idea* - «Il veut se tuer pour devenir dieu» (Id.): «du *surhomme* il n'a que la *logique* et l'*idée fixe*, de l'homme tout le registre» (MdS, 184).<sup>140</sup>

I suggest that we interpret Camus' 1941 version of the tragedy *Caligula* in the light of the question, brought forth in the MdS, of the relationship between absurd, creation and freedom. It is significant that in the preface to the 1958 American edition of his four tragedies (*Caligula*, *La Malentendu*, *L'État de Siège*, *Les Justes*), written between 1938 and 1949, Camus defined *Caligula* precisely as «l'histoire d'un *suicide supérieur*» (T, 1730).<sup>141</sup>

The Nietzschean parentage of the first version of the play, which is heavily indebted to the reading of Nietzsche's *Origine de la tragédie*, is highlighted by James Arnold,<sup>142</sup> according to whom between 1937 and 1938 «Camus avait mené de front deux explorations artistiques du sens de la mort» - the tragedy *Caligula*, and an unfinished novel, *La Mort Heureuse* – and that «[il] a fini par condamner à l'oubli l'exploration narrative, où d'ailleurs les meilleures pages sont lyriques, en faveur de l'exploration théâtrale qui, en 1938, relevait encore du théâtre lyrique». <sup>143</sup> According to Arnold,

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<sup>140</sup> My italics

<sup>141</sup> My italics.

<sup>142</sup> «Car toute la pièce [*Caligula*], de 1938 à 1941, évoluait dans l'ombre de la mort, non pas d'une mort – Drusilla étant le signe absent de la moitié perdue d'une unité ontologique idéale – mais la mort conçue comme le phénomène définitif qui donne son sens à la vie. En ceci le premier *Caligula* révélera des affinités avec les plus belles pages méditatives de Malraux dans *La Condition Humaine*. L'érotisme du premier *Caligula* n'est pas non plus sans rapports avec le Malraux qui s'interrogeait, au début des années trente, sur la mort et la vie par le biais de la sexualité. [...]», A. James Arnold, «Pourquoi une édition critique de *Caligula*», *Albert Camus 1980*, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>143</sup> Ivi, p. 182. As Arnold confirms, «*Caligula* et *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* se font écho en plusieurs endroits, en 1941» (CAC4, 160), especially concerning the divinisation of Caligula and Kirilov. A rapprochement of Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky is confirmed by Camus' 1933 notes, which attest his reading of Shestov's *La Philosophie de la tragédie* (see CAC4, 130).

L'état d'esprit "juvénile" dont Camus fait prevue dans le *Caligula* de 1938 est aussi, et au premier chef, une tentative artistique de suggérer la possibilité de réintégrer les contradictions de la vie humaine par delà la mort, afin de retrouver une plénitude de vie que l'on suppose aussi en deçà de la naissance. Il est évident qu'une tragédie qui se propose de traiter, de donner à voir et à sentir, cette conception de la vie et de la mort, *devra s'éloigner beaucoup de ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler les réalités de la vie sociale*. Cette tragédie-là, par contre, exploitera, jusqu'à l'exaspération des nerfs, la part d'ombre de la vie humaine, celle qui n'est pas et, peut-être, *ne sera jamais socialisée*.<sup>144</sup>

I argue that *Caligula* explores one aspect, namely, the absolute logic or the super-human «*idée fixe*» of modern thinking exposed to the experience of the absurd, or to *modern nihilism*, which cannot be socialised for it inevitably spells doom and destroys the world in which it enters. It is significant that Camus resumed this «tragédie de l'intelligence» (T, 1730) in the question «si la *poésie doit être meurtrière* ou non» (CAC4, 52):<sup>145</sup> *Caligula* is defined as «un empereur *artiste*» (CAC4, 21), who transforms his philosophy in corpses («pour la première fois dans l'histoire, la *poésie agit*», CAC4, 44).

*Caligula's* philosophy is the (*absurdist*) absolutization of the disclosing moment of the absurd, brought about by death as the limit *par excellence*, and *aesthetically* experienced through the touch/slap of the cold and bloodless corpse.<sup>146</sup> *Caligula* embodies the *absurd* «liberté [...] du condamné à mort» (CAC4, 31), initiated to the «vérité de ce monde qui est de n'en point avoir» (CAC4, 75): in a world rendered to its primitive meaninglessness and inhumanity, *Caligula* chooses the systematic ("logical") exercise of a boundless power and limitless freedom to *change* a finite existence of suffering and death, through the realization of the impossible (CAC4, 84).

What is important to point out for our purposes is that in the 1941 version, the question of power and that of freedom coincide: as poet and master (Emperor), I argue, *Caligula* illustrates, in my view, one possibility of the «aestheticizing» *creative* force, which we have traced in Nietzsche's fragments. «Monstre pour avoir trop aimé» (CAC4, 23), *Caligula* is *not* an idealist, he experiences despair through physical torment (CAC4, 32) as/in sensual excess:<sup>147</sup> Grenier would criticize this early version for its «côtés faibles (romantiques)» (CAC4, 124) – it is significant that Camus would take over the adjective «*romantique*» in HR to address the *absolutization* of the absurd sensibility, illustrated in the MdS, toward a murderous fabrication of corpses.

<sup>144</sup> A. James Arnold, «Pourquoi une édition critique de *Caligula*», op. cit., p. 183. My italics.

<sup>145</sup> My italics. In Cherea's words: «*Caligula* vivant, je suis tout entier livré à l'arbitraire et à l'absurde, c'est-à-dire à la poésie» (CAC4, 44).

<sup>146</sup> This image is developed for the first time in an untitled one-page manuscript («Voilà, elle est morte...») datable around 1933.

<sup>147</sup> According to Camus' friend and professor of philosophy, Jean Grenier, «ce que [Camus] admirait avant tout chez [Nietzsche], c'était la lutte continuelle contre la douleur physique» (CAC4, 132). On the relation between the young Camus' concern with the aesthetic justification of suffering and his appropriation of Nietzsche's aesthetics of tragedy, see Arnold's essay in CAC4, 126-ff.

What I would like to point out is the relationship between the absurd evidence (*modern nihilism*) and the exercise of *omnipotence*, which will be the object of further examination in Chapter 3, anticipating the idea – exposed by Arendt in OR – that Absolute Evil and Absolute Good (embodied in the tragedy respectively by Caligula and Scipion - CAC4, 68) *do not belong in this world*, that they are destructive of the human intercourse and plurality (CAC4, 29).

The tragedy develops one dimension of the *sensibilité absurde* illustrated in the MdS, and rooted in what the author defines as *modern nihilism*: I, however, suggest that it is possible to trace *another* dimension in Camus' *raisonnement absurde*, which opens the way for, and in a way provides the elements for, the author's ethical reflection between 1941 and 1945.<sup>148</sup>

In a fragment dated 1884, Nietzsche formulates the relationship between nihilism and *creation* - «C'est nous qui avons *créé* un monde pourvu d'une valeur ! Cela connu, nous reconnaissons aussi que le respect de la vérité est la *conséquence* d'une *illusion*, et qu'il faut estimer plus haut la force plastique, simplificatrice, constructive, inventive. « Tout est faux ! *Tout est permis !* [...]» (VP11, §108, 53):

La morale est dès maintenant anéantie : constater ce fait ! Ce qui reste, c'est : « *Je veux* ».  
Hiérarchie nouvelle. Contre l'égalité.  
Au lieu du juge et du répresseur, le créateur.  
Notre situation *favorable* : c'est nous qui moissonnons.  
Mon extrême responsabilité : mon orgueil !  
[...] (VP11, § 16, p. 19)

Stavroguine's *absurd* judgement: "*Tout est permis!*" (MdS, 185), in the chapter on Dostoyevsky's *Kirilov* in the MdS, echoes the final pages on the absurd creator («un monde demeure dont l'homme est le seul *maître*», MdS, 192): in a world without God, *everything is in our hands* - «[i]l n'y a pas de mystère dans la création humaine. La *volonté* fait ce miracle» (MdS, 190).<sup>149</sup>

<sup>148</sup> According to Arnold, it is only after the armistice in 1940 that Camus «a pu, su et dû reprendre *Caligula* en y insérant ses préoccupations éthiques de plus en plus marquées qui *n'existaient pas au moment de la première version*» (A. James Arnold, «Pourquoi une édition critique de *Caligula*», op. cit., p. 185), and which mark the shift from «le *texte lyrique au texte dramatique*» (Id.). It is significant that the aesthetic principle governing Camus' concept of tragedy underwent an important change *around* 1941: «Le *Caligula* de 1938 est lyrique et onirique. Les principes qui organisent les rapports entre ses parties – l'extraordinaire symétrie entre Scipion et Caligula, par exemple, ou bien la lutte métaphysique, l'*agon*, qui détermine le sort tragique du héros et qui se communique viscéralement, pour ainsi dire – ont été oblitérés par la substitution d'une esthétique étrangère à celle qui présidait à la composition de la version originale.» (Ivi, p. 183). We could hypothesize a parallel between the evolution of Camus' concept of tragedy and his reflection on the problem of nihilism around 1941-43.

<sup>149</sup> My italics.



For the French author, the Nietzschean "*je veux*" coincides with the *effort* (*will* as self-discipline) to maintain the lucid awareness of the absurd. It is in this sense that I suggest we interpret Camus's letter to Ponge: «Si je n'avais pas une peur bleu des magnifiques généralisations à la Nietzsche, je vous dirais: « Le sentiment de l'absurde, c'est le monde en train de mourir. La *volonté de l'absurde*, c'est le monde nouveau » (E, 1667).

What I suggest is that creation highlights, in the coincidence of the finite thought (of the finite) and the useless action of the *absurd* man - be him conqueror, artist, or Don Juan -<sup>150</sup> a normativeness *inherent* in the act of *ex-isting*.<sup>151</sup>

We can say, with Nancy,<sup>152</sup> that freedom from all (transcendent) law opens the way, in Camus' reflection on the absurd, to a concept of freedom of existence *as law* - law describing a limit which is not imposed to life from outside or above, but *is existence* as the finite *être-à* of man and world.

The *absurd* thought «éclaire ce désert et le *domine*. Elle connaît ses servitudes et les illustre. Elle mourra en même temps que ce corps. Mais le savoir, voilà sa liberté » (MdS, 167). The conqueror, in this sense, embodies the convergence of this groundless law, this unfounded *aesthetic* foundation, and *creation*:

Les conquérants parlent quelquefois de vaincre et surmonter. Mais c'est toujours « *se surmonter* » qu'ils entendent. Vous savez bien ce que cela veut dire. Tout homme c'est senti l'égal d'un dieu à certains moments. [...] Cela vient de ce que, dans un éclair, il a senti l'étonnante *grandeur* de l'esprit humain. Les conquérants sont seulement ceux d'entre les hommes qui sentent assez leur force pour être sûrs de vivre constamment à ces hauteurs et dans la pleine conscience de cette grandeur. [...] [Les conquérants] *ne quittent jamais le creuset humain*, plongeant au plus brûlant dans l'âme des révolutions. Ils y trouvent la créature mutilée, mais ils y rencontrent aussi les seules valeurs qu'ils aiment et qu'ils admirent, l'homme et son silence. C'est à la fois leur dénuement et leur richesse. Il n'y a qu'un luxe pour eux et c'est celui des relations humaines. (MdS, 167) [My italics]

The Nietzschean echoes in the conqueror's «self-overcoming» - which in the MdS is identified with the "arithmetic" capacity of the absurd thought to maintain itself *le plus* (E, 167), and to stretch the *aesthetic present* the most by *repeating* it - re-poses the question of the "transvaluation of values" within the *nihilistic* limits of the finite (E, 166), as a question of *praxis*: « Même humiliée, la chair est ma seule certitude. Je ne puis vivre que d'elle. La

<sup>150</sup> «Don Juan sait et n'espère pas. Il fait penser à ces *artistes* qui connaissent leur limites, ne les excèdent jamais et, dans cet intervalle précaire où leur esprit s'installe, ont toute la merveilleuse aisance des *maîtres*. Et c'est bien là le génie : *l'intelligence qui connaît ses frontières* » (E, 152). [My highlighting]

<sup>151</sup>As Paolo Flores d'Arcais points out, « [u]n'esistenza priva di necessità in un mondo privo di scopi, è un'esistenza per necessità *giudicante*. Cosa possa essere il senso del mondo e della propria esistenza viene scelto, momento per momento. Poiché non è dato, non può accadere altrimenti. Venire al mondo equivale a far nascere un dover essere. "Respirare è giudicare". Laddove non si dà giustificazione, deve inevitabilmente darsi giudizio. [...] L'esser-ci è allora fatalmente normativo [...] » (P. Flores d'Arcais, "L'assurdo e la rivolta", art. cit., p. 209).

<sup>152</sup> J.-L. Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

créature est ma patrie. Voilà pourquoi j'ai choisi cet effort absurde et sans portée. Voilà pourquoi je suis du côté de la *lutte*.» (MdS, 166). In the manuscript version of the MdS the term « lutte » is replaced by the term « révolte ».<sup>153</sup> I argue that the pages on the conqueror represent the textual link between the argument on the absurd in the MdS and the 1945 *Remarque sur la révolte*, which is the cornerstone of Camus' criticism of Existential philosophy and of his political reflection between 1944 and '47.

In his *Remarque sur la révolte*, Camus wrote: «[...] l'homme peut-il, à lui seul et sans le secours de l'éternel, créer ses propres valeurs ?» (E, 1696). «Dans l'ordre de l'expérience humaine, la révolte a le même sens que le cogito dans l'ordre de la pensée. Elle est la première vérité et elle crée la première valeur » (E, 1686-87). Creation, in this sense, cannot be understood as the *rea*-lization, or the bringing into presence, of some essence, a pre-existent idea or "plan", in the Platonic acceptation of *poiesis*. There is *nothing* that precedes that *experiri*, and revolt constitutes the founding act of human experience, in the finite sense of an effort that pushes itself to the limit (MdS, 136), and maintains itself in that being-at and touching-upon it, which de-fines the human condition:

Le monde est toujours fermé. Nous sommes toujours dans le cercle [...]. [...] à la limite on pourrait entrevoir un absolu *d'évidence* qui ne serait ni dans l'irréductibilité de l'homme ni dans la situation contre laquelle il est en lutte, mais dans le rapport que l'un et l'autre soutiennent entre eux, et qui est à proprement parler la *condition humaine*. C'est le *relatif absolu*. La révolte permet au moins d'affirmer que la condition humaine *est*, ce qui n'est pas si évident qu'il le paraît. (E, 1695-6). [My italics]

Revolt «founds» the human condition, in the only sense consistent with a *finite* thought of the finite, which is that of the lucid *act* of touching-upon-the-limit.<sup>154</sup> The *aesthetic judgement* is the *law-giving* act of the absurd man, protesting against his finitude, which founds *ex-istence*, in the sense of an opening-up (*sur-prise*) of its being ex-posed to the limits: it is in this sense that «*l'homme et son silence*» are the only values that are recognized and praised by the conqueror (MdS, 167).

<sup>153</sup> See Quillot's Notes et Variantes to MdS, note 3 to page 166 (E, 1446).

<sup>154</sup> Nancy offers an understanding foundation, which I take as appropriate to describe Camus's notion of creation: «Le modèle de la fondation n'est-il pas la fondation antique de la ville, par le tracé de sa limite ? [...] Ce n'est pas la fondation au sens architectonique du creusement et de l'établissement d'une assise sur laquelle pourra tenir un édifice. Pour pouvoir opérer une fondation architectonique, il faut d'abord avoir fondé au sens topographique et cadastral [...] qui est de délimiter l'espace de la fondation. Cette délimitation, par elle-même, n'est rien, elle est néant d'opération productiver. Elle ne fait rien, en ce sens (et elle n'est pas *poiesis*), et il n'y a rien, rien de donné ni de préétabli ( pas même l'idée d'un plan de la cité ou de l'édifice), [...] là où la fondation a lieu. Celle-ci est plutôt ce *rien* lui-même, cette insaisissable *chorá*, portés à l'intensité incandescente d'une décision. Ici, maintenant, où il n'y a rien, ici et maintenant qui est n'importe où et n'importe quand, est décidé de l'existence, par exemple d'une cité. Ce n'est pas produire cette cité, mais c'est cela sans quoi il n'y aurait ni plan ni opération pour la produire. Cela trace une limite en se portant sur cette limite, qui ne doit son existence qu'à ce geste fondateur.» (J.-L. Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, op. cit., pp. 112-113).

I suggest that the figure of Caligula, in the 1941 version of the tragedy, situates itself in the reverse of this *aesthetic* awareness: the image of the looking-glass, around which Camus organizes the Emperor's absolute creation, marks the withdrawal from the *aesthetic* touching-upon, and the simplifying force of terror which erases the plural com-pearance. Men are reduced to an (abstract) public of guilty victims in the inexorable face of their Judge/executioner (CAC4, 36). Caligula's hands stretching toward the cold surface of the mirror in the closing lines of his absurd monologue (CAC4, 119) summarise in an image the negation of Oedipus' tragic «tout est bien» (MdS, 197), for whom «le seul lien qui le rattache au monde, c'est la main fraîche d'une jeune fille» (Id.).

Now, what I suggest is that creation of values can be understood in/as the de-limiting of a material/sensory (aesthetic) "space" in which the meaning of *existence* is overturned (*trans-valuation*) into existence as meaning:

Comment ne pas comprendre que, dans cet univers vulnérable, tout ce qui est humain et n'est que cela prend un sens plu brûlant ? Visages tendus, fraternité menacée, amitié si forte et si pudique des hommes entre eux, ce sont les vraies richesses puisqu'elles sont périssables. C'est au milieu d'elles que l'esprit sent le mieux ses pouvoirs et ses limites. (MdS, 167) [My italics]

In the concluding pages of the essay on the absurd, Camus devotes particular attention to the mythological figure of Sisyphus, revisited as «travailleur inutile des enfers» (MdS, 195). Condemned to roll a stone endlessly to the top of an infernal mountain, Sisyphus pays the price of his "earthly" passions:<sup>155</sup> in this sense, « [il] enseigne la fidélité supérieure qui nie les dieux et soulève les rochers» (MdS, 198). His superior fidelity is the Nietzschean *fidelity to the earth* (the finite), in the light of which the *absurd* hero is exclusively *creator*:

S'il y a un destin personnel, il n'y a point de destinée supérieure ou du moins il n'en est qu'une dont il juge qu'elle est fatale et méprisable. Pour le reste, il se sait le maître de ses jours. À cet instant subtil où l'homme se retourne sur sa vie, Sisyphe, revenant sur son rocher, contemple cette suite d'actions sans lien qui devient son destin, créé par lui, uni sous le regard de sa mémoire et bientôt scellé par sa mort. Ainsi, persuadé de l'origine tout humaine de tout ce qui est humain, aveugle qui désire voir et qui sait que la nuit n'a pas de fin, il est toujours en marche. (MdS, 198) [My italics]

Creation, again, coincides with a *poiesis-praxis*, in which the act of shape donation (MdS, 192) is understood as a form of self-discipline, such that «l'exercice de vivre ne saurait aller sans la conscience de son caractère insensé» (MdS, 180).

<sup>155</sup> «Son mépris des dieux, sa haine de la mort et sa passion pour la vie, lui ont valu ce supplice indicible où tout l'être s'emploie à ne rien achever » (MdS, 196).

In the absurd confrontation with its finite condition (*le rocher*), Sisyphus illustrates the Pascalian grandeur of the lucid man,<sup>156</sup> devoid of the comfort of faith – he represents the *tragic* dimension of finitude:

Si ce mythe est tragique, c'est que son héros est conscient. Où serait en effet sa peine, si à chaque pas l'espoir de réussir le soutenait ? L'ouvrier aujourd'hui travaille, tous les jours de sa vie, aux mêmes tâches et ce destin n'est pas moins absurde. Mais il n'est *tragique* qu'aux rares moments où il devient conscient. Sisyphé, prolétaire des dieux, impuissant et révolté, connaît toute l'étendue de sa misérable condition : c'est à elle qu'il pense pendant sa descente. La clairvoyance qui devait faire son tourment consomme du même coup sa victoire. (MdS, 196)

The notion of *tragic* is worth analysing in detail, as it will prove essential in Camus' later writings. From the comparative analysis of the MdS with the *Carnets*, a constant correspondence emerges between the tragic and what we have defined as *absurd* or *aesthetic* conscience.

In a note, dated June 1937, Camus writes: «Combat *tragique* du monde souffrant. Futilité du problème de l'immortalité. Ce qui nous intéresse, c'est notre destinée, oui. Mais non pas « après », « avant ». » (CI, 51). The association of the tragic with conflict anticipates the pages on the *useless* struggle of the absurd hero (MdS, 166, 198) against a finite condition of suffering and death. Identified with the refusal of a transcendent principle or meaning that would justify existence, Camus defines the tragic as *contradictory* (CI, 51). The textual reference to the notion of the absurd as «*contradictory in existence*», in the later *Remarque sur la révolte* (E, 1696), is confirmed by Camus himself in another note of the *Carnets* in Mai '37, where he insists on the relationship between tragic and the *liminal* experience of game (*jeu*), as being a useless or absurd effort:

Aux confins – Et par-dessus: le jeu. Je nie, suis lâche et faible, j'agis comme si j'affirmais, comme si j'étais fort et courageux. Question de volonté= pousser l'absurdité jusqu'au bout= je suis capable de...

D'où prendre le jeu au tragique, dans son effort ; au comique dans le résultat (indifférent plutôt). [...] Epurer le jeu par la *conquête de soi-même* – la sachant absurde.

Conciliation du sage hindou et du héros occidental. [...] (CI, 39).

The echoes of Nietzsche's remarks on game (*jeu*) are pointed out by A. James Arnold.<sup>157</sup> I suggest that it is possible to detect a correspondence between Nietzsche's

<sup>156</sup> «[...] il est supérieur à son destin. Il est plus fort que son rocher.» (MdS, 196)

<sup>157</sup> According to Arnold, in chapter 10 ("Pourquoi je suis si malin") of *Ecce Homo* « "le jeu" a été marqué d'un trait de crayon dans la phrase: « *Je ne connais pas d'autre manière, dans les rapports avec les grandes tâches, que le jeu.* » (p. 70) Toute la fin de la page suivante, sur l'*amor fati* est mise entre crochets » (in A. James Arnold, "Camus lecteur de Nietzsche", art. cit., p. 96) - « [...] je révolte par ma seule existence tout ce qui a du sang mauvais dans les veines...Ma formule pour désigner la grandeur dans l'homme, c'est l'*amor fati* : que personne ne veuille rien autrement, ni en avant, ni en arrière, ni dans les siècles des siècles. Ne pas seulement supporter la nécessité, encore moins se la dissimuler – tout idéalisme est manière de mentir devant la nécessité -, mais l'aimer... » (F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Paris, Flammarion, p. 90). In Arnold's view, «Il est fort possible

definition of the *tragic philosopher* in *Ecce homo* and the figure of the *lucid thinker* in the MdS (E, 191).

It is significant that Camus insisted on the notion of *honnêteté* (MdS, 113) to describe the finite method of the absurd thought,<sup>158</sup> as opposed to the intellectual dishonest escape out of the evidence of finitude in the comfortable "constructions" (*maisons d'idées*) of metaphysical thought (MdS, 137), of which the «*idée fixe*» of the Over-Man is the extreme (inconsistent) expression.

In the philosophical essay, Sisyphus is *tragic* because he is aware (*conscient*) of the *absurd*, and chooses to acknowledge the weight of tears and blood of his finite condition – *tragedy* cannot be separated from the *aesthetic* or *absurd* conscience, as the figure of Oedipus beautifully illustrates:

Ainsi, Œdipe obéit d'abord au destin sans le savoir. À partir du moment où il sait, *sa tragédie commence*. Mais dans le même instant, aveugle et désespéré, il reconnaît que le seul lien qui le rattache au monde, c'est la main fraîche d'une jeune fille. Une parole démesurée retentit alors : « Malgré tant d'épreuves, mon âge avancé et la grandeur de mon âme me font juger que *tout est bien*. » L'Œdipe de Sophocle, comme le Kirilov de Dostoïevski, donne ainsi la formule de la victoire absurde. La sagesse antique rejoint l'héroïsme moderne.<sup>159</sup>

On ne découvre pas l'absurde sans être tenté d'écrire quelque manuel du bonheur. [...] Mais il n'y a qu'un monde. Le bonheur et l'absurde sont deux fils de la même terre. Il sont inséparables. [...] « Je juge que tout est bien », dit Œdipe, et cette parole est sacrée. Elle retentit dans l'univers farouche et limité de l'homme. Elle enseigne que tout n'est pas, n'a pas été épuisé. Elle chasse de ce monde un dieu qui y était entré avec l'insatisfaction et le goût des douleurs inutiles. Elle fait du destin un affaire d'homme, qui doit être réglée entre les hommes. (MdS, 197)

In a note in the *Carnets* in August 1938 Camus wrote :

Accroître le bonheur d'une vie d'homme, c'est étendre le tragique de son témoignage. L'œuvre d'art (si elle est un témoignage) vraiment tragique doit être celle de l'homme heureux. Parce que cette œuvre d'art sera tout entière soufflée par la mort. (CI, 120)

The relation tragic-happiness-death (absurd) is pivotal in order to grasp the meaning of the concluding lines of the MdS. Since the lyrical essays Camus had associated happiness with the lucid awareness of the finite – *la mort consciente* (CI, 119),<sup>160</sup> or what we have defined as *aesthetic conscience*. In *Le désert (Noces)* he wrote:

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que cet aspect du jeu soit en rapport avec l'Acte II de *Caligula* (version A) : « Jeu de Caligula », et avec le sous-titre de la pièce primitive : « Caligula ou le Joueur » (Ivi, p. 96).

<sup>158</sup> Two short notes from Henri Albert's translation of le *Crépuscule des Idoles* in the *Carnets* in August 1938 confirm Camus' interest in the Nietzschean notion of tragic and its relation to *aesthetic* conscience (death) (CI, 119). Moreover, in September 1939 : « "La volonté de système est un manque de loyauté" (*Crépuscule des Idoles*). "L'artiste tragique n'est pas un pessimiste. Il dit oui à tout ce qui est problématique et terrible" (*Crépuscule des Idoles*) » (CI, 174).

<sup>159</sup> See also CI, 39.

<sup>160</sup> The note on happiness in the *Carnets* follows Camus' notes from Nietzsche's *Crépuscule des Idoles* (CI, 119) and from *Humain, trop humain*: « Nietzsche. « Que désirons-nous donc à l'aspect de la beauté? C'est d'être

Mais qu'est-ce que le bonheur sinon le simple accord entre un être et l'existence qu'il mène ? Et quel accord plus légitime peut unir l'homme à sa vie sinon la double conscience de son désir de durée et son destin de mort ? On y apprend du moins à ne compter sur rien et à considérer le présent comme la seule vérité qui nous soit donnée par « surcroît ». (E, 85)

In Camus' lyrical writings, the sensual «*beauté insupportable*» of nature (E, 85) initiates the author to the bitter awareness of his finitude, happiness resides in the *aesthetic present* of the *chair consciente*, as the ultimate accord of a (finite) being with his condition (*ex-istence*) - <sup>161</sup> «singulier instant où la *spiritualité répudie la morale*, où le *bonheur naît de l'absence d'espoir*, où *l'esprit trouve sa raison profonde dans le corps*» (E, 87).<sup>162</sup>

Tout ce qui exalte la vie, accroît en même temps son absurdité. Dans l'été d'Algérie, j'apprends *qu'une seule chose est plus tragique que la souffrance et c'est la vie d'un homme heureux*. Mais ce peut être aussi bien le chemin d'une plus grande vie, puisque cela conduit à *ne pas tricher*. (E, 75) [My italics]

Happiness is associated with the lucid refusal *to cheat*: Camus' terminology in the 1938-9 lyrical essays betrays a close intellectual "parentage" with Nietzsche's work - *Ecce homo*, but also *Twilight of the Idols* and *Human, All too Human*, which he read between August '38 and September '39.

In *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche identifies morality with the «mensonge millenaire» of metaphysical, religious and philosophical, thought, as the «[...] *volonté de ne pas voir, à tout prix, comment en somme la réalité est faite*»,<sup>163</sup> which devaluates the sensory worldly appearances in the belief in a «*true world*», transcendent and supra-sensory.

The relationship between *mensonge* and the optimistic *bonheur mesquin* of the «*good*» (moral) men,<sup>164</sup> which deprives existence of its *grandeur*, bears some interesting affinities with Camus' own thought in the juvenile essays and notes. In particular, the identification, through the figure of Zarathustra, of the *tragic* philosopher with the *honest*

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beaux. Nous nous figurons que beaucoup de *bonheur* y est attaché, mais c'est une erreur» (*Humain, trop humain*) » (CI, 119-120).

<sup>161</sup> The definition of happiness as an *accord* between a being and his existence, and between man and his finite condition does not contradict the metaphoric definition of the absurd as "divorce", nor should it be confused with a form of "resignation" or "acceptation" of absurdity: the *aesthetic conscience*, in which the absurd is maintained, coincides with the lucid "fidelity" to the finite, in the sense of Sisyphus' will to acknowledge his condition. "Accord", in this sense, means the refusal to "escape" the finite (rejection of hope and faith in *another* life), which coincides with the metaphysical revolt of the absurd man.

<sup>162</sup> My italics.

<sup>163</sup> My italics. F. Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1909, p. 166 ; Paris, Flammarion, 1992, p.

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<sup>164</sup> The notion of happiness in Camus' writings cannot be confused with the petty happiness of Zarathustra's «*last men*»: «[...] il n'a pas été dit que le bonheur soit à toute force inséparable de l'optimisme. Il est lié à l'amour – ce qui n'est pas la même chose. Et je sais des heures et des lieux où le bonheur peut paraître si *amer* qu'on lui préfère sa promesse. Mais c'est qu'en ces heures ou en ces lieux, je n'avais pas assez de cœur à aimer, c'est-à-dire à ne pas renoncer. Ce qu'il faut dire ici, c'est cette *entrée de l'homme dans les fêtes de la terre et de la beauté*. Car à cette minute, comme le néophyte ses derniers voiles, il abandonne devant son dieu la petite monnaie de sa personnalité. Oui, *il y a un bonheur plus haut où le bonheur paraît futile*. » (E, 86) [My highlighting]

yes-saying spirit – the tragic sentiment being «l'émotion affirmative par excellence» -<sup>165</sup> and with the *immoralist*, who proceeds to the tabula rasa of Christian decadent values in view of a *transvaluation* of all values, finds some recurrent echoes, throughout Camus' early writings, in the relationship between «jeu»,<sup>166</sup> «valeurs héroïques»/«courage» (CI, 23) and «immoralisme».<sup>167</sup>

In a short text, probably the draft of a preface to his manuscript *Le Courage*, dated 1934, *immoralism* is associated with the lucid awareness of the «tragique qui obsède l'homme» (CAC 2, 299) and the heroic will «de n'en refuser»: «Entre cet envers et cet endroit du monde et de moi-même, je me refuse à choisir» (Ibidem). Immoralism and lucidity are closely interwoven in Camus' work with the recurring motive of «*dédoublement*», which plays a pivotal part in the definition of the artist in the author's philosophical and political thought.<sup>168</sup>

To conclude, the intertextual analysis of Camus' writings seems to confirm the need to re-interpret the «pensée limitée, mortelle et révoltée» of the MdS beyond the Existentialist labelling. The definition of *tragic thought*,<sup>169</sup> in the sense of an *aporetic and ironic (finite) thought of the finite*, which abandons all discourse on Foundation, and embraces an *aesthetic/aesthetizing perspective*,<sup>170</sup> in the Nietzschean acceptance explored above, is more resonant with, and offers, in my opinion, a deeper and more complex insight into the French writer's philosophical and political reflection.

Now, in the 1942 philosophical essay Sisyphus' «joie silencieuse» resides in the lucid contemplation (*conscience*) of his absurd torment, «[qui] fait taire toutes les idoles» - «L'homme absurde dit oui et son effort n'aura plus de cesse» (MdS, 197-8). Like Œdipus, in the moment of *clairvoyance* Sisyphus judges that «tout est bien» - «[c]et univers désormais sans maître ne lui paraît ni stérile ni futile. [...] La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à

<sup>165</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1909, p. 122 ; or Paris, Flammarion, 1992, p. 124.

<sup>166</sup> «La mort qui donne au jeu et à l'héroïsme son vrai sens» (CI, 29).

<sup>167</sup> « Et les voilà qui meuglent : je suis *immoraliste*. Traduction : j'ai besoin de me donner une morale. Avoue-le donc, imbécile. Moi aussi. » (CI, 41).

<sup>168</sup> «Intellectuel? Oui. Et ne jamais renier. Intellectuel= celui qui se dédouble. Ça me plaît. Je suis content d'être les deux. « Si ça peut s'unir ? » Question pratique. Il faut s'y mettre. « Je méprise l'intelligence » signifie en réalité : « je ne peux supporter mes doutes ». *Je préfère tenir les yeux ouverts.*» (CI, 41). [My italics]

<sup>169</sup> It traces an interesting correspondence between the *absurd* thought of the MdS and what Clément Rosset and Sergio Givone analyse and define respectively as *tragic philosophy* and *tragic thought*, in C. Rosset, *La logique du pire. Éléments pour une philosophie tragique*, Paris, PUF, 1993 and S. Givone, *Disincanto del mondo e pensiero tragico*, Roma-Bari, Il Saggiatore, 1988.

<sup>170</sup> Sergio Givone uses the expression «prospettiva estetizzante» (in S. Givone, *Disincanto del mondo e pensiero tragico*, op. cit., p. 32).

*remplir un cœur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux*» (MdS, 198).<sup>171</sup> Sisyphus' happiness is *tragic* in that it stems from the absurd revolt, groundlessly founded on the *aesthetic* fidelity to the earth, the passionate "yes" to the wonder of the finite.

I suggest that we interpret the Nietzscheanism of the MdS, and especially of the tragedy *Caligula*, which around 1937-38 explored the relationship between power and absurd freedom in its "superhuman" *mise en œuvre*, in the light of Camus' political engagement at the beginning of World War II.

According to Abbou and Lévi-Valensi,<sup>172</sup> Camus published a series of articles under various pseudonyms in the journal *Soir-Républicain* between October and December 1939. In an article, dated 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1939 and signed *Néron*, the young author intentionally draws on a Nietzschean terminology, developed around the theme "Sous les éclairages de la guerre", the article is entitled *Considérations inactuelles* – its "untimeliness" resting on the author's passionate defence of independence «[qui] *l'oppose aux maîtres et aux esclaves de l'heure*». <sup>173</sup>

Among the various characters/spokesmen of Camus's political position in *Soir Républicain* – from Zaks, who signs two articles reporting R. Capitant's interpretation of the doctrine of National Socialism,<sup>174</sup> to Irénée, who imagines a federal solution to the war, proposing the abdication of national sovereignties («instruments juridiques des impérialismes»)<sup>175</sup> to an international law and the creation of a *new order*,<sup>176</sup> to Jean Mersault, whose commentaries on international politics point to a "*société des peuples*" beyond the idea of nation, and the imperialistic interests («antagonismes égoïstes») related to it,<sup>177</sup> and, finally, to Liber and Marco, who similarly insist on the new order of a «politique de *plebiscite et de fédéralisme*» - themes that will recur in the later articles of *Combat* -<sup>178</sup> Néron voices, in its most radical form, Camus's (Nietzschean) *untimely* free spirit, demolishing all prejudices («en particulier ceux qui conduisent tout droit à la mort»),<sup>179</sup> and heroically affirming himself against a generalized process of "domestication" in 20<sup>th</sup> century politics, constructed around the master-slave dialectic.

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<sup>171</sup> My italics.

<sup>172</sup> CAC3, pp. 15-28.

<sup>173</sup> CAC3, p. 637.

<sup>174</sup> « La doctrine du national-socialisme » (6 octobre 1939) ; « La doctrine du national-socialisme. Croisade ? » (11 octobre 1939) ; Ivi, pp. 633-636.

<sup>175</sup> (11 November 1939) Ivi, p. 640.

<sup>176</sup> Ivi, p. 640.

<sup>177</sup> «Pas de croisade» (13 décembre 1939), « Notre revue de presse indépendante. La société des peuples » (15 décembre 1939), Ivi, pp. 641- 642, 648-649.

<sup>178</sup> « La recherche du possible » (30 décembre 1939), in CAC3, p. 651.

<sup>179</sup> CAC3, p. 637.



I suggest that the employ of a Nietzschean terminology in Camus' analyses of the contemporary political situation in the articles for *Soir Républicain* expresses an early perception on the part of the young author of the need to draw on an "alternative" (non-political, in the sense of what was conceived as political in the French tradition around 1940) source in order to formulate and define his own personal political thought.

This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2, which will focus on the continuity between the earlier "untimely" political position and the «*considerations volontairement inactuelles*» of the later articles for *Combat*,<sup>180</sup> as formulating an alternative approach to the political, as distinguished from both the Liberal and Marxist tradition of political thought.

I suggest that the question of nihilism is the *fil rouge* between the tragic thought of the MdS and the political reflection from 1944 onward: I agree with James Arnold that, besides the striking terminological continuity with the article in *Soir Républicain*, the role and understanding of Nietzsche's thought undergoes an important evolution in Camus' writings between 1938-39 and 1944-47. Arnold situates this crucial break around 1941-43. What I intend to explore is the shift in Camus' understanding of nihilism around 1941-43 as playing an important part in the development of the author's political reflection during the war and the Resistance.

#### 1.4. DEFINING GOOD NIHILISM.

In his letter to Ponge in January 1943, Camus wrote:

Si je n'avais pas une peur bleu des magnifiques généralisations à la Nietzsche, je vous dirais: « Le sentiment de l'absurde, c'est le monde qui est en train de mourir. *La volonté de l'absurde, c'est le monde nouveau.* » Mettons que cette formule contienne trente pour cent de vérité, et ce serait assez pour exalter beaucoup d'esprits. Mais aurons-nous la force qu'il faut ? (E, 1667) [My italics]

Camus' concern, I suggest, must be understood against the backdrop of his four *Lettres à un ami allemand*, written in Paris between July 1943 and July 1944 for the declared purpose «d'éclairer un peu le *combat aveugle*» (E, 219) of the men of the French Resistance. The «blindness» of the struggle against the Nazi occupant conveys the tragic effort of what Camus repeatedly describes as a (political) action which is not guided and legitimized by any principle or universal value. The question addressed in the letter to Ponge and in LAA asks whether a *will to the absurd*, which would justify the refusal of the destructive power policy

<sup>180</sup> «Démocratie et modestie», *Combat*, 30 avril 1947, in *Camus à Combat*, op. cit., p. 663-665.

of Nazism, and allow the «building» a *new* world out of the *tabula rasa* of modern nihilism, is conceivable.

In this sense , the four texts of LAA expose the relationship between the absurd premises of meaninglessness and valuelessness (*modern nihilism*) and the Nazi “deification” of falsehood (*mensonge*) and the will to destruction:

Vous n'avez jamais cru au sens de ce monde et vous en avez tiré l'idée que tout était équivalent et que le bien et le mal se définissaient selon que l'on *voulait*. Vous avez supposé qu'en l'absence de toute morale humaine ou divine les seuls valeurs étaient celles qui *régissaient le monde animal*, c'est-à-dire *la violence et la ruse*. Vous en avez conclu que l'homme n'était rien et qu'on pouvait tuer son âme, que dans la plus insensée des histoires la tâche d'un individu ne pouvait être que l'aventure de la *puissance*, et sa morale, le réalisme des *conquêtes*. (LAA, 240) [My italics]

Nazism embodies the “catastrophe” of *modern nihilism*: from the (finite) evidence of the absence of a meaning and values *in se* of existence, these nihilists conclude with the *total* absence of meaning and value. The absurd is hypostatized, falsehood takes up the “place” of truth, everything is equivalent, and power and conquest are celebrated as the essence and end of being. The *will to the absurd* thus coincides with the systematic (*logical*) self-deification of man, who replaces the vacant place of the (dead) God,<sup>181</sup> through the exercise of a limitless will to *destruction* (LAA, 240) The echo of Nietzsche's fragments on *incomplete* nihilism and the intermediate phase of nihilism in the *Will to Power*, is apparent, in my view, in the relationship brought forth by Camus between an extreme form of nihilism and the self-destructive instinct of the will to nothingness.<sup>182</sup>

Camus was well acquainted with the problem of the relationship between nihilism and the will to destruction through Jean Grenier, Professor of Philosophy in Algiers, and later close friend of Camus. Grenier had published two essays on «*Le Nihilisme Européen et les Appels de l'Orient*» under the pseudonym of Jean Caves in the French review *Philosophies* in

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<sup>181</sup> « Parce que vous étiez las de lutter contre le ciel, vous vous êtes reposés dans cette épuisante aventure où votre tâche est de mutiler les âmes et de détruire la terre. Pour tout dire, vous avez choisi l'injustice, vous vous êtes mis avec les dieux. » (LAA, 240-241)

<sup>182</sup> «On n'abandonne pas une position extrême pour une position moyenne, mais pour une autre extrême, *inverse* [...] C'est la forme outrancière du nihilisme: le Néant (“l'absurde”) éternel!

[...] Rien n'a de valeur dans la vie que le degré de la puissance – si l'on admet que la vie elle-même est volonté de puissance. La morale a préservé du nihilisme les *déshérités* en attribuant à tout homme une valeur infinie, une valeur métaphysique [...]. *A supposer que la croyance à cette morale disparût*, les déshérités, privés de leur consolation, *disparaîtraient*.

Cette disparition se présente sous l'aspect d'une *destruction*, d'une sélection instinctive de la *force destructive* [...] Le nihilisme, signe que les déshérités ont perdu toute consolation; *qu'ils détruisent pour qu'on les détruise*; [...] qu'ils se placent sur le terrain du principe opposé [...]. Telle est la forme européenne du bouddhisme, de la *négation active* après que l'existence a perdu son « sens ». » (VP II, § 8, pp. 13-15). [My italics]

1924.<sup>183</sup> Grenier identifies nihilism with the Spenglerian «despair of civilization», and with the Nietzschean «*volonté du néant*»:<sup>184</sup> the European spirit is “nihilistic” in the sense of a *negative, negating* spirit, which rejects all traditional standards, and culminates in a celebration of the *élan vital* through violence («C’est que l’Occidental, “homme de puissance” (Gewaltmensch) périt pour se trop abandonner à la fogue des instincts»).<sup>185</sup>

The comparative analysis of the 1941 note on Absurd and Hitlerism/Power (CI, 225) with the 1942 and 1943 preface, notes and letters, where Camus resorts to the notion of Nihilism in order to address the argument of the MdS, suggests that around that date the writer was re-thinking the work of Nietzsche in the light of the problem of a relationship between nihilism and Nazism. It is plausible that he would resort, in particular, to the posthumous notes, published under the heading of *La Volonté de Puissance*, in order to elucidate the relationship between the modern loss of Foundation, the decline of the Western tradition, and politics.

There are reasons to believe that Camus was (re)approaching Nietzsche against the backdrop of (and as a reply to) the French philosophico-political debate of the Thirties and early Forties concerning the relationship between nihilism and Hitlerism. In 1939, the Editions Gallimard had published the French translation of Hermann Rauschning’s *Die Revolution des Nihilismus*.<sup>186</sup> this German exile, who had been in Hitler’s entourage in the early phases of Nazi government, develops a thesis which bears many affinities with the argument of Camus’s LAA.

Rauschning offers an interpretation of National Socialism as a movement of «sheer destruction» and «utter nihilism» (RD, xii), the latter being identified not only with the

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<sup>183</sup> I owe the reference to this important source to Professor Toby Garfitt, a scholar of the work and thought of Jean Grenier and Albert Camus.

<sup>184</sup> «*Amor Fati*. Qu’une civilisation doute d’elle-même, voilà qui est grave, qu’elle se veuille détruire, voilà qui est désespéré. Ce doute, cette volonté que présentait Nietzsche, nous la voulons montrer présente à tous les Européens d’aujourd’hui et qui pensent. Et d’abord aux Allemands. Il a paru, après la guerre, en Allemagne un livre d’Oswald Spengler : *La ruine de l’Occident*, qui vient d’atteindre, malgré ses 1200 pages in-8, sa 47<sup>e</sup> édition, qui donne naissance, depuis cinq ans, à une quantité d’articles, de livres d’exégèse ou de critique, qui enfin a été couronné en 1919, par le comité du *Nietzsche-Archiv*. Un pareil succès avec un pareil titre prouve quelque chose. Le mieux, pour connaître la pensée de l’Allemagne contemporaine, est donc d’analyser ce qu’elle tient unanimement, sinon pour un chef-d’œuvre, du moins pour un monument très important. Il semble en la lisant, qu’on assiste, dépouillé de toutes somptuosités wagnériennes, au vrai Crépuscule des Dieux» (Jean Caves, « Le Nihilisme Européen et les Appels de l’Orient », *Philosophies*, n. 1, 15 mars 1924, 51-52). « [...] [la civilisation de l’Occident] travaille à se ruiner pour avancer l’heure de sa mort. [...] Nietzsche l’a bien analysée, cette *Schadenfreude* tournée contre soi : « Cette tendance d’aller à sa perte se présente comme la *volonté* de se perdre [...] la volonté de destruction comme volonté d’un instinct plus profond encore, l’instinct de l’auto-destruction, la *volonté du néant* ». » (Jean Caves, art. cit., 55-57).

<sup>185</sup> Jean Caves, art. cit., 61.

<sup>186</sup> Hermann Rauschning, *La révolution du nihilisme*, traduit de l’allemand par Paul Ravoux et Marcel Stora, Paris, NRF Gallimard, 1939.

negation of all traditional moral and spiritual values, but also primarily with the dissolution of all rational principles, with an anti-theoretical rejection of all doctrine, unleashing the «*instincts les plus bas de l'humanité, à la brutalité, à la violence, à la haine, à la vengeance, à l'envie...au banditisme, au mensonge.*» (RD, 65), and culminating in the exaltation of a boundless policy of violence and absolute *dominion* (RD, 60-1).<sup>187</sup>

In his 1940 lecture on Nietzsche's *European Nihilism*, Heidegger focused on Nihilism, in the sense of a process of de-valuation and transvaluation of values, as the extreme development of *modern* metaphysical thinking. In the light of Nietzsche's concluding section of fragment n. 12 on the decline of cosmological values,<sup>188</sup> Heidegger identifies values with particular *viewpoints* on the conditions *for* the preservation and strengthening, which refer to complex forms of duration of life within becoming, or *centres of dominion* – what Nietzsche defines as *will to power*.<sup>189</sup> It is in the light of this definition that Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's distinction of different forms of Nihilism: in the posthumous notes, *incomplete nihilism* - «Le nihilisme *incomplet*, ses formes: nous y vivons en plein. Les tentatives d'échapper au nihilisme, *sans renverser* les anciennes valeurs, produisent l'effet contraire,

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<sup>187</sup> A very similar thesis had already been formulated by Emmanuel Lévinas in his article *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'Hitlérisme*, published in the revue *Esprit* in 1934. Although he never uses the term 'Nihilism', Lévinas roots Hitlerism in an extreme form of scepticism, identified with a complacent absence of belief and commitment to any truth. In this sense, Nazi "philosophy" is seen as marking the collapse of Western civilization, by celebrating the "awakening of elemental feelings" and the annihilation of the spiritual values of the Judeo-Christian tradition. According to Lévinas, Hitlerism embodies the dissolution of the Platonic-Christian duality Body/Mind (corresponding to the one Senses/Ideas), identifying the Self with physical existence, and therefore "chaining" the latter to the fatality of biological laws – a thesis that finds an echo in the notion of «biological Caesarism» in Camus's *HR*. The Krieck-Heidegger political *querelle* on Nihilism and its relation to National Socialism also dates between 1934 and 1936. In 1934, in the Nazi review *Volk im Werden*, of which he was the director, Ernst Krieck, professor of Philosophy and rector of the University of Frankfurt, later successor of Heinrich Rickert in Heidelberg, attacked Heidegger's doctrine in *Sein und Zeit*, denouncing its rootedness in a *metaphysical nihilism*. It is shortly after this event that Heidegger comes to combine his interest in Nietzsche's work, and in particular in the *Will to Power*, with his reflection on nihilism. In his lecture on *Schelling* in Summer 1936, Heidegger praises Nietzsche for experiencing and elaborating a "great knowledge" of Nihilism, and for starting a counter-movement foreboding authentic historical decisions: in a passage of the manuscript version of the lecture, expunged in the 1971 edition, the philosopher emphasised the relationship between Nietzsche's thought on Nihilism and the Nazi-Fascist movements, by pointing to Mussolini and Hitler as the (only) two men in Europe to start, in different ways, such counter-movements within the political configuration of the nation, under the profound influence of Nietzsche, but without directly affirming the *authentic metaphysical framework* of Nietzsche's thought (see Franco Volpi, Introduction to the Italian edition of M. Heidegger, *Il Nichilismo Europeo*, op. cit., pp. 15-19; and also Mazzino Montinari, "La Volonté de Puissance" *n'existe pas*, Editions d'Éclat, Paris, 1996).

<sup>188</sup> « [...] le résultat de certaines perspectives d'utilité bien définies, destinées à maintenir et à fortifier certaines formes de domination humaine et projetées à tort dans l'essence des choses. C'est encore une fois la *naïveté hyperbolique* de l'homme qui se prend pour le sens et la mesure des choses. » (VII, § 111, p. 55-56). Cfr. F. Nietzsche, *Le Nihilisme Européen*, Paris, Editions Kimé, p. 38 (fr. n. 12).

<sup>189</sup> M. Heidegger, *Il Nichilismo Europeo*, op. cit., p. 116.

rendent le problème plus aigu» (VP II, § 7, p.12) – is opposed to the transvaluating *complete* nihilism, which is preceded and prepared by an intermediate phase of *extreme* nihilism:<sup>190</sup>

Qu'est-ce qu'une *croissance*? Comment naît-elle? Toute croissance consiste à *tenir pour vrai*.

La forme *extrême* du nihilisme consisterait à dire: Toute croissance, toute opinion est fautive, parce qu'il n'y a pas de « monde vrai ». Il n'y a donc qu'une apparence perspectiviste dont l'origine est en nous (dans la mesure où nous avons besoin d'un monde rétréci, abrégé, simplifié) - La mesure de notre force, c'est ce que nous pouvons reconnaître de *phénoménisme*, de mensonge nécessaire, sans en mourir.

Dans cette mesure, le nihilisme était la négation d'un « monde vrai », de l'Être, pourrait être la pensée d'un Dieu. (VP II, § 627, 229-230)<sup>191</sup>

In Heidegger's reading, it is in *this* extreme form, that nihilism is ambiguous, allowing two distinct variants: a *passive* nihilism («[...] comme déclin et régression de la puissance de l'esprit»), and an *active* nihilism («[...] comme signe de la force accrue de l'esprit»),<sup>192</sup> the latter being identified with the recognition of the will to power as the foundation (*sub-iectum*) of the possibility of truth.<sup>193</sup> Heidegger emphasises the supreme *strength* of the active-ecstatic form of nihilism as a *God-like way of thinking*, which does not admit anything as a measure for all things *beside* and *above* itself, and which overcomes sheer aspiration to Nothingness through an active «force violente et destructive» (VP II, §277, 110),<sup>194</sup> *creating* the space for a new position of values.<sup>195</sup>

In his commentary on *European Nihilism*, Heidegger defines Nietzsche's "antropomorphism" as the explicit enunciation of what was thought and postulated very early in the history of metaphysics as the principle of all thinking, namely, the unconditional role of man as dominator and ultimate principle of all interpretations of the world - <sup>196</sup> the *unconditioned subjectivity*. From this perspective, he identifies *active* nihilism with the God-like perspective, one that recognizes no other principle and measure *above* and *beside* the Subject-man.

Tracing in Nietzsche's will to power the ultimate *unconditioned* foundation (as *subiectum*), Heidegger defines nihilism as the extreme outcome of *modern* metaphysics,<sup>197</sup> which, he argues, has its foundation in Descartes' reflections on method. The Cartesian

<sup>190</sup> M. Heidegger, op. cit., p. 108. «*Postulat de cette hypothèse*: l'idée qu'il n'y a pas de vérité; qu'il n'y a pas de nature absolue des choses, de "chose en soi". Ce n'est là que du nihilisme, et du plus extrême. Il place la valeur des choses justement dans ce fait qu'il n'y a aucune réalité qui corresponde ou qui ait jamais correspondu à ces valeurs, mais qu'elles sont au contraire un symptôme de force chez le créateur de valeurs, une simplification utile à la vie» (VP II, § 112, p. 56).

<sup>191</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Le Nihilisme Européen*, op. cit., p. 39 (fr. n. 15). My italics.

<sup>192</sup> Ivi, p. 42 (fr. 22). VP II, § 276, 109.

<sup>193</sup> M. Heidegger, *Il Nichilismo Europeo*, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>194</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Le Nihilisme Européen*, op. cit., p. 42 (fr. 23).

<sup>195</sup> M. Heidegger, *Il Nichilismo Europeo*, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>196</sup> Ivi, p. 154.

<sup>197</sup> Ivi, pp. 168- ff.

“method”, as the proceeding *against* being, which secures it as an object for a subject, discloses new forms of dominion, unknown to the Greek world, under the *unlimited* sovereignty of *subjectivity*.<sup>198</sup>

Now, Nietzsche’s metaphysics as “anthropomorphism”, as the configuration of the world in the image of man, poses the negation of truth in the sense of *error/falsehood* as the only essence of truth: thus conceived, Nietzsche provides the subject (as will to power) with the unconditional disposal of truth/falsehood. Thus, as Heidegger emphasises,<sup>199</sup> the subjectivity is not merely *freed from all limits*, but it itself decides and disposes of all limitation.

It is significant that ten years later, in his essay on *Nietzsche et le nihilisme*, published in *Les Temps Modernes* in August 1950 and later included in the philosophical essay *L’Homme révolté*, Camus should draw a similar parallel between Nietzsche’s nihilism and Descartes’ method, but with a diametrically different meaning:

Au lieu du doute méthodique, il [Nietzsche] a pratiqué *la négation méthodique*, la destruction appliquée de tout ce qui masque encore le nihilisme à lui-même, des idoles qui camouflent la mort de Dieu. « Pour élever un sanctuaire nouveau, il faut abattre un sanctuaire, telle est la loi. » Celui qui veut être créateur dans le bien et dans le mal, selon lui, doit d’abord être destructeur et briser les valeurs. [...] Il a écrit, à sa manière, le *Discours de la méthode* de son temps, sans la liberté et l’exactitude de ce XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle français qu’il admirait tant, mais avec la folle lucidité qui caractérise le XX<sup>e</sup> [sic] siècle, siècle du génie, selon lui. Cette méthode de révolte, il nous revient de l’examiner. (HR, 476)

Camus traces the “lucid folly” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century precisely in the *unconditional* or “*absolute*” negation brought about by *modern* nihilism, and prepared by Nietzsche’s *method of revolt*, or the methodical negation, which coincides with the *tabula rasa* of all transcendent principle and value. Camus, like Heidegger, shows himself to be aware, in the 1951 essay on revolt and in his notes around 1943-45, that the absence of limit is the problem of *modern* nihilism. In an interview to *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* in May 1951, Camus observed that

[q]uand j’analysais le sentiment de l’Absurde, dans *le Mythe de Sisyphe*, j’étais à la recherche d’une méthode et non d’une doctrine. Je pratiquais le *doute méthodique*. Je cherchais à faire cette « table rase » à partir de laquelle on peut commencer à construire.

Si on pose que rien n’a de sens, alors il faut conclure à l’absurdité du monde. Mais rien n’a-t-il de sens ? Je n’ai jamais pensé qu’on puisse rester sur cette position. Déjà, quand j’écrivais *le Mythe*, je songeais à l’essai sur la révolte [...]. (E, 1342-3)<sup>200</sup> [My italics]

<sup>198</sup> Ivi, pp. 205- 207.

<sup>199</sup> Ivi, p. 241.

<sup>200</sup> In the same year he declares: « je me place dans le nihilisme et c’est là que je cherche des valeurs constructives, parce que de ces valeurs-là, je peux être sûr [...] je ne veux pas la fin de notre civilisation, je veux au contraire affirmer des valeurs qui assureront la reconstruction. Si je pars du nihilisme, c’est pour trouver des valeurs sûres » (F. Rauhut, “Du nihilisme à la mesure...”, op. cit., pp. 17-ff.)

Furthermore, insisting on the provisional character of the absurd negation he wrote: «son vrai caractère [...] est d'être un passage vécu, un point de départ, *l'équivalent en existence, du doute méthodique de Descartes* » (HR, 417).<sup>201</sup> What is interesting to point out is that in the 1945 *Remarque sur la révolte* Camus maintains that «[d]ans l'ordre de l'expérience humaine, la révolte a le même sens que le *cogito* dans l'ordre de la pensée. Elle est la première vérité et elle *créé* la première valeur » (E, 1686-87) – stretching the analogy, in a note, to the point of declaring that «le *cogito est révolte* » (Id.).<sup>202</sup>

The emphasis on value and truth seems to expose Camus's argument (and its "Cartesian" terminology) to the Heideggerian critique of the modern metaphysics of *subjectivity*, touching upon the problem of man as the unconditioned, and therefore unlimited, *sub-iectum* who posits («creates») values, introducing and extracting them from the world. But I argue that the *raisonnement absurde* of the MdS does not allow us to draw such conclusions: if the absurd experience dismantles the concept of Subject as a "*jeux stérile*" (MdS, 111), or illusory construction, in the line of Nietzsche's critique of meta-physical idols, Camus' notion of "*la chair consciente*" cannot be confused with the Heideggerian notion of "*body*" in the German philosopher's critique of Being as Representativeness.

According to Heidegger, while Descartes' man is *subject* in the sense of the representing Ego, for Nietzsche, man is *subject* in the sense of the *unconditioned* subjectivity of the body, as passions and instincts – as *will to power*.<sup>203</sup> It follows, in Heidegger's view, that *active nihilism* lies precisely in the recognition of this subjectivity of the body (as *will to power*) as the only foundation and origin of values: Nietzsche's metaphysics, according to the German philosopher, is centred around *animalitas*, the essence of subjectivity disclosing itself as *brutalitas* and *bestialitas*.<sup>204</sup> This, I argue, is where Camus joins, and immediately parts ways with Heidegger: the problem of *modern nihilism* lies for both in the un-conditionality of man as *subject* and *master* of a God-less creation, that is, in a (metaphysical) condition of *absence of limit*.

Now, the question of limit, inscribed, as I have attempted to show, in the *aesthetic* experience of the absurd, as an essentially cognitive/ontological question, acquires a primary *political* concern in Camus' reflection *after* 1941. This would explain why, in his letter to

<sup>201</sup> My italics.

<sup>202</sup> The *cogito* is revolt precisely in that it erases all reference to a transcendent Being or Value. Certainty and values are posed in *the hands of man*. But it is in disclosing the God-like unconditionality of man as only *master* that revolt opens the way to *absolute nihilism*, the object of Camus's analysis in the 1951 essay.

<sup>203</sup> M. Heidegger, *Il Nichilismo Europeo*, op. cit., p. 230.

<sup>204</sup> Ivi, p. 243. From this perspective, nihilism (*extreme-active-ecstatic*) is the accomplishment of the *modern* pre-eminence and *dominion* of the unconditioned subject.

Ponge in '43, Camus would claim his right to *think in the margins* of modern nihilism, *outside and against* a form of nihilism diffused in his time. «Je l'ai dit dans ma prière d'insérer: "Il s'agit de savoir si l'on peut définir un *bon nihilisme*." Il me semble que vous [Ponge] *du moins* avez démontré qu'on le pouvait » (E, 1666).<sup>205</sup> As though regretfully avowing the unsuccessfulness of his own attempt, Camus' words confirm that the MdS was conceived by its author as an altogether personal effort of *mise en œuvre* in this direction:

Si j'en juge par vos notes, la définition serait celle-ci : « Le bon nihilisme est celui qui conduit au relatif et à l'humain ». C'est là que je vous rejoins, malgré mon goût de l'ontologie, car, sur ce point précis de notre destin historique, j'ai assez le goût de l'homme et de son bonheur pour éviter toutes les contradictions. (E, 1666).

What I argue is that the « relative » and the « human », as opposed to the « Absolute » and « God-like », are inscribed in the *raisonnement absurde* of the MdS, and more precisely, in the metaphoric constellation employed by Camus to define the absurd. According to the author, the feeling of the absurd, or of *absurdity*, as Camus seems to interchange the two formulas, is a *passion* «qui règle mes rapports avec la vie» (MdS, 113) - «savoir si l'on peut vivre avec ses passions, savoir si l'on peut accepter leur *loi profonde* qui est de *brûler* le cœur que dans le même temps elles *exaltent*» (Id.).

Furthermore, the absurd is metaphorically described as depending both upon man and upon the world – in this sense, I suggest, it is *relative* par excellence: it is the only link between the two, which «les scelle l'un à l'autre comme la *haine* seule peut river les êtres» (MdS, 113). The sensory dimension (*aisthesis*), confirmed by the reference to hatred as a passionate *face-to-face* or *con-frontation*, is the dominant feature in Camus' characterisation of the absurd/absurdity as a *contradiction*: it is in this peculiar (*aesthetic*) *être-à*, that «toute la conséquence d'une vie peut en naître » (MdS, 118).

L'irrationnel, la nostalgie humaine et l'absurde qui surgit *de leur tête-à-tête*, voilà les trois personnages du *drame* qui doit nécessairement finir avec *toute la logique dont une existence est capable*. (MdS, 118)

Dans cet univers indéchiffrable et limité, *le destin de l'homme prend désormais son sens*. (MdS, 113)  
[My italics]

The close textual analysis of the MdS brings forth the implications of the theatrical metaphor, as related to, and conveying a specific *aesthetic* acceptance of time,<sup>206</sup> which illustrates the absurd as *ex-ceeding* sheer meaninglessness (of the world) and valuelessness.

<sup>205</sup> My italics.

<sup>206</sup> MdS, 158. «Quoi d'étonnant à trouver une gloire périssable bâtie sur les plus éphémères des créations ? L'acteur a trois heures pour être Iago ou Alceste, Phèdre ou Gloucester. Dans ce court passage, il les fait naître et mourir sur cinquante mètres carrés de planches. Jamais l'absurde n'a été si bien et si longtemps illustré. Ces vies merveilleuses, ces destins uniques et complets qui croissent et qui s'achèvent entre des murs et pour quelques



Now, while, according to Heidegger, Nietzsche roots appraising in the will-to-power,<sup>207</sup> Camus situates appraising in the very *act of living*, that is, in existing.<sup>208</sup> According to him,

*Refuser toute signification au monde revient à supprimer tout jugement de valeur. Mais vivre, et par exemple se nourrir, est en soi un jugement de valeur. On choisit de durer dès l'instant qu'on ne se laisse pas mourir, et l'on reconnaît alors une valeur, au moins relative, à la vie. (E, 865) [My italics]*

The *act of living*, of existing, which for Camus is always and already some kind of judgement – *aesthetic* (in Nietzsche's acceptance of the term, that is anti-foundational, as opposed to *moral*), and *aesthetic*, i.e., unfoundedly founded on *aisthesis* – cannot be reduced to sheer bestiality (*animalitas*), nor to the nakedness of bodily functions and drives, *ex-istence* (the absurd) being precisely what distinguishes, in Camus's argument, man from animal, as the *one-with-the-world*.<sup>209</sup>

I argue that, while apparently re-stating the subject-object opposition of modern metaphysics, Camus' absurd is (in) the *being-in-front-of-the-world* of a subjectivity (the lucid will to «être en face du monde le plus souvent possible», MdS, 144), which roots that *con-frontation* in the sensory *toucher-à* of man-to-world and of world-to-man,<sup>210</sup> that is, in the *aisthetic* present of *la chair consciente*. In this sense, the absurd of the MdS eventually marks the irreparable break down of the un-conditioned Ego.

As I have attempted to show, the limit is inscribed in *ex-istence* as the absurd *touching-upon-the-borders* which exposes the finitude of man's condition: this is where Camus situates the “*relative*” and “*human*”, which are the distinguishing features of *good nihilism*.

The fact that, between 1942 and 1944, Camus identifies *good nihilism* with a «good» *use* of the anti-Foundational, “*aestheticizing*”, conclusions brought forth by the evidence of absurdity, emerges in the 1944 article “*Sur une philosophie de l'expression*” de Brice Parain,

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heures, quel raccourci souhaiter qui soit plus révélateur ? [...] Si jamais la morale de la quantité pouvait trouver un aliment, c'est bien sur cette scène singulière » (MdS, 159). It is significant that Camus would chose four characters belonging to ancient and modern tragedy to illustrate the *métier absurde* of the actor.

<sup>207</sup> M. Heidegger, *Il Nichilismo Europeo*, op. cit., p. 288.

<sup>208</sup> See his letter to Bonnel in March 1943 (E, 1423).

<sup>209</sup> «Si j'étais arbre parmi les arbres, chat parmi les animaux, cette vie aurait un sens ou plutôt ce problème n'en aurait point car je ferais partie de ce monde. Je serais ce monde auquel je m'oppose maintenant par toute ma conscience et par toute mon exigence de familiarité. » (MdS, 136).

<sup>210</sup> Man's *nostalgie*, or need for unity and meaning, exposes man to the world precisely in the sense that the world is *felt* on the sensory limit or boundary, upon which man inevitably touches in his *stretching out* for reasons. As he points out in his letter to Bonnel: «[...] l'absurde n'aurait pas de sens hors de la nostalgie. Mais je me refuse seulement à croire que dans l'ordre métaphysique le besoin d'un principe nécessite l'existence de ce principe» (E, 1424).

and is confirmed by a note in the *Carnets* (September 1944), which brings forth the continuity between Camus' interrogation on language, the question of nihilism and its relationship with totalitarianism:<sup>211</sup>

Il n'y a pas d'autre objection à l'attitude totalitaire que l'objection religieuse ou morale. Si le monde n'a pas de sens, ils ont raison. Je n'accepte pas qu'ils aient raison. Donc...

C'est à nous de créer Dieu. Ce n'est pas lui le créateur. Voilà toute l'histoire du Christianisme. Car nous n'avons qu'une façon de créer Dieu, qui est de le devenir. (CII, 127) [My italics]

If the world has no reason and value, *they, i.e.*, the Nazis, are right to resort to power and violence, to the instinctual drives (E, 240), or to *bestiality*,<sup>212</sup> as the logical outcome of the total negation of all meta-physically grounded sense and value.

What Camus voices here is the dilemma that the "Nietzschean" generation of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century faced with the break down of the Western Tradition (*modern nihilism*),<sup>213</sup> in which it was incapable of rationally refuting the nihilistic argument at the core of the Nazi «totalitarian attitude», or of appealing to any religious/ moral to justify an active rejection of its murderous policy.

Et à la vérité, *moi qui croyais penser comme vous*, je ne voyais guère d'argument à vous opposer, sinon un goût violent de la justice qui, pour finir, me paraissait aussi peu raisonné que la plus soudaine des passions. (LAA, 240) [My italics]

Declaring in the fourth *Lettre* in July 1944 that *different conclusions* could be drawn from a common absurd experience of de-valuation of superior values, Camus suggests the possibility of a *bad use* of the nihilistic premises inherent in the *raisonnement absurde*. This is confirmed in the article on Parain, published the same year, where the author shows himself to be fully aware of the pitfalls in Nietzsche's thought,<sup>214</sup> which he summarises in the notion of «métaphysique du mensonge» (E, 1679).

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<sup>211</sup> It is significant that Camus' early notes on Parain's philosophy of language in the *Carnets*, taken over two years later in the article for the review *Poésie* 44, should have been written in the same period as the draft of a preface to the MdS (between March and August 1942): «Brice Parain. Essai sur le logos platonicien. Étudie le logos comme langage. Revient à doter Platon d'une philosophie de l'expression. Retraced effort de Platon à la recherche d'un réalisme raisonnable. Quel est le « tragique » du problème ? Si notre langage n'a pas de sens, rien n'a de sens. Si les sophistes ont raison, le monde est insensé. La solution de Platon n'est pas psychologique, elle est cosmologique. Quelle est l'originalité de la position de Parain : il considère le problème du langage comme métaphysique et non pas social et psychologique [...]» (CII, 34-35).

<sup>212</sup> «Vous [les Nazis] avez supposé qu'en l'absence de toute morale humaine ou divine les seules valeurs étaient celles qui régissaient le monde animal, c'est-à-dire la violence et la ruse» (LAA, 240).

<sup>213</sup> «Nous avons longtemps cru ensemble que ce monde n'avait pas de raison supérieure et que nous étions frustrés. Je le crois encore d'une certaine manière. Mais j'en ai tiré d'autres conclusions que celles dont vous me parliez alors et que, depuis tant d'années, vous essayez de faire entrer dans l'Histoire» (LAA, 239-240).

<sup>214</sup> A quotation from Nietzsche's posthumous fragments, which can be found in both the editions of *La Volonté de puissance* and in the *Œuvres Posthumes*, suggests that by 1944 Camus was already acquainted with these two works by the German philosopher: «Aux tentatives de justification, on a substitué l'étude des règles de l'expression. C'est une évolution parallèle à celle qui a fini par remplacer, dans notre siècle, la métaphysique par

Anticipating Gianni Vattimo, according to whom «once the real world has been recognized as possessing the structure of a fable, the fable could then be said to acquire the ancient metaphysical dignity (the “glory”) of the real world»,<sup>215</sup> the liquidation of the *True* eternal principles of traditional Metaphysics as *fable* or *lie* is seen by Camus as leaving the transcendent “space” of the *ontos on vacant*: «la foi dans la divinité de la vérité» is turned upside down, through the glorification of its opposite (*mensonge*), but remains nevertheless *intact*. The absurdity of *this* world is, thus, turned into an *Ab-solute* :<sup>216</sup> «Nietzsche acceptait le mensonge de l’existence et y voyait le principe de toute vie et de tout progrès» (E, 1679).

It is in the *bad* logic of this *incomplete* or *inconsequent* form of nihilism that we recognize the elements of the totalitarian attitude, defined in the LAA the same year:

Parce que vous [les Nazis] avez fait de votre désespoir une ivresse, parce que vous vous en êtes délivré en l’érigeant en principe, vous avez accepté de *détruire* les œuvres de l’homme et de lutter contre lui pour achever sa misère essentielle. [...] Parce que vous étiez las de lutter contre le ciel, vous vous êtes reposés dans cette épuisante aventure où votre tâche est de mutiler les âmes et de *détruire* la terre. Pout tout dire, vous avez choisi l’injustice, vous vous êtes mis avec les dieux. Votre logique n’était qu’apparente. (LAA, 240-241) [My italics]

The *inconsequent* logic of the totalitarian attitude, resumed in the Nazi ideology and power policy - stemming from a common principle or “*commencement*” (E, 240), in other words, from *modern* nihilism, as experienced by the front generation - is described by Camus as a *loss of lucidity*.

Culminating in self-divinisation, loss of lucidity can easily be identified as the extreme outcome of the God-like perspective of an *unconditioned* and *unlimited* subjectivity.<sup>217</sup> It is possible to trace a convergence, in Camus’ pages, of this incomplete-nihilism and the logic of domination of power policy, structured around the conceptual constellation of *de-struction/*

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le culte de l’action, l’effort de la connaissance par la petite sagesse du pragmatisme. «La connaissance et le devenir s’excluent», dit Nietzsche. Il faut donc, si l’on veut vivre dans le devenir, abandonner tout espoir de connaissance » (E, 1675).

<sup>215</sup> Gianni Vattimo, « An apology for Nihilism », in G. Vattimo, *The End of Modernity. Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*, Polity Press, 1988, p. 25.

<sup>216</sup> Historicism is, in this sense, only apparently rejecting nihilism - as he points out in his 1949 conference “Le temps des meurtriers”: «tout le réalisme politique et moral qui guidait et guide encore les destinées du monde obéit, souvent sans le savoir, et avec 100 ans de retard, à une philosophie de l’Histoire née en Allemagne, selon laquelle l’humanité entière se dirige selon des voies rationnelles vers un Univers définitif. On a remplacé le nihilisme par un rationalisme sans nuances [...] [et] s’il est vrai que l’Histoire obéit à une logique souveraine [...] alors tout ce qui sert cette marche inévitable est bon et les accomplissements de l’Histoire sont les vérités définitives » (in F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., p. 58).

<sup>217</sup> The reference to the Over-Man as the product of the self-divinisation of man is apparent in the first LAA (July 1943): «Nous luttons pour cette nuance qui sépare le sacrifice de la mystique, l’énergie de la violence, la force de la cruauté, pour cette plus faible nuance encore qui sépare le faux du vrai et l’homme que nous espérons des dieux lâches que vous révèrez » (E, 224). The continuity with the Parain article is confirmed on a textual level by an immediate echo : « Il n’est pas sûr que notre époque ait manqué de dieux. On lui en a proposé beaucoup, et le plus souvent bêtes ou lâches. » (E, 1671).

«*achèvement*». This is essential in order to grasp the meaning of Camus' personal position *vis-à-vis* the traditional concept of the political, and especially of the political role of *creation*.

Now, what is important to point out is that, by identifying the *inconsequent logic* of the Nazis' nihilistic reasoning with a *loss of lucidity* (metaphorically designated as *aveuglement*), Camus seems to suggest that the *lucid* thought, illustrated in the MdS as a possible (though not the only) outcome of the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of traditional values, as an *honest* thought, namely, one that is consistent with its absurd premises, may be identified with the *good nihilism*, of which the MdS was conceived as an attempt of *mise en œuvre*.

Moreover, it suggests that Camus conceived of *good nihilism* as coinciding with the Nietzschean *active* or *complete nihilism*. This is confirmed by the fact that, almost eight years after the publication of the essay on the absurd, in his article on *Nietzsche et le nihilisme*, published in *Les Temps Modernes* in August 1950 and later included in *L'homme révolté*,<sup>218</sup> Camus hinted *a posteriori* at a philosophical parentage between the absurd argument of the MdS and Nietzsche's notes on *active nihilism*.

The terminological correspondences between Camus' commentary of Nietzsche's *La Volonté de puissance* and the pages on absurd freedom and the lucid *tabula rasa* of metaphysical '*illusions*' in the MdS suggest that the French writer conceived the *aesthetic* or *tragic* thought of the 1942 essay, as the «*mise au point*» of a *good nihilism*, to be inheriting (and completing) the *positive* legacy of the German philosopher, that of a certain *use – clinical, methodical, provisional or strategic* (HR, 475) - of the anti-foundational premises brought forth by his "conscious" nihilism (Id.):

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| <p>MdS (1942):</p> <p>«En dehors de cette unique fatalité de la mort, tout, joie ou bonheur, est liberté. Un monde demeure dont <i>l'homme est le seul maître</i>. Ce qui le liait, c'était <i>l'illusion</i> d'un autre monde » (MdS, 192)</p> <p>«Je peux tout refuter dans ce monde qui m'entoure.</p> | <p><i>Nietzsche et le nihilisme</i> (1950):</p> <p>« La vraie morale, pour Nietzsche, ne se sépare pas de la <i>lucidité</i> » (HR, 477)</p> <p>« Le nihilisme, qu'il se manifeste dans la religion ou dans la prédication socialiste, est l'aboutissement logique de <i>nos valeurs dites supérieures</i>. L'esprit libre détruira ces valeurs, dénonçant les <i>illusions</i> sur lesquelles elles reposent, le marchandage qu'elles supposent, et le crime qu'elles commettent en empêchant <i>l'intelligence lucide</i> d'accomplir sa mission : transformer le nihilisme passif en nihilisme <i>actif</i>. » (HR, 479) « Dans ce monde débarrassé de Dieu et des idoles morales, l'homme est maintenant solitaire et <i>sans maître</i>. » (Id.)</p> <p>« Si le destin n'est pas orienté par une valeur supérieure, si le hasard est roi, voici la marche dans les ténèbres, <i>l'affreuse liberté de l'aveugle</i>. [...] Cette</p> |
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<sup>218</sup> HR, 475- 489.

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| me heurte et me transporte, sauf ce chaos, <i>ce hazard roi</i> et cette divine équivalence qui naît de l'anarchie. Je ne sais pas si ce monde a un sens qui le dépasse. Mais je sais que je ne connais pas ce sens [...] » (MdS, 136). | impasse où Nietzsche pousse <i>méthodiquement</i> son nihilisme, <sup>219</sup> on peut dire qu'il s'y rue avec une sorte de joie affreuse. Son but avoué est de rendre à l'homme de son temps la situation intenable. » (HR, 480-481) (My italics) |
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*Lucidity* is the term used in the MdS to address the *aesthetic* finite thought of the finite, as opposed to the suicidal logic of *absolute* negation (MdS, 138). That the former coincides with a particular *use* of the nihilistic evidence of the loss or retreat of the world is confirmed in the MdS by the association of lucidity with *ascesis*, or self-mastering, as illustrated in the chapter on “*La liberté absurde*” and in the figure of the *absurd creator*.

Thus, the question of *good* nihilism coincides with the question of the finite “method” (in the Greek acceptance of *meta-hodos*, *hodos* = “way”) traced in MdS, identified, precisely, with «*la route aride et desséchée de l'effort lucide*»,<sup>220</sup> through which

[touts] les problèmes reprennent leur tranchant. L'évidence abstraite se retire devant le lyrisme des formes et de couleurs. Les conflits spirituels s'incarnent et retrouvent l'abri misérable et magnifique du cœur de l'homme. *Aucun n'est résolu. Mais tous sont transfigurés. Va-t-on mourir, échapper par le saut, reconstruire une maison d'idées et de formes à sa mesure? Va-t-on au contraire soutenir le pari déchirant et merveilleux de l'absurde? Faisons à cet égard un dernier effort et tirons toutes nos conséquences. Le corps, la tendresse, la création, l'action, la noblesse humaine, reprendront alors leur place dans ce monde insensé. L'homme y retrouvera enfin le vin de l'absurde et le pain de l'indifférence dont il nourrit sa grandeur.* (MdS, 137)<sup>221</sup> [My italics]

In analogous terms, and mirroring the movement of “*la pensée humiliée*”, it is in the work of the great “*romanciers philosophes*”,<sup>222</sup> which embodies the *échec* of *tragic* thought against the hubristic God-like view of extreme or absolute nihilism, that «[la] pensée abstraite rejoint enfin son support de *chair*» (MdS, 178):

<sup>219</sup> In an interview in mai 1951 Camus declared : « Quand j'analysais le sentiment de l'Absurde dans le *Mythe de Sisyphe*, j'étais à la recherche d'une méthode et non d'une doctrine. Je pratiquais le doute méthodique. Je cherchais à faire cette 'table rase' à partir de laquelle on peut commencer à construire. Si l'on pose que rien n'a de sens, alors il faut conclure à l'absurdité du monde. Mais rien n'a-t-il de sens? Je n'ai jamais pensé qu'on puisse rester sur cette position. » (E, 1343).

<sup>220</sup> «Elle [la route aride de l'effort lucide] débouche maintenant dans la vie quotidienne. Elle retrouve le monde de l' « on » anonyme, mais l'homme y rentre désormais avec sa révolte et sa clairvoyance. Il a désappris d'espérer. Cet enfer du présent, c'est enfin son royaume. » (E, 137).

<sup>221</sup> The echoes of Camus's review of the novel *Le Pain et le Vin*, by the Italian anti-fascist writer Ignazio Silone, in *Alger républicain* (23<sup>rd</sup> Mai 1939) would confirm the *aesthetic* dimension inherent in the metaphoric constellation of the absurd, as well as its latent political implications: «Retrouver le chemin de ces gestes et de cette vérité, et d'une philosophie abstraite de la révolution revenir *au pain et au vin de la simplicité*, c'est l'itinéraire d'Ignazio Silone et la leçon de ce roman. Et ce n'est pas sa moindre grandeur que de nous inciter, nous aussi, à retrouver, à travers les haines de l'heure, le visage d'un peuple fier et humain qui demeure notre seul espoir de paix » (E, 1399).

<sup>222</sup> Camus cites among many Balzac, Sade, Melville, Stendhal, Dostyevsky, Proust, Malraux, and Kafka. « Mais justement le choix qu'ils ont fait d'écrire en images plutôt qu'en raisonnements est révélateur d'une certaine pensée qui leur est commune, persuadée de l'inutilité de tout principe d'explication et convaincue du message enseignant de l'apparence sensible. » (MdS, 178).

Incapable de sublimer le réel, la pensée s'arrête à le mimer. Le roman dont il est question est l'instrument de *cette connaissance à la fois relative et inépuisable*, si semblable à celle de *l'amour*. De l'amour, la création romanesque a *l'émerveillement initial et la rumination féconde*. (MdS, 179). [My italics]

What emerges in the pages of the MdS is an opposition between abstract/suicide and *aisthesis*/lucidity. The latter cannot be separated from self-discipline, as the condition for the re-opening of the possibility of *meaning* out of the logical impasse of the anti-foundational *nihil*.<sup>223</sup>

[...] Tout, dès qu'on creuse, aboutit à un problème *métaphysique*. Ainsi, de quelque part que l'homme se tourne, il se trouve isolé sur le réel comme sur une île entourée d'une mer fracassante de possibles et d'interrogations. *On peut conclure de là que le monde a un sens*. Car il n'en aurait pas, s'il était, brutalement. Les mondes heureux n'ont pas de raisons. Il est donc ridicule de dire : « La métaphysique est-elle possible ? ». *La métaphysique est*. (CII, 96). [My italics]

It is clear from this note, probably dated between February and May 1943, that, in Camus's acceptation of the term, metaphysics cannot be confused with a Platonic-Christian «reasonable realism»: it is precisely because man is surrounded by the *absurd* walls (the image of the island evoking the *finiteness* of human condition and the *échec* of all foundationalism), that the world has a meaning. A world without man would have no reason and no meaning, it would simply *be*. *Metaphysics*, therefore, in this specific acceptation, coincides with *ex*-istence as the mutual *exposedness* of man-to-the-world and the world-to-man. namely, the *absurd*.<sup>224</sup> It is precisely in this sense that we should understand Camus' «*souci métaphysique*» (E, 1666), summarising his *personal* position *vis-à-vis* of modern nihilism.

*Good* nihilism is a form of thinking which develops *in the margins* of modern nihilism, as a result of its anti-foundational *tabula rasa*, but which cannot be reduced to a philosophy of *absurdity*, in the sense of a thought of utter meaninglessness (of the world). Instead, it is identified with an *honest*,<sup>225</sup> “metaphysically” concerned (in the sense exposed

<sup>223</sup> In July 1943 he wrote: «Nous avons beaucoup à dominer et peut-être pour commencer la perpétuelle tentation où nous sommes de vous ressembler. Car il y a toujours en nous quelque chose qui se laisse aller à l'instinct, au mépris de l'intelligence, au culte de l'efficacité.» (LAA, 222).

<sup>224</sup> I use the term *ex*-istence to refer to the finite *être-à* as the *absurd exposedness* to the limits, that is, in an anti-foundational sense. It is in this sense that we must read the following note in the *Carnets* (September 1943): «Puisque le mot existence recouvre quelque chose, qui est notre nostalgie, mais puisqu'en même temps il ne peut s'empêcher de s'étendre à l'affirmation d'une réalité supérieure, nous ne le garderons que sous une forme convertie – nous dirons philosophie *inexistentielle*, ce qui ne comporte pas une négation mais prétend seulement rendre compte d'un état de « l'homme privé de... » La philosophie *inexistentielle* sera la philosophie de l'exil » (CII, 106). [My italics]

<sup>225</sup> « [...] je ne prétends pas à penser nouvellement, mais à penser *honnêtement*. » (E, 1666).

above), *tragic* thought of the finite. In the closing lines of his *raisonnement absurde* Camus wrote:

Mais il est mauvais de s'arrêter, difficile de se contenter d'une seule manière de voir, de se priver de la contradiction, la plus subtile peut-être de toutes les forces spirituelles. Ce qui précède [i.e. the absurd argument] définit seulement *une façon de penser*. Maintenant, il s'agit de vivre. (MdS, 146) [My highlighting]

The «way of thinking» outlined in the MdS is precisely that *absurd* method which emerges from the tragic awareness of the ontologic/*aesthetic* limit, and is made *visible* by the artist's absurd effort and *self-discipline*.

The 1942-43 *Carnets* attest the continuity between the *tragic* or *aesthetic* thought of the MdS and Camus' reflection on revolt, from the *Remarque* to HR:

Essai sur la révolte. La nostalgie des "commencements". *Id.* le thème du relatif – mais *le relatif avec passion*. Ex : déchiré entre le monde qui ne suffit pas et Dieu qu'il n'a pas, l'esprit absurde choisit avec passion le monde. *Id.* : partagé entre le relatif et l'absolu, il saute avec ardeur dans le relatif. (CII, 62-63) [My italics]

Camus clearly grafts the notion of revolt in the tragic *passion passive*, which dwells in the finite and liminal dimension of the *relative* – a dimension recovered, as Camus writes to Ponge in January 1943, by and through *good nihilism* (E, 1666).

The notion of the "*relative*" recurs on another occasion the same year: in his letter to Pierre Bonnel, Camus declares his belief in the possibility «de lier à une philosophie absurde une pensée politique soucieuse de perfectionnement humain et plaçant son optimisme dans le *relatif*» (E, 1423).<sup>226</sup>

Now, the *aesthetic* component in the transition from the absurd to revolt is brought forth by Camus's insistent reference to the three intertwined terms *bonheur* – *beauté* – *amour* in the 1943-44 *Carnets*:

Essai sur la Révolte. Après avoir fait partir de l'angoisse la philosophie : la faire sortir du *bonheur*.

*Id.* Régénérer l'amour dans le monde absurde, c'est en fait régénérer le plus brûlant et le plus périssable des sentiments humains (Platon : « Si nous étions des dieux, nous ne connaîtrions pas l'amour »). [...] Mais cet amour est en dehors de l'éternel. C'est le plus humain des sentiments avec ce que le mot comprend à la fois de limitation et d'exaltation. C'est en cela que *l'homme ne se réalise que dans l'amour parce qu'il y trouve sous une forme fulgurante l'image de sa condition sans avenir* [...].(CII, 75) [My italics]

Tragic *happiness* closes the *raisonnement absurde* of the MdS on the famous lines, «Il faut imaginer Sisyphe *heureux*» (MdS, 198). It is significant that, between November 1942 and

<sup>226</sup> This idea is further developed in a note, probably dated end 1943 : «La plus grande économie qu'on puisse réaliser dans l'ordre de la pensée c'est d'accepter la non-intelligibilité du monde – et de s'occuper de l'homme» (CII, 113).

January 1943, Camus should re-question the work of Nietzsche precisely through the notion of *bonheur*: «Le beau, dit Nietzsche, après Stendhal, est une promesse de bonheur. *Mais s'il n'est pas le bonheur même, que peut-il promettre?*» (CII, 60).

Beauty, in the *tragic* perspective of the *lucid* artist, *coincides* with happiness – not in the sense of some kind of “ideal” (*promised*, thus not sensually *present*) object of disinterested contemplation, but rather as sensory (*passionate*) touching-upon-the limit which *de-fines* the human finite condition.<sup>227</sup>

Camus describes the lucid or *absurd* thinker who, although acknowledging a philosophy of *evidence* («qui répugne à l'esprit et au cœur *mais qui s'impose*», CII, 82), *knows* a philosophy of *preference*, as «*penseur heureux*»:

Ainsi ma philosophie d'évidence, c'est l'absurde. Mais cela ne m'empêche pas d'avoir (ou plus exactement de *connaître*) une philosophie de préférence : Ex : un juste équilibre entre l'esprit et le monde, harmonie, plénitude, etc...Le penseur heureux est *celui qui suit sa pente* – le penseur exilé celui qui s'y refuse – par vérité – avec regret mais détermination... Peut-on pousser aussi loin cette séparation entre le penseur et son système ? N'est pas en fait revenir à un réalisme détourné : la vérité extérieure à l'homme – contraignante. Peut-être, *mais ce serait alors un réalisme non satisfaisant. Non pas une solution à priori.* (CII, 83) [My italics]

The contradiction between the evidence of the absurd, evoked in the MdS, and the inclination of the *penseur heureux* – between the thinker and his set of (absurd) “truths”- is the key term of Camus' definition of the tragic finite thought of the finite.<sup>228</sup>

The philosophy of preference introduces a protest, which creates a tension between the nihilistic evidence (absurd) and the thinker's *tragic knowledge*: “*bonheur*” and “*connaissance pure*”, thus, coincide, and in the 1943 notebooks (CII, 87) they are opposed to the absurdist attitude of the *exiled thinker* (CII, 83), who hypostatizing the *contradiction in existence* of the absurd,<sup>229</sup> attempts to deduce a stringent logicity from his initial illogic, *i.e.*, contradictory, evidence.

The tragic *bonheur* is opposed to the *satisfaction* or «*complaisance dans la douleur*», which, in the same pages of his notebooks, Camus links to the Nietzschean notion of Eternal

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<sup>227</sup> A note in the *Carnets*, dated between March and August 1942, brings to our attention a relationship between beauty and freedom, which is of interest for the understanding of Camus' political writings in the following months: «Les pays qui abritent la beauté sont les plus difficiles à défendre – tant on vaudrait les épargner. Ainsi les peuples artistes devraient être les victimes désignées des peuples ingrates – si l'amour de la liberté ne primait pas l'amour de la beauté au cœur des hommes. C'est une *sagesse instinctive – la liberté étant la source de la beauté*» (CII, 22). In another note, in 1944, Camus confessed : « Je ne peux pas vivre hors de la beauté. C'est ce qui me rend faible devant certains êtres » (CII, 94).

<sup>228</sup> He notes in his *Carnets* in 1943: «Imaginons un penseur qui dit: «Voilà, je sais que cela est vrai. Mais finalement les conséquences m'en répugnent et je recule. *La vérité est inacceptable même pour celui qui la trouve.* » On aura ainsi le penseur absurde et son *perpétuel malaise*» (CII, 82).

<sup>229</sup> « Absurde. Si l'on se tue, l'absurde est nié. Si l'on ne se tue pas l'absurde révèle à l'usage *un principe de satisfaction* qui le nie lui-même. Cela ne veut pas dire que l'absurde n'est pas. Cela veut dire que l'absurde est *réellement* sans logique. C'est pourquoi on ne peut *réellement* pas en vivre » (CII, 109).



Return (CII, 104), and which, he suggests, identifies the *absurdist* attitude of the modern European, *i.e.*, nihilistic, thought - «L'Européen qui fait du courage une volupté: il s'admire. Répugnant. Le vrai courage est *passif*: il est indifférence à la mort. Un idéal : la connaissance pure et le *bonheur*» (CII, 87).<sup>230</sup> *Bonheur, amour, beauté* must be interpreted as three interrelated dimensions of the *aesthetic* experience, described in the MdS. It is from this perspective that the notes on sexuality, scattered in the 42-43 *cahiers*, acquire a specific meaning and relevance, and provide a link between the 1942 philosophical essay and the moral and political reflection between 1943-44.

It is significant that, as early as November 1942, Camus explicitly relates his reflection on sexuality to the absurd and the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of meaning and value: «La sexualité débridée conduit à une *philosophie de la non-signification du monde. La chasteté lui rend au contraire son sens (au monde)* » (CII, 55).<sup>231</sup> Camus demonstrates the use of the term chastity both with a strong *aesthetic* or sensory dimension, and with a clear *aesthetic* value, drawing upon the Nietzschean motif of the artist's *ascetic* self-discipline towards the realization of the work of art.<sup>232</sup>

Chastity is related to the artist's conduct as distinguished from, and transcending, the pure *toucher-à* of sensual love into a relative, finite, (*aesthetic*) *meaning*, that is «*created*» not through a violent suppression (*ressentiment*), but through the self-mastering (*askesis*) of the artist's limitless and measureless passions and imagination.<sup>233</sup> In contrast, de Sade's *systematic* eroticism illustrates «une des directions de la pensée absurde» (CII, 111), which introduces a stringent logicity in the initial *aesthetic* experience, betraying it.

Martha's *bonheur des pierres*, formulated in a note for the tragedy *Le Malentendu* in the 1942 *Carnets*, illustrates, in my view, the logical "systematization" of the *aesthetic* couple *bonheur-amour*, which dissolves the absurd (finite) experience of the sensory/sensual being-exposed-to-the-limit into the abstract, God-like, anti-*aesthetic* and anti-tragic, self-centredness of a self-sufficient monad: «La sœur. – Priez Dieu qu'il vous rende comme une pierre. C'est ça le vrai bonheur et c'est cela qu'il a choisi pour lui-même. Il est sourd, je vous dis, et muet comme un granit. Faites-vous semblable à lui pour ne connaître plus du monde que l'eau qui

<sup>230</sup> My italics.

<sup>231</sup> My italics. «Une seule façon de ne pas se laisser "posséder" par l'absurde, c'est de ne pas retirer d'avantages. Pas de dispersion sexuelle sans chasteté, etc. *Id.* introduire thème de l'oscillation. [...] » (CII, 82).

<sup>232</sup> «La sexualité ne mène à rien. Elle n'est pas immorale mais elle est improductive. On peut s'y livrer pour le temps où l'on ne désire pas produire. Mais seule la chasteté est liée à un progrès personnel. Il y a un temps où la sexualité est une victoire – quand on la dégage des impératifs moraux. Mais elle devient ensuite une défaite – et la seule victoire est conquise sur elle à son tour : c'est la chasteté » (CII, 51).

<sup>233</sup> CII, 77-78.

ruisselle et le soleil qui réchauffe. Rejoignez la pierre pendant qu'il en est temps [...]» (CII, 64-65).

Abstraction defines the *absurdist* attitude as opposed to the *tragic* attitude,<sup>234</sup> which Camus characterises in altogether different terms in a note for his Essay on Revolt in 1943: «Essai sur la Révolte: une des directions de l'esprit absurde c'est la *pauvreté* et le *dénuement*.» (CII, 82). As Eduard Morot-Sir points out,<sup>235</sup> *pauvreté* and *dénuement* work primarily as *aesthetic* principles, which describe the author's painful effort toward the self-mastering of his passions and imagination. *Pauvreté* and *dénuement* seal the *aesthetic* moment, described in the lyrical essays and in the MdS, with the aesthetic effort of the artist. It is in the light of the opposition between *aisthesis/art* and abstraction that, in Camus's articles and notes around 1943 and 44, the artist's reflections acquire a strong moral and political connotation.

In the *Carnets* between November 1943 and September 1944, the Plague resumes the opposition between a *tragic* finite thought of the finite, exposed and limited by the *aesthetic* present brought forth by the experience of the absurd, and the absurdist attitude, denoted throughout the notebooks by the appeal to *ab-straction*, as a limitless withdrawal from the sensory exposedness-to-the-limit, which erases the unique singularity of the particular that is met in the sensory *toucher-à*.

He writes in a note: «*Id. Dans la peste on ne vit plus par le corps, on se décharne*» (CII, 119).<sup>236</sup> The plague is the (dis-embodiment) embodiment of war's permanent "state of siege": a brief note on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1942 testifies to Camus' impression at the news of the landing of the Allies in North Africa: «*Comme des rats!*» (CII, 53). I suggest that the author's reflection on war and the political question of the «irruption of History» is mediated, precisely, by the *tragic* dimension of *aisthesis*.

As he wrote in a note dated December 1942,<sup>237</sup> through the metaphor of the plague Camus expresses «l'étouffement dont nous avons souffert et l'atmosphère de menace et d'exil dans laquelle nous avons vécu. Je veux du même coup étendre cette interprétation à la notion d'existence en général. La peste donnera l'image de ceux qui dans cette guerre ont eu la part de la *réflexion*, du silence – et celle de la *souffrance morale*» (T, 1959). In order to clarify the

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<sup>234</sup> In another note in September 1944: «*Ceux qui aiment toutes les femmes sont ceux qui sont en route vers l'abstraction. Ils dépassent ce monde, quoiqu'il y paraisse. Car ils se détournent du particulier, du cas singulier. L'homme qui fuirait toute idée et toute abstraction, le vrai désespéré, est l'homme d'une seule femme. Par entêtement dans ce visage singulier qui ne peut satisfaire à tout*» (CII, 126)

<sup>235</sup> E. Morot-Sir, "Logique de la limite, esthétique de la pauvreté: théorie et pratique de l'essai", in *Albert Camus 1980*, op. cit., pp. 192-208.

<sup>236</sup> My italics.

<sup>237</sup> Later transcribed in CII, 66-ff.

meaning assigned in 1942 to the term «souffrance morale», and the peculiar role played by the notion of *reflection* in the development of his political thought around 1942-43, it is essential that we take a closer look at his definition of the plague:

la peste [...] est la plus concrète de toutes les forces [...]. [...] elle ouvre les yeux, [...] elle force à penser. Elle est à ce compte comme tous les maux de ce monde et comme le monde lui-même. [...] Quelque grandeur que les individus en tirent, à considérer la misère de nos frères, il faut être un fou, un criminel ou un lâche pour consentir à la peste, et en face d'elle le seul mot d'ordre d'un homme est la *révolte*. (T, 1957)

Moralité de la peste : elle n'a servi à rien ni à personne. Il n'y a que ceux que la mort a touchés en eux-mêmes ou dans leur proches qui sont instruits. Mais la vérité qu'ils ont conquise ne concerne qu'eux-mêmes. Elle est *sans avenir*. (T, 1956).

The truth, ex-posed by the plague, is the absurd evidence which erases the teleological (“*sans avenir*”) and utilitarian categories of (modern) thought, opening up the ex-posedness of existence.

The continuity with the terminology of the play *Caligula* – the Emperor embodying the *tragic* man awoken to the evidence that men *die* and are not *happy*, who chooses to turn himself into the Plague in order to teach the absurd “truth” to all his subjects - and with the MdS is apparent: «Quel est l'idéal de l'homme en proie à la peste? – Je vais bien vous faire rire: c'est *l'honnêteté*» (T, 1958).<sup>238</sup>

What characterises the plague as *illness*, in its first movement, is the destruction of *aisthesis*, the withdrawal from that being-at-the-limit, which ex-poses and ex-plodes the monadic individuality in the sensory/sensual *toucher-à*. This withdrawal is summarised in the notion of separation.<sup>239</sup>

Les séparés. *Id.* Tout au bout du temps de la peste, ils n'imaginaient plus cette intimité qui avait été la leur et comment avait pu vivre près d'eux un être sur lequel, à tout moment, il *pouvaient porter la main*. (CII, 91).<sup>240</sup>

In another note he writes:

Peste. On ne peut pas jouir du cri des oiseaux dans la fraîcheur du soir – du *monde tel qu'il est*. Car il est recouvert maintenant d'une couche épaisse d'histoire que son langage doit traverser pour nous atteindre. Il en est déformé. *Rien de lui n'est senti pour lui-même* parce qu'à chaque moment du monde s'attache toute une série d'images de mort ou de désespoir. Il n'y a plus de matin sans agonies, plus de soir sans prisons et plus de midi sans carnages épouvantables. (CII, 118) [My italics]

<sup>238</sup> «[...] Un des thèmes possibles : lutte de la médecine et de la religion ; les puissances du relatif (et quel relatif) contre celles de l'absolu. C'est le relatif qui triomphe ou plus exactement qui ne perd pas» (T, 1957).

<sup>239</sup> As the notebooks attest, by the end of 1942 tuberculosis forced the author to undergo the experience of separation and withdrawal from the intimacy of the beloved ones : «La maladie est un couvent qui a sa règle, son *ascèse*, ses silences et ses inspirations» (CII, 57).

<sup>240</sup> My italics. «Peste. Les séparés: Journal de la Séparation? « Le sentiment de la séparation fut général et il est possible d'en donner une idée d'après les conversations, les confidences et les nouvelles qui paraissent dans les journaux. » *Id.* Les séparés. Cette heure du soir, qui pour les croyants est celle de l'examen de conscience – cette heure est dure pour le prisonnier – elle est celle de *l'amour frustré* » (CII, 90-91).

In a text published in 1943, “Les exilés dans la peste”, he describes the condition of imprisonment (T, 1963) of those under the siege of the deadly epidemic: «[...] tous enfin se virent éloignés sans recours, empêchés de rejoindre ou de *communiquer*. [...] Cette invasion brutale de la maladie avait pour premier effet de *supprimer les sentiments individuels*, ou du moins, d’obliger les gens à agir comme s’ils n’en avaient pas» (T, 1960).<sup>241</sup>

The overcoming of the initial stage of withdrawal is, however, already attested in a note dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 1943: «La maladie est une croix, mais peut-être aussi un garde-fou. L’idéal cependant serait de lui prendre sa force et d’en refuser les faiblesses. Qu’elle soit la retraite qui rend plus fort au *moment voulu*. Et s’il faut payer en monnaie de souffrance et de renoncement, payons » (CII, 73).<sup>242</sup> *Souffrance/douleur*, experienced under the absurd condition of the plague/illness/separation, coincide with the (re-)opening up of what we have previously defined as the *aesthetic* present, which already provided the link between the plague/absurd and revolt in the MdS.<sup>243</sup>

Camus distinguishes the « prisoners », exiled by the plague, who are still capable of “reflection”, imagination and memory, from those who, lacking all capacity of imagination, succumb to the illness (CII, 68). In a note between March and May 1943, we read: «Peste: *très important*. “C’est parce qu’ils vous ont foutu le ravitaillement et la douleur des séparations qu’ils vous ont eus *sans révolte*» (CII, 97).<sup>244</sup>

Intimately intertwined with love, happiness, suffering, pain, and sensory pleasure, revolt belongs to, and is only possible under the condition of, *aisthesis*. The exiled condition is described by the *tragic* oscillation between the sensory dimension, actualised through imagination, and a reality with mortifies the sensory ex-posedness (*toucher-à*) of man.<sup>245</sup> that

<sup>241</sup> My italics. «Les télégrammes restèrent alors la seule ressource. Des êtres qui liaient l’intelligence, le cœur et la chair, en furent réduits à chercher les signes de cette communion ancienne dans le majuscules d’une dépêche de dix mots. Et comme, en fait, les formules qu’on peut utiliser dans un télégramme sont vite épuisées, de longues vies communes et des passions douloureuses se résumèrent rapidement dans un échange périodique de formules toutes faites [...]» (T, 1960-1).

<sup>242</sup> My italics. In a note in the *Carnets* (winter 1942) he writes: «Vivre avec ses passions c’est aussi vivre avec ses souffrances, - ce qui en est le contrepois, le correctif, l’équilibre et le paiement, Lorsqu’un homme a appris - et non pas sur le papier - à rester seul dans l’intimité de sa souffrance, à surmonter son désir de fuir, l’illusion que d’autres peuvent « partager », il lui reste peu de chose à apprendre » (CII, 57). And further on: « Toute pensée se juge à ce qu’elle sait tirer de la souffrance. Malgré ma répugnance, la souffrance est un fait » (CII, 94)

<sup>243</sup> «[...]L’Etranger décrit la nudité de l’homme en face de l’absurde. *La Peste*, l’équivalence profonde des points de vue individuels en face du même absurde. C’est un progrès qui se précisera dans d’autres œuvres. Mais, de plus, *La Peste* démontre que l’absurde *n’apprend rien*. C’est le progrès définitif.» (CII, 36)

<sup>244</sup> My italics.

<sup>245</sup> « Ils [les séparés] éprouvaient aussi la souffrance profonde de tous les prisonniers et de tous les exilés qui est de *vivre avec une mémoire qui ne sert à rien*. Ce passé même auquel ils réfléchissaient sans cesse n’avait que le goût du regret. [...] Ces aller-retour, *ces oscillations entre des joies imaginaires e les réalités de l’absence*, c’était en vérité l’exil. Et chacun d’eux apprenait presque à neuf qu’il relevait d’une patrie aux couleurs de l’amour et de la liberté, hors de laquelle il perdait son nom d’homme ». (T, 1964) [My highlighting]

same exposedness and oscillation, which *define* the absurd in the MdS.<sup>246</sup> Furthermore, revolt is only possible in concurrence with «*la pensée en general, c'est-à-dire [...] l'imagination précise*»,<sup>247</sup> or what he addresses elsewhere, in clear Kantian terms, as *reflection*.<sup>248</sup>

According to a note in 1943 (CII, 81), the *tragic* thought that emerges and informs the MdS is the premise and condition to philosophizing – as the point zero, the methodical *tabula rasa*, the *pars destruens* – *after* which and *through* which philosophizing not only is possible, but becomes necessary. The notion of revolt, thus inseparable from the absurd *aisthesis* – or, rather, from the absurd thought *as* rooted in the *aesthetic* present – is crucial in order to (re-)define philosophy beyond nihilism. As he declared in an interview in 1945:<sup>249</sup>

Accepter l'absurdité [i.e. meaninglessness and senselessness] de tout ce qui nous entoure est une étape, une expérience nécessaire : ce ne doit pas devenir une impasse. Elle suscite une révolte qui peut devenir féconde. Une analyse de la notion de révolte pourrait aider à découvrir des notions capables de redonner à l'existence un sens relatif, quoique toujours menacé. (E, 1425)

I argue that the absurd evidence does not become an *impasse*, but brings revolt into being only in so far as the capacity for *thinking* is preserved, namely, the capacity for the opening up of the *aesthetic present* and its re-petition by the faculty of imagination.

The *aesthetic present* is the cornerstone of Camus' main objection to Sartre's existentialist philosophy – and of philosophy *tout court* as generally identified with the Hegelo-Marxian conception of philosophizing – in the *Carnets* in 1943: «*Être et Néant* (p. 135-136). Étrange erreur sur nos vies parce que nous essayons *d'éprouver nos vies de l'extérieur*» (CII, 119). It is in this sense that, I suggest, we must read his well-known declaration in an interview to *Servir* in December 1945:

[...] Je ne suis pas un philosophe. Je ne crois pas assez à la raison pour croire à un système. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de savoir comment il faut se conduire. Et plus précisément comment on peut se conduire quand on ne croit ni en Dieu ni en la raison. (E, 1427).

Earlier that year in a note in the *Carnets* (October 1945), he wrote :

<sup>246</sup> It is significant that, in 1943, Camus was thinking of introducing the theme of oscillation in his essay on revolt (CII, 82).

<sup>247</sup> My italics. He notes in 1943: «Ce qui distingue le plus l'homme de la bête, c'est l'imagination. De là que notre sexualité ne puisse être vraiment naturelle, c'est-à-dire aveugle » (CII, 94).

<sup>248</sup> Such "precise imagination", which is seen to *produce* the absurd world, by applying a *modern principle* to human conduct (morality) and aesthetics (CII, 81), not only coincides with the «*triomphe du charnel*» described in the MdS as the mark of a tragic finite thought of the finite, but, I suggest, in the «*modern principle*» evoked in the *Carnets* is precisely that «*modern nihilism*», which the 1942 essay was supposed to convey in metaphors or *images*. The reference to Scheler's book on the man of *ressentiment* in the *Carnets* in the early months of 1943 (CII, 81) seems to confirm the continuity between Camus' reflection on nihilism, the tragic thought developed in the MdS, and the emergence of the notion of revolt.

<sup>249</sup> "Non, je ne suis pas existentialiste", extraits d'interview à *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (15 Novembre 1945) in E, 1424-27.

Pourquoi suis-je un *artiste* et non un philosophe? C'est parce que je pense selon les mots et non selon les idées. (CII, 146). [My italics]

In the concluding section of «La création absurde» in MdS, Camus explicitly declared that «les idées sont le contraire de la *pensée*», that is, of the *tragic* «*pensée limitée, mortelle et révoltée*» (MdS, 191) disclosed by the absurd experience, which constitutes the lucid «philosophies *ironiques* qui font les œuvres passionnées» (*Id.*). Art is conceived as the «site» of the *aesthetic* experience of the absurd *toucher-à*,<sup>250</sup> which expresses the liminal exposedness, in the foundationless «being-left-alone», of human *ex-istence*.<sup>251</sup>

To «think in words», as opposed to thinking in abstract concepts, is the artist's *tragic* thought of the finite. Now, in his Diplôme on *Métaphysique chrétienne et néoplatonisme* in 1936 Camus attempts a definition of the «*point de vue d'artiste*» as contained, in his view, in Plotin's way of philosophizing:<sup>252</sup>

[...] aussi bien qu'une pensée religieuse, la philosophie de Plotin est un *point de vue d'artiste*. Si les choses s'expliquent c'est que les choses sont belles. Mais cette extrême émotion qui saisit l'artiste devant la beauté du monde, Plotin la transporte dans le monde intelligible» (E, 1271).

[...] Mais si, de la description, Plotin passe à l'explication, il a recours à des *images*. (E, 1276)

[...] Dans le 9<sup>e</sup> traité de la «IV Ennéade», Plotin démontre l'unité fondamentale des âmes et leur liaison à la force qui anime le monde. À vrai dire, il en donne surtout une *image*. [...] La solution de Plotin est comme toujours moins une raison qu'un sentiment dont il tente de donner l'équivalent dans une *image* [...]. (E, 1280) [My italics]

The aesthetic «explanation» through the recourse to images thus constitutes, in Camus's own words, the artist's perspective, which is the condition of a peculiar kind of thinking and philosophizing. It is significant that, in January 1936, Camus noted in his *Carnets*: «On ne pense que par images. *Si tu veux être philosophe, écris des romans.*» (CI, 23).<sup>253</sup>

In the notebooks of the early Forties, we detect a clear continuity, if not a straightforward identity, between the artist's «*discipline nécessaire à l'œuvre*» (CII, 77) – the

<sup>250</sup> «Toute pensée qui renonce à l'unité exalte la diversité. Et la diversité est le lieu de l'*art*. La seule pensée qui libère l'esprit est celle qui le laisse seul, *certain de ses limites* et de sa fin prochaine.» (MdS, 191).

<sup>251</sup> From the perspective of the *absurd* aesthetics, the lucid novelist embodies the *aesthetic* thought: «[...] L'essentiel est qu'ils triomphent dans le *concret* et que ce soit leur grandeur. Ce triomphe tout *charnel* leur a été préparé par une pensée où les pouvoirs abstraits ont été humiliés. Quand ils le sont tout à fait, la *chair* du même coup fait resplendir la création de tout son éclat absurde» (E, 191). «À un certain point où la pensée revient sur elle-même, ils [les penseurs lucides] dressent les *images* de leur œuvres comme les symboles évidents d'une pensée limitée, mortelle et révoltée» (*Id.*).

<sup>252</sup> «[...] la synthèse plotinienne fournit à la pensée chrétienne, non pas une doctrine (selon certains auteurs) mais une méthode et une façon de voir les choses» (E, 1269).

<sup>253</sup> My italics. «[...] justement *le choix* [que les romanciers philosophes] *ont fait d'écrire en images plutôt qu'en raisonnements* est révélateur d'une certaine pensée qui leur est commune, persuadée de l'inutilité de tout principe d'explication et convaincue du message enseignant de l'apparence sensible.» (MdS, 178).

aesthetic "ascèse" or self-mastering - and what Camus understands as the exercise of *thought* (*Id.*), as the *aesthetic* awareness preserved and *repeated* by imagination.<sup>254</sup>

Art ex-poses and ex-presses, through the artist's *creation*, the "loss of the world" experienced by the finite thought of the finite:

Du naturel en art. *Absolu il est impossible. Parce que le réel est impossible* (mauvais goût, vulgarité, inadéquation à l'exigence profonde de l'homme). C'est pour cela que la création humaine, faite à partir du monde, est toujours pour finir tournée contre le monde. [...] C'est l'art et l'artiste qui *refont le monde*, mais toujours avec une arrière-pensée de *protestation*. (CII, 115-116) [My italics]

The intertextual analysis of the MdS excludes that the lucid artist's re-making of the world may be understood as some kind of architectonic founding or fabrication (*poiesis*) of a material/matter according to a pre-established idea or project in the author's mind. As we have previously shown, in the 1942 essay, Camus employs a narrow acceptance of *creation* in the sense of an *aesthetic* or finite *thought* (MdS, 177) of the world.<sup>255</sup>

The artist's creation is comprised by Camus under the Nietzschean notion of « ruminantion » and the pre-philosophic notion of *wonder* (MdS, 179), and contains revolt, identified with an *aesthetic* deliberation (protest) as its constitutive moment. As Gay-Crosier points out,<sup>256</sup>

[...] [d]ésireux de surmonter par la parole ou l'écriture l'absence d'un centre fixe entre les termes de la contradiction qui le harcèle, le locuteur ou l'écrivain, rebelle au désordre naturel, se voit forcé de corriger celui-ci par l'ordre artificiel mais insuffisant de sa grammaire. Son discours, qui a pour ambition de centrer et de fixer le sens produit par un réseau de noms et prédicats, ne parvient qu'à fixer [...] l'absence de sens et est incapable de fournir un sens permanent. L'acte prédicatif plus que la simple nominalisation constitue une intervention discriminatrice, une différenciation, bref *un jugement* par excellence. L'acte prédicatif prend alors l'allure d'une révolte qualificative qui s'évertue à vêtir d'une chair concrète palpable l'ossature de la nominalisation souvent abstraite. De là l'importance de la métaphore dans le discours philosophique camusien. En tant que modalité de la révolte - celle qui se dirige contre le manque de sens concret - l'intention prédicative doit se résigner au même insuccès que celui par lequel se solde toute rébellion [...].

Volonté discriminatrice en action, la révolte discursive, de par sa répétition et son énergie, assure la révision périodique des jugements qu'elle apporte, instaurant, ce faisant, le discours critique, c'est-à-dire la distance vis-à-vis de son objet et d'elle-même. *À la scission intellectuelle de l'objet et du sujet la révolte substitue une opposition vécue*, donc assumée, mais non une synthèse des contraires. *Elle réunit singulièrement la séparation intellectuelle et la proximité vécue*. Ainsi la négation affirmative qu'elle pratique est-elle à la fois

<sup>254</sup> « Dans toute souffrance, émotion, passion, il y a un stade où elle appartient à l'homme même dans ce qu'il a de plus individuel et de plus inexprimable et un stade où elle appartient à l'art. Mais dans son premier moment l'art ne peut jamais rien en faire. L'art est la distance que le temps donne à la souffrance. C'est la *transcendance de l'homme par rapport à lui-même*. » (CII, 110). (My italics). This idea is essential, in my view, to grasp the meaning of the link between art and revolt that Camus establishes in the MdS and throughout his notebooks (1943-44).

<sup>255</sup> Between Autumn 1943 and 1944 Camus devotes a series of notes to the question of «*La création corrigée*» and the work of art - «*Mon oeuvre. Terminer suite d'œuvres sur livre sur le monde crée : « La création corrigée ».* » (CII, 117). «*Si l'œuvre, produit de la révolte, résume l'ensemble des aspirations de l'homme, elle est forcément idéaliste (?)*» (CII, 117). [My italics]

<sup>256</sup> Raymond Gay-Crosier, « La révolte génératrice et régénératrice », in *Albert Camus : œuvre fermée, œuvre ouverte ? Actes du Colloque du Centre Culturel International de Cerisy-la-Salle*, Cahiers Albert Camus 5, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, pp. 123-125.

une tentative de rapprochement par la distance et de distanciation par le rapprochement. C'est ce genre de *proximité distancée, donc critique, que Camus propose d'adopter face à l'histoire* [...]. [My italics]

In the notion of « distanced proximity », which, in Gay-Crosier's words, defines the artist's *discursive* revolt, it is not difficult to recognize those elements which we have seen to characterise the *aesthetic present* as the absurd ex-perience of *être-à*.

The liminality, inexorably inscribed in language, is what repeatedly emerges in the 1944 article «*Sur une philosophie de l'expression*» de Brice Parain. It is this very liminality, which provides the key to the overcoming of a nihilistic-*absurdist* «philosophie de la non-signification» (E, 1678):

[Parain] affirme sans doute que, si le langage n'a pas de sens, rien ne peut en avoir et que tout est possible. Mais ses livres montrent *en même temps que les mots ont juste assez de sens pour nous refuser cette ultime certitude que tout est néant*. [...] Ni oui ni non, le langage est seulement une machine à fabriquer du doute. Et comme dans tout problème qui engage l'être, dès que nous avançons un peu loin, là où notre condition se joue, nous rencontrons la nuit. Un « non » brutal serait au moins positif. Mais ce n'est pas cela. Ce langage si *incertain* [...] *ne donne pas l'être, mais il le laisse soupçonner*. Chaque mot dépasse l'objet qu'il prétend désigner et appartient au genre. Mais s'il indique le genre, il n'est pas le genre tout entier [...]. *Dans le mot, il y a quelque chose de plus, mais ce quelque chose de plus n'est pas encore assez*. (E, 1678)

[...] [Parain] entrevoit seulement *qu'il y a dans le langage une puissance qui nous déborde* : « On lui demande de formuler ce que l'homme a de plus intimement individuel. Il n'y est pas propre. Sa destination est de formuler ce que l'homme a de plus strictement *impersonnel, de plus strictement pareil aux autres*. » C'est à cette *banalité supérieure* que peut-être il faut se tenir [...] Car le langage passe l'individu et sa terrible inefficacité est le signe de sa transcendance. (E, 1679) [My italics]

The liminality of language is inseparable from its « inefficacy », which declares the loss or retreat of the original, “re-velatory” word, founding the intimate Being of the community:<sup>257</sup>

L'histoire de la philosophie, pour Parain, est, au fond, l'histoire des échecs de la pensée devant le problème du langage. L'homme n'est pas arrivé à trouver ses mots. Et peut-être est-il possible d'imaginer *l'aventure métaphysique comme une quête, à la fois obstinée et stérile, du maître-mot qui éclairerait tout*, le « Sésame » suffisant, l'équivalent de « Aum », la syllabe sacrée des Hindous. À cet égard, les recherches de Parain montrent que des premiers Grecs à la dialectique moderne, la réflexion sur le langage a évolué dans le sens d'une *démission*. (E, 1674-5) [My italics]

The transcendence of language is a *finite* transcendence, as the being-driven-to-the-limit which dissolves the presence of Being into the *aesthetic près-ence*, as an endless *toucher-à*, the revolted «distanced *proximity*»,<sup>258</sup> which exposes the absurd or tragic awareness of the impossibility of hypostasis. In this sense, language marks, in the very moment it seems to embrace it, the failure of the architectural paradigm of artistic creation:

<sup>257</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1999, pp. 122-123.

<sup>258</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 157-ff.



hence, Camus' insistence on the absurd work of art as *défi* to God as Supreme Architect, and to the world as divine creation.<sup>259</sup>

As he writes in 1944, «[ce] qui caractérise notre siècle, ce n'est peut-être pas tant d'avoir à *reconstruire le monde* que d'avoir à *le repenser*. Cela revient à lui donner un langage » (E, 1680).<sup>260</sup> It is significant that, for Camus, the interrogation on the problem of language – as developed by various authors, such as Jean Paulhan, Francis Ponge, and Parain himself – «ne s'agit pas chez eux d'un exercice byzantin sur des motifs de grammaire, mais d'une interrogation profonde qui *ne se sépare pas de la souffrance des hommes*» (E, 1681).<sup>261</sup>

The social and political implications of an interrogation on language had already been brought forth by the Surrealists. But in the Forties, and mainly through the work of the above mentioned authors, an important change had taken place:

Au lieu de tirer de l'incertitude du monde ou du langage toutes les libertés, une démente calculée, l'inspiration automatique, on s'efforce à la *discipline intérieure*. Du désespoir on ne tire plus l'anarchie, mais la *domination de soi*. La tendance n'est plus de nier la raison du langage et de lâcher la bride à ses désordres. Elle est de lui reconnaître des pouvoirs relatifs de revenir, *par l'absurde ou le miracle, à sa tradition*. Autrement dit, et ce passage de pensée est capital pour l'époque, d'une philosophie du mensonge et de la non-signification, au moins apparente, du monde, on ne tire plus l'apologie de l'instinct, mais un *parti pris de l'intelligence*. Il s'agit seulement d'une *intelligence raisonnable revenue au concret et soucieuse d'honnêteté*. C'est un nouveau classicisme – et qui témoigne pour les deux valeurs qui sont aujourd'hui le plus attaquées, je veux dire l'intelligence et la France. (E, 1681) [My italics]

This text constitutes an invaluable *trait-d'union* between the « aesthetic » reflection of the MdS and the 1943-44 political writings. Camus employs the terminology of the MdS – “*honnêteté*”, “*domination de soi*”, “*discipline*” – thus confirming the continuity between his reflection on language and the pages on the *raisonnement absurde* - l' «*intelligence raisonnable revenue au concret et soucieuse d'honnêteté*» coinciding, I argue, with the *aesthetic* or tragic thought of the finite.

In my view, the key to the later criticisms concerning the “*conservatism*” of Camus's philosophical and political thought lies precisely in the meaning of that «return to the tradition», hinted in the 1944 article, as the only valuable alternative to nihilism. As he

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<sup>259</sup> Scattered notes on « *la création corrigée* », later taken over and developed in HR, can be found in the *Carnets* between 1943 and 1944 : « Pour ma « création contre Dieu ». C'est un critique catholique (Stanislas Fumet) qui dit que l'art, *quel que soit son but*, fait toujours une coupable concurrence à Dieu. [...] Encore Péguy : « Il y a même une poésie qui tire son éclat de l'absence de Dieu, qui ne spéculé sur aucun salut, qui ne s'en remet à rien d'autre qu'à elle-même, effort humain, récompensé dès la terre, à remplir le vide des espaces. » Il n'y a pas de milieu entre la littérature apologétique et la littérature de concurrence » (CII, 108-9).

<sup>260</sup> In this sense, Camus' conception of art reflects, and must be inscribed in, an aesthetics of failure – what Eduard Morot-Sir defined as *esthétique de la pauvreté* (see E. Morot-Sir, “Logique de la limite, esthétique de la pauvreté: théorie et pratique de l'essai”, in *Albert Camus 1980*, op. cit., pp. 192-208).

<sup>261</sup> My italics.

suggests in this text, tradition can be recovered either *via* miracle, *i.e.*, the religious solution (which Camus ultimately rejects); or *via* the absurd, *i.e.*, the *aesthetic* awareness, as the unfounded foundation of that act of deliberation that constitutes the «*parti pris de l'intelligence*» (E, 1681).

As the absurd creation is born of «*l'émerveillement initial*» (MdS, 179),<sup>262</sup> disclosed in the *aesthetic* experience of the absurd, the *new* classicism propounded in the 1944 article, which resumes Camus' aesthetics of finitude (*esthétique de la pauvreté*),<sup>263</sup> binds the lucid thinker to

ces vertus qui font l'honneur de l'homme et qui sont *honnêteté* et *pauvreté*. Ce qu'on peut apprendre de l'expérience qui nous est ici proposée [*i.e.* the absurd experience], c'est à tourner le dos aux attitudes et aux discours, *pour porter avec scrupule le poids de notre vie quotidienne*. «*Maintiens l'homme dans son application, dit L'Essai sur la misère humaine, c'est par elle qu'il devient immense et c'est la seule immensité qu'il transmet.*». *Oui, nous avons à retrouver notre banalité.* (E, 1681-2)<sup>264</sup> [My italics]

As Pierre-Louis Rey points out,<sup>265</sup> « [I]es préoccupations esthétiques de Camus n'éclairent pas seulement les débats politiques ou moraux auxquels il fut mêlé : on a souvent le sentiment qu'elles les *justifient*»: an «*aesthetic*» justification, *i.e.*, anti-metaphysical and anti-foundational, which, I argue, offers the key to an *aesthetic* understanding of the political developed in the 1943-44 articles and notebooks. Camus notes in his *Carnets* in 1944:

Je ne crois pas aux actions désespérées. Je ne crois qu'aux actions fondées. Mais je crois qu'il faut peut de choses pour fonder une action. (CII, 127)

The *aesthetic* judgement of revolt) brings about the Foundation-less foundation (*archê*) of political action, beyond nihilistic despair and the break down of tradition.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> On the relationship between stupor and «interrupted myth», see Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, pp. 137-ff.

<sup>263</sup> He writes in the *Carnets* (Mai 1943): «La confiance dans les mots, c'est le classicisme – mais pour garder sa confiance il n'en use que prudemment. Le surréalisme qui s'en défie en abuse. Retournons au classicisme, *par modestie*.» (CII, 101)

<sup>264</sup> Camus's conception of art, as the finite “product” of the *aesthetic* “distanced proximity”, that is, of discursive revolt, can therefore be understood, with Nancy, as «une *poiesis* qui soit, en elle-même, une *praxis*. Ce qui est fondé existe en tant que c'est, par libre décision, sort de l'en-soi, de la nuit de l'abstraction et de l'épaisseur de l'immanence, mais n'en est pas sorti au sens de quelque chose qui en aurait été extrait: ce n'en est encore sorti qu'au sens de la libre décision, qui en fait en même temps l'incision inaugurale à la surface de l'en-soi – et celui-ci se retire. C'est l'expérience même, parce que cela ne recueille ni ne produit rien : cela décide d'une limite [...]. L'expérience de fonder est sur la limite. Ce qui est fondé *existe* [...] selon le mode de l'existence de la limite, c'est-à-dire selon le mode de ce *franchissement de soi* (franchissement et affranchissement, gestes de libération) qui fait la structure propre de la limite. La fondation est l'expérience de la transcendance finie [...]» (J.-L. Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté*, op. cit., pp. 113-114).

<sup>265</sup> Pierre-Louis Rey, *Camus une morale de la beauté*, SEDES, Paris, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>266</sup> In a note between Novembre 1943 and September 44: «Poser la question du monde absurde, c'est demander: «Allons-nous accepter le désespoir, *sans rien faire*.» Je suppose que personne d'*honnête* ne peut répondre oui »

What I will argue in the following chapter, through the comparative analysis of the articles and editorials for *Combat*, is that the *aesthetic* moment comes to define a certain “aesthetic” conception of politics and political action – one which cannot, however, be reduced to what is generally addressed as the “*aestheticization*” of the political, which designates the Nazi project of Politics as Total Art, and culminates in the totalitarian Immanent community.

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(CII, 116). «*Essai sur Révolte: « Tous les révoltés agissent pourtant comme s'ils croyaient à l'achèvement de l'histoire. La contradiction est... ».*» (CII, 123). My italics.

## CHAPTER 2. AT THE ORIGIN OF THE POLITICAL.

In the present chapter, I will focus on the continuity between the MdS and the political articles written by Camus for the journal *Combat* during the Resistance and in the aftermath of the War, elucidating whether and in what sense the judgment of revolt, rooted in the *aesthetic* or *tragic* finite thought of the finite (defined in Chapter 1), as bringing about a *good* (use of) nihilism within a post-metaphysical horizon, provides the moral guidelines for political conduct in the totalitarian *impasse*. What I intend to show is that Camus' political programme of re-introducing the language of morality within politics, generally read in the light of the French tradition of the *moralistes*, discloses the possibility of «aesthetically» re-thinking the political, outside and against the organicistic/ «immanent» concept of the (political) community.

His political writings are read together and next to Arendt's reflection on morality, thinking and judging, in order to grasp the political relevance of creation and language in tracing the source for a moral norm of conduct within the political acting-together-at-the-limit, brought forth by the *aesthetic* or tragic thought of the MdS.

### 2.1. A *COMBAT* AGAINST NIHILISM (1944-49).

The 1944 texts highlight a pivotal concern, on Camus' part, for the question of language as an eminently *political* question. The continuity between the fourth *Lettre à un ami allemand*, the article "*Sur une philosophie de l'expression*" de Brice Parain and the editorial «La démocratie à faire» in the journal *Combat* (2<sup>nd</sup> September 1944) on this theme is apparent:

Il n'est pas sûr que notre époque ait manqué de *dieux*. On lui en a proposé beaucoup, et le plus souvent *bêtes ou lâches*. Il semble bien, au contraire, qu'elle manque d'un dictionnaire. C'est une chose, du moins, qui paraît évidente à ceux qui espèrent pour *ce monde*, où tous les mots sont *prostitués*, une justice claire et une liberté sans équivoque. Mais la question que vient de poser Brice Parain est justement de savoir si un tel dictionnaire est possible et, surtout, s'il peut se concevoir *en dehors d'un dieu qui lui donne ses significations*. (E, 1671-2) [My italics]

The question of nihilism is evoked under the twofold, historically delimited, phenomenon of the de-valuation of superior values (death of God), and the loss of meaning (*signification*) that it entails, and of the construction of a myriad of «*dieux bêtes ou lâches*» - of what he will address in *HR* as the «*sacré dégradé*» of totalitarian regimes - in the ab-solute

and transcendent space left vacant by the (Christian) God of the tradition (*incomplete nihilism*).

It is within the nihilistic horizon, in a world organized on the systematic prostitution of words, that the reconstitution of a dictionary goes together with, and is inseparable from, the attempt to re-think the political beyond the horrors of totalitarian regimes – «nous ne concevons pas de politique sans langage clair», he writes in *Combat* (CAC8, p. 166).<sup>1</sup> In the editorial «L'intelligence et le caractère» (29<sup>th</sup> August 1944), Camus wrote:

*C'est le temps de la morale, c'est-à-dire celui où le langage devient net et où il est possible de le tenir à la face mêmes des réalistes.* (CAC8, p. 156) [My italics]

It is in the light of his concern for language, as an eminently *political* concern, that Camus's engagement as *rédacteur en chef* and editorialist in the journal of the Resistance *Combat* between August 1944 and June 1947,<sup>2</sup> acquires its full meaning. In the article «Le journalisme critique» (8<sup>th</sup> September 1944), Camus insists on the invaluable role of what he defines as critical journalism in giving «au pays le langage qui le fera écouter» (CAC8, 182):

*À des temps nouveaux, il faut, sinon des mots nouveaux, du moins des dispositions nouvelles de mots. Ces arrangements, il n'y a que le cœur pour les dicter, et le respect que donne le véritable amour.* (CAC8, 182)

Considered as one of the greatest and most authoritative voices of the «mystique de la Résistance»,<sup>3</sup> Camus' contribution to *Combat* exceeds, in my view, the *topoi* of the French Resistant thought.<sup>4</sup> I suggest that the 1944-46 articles provide an essential key to the understanding of Camus' concept of the political, by re-thinking the author's concern for language within the sphere of *aisthesis*, as posing in the line of the finite method of the finite,

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi confirms that «*Les Lettres à un ami allemand* éclairent admirablement le sens qu'il faut donner à l'engagement de Camus, et à sa participation à *Combat* clandestin» (in *Cahiers Albert Camus 8. Camus à Combat*, édition établie, présentée et annotée par J. Lévi-Valensi, Gallimard, Paris, 2002, p. 35).

<sup>2</sup> Born in December 1941 out of the fusion of François Menthon, Pierre-Henri Teigen, René Capitant, Alfred and Paul Coste-Floret's Resistant movement *Liberté* with Henri Frenay, Bertie Albrecht, Jacqueline and Jean-Guy Bernard's journal *Vérités* (CAC8, 21-22), *Combat* was published with the programmatic intention of providing «*informations précises puisées aux meilleures sources [...] de Brest à Nice et de Dunkerque à Bayonne*» in order to fight «*contre l'anesthésie du peuple français*», and to be accessible to the largest number so that «*à la défaite des armes succède la victoire de l'esprit*» (see CAC8, 23-24). It is highly probable that Camus came into contact with the movement of *Combat* during his frequent travels to Saint-Etienne, where he received medical treatment for tuberculosis, and to Lyon, where he repeatedly met Pascal Pia and René Reynaud, who were among the first active militants of this clandestine movement, and Francis Ponge, actively participating in *Résistance communiste*. Camus's letter to Ponge is dated 27<sup>th</sup> January 1943 (E, 1662-1668): a fake identity card in the name of Albert Mathé, dated 20<sup>th</sup> May 1943, proves that only a few months later Camus was engaged with the Resistance. The first *Lettre à un ami allemand*, written in July '43, attests «*d'un état d'esprit de révolte, de colère, de combattant, même – ou plutôt surtout – si ce combattant déteste la guerre et la violence*» (CAC8, 34).

<sup>3</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, *Dictionnaire de la vie politique française au XX siècle*, PUF, 1995, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> See, in particular, Henri Michel et Boris Mirkine-Guetzévitch, *Les idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance (Documents clandestins – 1940-1944)*, PUF, Paris, 1954.

brought forth by the textual analysis of the MdS, the question of the morality of human (political) action.

It is important to point out that, throughout the articles and editorials of *Combat*, Camus uses the terms *politics/political* with a strong negative acceptation, which generally refers to the political practice codified in France under the Third Republic, which he summarises under the term of «realism», as a strict teleological reasoning applied to public conduct. In « L'intelligence et le caractère », Camus defines such reasoning as

*un effet de l'intelligence seule. Cette faculté aperçoit très bien la relativité de toutes choses. Sa conclusion normale quand elle examine un événement historique est que cela passera, qu'il n'est donc pas de raisons de se gêner. Et passant de la révolution à Pétain, on peut effectuer un pas de plus et faire des offres d'emploi à ceux-là que Vichy justement a tenté de déshonorer. [...] C'est que l'intelligence seule ne suffit pas à apercevoir cette évidence. Il faut aussi du caractère [...] » (CAC8, 155)*

That Camus identifies the pair « intelligence *et* caractère » with an *aesthetic* or lucid thought is confirmed, a few lines later, by the association of political realism with *aveuglement* and *mensonge*, the latter being identified with the systematic abuse and « prostitution » of language for the purpose of political propaganda and historical efficacy.

The author opposes the realism of (traditional) politics – identified with the utilitarian reasoning of the French bourgeois ruling class, which justifies *all* means (and, hence, the collaboration with a regime founded on violence and murder) for the realization of its political ends, and which was de-legitimized by « la honte » of 1940 - with a morality defined around the *aesthetic* terms of « sacrifice », « grandeur », « souffrance ».<sup>5</sup>

In the editorial « Morale et politique » (4<sup>th</sup> September 1944) Camus declares the intention of « *supprimer la politique pour la remplacer par la morale. C'est ce que nous appelons une révolution* » (CAC8, 171).

I suggest that the political project embraced by the équipe of *Combat* under the heading of « De la Résistance à la Révolution » (21<sup>st</sup> August 1944) must be understood in the sense of a « trans-valuation »,<sup>6</sup> in the immediate aftermath of the Liberation of the political by means of allowing morality into the sphere of human action.

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<sup>5</sup> « La fin d'un monde » (6<sup>th</sup> September 1944) condemns the political manoeuvres of the « moribund » bourgeois ruling class (« *le rôle directeur de la bourgeoisie est terminé en 1940* », CAC8, 172) : « Nous savons maintenant que les vies françaises sont irremplaçables. Mais il faut que cette classe comprenne, qu'elle nous laisse enfin [...] après avoir tant manqué de *courage* et de *générosité*, elle ne se prive pas de cette *intelligence élémentaire* qui lui permettrait encore d'être le témoin d'une *grandeur* dont elle n'a pas su être ouvrière. » (CAC8, 173). [My italics]

<sup>6</sup> Camus himself would write to Francis Ponge in 1943 : « [...] je pense quelquefois à *une immense révision des valeurs, totale et clairvoyante* – et je sais bien que je n'aurai ni le talent ni la force de mener cela à bien. Mais cela du moins peut être l'œuvre de plusieurs esprits et c'est une tâche qui doit vous séduire. Vous pouvez

This is a project that stems from the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of Foundation, and aims at overcoming nihilism by bringing the latter to its extreme consequences, against all *incomplete-nihilistic «retour à l'arsenal des vieilles solutions»*:

Nous croyons que la vérité de ce siècle ne peut s'atteindre qu'en *allant jusqu'au bout de son propre drame. Si l'époque a souffert de nihilisme, ce n'est pas en ignorant le nihilisme que nous obtiendrons la morale dont nous avons besoin.* Non, tout ne se résume pas dans la négation ou l'absurdité. Nous le savons. Mais il faut d'abord poser la négation et l'absurdité puisque ce sont elles que notre génération a rencontrées et que ce sont elles dont nous avons à nous arranger.<sup>7</sup> (CAC8, 310)[My italics]

It is precisely in the connection of a pessimistic thought, or what he defines as *«une philosophie de la négation»*, and a positive *«morale de la liberté et du courage»* (CAC8, 310),<sup>8</sup> that Camus writes :

il s'agit de savoir [...] si l'homme, *sans le secours de l'éternel ou de la pensée rationaliste, peut créer à lui seul ses propres valeurs.* Cette entreprise nous dépasse tous infiniment. [...] la France et l'Europe ont aujourd'hui à *créer une nouvelle civilisation ou à périr.* (CAC8, 308) [My italics]

This idea, confirmed one year later in an interview to *Servir* (20<sup>th</sup> December 1945),<sup>9</sup> places Camus' political reflection at the margins of the theologico-political paradigm - resumed, on the one hand, by traditional (religious) political thought and, on the other, by 19<sup>th</sup> century Historicist ideologies. Now, according to Camus

[...] les civilisations ne se font pas à coups de règle sur les doigts. Elles se font par la confrontation des idées, *par le sang de l'esprit, par la douleur et le courage.* (Id.)

The metaphor *« sang de l'esprit »* immediately refers to, and repeats, the *aesthetic* association contained in the *absurd* metaphor of *«la chair consciente»*: what I suggest is that the morality

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évidemment alléguer que Sisyphe est paresseux. Mais quoi, ce sont les paresseux qui remuent le monde. Les autres n'ont pas le temps » (E, 1668). He associates the moral and political transvaluation to *clairvoyance*, which is the distinctive feature of Sisyphus, in the concluding chapter of the 1942 essay devoted to this mythological figure (*«Si ce mythe est tragique, c'est que son héros [Sisyphé] est conscient. [...] La clairvoyance qui devait faire son tourment consommé du même coup sa victoire»*, MdS, 196). This text confirms the continuity of his political reflection with the tragic thought developed in the MdS.

<sup>7</sup> A. Camus, *«Le pessimisme et le courage»* (3<sup>rd</sup> Novembre 1944).

<sup>8</sup> Camus argues here against the thesis, widely accepted in the French press around '44-'45, of a causal relationship between the philosophies of negation and the *«plus lâches servitudes»*, according to the reasoning that a *«philosophie pessimiste est par essence une philosophie découragée et pour ceux qui ne croient pas que le monde est bon, ils sont donc voués à accepter de servir la tyrannie»*. One of the examples he quotes is Gaston Rabeau's article *«Nazisme pas mort?»* published in the Christian-Democratic journal *L'Aube* on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1944. According to Rabeau: *«C'est notre Université qui a fait connaître Nietzsche, et Nietzsche est une des premières sources du nazisme. [...] Il y a eu ensuite la doctrine du néant et du désespoir. Cette philosophie du néant et du désespoir devant l'absurdité du monde et l'inutilité de l'existence est celle de Martin Heidegger. Elle a été tout récemment implantée en France avec beaucoup d'originalité et de profondeur par M. Sartre [...] Mais toute une littérature, romans et théâtre, répand, depuis plusieurs années, des doctrines nihilistes [...] J'espère que les auteurs célèbres auxquels je fais allusion ne continueront pas à accomplir leur œuvre de mort»* (CAC8, p. 307, note 2).

<sup>9</sup> E, 1427.

propounded by Camus in the 1944 articles should not be confused with the “traditional” table of moral, *i.e.*, transcendent, values (against which he had declared his vocation of *immoraliste* since the early ‘30’s), but should, instead, be identified precisely with a finite «*morale de la chair*», unfoundedly founded on *aisthesis*.<sup>10</sup>

In the article «*De la Résistance à la Révolution*», written by Camus during the riots that culminated three days after in the Liberation of Paris,<sup>11</sup> and published in the first non-clandestine edition of *Combat* (21<sup>st</sup> August 1944),<sup>12</sup> the writer summarises the political line of the journal in the following terms:<sup>13</sup>

Il a fallu cinq années de lutte obstinée et silencieuse pour qu’un journal, né de l’esprit de résistance, publié sans interruption à travers tous les dangers de la clandestinité, puisse paraître enfin au grand jour dans un Paris libéré de sa honte. [...] Ces années n’ont pas été inutiles. Les Français qui y sont entrés par le simple réflexe d’un honneur humilié en sortent avec une science supérieure qui leur fait mettre désormais au-dessus de tout *l’intelligence, le courage et la vérité du cœur humain*. Et ils savent que ces exigences *d’apparence si générale* leur créent des obligations quotidiennes sur le plan moral et politique. Pour tout dire, n’ayant qu’une foi en 1940, ils ont une politique, au sens noble du terme, en 1944. Ayant commencé par la résistance, ils veulent finir par la Révolution.<sup>14</sup>

The «*politique au sens noble du terme*» is defined around the terms of *intelligence, courage, vérité du cœur*: all terms, as we have shown, belonging to the *aesthetic* constellation of the finite or *tragic* thought illustrated in the MdS, which, I argue, explicitly breaks with the utilitarian, teleological reasoning underpinning 20<sup>th</sup> century political realism.

We fail to grasp the meaning and the implications of Camus’ contribution to the post-war political debate if we do not seriously question the centrality accorded to the problem of morality and the *creation* of values in the articles and notes of the Forties. In the article «*Ils*

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<sup>10</sup> « [...] il vient des temps où la morale rentrer dans la politique – he writes on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1944 - parce que des hommes, tout d’un coup, *se sont mis à payer cette politique avec leur sang*, parce que des Français l’ont faite au moyen de tortures et d’assassinats d’un côté, de sacrifices et de grandeurs secrètes de l’autre. » (CAC8, 155). This idea is further developed in the editorial of the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1944: «Le monde que nous espérons a déjà été payé trop cher. S’il y faut encore le sang et la douleur des hommes, il faudra bien donner ce sang et souffrir cette douleur. Mais pas un Européen ne saurait y penser avec légèreté. Et dans tous les cas, ce n’est pas dans ce pays où nous venons de vivre toute l’étendue et toute l’absurdité de la misère humaine qu’on trouvera des hommes pour l’accepter dans la gaîté du cœur. [...] Les Français n’avaient pas tous reconnus en 1939 que la guerre avait un sens. Ils savent maintenant qu’elle en a un. Elle a même pris pour eux un sens supérieur puisqu’ils n’ont plus seulement à détruire un ennemi, mais aussi à vaincre l’idée que quatre années de trahison officielle ont donnée de la France à l’extérieur. [...] Nous nous sommes mis dans la position difficile d’un peuple qui doit à nouveau faire preuve d’une noblesse et d’une grandeur autrefois reconnues sans effort. Que nous ayons à le faire avec la vie des meilleurs d’entre nous, c’est l’affreuse tragédie de notre nouvelle histoire » (CAC8, 216-217). The «*higher*» meaning of war coincides with the *aesthetic* and finite *sens* of *la chair souffrante*, expressed by the images of blood and pain. It is important to observe that Camus identifies France not so much with the Nation-State, conceived as an abstraction and a legal construction, but with the “living” people, of those who have paid with their lives and suffering the Nazi Occupation and the war.

<sup>11</sup> See Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, “Un journal dans l’histoire”, in *Cahiers Albert Camus 8. Camus à « Combat »*. *Éditoriaux et articles d’Albert Camus 1944-47*, Gallimard, Paris, 2002, p. 42. Abbreviated as CAC8.

<sup>12</sup> Camus contributed to the clandestine *Combat* between March and July 1944 (n. 55-58).

<sup>13</sup> CAC8, 44.

<sup>14</sup> CAC8, 141-2.



*ne passeront pas*» (23<sup>rd</sup> August 1944), Camus explicitly relates the condition of the Plague – illustrated by those who have lost their capacity for memory and imagination, or those who are incapable of *aesthetic* thinking - to nihilism: «Aux quelques rares Français qui, mutilés dans leur mémoire et leur imagination, oublieux de l'honneur et insoucieux de la honte, assis dans leur confort personnel, pourraient demander : « À quoi bon ? » il faut, ici, répondre » (CAC8,147).

The echo of Nietzsche's posthumous note on nihilism is not fortuitous: Camus's re-reading and re-evaluation of the philosopher's work dates precisely around 1943-44.<sup>15</sup> He wrote around that date:

Révolte. Chap. I. *La morale existe. Ce qui est immoral, c'est le Christianisme. Définition d'une morale contre le rationalisme intellectuel et l'irrationalisme divin.* [...] (CII, 125) [My highlighting]

In the absurd horizon, some kind of morality can and must, therefore, be recovered beyond the nihilistic *tabula rasa* - <sup>16</sup> that is, an *aesthetic* morality (in the Nietzschean sense), unfoundedly founded on the *aesthetic* experience, which is brought forth in the finite exposedness of *la chair souffrante* in/as that *déchirement*, which is the mark of *lucidity*.<sup>17</sup>

The continuity between the *good* nihilism of the *raisonnement absurde* and the political writings is highlighted by two articles in *Combat*, « *Le sang de la liberté* » (24<sup>th</sup> August 1944) and « *La nuit de la vérité* » (25<sup>th</sup> August 1944), where Camus describes the «effort commun» of the French Resistance (*Combat*, 142) in terms that echo the chapter on the absurd Conquest in the MdS:

« Une fois de plus, la justice doit s'acheter avec le sang des hommes.  
Nous connaissons trop ce combat, nous y sommes trop mêlés par la *chair* et par le *cœur* pour accepter sans amertume cette terrible condition. » [...]. (CAC8, 149)

« Unis dans la même souffrance pendant quatre ans, nous le sommes encore dans la même ivresse, nous avons gagné notre *solidarité*. Et nous reconnaissons avec étonnement dans cette nuit

«[...] le chemin de la lutte me fait rencontrer la chair. Même humiliée, la chair est ma seule certitude. Je ne puis vivre que d'elle. » (MdS, 166)

« Comment ne pas comprendre que, dans cet univers vulnérable, tout ce qui est humain et n'est que cela *prend un sens plus brûlant* ? Visages tendus, *fraternité* menacée, amitié si forte et si pudique des hommes entre eux, ce sont les vraies richesses parce qu'elles

<sup>15</sup> CII, 78-79. Nietzsche's name recurs in Camus's notes on morality in the *Carnets*: «On ne peut être capable d'engagement sur tous les plans. Du moins peut-on choisir de vivre sur le plan où l'engagement est possible. Vivre ce qu'on a d'honorable et cela seulement. Dans certains cas cela peut conduire à se détourner des êtres même (et surtout) pour un cœur qui a la passion des êtres. En tout cas cela fait du déchirement. Mais qu'est-ce que cela prouve ? Cela prouve que celui qui aborde *sérieusement* le problème moral doit finir dans les extrêmes. Qu'on soit pour (Pascal) ou contre (Nietzsche), il suffit qu'on le soit *sérieusement* et l'on voit que le problème moral n'est que sang, folie et cris». (CII, 125).

<sup>16</sup> Cf., his letter to Barthes in 1955 (T, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> See MdS, 165.

bouleversante que pendant quatre ans nous n'avons jamais été seuls. Nous avons vécu les années de la *fraternité*. » (CAC8, 152)

« [...] On ne peut toujours vivre de meurtres et de violence. *Le bonheur, la juste tendresse, auront leur temps*. Mais cette paix ne nous trouvera pas oublieux. Et pour certains d'entre nous, le visage de nos frères défigurés par les balles, *la grande fraternité virile* de ces années ne nous quitteront jamais. [...] Rien n'est donné aux hommes et le peu qu'ils peuvent *conquérir* se paye en morts injustes. Mais la *grandeur* de l'homme n'est pas là. Elle est dans *la décision d'être plus fort que sa condition*. Et si sa condition est injuste, il n'y a qu'une façon de la *surmonter* qui est d'être juste lui-même. » (CAC8, 153)

[My italics]

sont périssables. C'est au milieu d'elles que l'esprit sent le mieux ses pouvoirs et ses *limites*. » (MdS, 167)

« La *grandeur* a changé de camp. Elle est dans la protestation et le sacrifice sans avenir. [...] C'est une revendication de l'homme contre son destin. [...] Les conquérants parlent quelque fois de vaincre et *surmonter*. Mais c'est toujours « se surmonter » qu'ils entendent. Vous savez bien ce que cela veut dire. Tout homme s'est senti l'égal d'un dieu à certains moments. C'est ainsi du moins qu'on le dit. Mais cela vient de ce que, dans un éclair, il a senti l'étonnante *grandeur de l'esprit humain*. *Les conquérants sont seulement ceux d'entre les hommes qui sentent assez leur force pour être sûrs de vivre constamment à ces hauteurs et dans la pleine conscience de cette grandeur*. » (MdS, 166-7)

« [...] Notre destin est en face de nous et c'est lui que nous provoquons. Moins par orgueil que par conscience de notre condition sans portée. Nous aussi, nous avons parfois pitié de nous-mêmes. C'est la seule compassion qui nous semble acceptable : un sentiment que peut-être vous ne comprenez guère et qui vous semble peu viril. Pourtant ce sont les plus audacieux d'entre nous qui l'éprouvent. Mais *nous appelons virils les lucides et nous ne voulons pas d'une force qui se sépare de la clairvoyance*. » (MdS, 168). [My italics]

Protest and sacrifice are precisely the terms through which Camus drafts his *Essai sur Révolte* around '44:<sup>18</sup> the heroic «*decision d'être plus fort que sa condition*» can be easily identified with that deliberative act (*praxis*) disclosed by the *aesthetic* judgement of revolt, which unfoundedly founds the new values of what he addresses as an *anti-political* and anti-realistic «*politique de l'honneur*».<sup>19</sup>

Nous étions entrés dans cette guerre avec l'idée que cela était absurde, mais qu'on ne pouvait pas faire autrement. Nous pouvons dire ainsi que nous y sommes entrés pour *l'honneur*. (CAC8, 185) [My italics]

Now, *honour* is one of the terms that recur in the editorial of the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1944, which Camus devotes to the German situation. According to the author, the German people are immersed in a profound «*sommeil de l'esprit*», which explains why «[il] continue à

<sup>18</sup> «*L'homme peut-il à lui seul créer ses propres valeurs? C'est tout le problème. Vous êtes pertinent? Mais je n'ai jamais dit que l'homme n'était pas raisonnable. Ce que je veux, c'est le priver de son prolongement illusoire et de faire reconnaître qu'avec cette privation il est enfin clair et cohérent. Id. Sacrifice qui conduit à valeur. [...]* Considérer l'héroïsme et le courage comme des valeurs secondaires – *après avoir fait preuve de courage*. » (CII, 23-4).

«*Le temps de la justice*» (22<sup>nd</sup> August 44) (CAC8, 146).

se taire derrière ses frontières entamées, *massif*, obstiné, *muet* sur les crimes qu'on a commis en son nom, résigné aux terribles blessures qui tombent sur ses villes» (CAC8, 195) :<sup>20</sup>

[...] ce peuple suit sa vocation profonde, celle d'un *pays qui n'a pas voulu penser* et qui pendant des années n'a pas eu d'autre souci que d'éviter les charges de la pensée. L'unité qui commence avec Bismarck n'était pas la fusion harmonieuse et féconde d'individus différents. Cette unité était d'abord une *unanimité*. Et jamais, comme sous Hitler, cette unité n'a été si totale. Elle était *l'unité indistincte et amorphe d'un peuple content d'avoir la paix*. Oui, ce peuple a fait la guerre parce qu'il voulait la paix de l'esprit. Et la paix de l'esprit consistait pour lui à laisser à d'autres le soin de penser pour lui. Ce peuple n'aime pas la liberté, puisqu'il hait la critique. C'est pour cela qu'il n'aime pas les révolutions qui affranchissent l'homme et qu'il n'a jamais fait que des révolutions légales, qui renforçaient à la fois l'État et la nation. Et ce régime hitlérien qui lui enlevait le *bonheur* et la *dignité*, l'*honneur* et la *vie personnelle*, il l'a accepté parce que, pour finir, il y trouvait ce sommeil de l'esprit dont il avait toujours rêvé. (CAC8, 195-196) [My italics]

This text is of particular interest for a series of reasons : firstly, it associates the realisation of the totalitarian, "immanent", community under the regime of Hitlerism with *thoughtlessness*; and secondly, by relating the (in)capacity for thinking with the notion of freedom, it highlights the complexity of Camus' understanding of *revolution*.

In analysing the German case, Camus distinguishes a *legal* revolution, reinforcing the state and the nation, from a *material* revolution – rooted in a revolt, which stems from (material) despair *and not from constructive reflection* (CAC8, 196), thus closing itself back upon «cette épaisseur, cette inertie qui le livreront [the German people] aux vainqueurs du moment» (*Id.*) –<sup>21</sup> from «les révolutions qui affranchissent l'homme» (*Id.*). Freedom is inseparable from the capacity of thinking, as the condition for a political unity («fusion harmonieuse et féconde d'individus *différents*») which cannot be confused with the totalistic and totalitarian «*unanimité inconsciente*» (CAC8, 195).

In the editorial of the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, the political relevance of language is once again spelt out: the silence of the German people is identified with the silence of its Führer, who dispensed the German people from the *capacity for speaking and the exercise of words* (CAC8, 199), which is the mark of *thoughtlessness*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> «Cette énorme masse garde son silence comme si le monde entier et son propre destin lui étaient devenus étrangers. Tous les observateurs alliés et neutres sont d'accord : le peuple allemand continue de dormir dans le *crépuscule de ses dieux* » (CAC8, 195). [My italics]

<sup>21</sup> As Abbou points out, «Camus n'a jamais réduit la libération de l'homme au seul domaine matériel, pas plus d'ailleurs qui ne l'a exclu. Et l'on commettrait une erreur grossière en supposant que le journaliste relègue les données matérielles et historiques de la libération de l'homme à un plan secondaire » (A. Abbou, « Nature et place d'une théorie de la libération de l'homme dans la pensée d'Albert Camus », in *Camus et la politique*, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>22</sup> «[...] ce silence est éloquent. Il s'identifie à celui de toute l'Allemagne, il est celui d'un homme qui, lui aussi, a renoncé à penser. Hitler, sans doute, n'était pas un penseur. Mais c'était un homme à qui les mots tenaient lieu d'idées. Ses méditations, elles étaient hurlées à pleins poumons devant cent mille Allemands. Et se taire pour lui, c'est ne plus être. » (CAC8, 200).

Camus traces the totalitarian immanent unity of the German nation under the Führer to *thoughtlessness*, which he designates as a *hatred of consciousness*, and which is nothing other than the *loss of lucidity (aveuglement)* of the LAA.<sup>23</sup> In the political articles, *thoughtlessness* thus coincides with the rejection of the *aesthetic* thought of the 1942 essay. This is confirmed in the same editorial, where the exercise of words is related to righteousness, the latter being reduced under Hitlerism to sheer exercise of force:

L'Allemagne a accepté d'avoir raison ou tort avec Hitler. Et la raison de Hitler n'était faite que de sa force. L'Allemagne a accepté d'avoir raison ou tort avec la force. La conviction profonde de ce peuple était que Hitler serait toujours plus fort que son destin. Mais aucun homme jamais ne peut être plus fort que son destin, sinon dans le silence de son cœur ou par les pouvoirs de l'amour. Seulement, c'était là le genre de force qui le faisait rire. (CAC8, 200)

The continuity with the *aesthetic* finite thought of the finite, in the chapter on the absurd conquest, is further highlighted in Camus' association of the immanent/totalizing logic of Hitlerism to modern individualist thought:

[ce] peuple qui a tant détesté l'individu, a pris de l'individualisme la part la plus basse, celle qui met un homme au-dessus des autres au mépris de toute conscience. (Id.)

Camus thus roots the Nazi «immanent» community in an extreme appropriation of modern individualism, which, by rejecting the *aesthetic* dimension, which is the mark of *lucidity* or *consciousness*, as the condition for thinking plurality (CAC8, 195), is turned into an abstract *reductio ad unum*, that culminates - in the nihilistic, a-moral and God-less, equation of righteousness to force - in *collective suicide*.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that, in the aftermath of the Liberation of France from the Nazi occupant, Camus was primarily concerned with the necessity of *re-thinking* the political community towards a radical “transvaluation” of the latter in the sense of an *aesthetic* finite thought of the finite, is apparent in the editorial of the 19<sup>th</sup> September 1944.

In the report of the first public meeting of the Mouvement national de Libération («Des hommes qui ne parlaient au nom d'aucun parti, qui ne s'adressaient à aucune clientèle existant déjà avant la guerre [...], CAC8, 197), the term «revolution» plays a pivotal role :

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<sup>23</sup> In the editorial of the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1944, Camus wrote: «[...] si Hitler avait réussi, l'Histoire eût reconnu en lui un grand homme. Quelques-uns d'entre nous, sans doute, l'eussent encore nié au nom même de la grandeur dont nous aurions jugé qu'elle avait été pour toujours avilie dans un régime où le nom d'homme avait perdu son sens. Mais l'Allemagne entière et le monde eussent oublié la médiocrité irrémédiable de cette âme livrée aux *idée fixes*, les crimes que jusqu'à lui on pensait être sans nom, mais qui prendront maintenant le sien, le malheur enfin qu'il traînait autour de lui et qu'il a étendu comme une nuit sur tant de pays désespérés » (CAC8, 189).

<sup>24</sup> CAC8, 201. In another editorial (29<sup>th</sup> September 1944) Camus wrote: «[...] nous avons l'idée que l'Allemagne hitlérienne est décidée à finir dans le plus tragique et le plus théâtral des suicides [...] » (CAC8, 216).

De quelle révolution s'agit-il ? Celle dont on parlait dimanche à Pleyel ne ressemble à aucune de celles qui nous étaient déjà proposées avant la guerre et par des partis très différents. C'est pour cela qu'elle semble vague à certains esprits. *On a l'habitude de faire correspondre aux mots les images les plus familières. La révolution, pour beaucoup, c'est 1789 et 1917. Le reste est trop fatiguant à penser.* Il n'est même pas sûr que les mouvements représentés à la réunion d'hier aient eux-mêmes une idée tout à fait précise de cette révolution. Mais ils parlaient au nom d'une force intérieure qui les dépasse, qui les a portés pendant quatre ans et qui, dans certaines conditions, pourrait prendre demain sa vraie forme. (CAC8, 197)

Revolt is the force that has guided the Resistance for four years - «[c]'est-à-dire le refus entier, obstiné, presque aveugle au début, d'un ordre qui voulait mettre les homes à genoux. *La révolte, c'est d'abord le cœur* » (CAC8, 198). It is in the very moment «où [la révolte] passe dans l'esprit, où le sentiment devient idée, où l'élan spontané se termine en *action concertée*» (CAC8, 198) that « l'informe pensée qui jaillit aujourd'hui au bout de ces quatre ans de nuit [...] porte le germe [...] de toutes les renaissances » (CAC8, 198-9).

Not only does Camus oppose this « shapeless thought » to the «  *paresse de l'esprit* », which he sees at the root of all Historicistic reasoning, but it is also in *this* revolt that we must find, in his view, « la théorie originale et précise » of a new revolution (CAC8, 198) – a kind of “theory” which is consistent with the finite method of the MdS:

Nous ne croyons pas ici aux révolutions définitives. Tout effort humain est relatif. L'injuste loi de l'histoire est qu'il faut à l'homme d'immenses sacrifices pour des résultats souvent dérisoires. Mais si mince que soit le progrès de l'homme vers sa propre vérité, nous pensons qu'il justifie toujours ces sacrifices. Nous croyons justement aux révolutions relatives. (CAC8, 198)

As he wrote to Ponge in January 1943 :

*En matière politique du moins, la notion du relatif ne m'est pas étrangère, croyez-le. Je regrette d'avoir laissé en Algérie le seul écrit politique que j'aie commis et qui (coïncidence supplémentaire) faisait état de ce que j'appelais « la révolution pessimiste » ou « la révolution sans métaphysique ». Vous auriez été surpris de voir que j'ai rencontré, vous ignorant, exactement les mêmes formules que vous. [...] [d]ans la méditation où le temps nous plonge, la seule chose que nous puissions faire, c'est de prendre conscience. Nous avons pour cela besoin les uns des autres. À cet égard, je crois que votre expérience, cette chasse insistante de l'expression, qui aboutit à un humanisme intolérant (au bon sens) et à un relativisme passionné, est irremplaçable [...] (E, 1667)*  
[My highlighting]

The continuity between his political articles around 1944 and the chapter on the absurd conquest in the MdS is, once more, made visible in an editorial, published in *Combat* on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1944, and later included in the chapter “Morale et politique” of his collection of political writings *Actuelles*, where the « pessimist revolution », or the revolution without metaphysics, acquires its full meaning in the light of Camus' « passion désintéressée au bonheur impossible des hommes » (CAC8, 312):

Nous savons, en effet, que le salut des hommes est peut-être impossible, mais nous disions que ce n'est pas une raison pour cesser de le tenter et nous disions surtout qu'il n'est pas permis de le dire impossible avant d'avoir fait une bonne fois ce qu'il fallait pour démontrer qu'il ne l'était pas. Aujourd'hui, l'occasion nous en est donnée. (CAC8, 312-313)

The echoes of the *good-nihilistic* «faire comme si» of the absurd conqueror in the MdS are apparent.<sup>25</sup> Now, Camus opposes the modest political thought of an «intelligence raisonnable revenue au concret» (E, 1681), i.e., the aesthetic or finite («soucieuse d'honnêteté», *Id.*) thought of the finite to the *idealistic* political systems and ideologies - the polemical target of the article being principally Communism - which justify all means toward the realization of an ultimate and definitive *salut* or *bonheur* of men.

Intellectual and moral *honesty* is, in contrast, the condition for that *clairvoyance* (CAC8, 224), which – in apparent continuity with the terminology of the 1942 essay - Camus poses as the method of a *new political praxis*.

As he writes in the editorial of the 27<sup>th</sup> September, devoted to the trial of Louis Renault, and touching upon the charges of «indignité nationale», concerning the confiscation of the properties of French industrialists that collaborated with the Vichy regime,<sup>26</sup> the year 1940 marks, in the history of France, the break-down of the moral and political guideposts of the tradition.<sup>27</sup>

This idea is further developed in the editorial of the 7<sup>th</sup> October, included in the chapter “Morale et politique” in *Actuelles*, where Camus rejects the Communist re-appropriation of the traditional means of political action, in particular, of violence and manipulation of language (lying and propaganda), identified with political realism («il s'agit de savoir si tous les moyens sont bons», CAC8, 312), in order to realize a higher end, that is legitimized through a coherent Philosophy of History:

[...] nous ne croyons pas au réalisme politique. Notre méthode est différente. Nos camarades communistes peuvent comprendre que des hommes qui n'étaient pas en possession d'une doctrine aussi ferme que la leur aient eu beaucoup à réfléchir pendant ces quatre années. [...] Parmi tant d'idées bouleversées, tant de purs visages sacrifiés, au milieu des décombres, ils ont senti le besoin d'une doctrine et d'une vie nouvelles. *Pour eux, c'est tout un monde qui est mort en juin 1940.* (CAC8, 239). [My italics]

It is not difficult to recognize in the new doctrine of the revolted men of the Resistance the finite *aesthetic* thought of the finite, which, in the nihilistic horizon of the *tabula rasa* of the tradition, poses the conditions for re-thinking political action *beyond* the reduction, during the Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime, of the political to a «*legal fiction*» (CAC8, 210).

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<sup>25</sup> The absurd thought of the limits of human action in the charter on Conquest in the MdS constitutes, I argue, the premise and condition to grasp the meaning of Camus' political engagement. The echoes of the absurd or nihilistic wisdom of the conqueror in Camus' notion of *pessimist revolution* are apparent (MdS, 166).

<sup>26</sup> Editorial, 28<sup>th</sup> September (CAC8, 212-ff.)

<sup>27</sup> «[en] 1940 a commencé, en France, une époque où les hommes ont été appelés à se juger un par un, dans la solitude, hors de tout appui traditionnel.» (CAC8, 212) (My italics).

What emerges in the editorials between September and October '44, is a dissociation of judgement and (written) law, the latter authorizing the terrorist practices under the Nazi-Fascist regime in France: written law is opposed to the «*loi des cœurs*»,<sup>28</sup> that is, to the Resistance fighters' revolt as some other kind of *law*, de-limiting men's conduct in the sense, analysed above, of an internal self-mastering (*askesis*),<sup>29</sup> the political urgency in the aftermath of the Liberation thus being the institution of what Camus calls the «*tribunaux d'honneur*» (CAC8, 211), which would allow us to «*juger au nom d'une vérité qui n'a pas encore pris forme de loi*» (Id.) - that is, in the name of a «*law of honour*» or *moral justice*.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that the «*truth*», opposed by Camus to a murderous law, which allows violence and torture, and destroys communication, is nothing but the finite, anti-metaphysical, truth of *aisthesis*, is made apparent in the exchange of articles with François Mauriac concerning the question of justice. In the editorial of the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1944, touching upon the problem of the trials against collaborators of the Vichy regime,<sup>31</sup> the author develops an argument, which, I suggest, anticipates the tone and conclusions of Hannah Arendt's report of Eichmann's trial in '66:

Nous n'avons pas le goût du meurtre. Et la personne humaine figure tout ce que nous respectons au monde. Notre premier mouvement devant cette condamnation [the death sentence of G. Suarez] est donc la *répugnance*. Il nous serait facile de penser que *notre affaire n'est pas de détruire des hommes*, mais qu'elle est seulement de faire quelque chose pour le bien de ce pays. Mais en vérité, nous avons appris depuis 1939 que nous trahirions ainsi le bien même de ce pays. La France porte en elle, comme un corps étranger, une minorité d'hommes qui ont fait hier son malheur et qui continueront de le faire. Ce sont les hommes de la trahison et de l'injustice.

*C'est leur existence même qui pose le problème de la justice puisqu'ils forment une part vivante de ce pays et que la question est de les détruire.*

[...] que M. Mauriac considère le conflit où se trouvent des hommes qui ignorent la sentence divine et qui gardent, cependant, le goût de l'homme et l'espoir de sa grandeur. [...] *nous avons choisi d'assumer la justice humaine avec ses terribles imperfections, soucieux seulement de la corriger par une honnêteté désespérément maintenue.*

Nous n'avons jamais demandé une répression aveugle et convulsive. Nous détestons l'arbitraire et la sottise criminelle, [...] nous souhaitons pour cela une justice prompte et limitée dans le temps, la répression

<sup>28</sup> «Pendant quatre ans, ce n'est pas au nom de la loi écrite que nous avons jugé, c'est au nom de la *loi des cœurs*. Quant aux textes de lois, ils ne servaient qu'au bourreau » (CAC8, 211).

<sup>29</sup> In the editorial on the question of National indignity (28th September 1944), Camus opposes the collaborationist industrialists («*des hommes que l'argent a détournés de toute conscience*», CAC8, 213) to «[...] des hommes de liberté et de justice [qui] se trouvent ligotés par leur principes eux-mêmes et seraient empêchés d'agir s'ils ne décidaient pas, une fois pour toutes, de faire de leur conscience la nouvelle loi dont ils ont besoin » (CAC8, 214). In the editorial of the 29th October 1944, he adds: «*Le goût de l'honneur ne va pas sans une terrible exigence envers soi-même et envers les autres. Cela est fatigant, bien sûr. Et un certain nombre de Français étaient fatigués d'avance en 1940* » (CAC8, 295).

<sup>30</sup> «C'est la fiction de légalité que Vichy a créée qui nous force à substituer la *justice morale* à la justice de droit [...]» (CAC8, 302).

<sup>31</sup> The polemic, concerning the problem of the press and the epuration, originated from the death sentence of the journalist Georges Suarez, member of the Parti Populaire français and director of the collaborationist *Aujourd'hui*, accused of giving intelligence to the enemy and of treason, and executed on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1944 (see CAC8, 288, n. 1).

immédiate des crimes les plus évidents, et ensuite, puisqu'on ne peut rien faire sans la médiocrité, *l'oubli raisonné des erreurs que tant de Français ont tout de même commises*. (CAC8, 288-289) [My italics]

Honesty is associated with a *clairvoyant* respect, not of sheer life, nor of Man as an abstract entity, but of the «*personne humaine*», conceived *aesthetically*.<sup>32</sup> Camus traces the conditions for a social and political *re-naissance*, of a new “beginning” (*commencement*), firstly, in the exclusion from the «*living*» community (of the living) of those, who, for their lack of thought and imagination, have made themselves responsible for *malheur* and *injustice*, *i.e.*, for the suffering and death of their fellow-men; and secondly, in a “*reasonable forgetfulness*” that would re-open the conditions for reconstruction.

What emerges from Camus' articles around 1944 is the understanding and re-definition of the political community in terms that echo the reflection of Georges Bataille and of the Collège de Sociologie around that same date:<sup>33</sup> by opposing the ‘active’ principle of power, associated with *dominion* and violence (realism), to the ‘passive’ principle of revolt, as *aesthetic* judgement (the clairvoyant «*passion passive*» of the *Carnets*), Camus re-comprises the political community *beyond* the totalizing and totalitarian «community toward *action*» realised by Hitlerism - as the active realization (fabrication) of the mono-cephalous community, the product of an abstracting and simplifying *reductio ad unum* – in the sense of what could be defined as a «community toward *existence*»,<sup>34</sup> the latter being identified by Camus with the *aesthetic* judgement of revolt, which is the opposite of abstraction.<sup>35</sup>

It is significant, in this sense, that Georges Bataille expressed his enthusiastic approval for Camus's *Remarque sur la révolte*, published in the review *L'Existence* in 1945. As Bataille's notion of «communication» - which, in the 1945 work *On Nietzsche*,<sup>36</sup> is rooted in the moment of *risk taking* of the individuals' separate existence (shattering the «*full and intact individual*»), as the liminal experience of the being suspended in *the beyond oneself* at the

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<sup>32</sup> The *aesthetic* dimension of the notion of *person* in Camus's political articles of this period is apparent in the editorial of the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1944, devoted to the memory of René Leynaud, and later included, not without reason, in the chapter “*La Chair*” in the collection *Actuelles*: «Car des hommes comme Leynaud étaient entrés dans la lutte [de la Résistance], convaincus qu'aucun être ne pouvait parler avant *de payer de sa personne*» (CAC8, 292). The continuity with the (nihilistic) finite thought of the finite developed in the MdS is further confirmed in the editorial of the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1944: «Ce langage est-il si horrible que le pense M. Mauriac? Certes, ce n'est pas celui de la grâce. Mais c'est le langage d'une génération d'hommes élevés dans le spectacle de l'injustice, *étrangère à Dieu, amoureuse de l'homme et résolue à le servir contre un destin si souvent déraisonnable*. C'est le langage de cœurs décidés à prendre en charge tous leur devoirs, à vivre avec la tragédie de leur siècle et à servir la grandeur de l'homme au milieu d'un monde de sottise et de crimes.» (CAC8, 289-290).

<sup>33</sup> Georges Bataille collaborated to *Combat* with an article on «Nietzsche est-il fasciste?» (20<sup>th</sup> of October 1944)

<sup>34</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Communitas*, op. cit., p. 304.

<sup>35</sup> CAC8, 475.

<sup>36</sup> Bataille dedicated a copy of *Sur Nietzsche* to Camus : «à Albert Camus,...la morale pourrait-elle être poussée trop loin ? Avec l'amitié de Georges Bataille » (see F. Favre, «*Quand Camus lisait Nietzsche*», in *Albert Camus* 20, op. cit., p. 204).



limit of nothingness - <sup>37</sup> Camus' notion of revolt designates a liminal experience «d'un "tout" encore assez obscure et d'un "rien" qui signifie exactement la possibilité de sacrifice de l'homme à ce tout» (E, 1683):

Le révolté veut être tout, c'est-à-dire cette valeur dont il a soudain pris conscience et dont il veut qu'elle soit dans sa personne reconnue et acceptée – ou rien, c'est-à-dire être déchu par la force qui le domine. À la limite il acceptera de mourir. Il met en balance la mort et ce qu'il appellera par exemple sa liberté. [...] la révolte, contrairement à une opinion courante, et bien qu'elle naisse dans ce que l'homme a de plus strictement individuel, *met en cause la notion même d'individu*. Car si l'individu, dans les cas extrêmes, accepte de mourir et meurt dans le mouvement de sa révolte, il montre par là *qu'il se sacrifie au bénéfice d'une vérité qui dépasse sa destinée individuelle, qui va plus loin de son existence personnelle*. [...] La part que le révolté défend, il a le *sentiment qu'elle lui est commune avec tous les hommes*. C'est de là qu'elle tire sa soudaine *transcendance*. C'est pour toutes les existences en même temps que le fonctionnaire se dresse lorsqu'il juge que, par un tel ordre, quelque chose en lui est nié qui ne lui appartient pas seulement, mais qui est *un lieu commun où tous les hommes*, même celui qui l'insulte et l'opprime, ont une *solidarité* toute prête. Il y a une *complicité* qui unit à la victime le bourreau. (E, 1683-84) [My italics]

The value "created" (E, 1687) by the judgement of the revolted man does not coincide with the individual, but is inherently plural («Il faut tous les hommes pour la composer», E, 1685), in that it is founded on the *aesthetic* experience of a *toucher-à* - «C'est dans la révolte que *l'homme se dépasse dans autrui*, et, de ce point de vue, la solidarité humaine est *métaphysique*» (*Id.*) – which exceeds reduction to empathy:<sup>38</sup> anticipating certain passages of Hannah Arendt's lectures on Kant, Camus qualifies revolt in the (Kantian) terms of *disinterested* judgement.<sup>39</sup>

It is significant that Camus posed *disinterestedness* as one of the key elements of his political programme in the editorial of the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1944:

[...] notre foi est qu'aucune tâche humaine n'est impossible à l'homme. Il nous faut seulement et précisément des hommes. Des hommes, c'est-à-dire des cœurs avertis à la fois de *l'audace* et de la *prudence*, des *âmes sensibles* et des volontés fermes, des esprits capables en même temps de *désintéressement* et de *engagement*. Et si l'on devait nous dire que cela encore est inhumain, alors nous répondrions que c'est une raison pour le tenter et pour redonner ainsi à ce pays le dernier espoir de sa *grandeur*. (CAC8, 276) [My italics]

The term also recurs in the editorial of the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1944, concerning the diffusion of the Socialist doctrine among larger fractions of the French public opinion, where Camus reveals his political convictions:

La justice sociale peut très bien se faire sans une philosophie ingénieuse. Elle demande quelques vérités de bon sens et ces choses simples qui sont la *clairvoyance*, l'énergie et le *désintéressement*. [...] les doctrines ne sont pas efficaces par leur nouveauté, mais seulement par l'énergie qu'elle véhiculent et par leur *esprit de sacrifice* des hommes qui les servent. (CAC8, 351)

<sup>37</sup> G. Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, The Athlone Press, London, 1992, p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> E, 1684-5 (See my analysis in Chapter 4).

<sup>39</sup> «On se révolte aussi contre soi-même et ce mouvement où l'homme se dresse contre l'homme lui-même [...] montre au moins le caractère profondément *désintéressé* de toute révolte » (E, 1684) (My italics).

By taking his distance from the Socialist doctrines of the Third Republic (CAC8, 352),<sup>40</sup> Camus propounds

un autre socialisme, qui est *décidé à payer*. Il refuse également le mensonge et la faiblesse. Il ne pose pas la question futile du progrès, mais il est persuadé que le sort de l'homme est toujours entre les mains de l'homme.

*Il ne croit pas aux doctrines absolues et infaillibles, mais à l'amélioration obstinée, chaotique mais inlassable, de la condition humaine.* La justice pour lui vaut bien une révolution. [...] celle-ci lui est plus difficile qu'à d'autres, parce qu'il n'a pas le mépris de l'homme [...]. (CAC8, 352) [My italics]

In the editorial of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 1944, Camus distinguishes two forms of Socialism among the political thoughts, which struggled to express themselves in the immediate aftermath of the Liberation, and during the war: «un *socialisme marxiste de forme traditionnelle*, représenté par les *anciens partis*, et un *socialisme libéral, mal formulé* quoique généreux, qui se traduit dans les mouvements et les personnalités issus de la résistance» (CAC8, 348-9).<sup>41</sup>

This latter form of “Libertarian” Socialism appealed to a «tradition collectiviste française qui a toujours laissé sa place à la *liberté de la personne* et qui *n'a rien emprunté au matérialisme philosophique*» (CAC8, 349). It is precisely the rejection of the strong and coherent Philosophy of History, inscribed in the philosophical materialism of the Marxist version of the Socialist doctrine, which prevented the «*socialisme résistant*» (*Id.*) from converging into the ancient organization(s) of the political tradition.

It is in this sense that I suggest we must understand Camus' appeal to the law of *honour* -<sup>42</sup> inseparable from revolt,<sup>43</sup> and belonging, together with *honesty, generosity* and *courage*, to the constellation of the *aesthetic* finite thought of the finite - as summarising an

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<sup>40</sup> «Il y a une certaine forme de cette doctrine [socialiste] que nous détestons peut-être plus encore que les politiques de tyrannie. C'est celle qui se repose dans l'optimisme, qui s'autorise de l'amour de l'humanité pour se dispenser de servir les hommes, du progrès inévitable pour esquiver les questions de salaires, et de la paix universelle pour éviter les sacrifices nécessaires. Ce socialisme-là est fait surtout du sacrifice des autres. Il n'a jamais engagé celui qui le professait. En un mot, ce socialisme a peur de tout et de la révolution » (CAC8, 351).

<sup>41</sup> My italics.

<sup>42</sup> The law of honour is related to the question of justice and epuration: « [...] il fallait aller jusqu'au bout de notre contradiction et accepter résolument de paraître injustes pour servir réellement la justice. [...] Il s'agissait de *créer la loi dont nous avons besoin, de la formuler en termes clairs et irréprochables*. Il s'agissait enfin, pour compenser sa rétroactivité, de lui assigner dans le temps une limite précise, passée laquelle elle ne serait plus valable. Il était possible alors d'aller vite parce qu'il devenait possible de parler clair. Le Gouvernement ne pouvait pas arrêter tous les coupables en quelques semaines. Il pouvait en quelques semaines *créer sa loi d'honneur* qu'on aurait appliquée pendant six mois ou un an et qui aurait débarrassé la France d'une honte qui dure encore » (CAC8, 432).

<sup>43</sup> In the editorial of the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1944, Camus relates honour to revolt, as the “no-saying” force («la capacité de dire non») of the men of Resistance, which will be providing those same men with the yes-saying strength («fermeté») and positive virtues for political reconstruction (CAC8, 296).

open, limited, political programme, consistent with its open and limited (*good-nihilistic*) "doctrine".<sup>44</sup>

[La méthode que nous essayons d'appliquer aujourd'hui] ne prétend pas à refaire toute la politique d'un pays. Elle veut essayer de provoquer dans la vie politique de ce même pays *une expérience très limitée qui consisterait, par une simple critique objective, à introduire le langage de la morale dans l'exercice de la politique*. Cela revient à dire *oui et non en même temps* et à le dire avec le même sérieux et la même objectivité. (CAC8, 239-240) [My italics]

It is significant that, one year later, in *Remarque sur la révolte*, Camus defined revolt precisely as this very same act of «[dire] à la fois *oui et non*» (E, 1682), namely, with a refusal which is not a resignation, but lies in

*ce sentiment du révolté que l'autre "exagère", "qu'il n'a pas de raisons pour", enfin "qu'il outre passe son droit", la frontière, pour finir, fondant le droit*. La révolte ne va pas sans le sentiment d'avoir soi-même en quelque façon et quelque part raison. [...] [Le révolté] affirme qu'il y a en lui quelque chose qui vaut qu'on y prenne garde. (E, 1682) [My italics]

In « Le sang de la liberté » (24<sup>th</sup> August 44), the « *immenses raisons* » of the Resistance fighters lay precisely in the despairing experience of four years of war, to which men have been «mêlés par *la chair et par le cœur*». The *aesthetic* dimension of such experience, emphasized by these recurring metaphors, explicitly provides the answer to the nihilistic «*À quoi bon?*»,<sup>45</sup> as well as to the Nazi argument in LAA: «La Résistance a aujourd'hui - Camus wrote on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1944 - l'expérience du *courage et du sacrifice*» (CAC8, 359), and as such it is a «*force de rénovation qui a conçu l'idée d'une France juste , en même temps qu'elle forgeait une France libre*» (CAC8, 367).<sup>46</sup>

The «*lutte indicible*» for freedom, in the feverish hours that preceded the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, is thus described by Camus as the «*terrible enfantement*» of a revolution (CAC8, 150) - but the metaphor, of Marxian memory, of 20<sup>th</sup> century political realism is exploded:

Le Paris qui se bat ce soir veut commander demain. *Non pour le pouvoir, mais pour la justice, non pour la politique, mais pour la morale, non pour la domination de leur pays, mais pour sa grandeur* » (Id.) [My italics]

In the material *dénuement* of France and Europe, in the aftermath of the Nazi occupation and of war, Camus traces the conditions for a new, unprecedented, freedom of action, which finds

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<sup>44</sup> To use of the term "political theory" with reference to Camus' reflection would be, as Abbou puts it, «une provocation [...]. Camus s'était toujours défié des théories et des systèmes, il aurait, en une matière si grave, congédié la question en remarquant qu'il avait récusé d'emblée les deux sources du dérèglement de la pensée révolutionnaire: la raison et la logique » (A. Abbou, « Nature et place d'une théorie de la libération de l'homme... », art. cit., p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> CAC8, 147.

<sup>46</sup> My italics.

the (*aesthetic*) premises for a political renovation - what he insistently addresses as «révolution par la loi» - <sup>47</sup> in the experience of the Resistance:

[...] une dernière chance nous était donnée. Nous pensons vraiment qu'elle est la dernière. La ruse, la violence, le sacrifice aveugle des hommes, il y a des siècles que ces moyens ont fait leurs preuves. Ces preuves sont amères. *Il n'y a plus qu'une chose à tenter, qui est la voie moyenne et simple d'une honnêteté sans illusions, de la sage loyauté et l'obstination à renforcer seulement la dignité humaine.* (CAC8, 313) [My italics]

It is significant that, beside his repeated denunciation of the stupidity and senility of the French Administration in the critical phases of the war, Camus paid particular attention to the cupidity of the economic oligarchies, and qualify the latter in terms of «*aveuglement*» and insufficient imagination (CAC8, 383-4), thus immediately associating it with the anti-*aesthetic*, nihilistic thought of Hitlerism.

In his editorial of the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1945, he explicitly pointed out that «la libération n'était pas la liberté, que le combat contre l'ennemi nazi se confondait pour nous avec la lutte contre les puissances de l'argent» (CAC8, 443).<sup>48</sup> It is to this latter problem that, I argue, we must relate the moral question. In the editorial of the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1945, later included in the chapter "Morale et politique" of *Actuelles*, Camus would insist that

cette époque ne prétend pas donner de leçon de moralité à celle qui l'a précédée. Mais elle a le droit, acquis au milieu de terribles convulsions, de rejeter purement et simplement la morale qui l'a menée à la catastrophe. Car ce n'est pas sans doute les idées politiques de M. Herriot et de ses collègues radicaux qui nous ont perdus. *Mais la morale sans obligation ni sanction qui était la leur, la France des boutiquiers, de bureaux de tabac et de banquets législatifs dont ils nous ont gratifiés, a fait plus pour énerver les âmes et détendre les énergies que des perversions plus spectaculaires.* Dans tout les cas, ce n'est pas cette morale qui donne à M. Herriot le droit de condamner les Français de 1945. *Ce peuple est à la recherche d'une morale, voilà ce qui est vrai. Il est encore dans le provisoire.* (CAC8, 553-554) [My italics]

Denouncing the political morality of the economic «*fausses élites*», who were responsible, in Camus' view, for the identification of the exercise of politics with the «*vertus moyennes*» of utter mediocrity in the pre-war years (CAC8, 554), the author summarises the «*arrachements et [...] douleur*» of the war, and of the Nazi occupation, in terms of a «*conflit moral étendu à une nation entière*» (CAC8, 554).<sup>49</sup>

Camus opposed to the private interests of the political and economic élites of the Third Republic and the Vichy regime («dont nous avons enregistré la démission») - which in the aftermath of the Liberation controlled a disquieting revival of «des politiques obstinément

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<sup>47</sup> CAC8, 386.

<sup>48</sup> In another editorial (9<sup>th</sup> March 1945): «Il y a deux manières d'attenter à la liberté: par la force policière ou par la force économique. Cette dernière peut s'exercer soit directement - d'une manière matérielle - soit indirectement, en orientant la pensée, en l'abêtissant, en l'infléchissant par la presse dans le sens d'intérêts particuliers.» (CAC8, 453).

<sup>49</sup> My italics.

nationalistes» - the programme, promoted by the équipe of *Combat*, of a popular democracy «dont l'économie serait *juste* et le principe politique, *libéral*» (CAC8, 443), organized around the collectivisation of production,<sup>50</sup> and the creation of a political and economic federation.<sup>51</sup>

Camus devoted an editorial (26<sup>th</sup> of December 1944) to the concept of democracy, in the wake of the declaration of Pope Pio XII,<sup>52</sup> in which he rejects the latter's (moderate) understanding of democracy «*au sens large* [...] [qui] peut comprendre aussi bien la république que la monarchie. [Qui] se défie de la masse [...] [et] admet aussi les inégalités de la condition sociale, sauf à les tempérer par l'esprit de fraternité » (CAC8, 410). « Il y a une *modération de l'esprit* qui doit aider à l'intelligence des choses sociales, et même *au bonheur des hommes* », which is not conservative (CAC8, 410-11) and is identified with the self-discipline of the « revolted » thought, which coincides with the *aesthetic parti pris* of men's (*tragic*) happiness. Camus associates this kind of moderation with an understanding of the political, which has its formulation in the Charter of the Resistance (CAC8, 450), and would be fully expressed, in the author's view, by an international democracy, opposed to the acceptance and promotion of Imperialistic power politics (CAC8, 446).

What emerges in the articles for *Combat* is the presence of two distinct/opposed paradigms of the political: one characterised by the notions of power, dominion and conquest – associated with the term «*aveuglement*», designating the lack of imagination or *abstraction* which governs its political actors – and the other, identified with the experience of the Resistance, founded on revolt - what we have addressed in terms of *aesthetic* judgment.

This reading is confirmed by Roger Dadoun's analysis of an an-archic foundation in Camus' work.<sup>53</sup> By tracing in the convergence of revolt and «*bonheur*», the foundation of an-*arché*, as the twofold suppression of anteriority and authority - <sup>54</sup> both terms embodying an

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<sup>50</sup> «Depuis six mois, nous réclamons une économie de guerre et de reconstruction qui marque une rupture avec le passé, des socialisations (et d'abord celle du crédit) qui mettent la production au service de la collectivité [...] » (CAC8, 443).

<sup>51</sup> «Depuis six mois, conscients de la contradiction où s'étrangle un monde pris entre une économie désormais internationale et des politiques obstinément nationalistes, nous réclamons une fédération économique mondiale, où les matières premières, les débouchés commerciaux et la monnaie seront internationalisés et prépareront ainsi la fédération politique qui empêchera les peuples de s'égorger tous les vingt ans » (CAC8, 443).

<sup>52</sup> «La vraie démocratie – according to Pio XII -, qu'elle soit de forme républicaine aussi bien que de forme royaliste, assure aux peuples la liberté à laquelle ils aspirent, alors que dans l'État autoritaire gouverné par des mains politiques, personne n'a le droit de vivre honorablement sa vie propre » (CAC8, 408, note 2). Camus praises the «*termes clairs*» and the «*langage net*» in which the highest spiritual authority of his time would finally condemn the Nazi-Fascist dictatorships (CAC8, 409) : « Disons-le clairement, nous aurions voulu que le Pape prît parti, au cœur même de ces années honteuses, et dénonçât ce qui était à dénoncer. Il est dur de penser que l'Église a laissé ce soin à d'autres, plus obscurs, qui n'avaient pas son autorité [...] » (CAC8, 409-410).

<sup>53</sup> Roger Dadoun, «Albert Camus: Fondations d'anarchie», in *Camus et la politique*, op. cit., p. 263.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, p. 262.

order «où *personne n'est jamais reconnu*»,<sup>55</sup> namely, the anti-*aesthetic* sphere of abstraction and dominion, which destroys the *près-ence of la presence sensible* –<sup>56</sup> Camus' emphasis on the *aesthetic* moment in the articles of *Combat* highlights an (unfounded) origin/foundation (*archê*) other of the political, and an *alternative* paradigm of political action.

I argue that the *aesthetic* judgment of revolt unfoundedly founds the (new) political community, as a community «for *ex-istence*». This thesis is confirmed by the individuation, in the articles between 1944-46, of two recurrent, and clearly marked, terminological constellations, employed by Camus when dealing with political problems:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Puissance<br>Domination/ conquête) (→ Impérialismes )                     | Générosité<br>Honnêteté                                     |
| Aveuglement (→ manque d'imagination)<br>Abstraction (→ Terreur→ Réalisme) | Clairvoyance (→ âmes sensibles = capables<br>d'imagination) |
| Dieux lâches  | Grandeur<br>Courage/audace                                  |

It is significant that Camus assimilated the Resistance «*combat*» against the Nazi occupant with the post-Liberation political struggle to dismantle the monopoly of power of the industrial and financial élites, as the expressions of one identical political paradigm.

This seems to be confirmed by an article, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1945 – the last of a series of six articles devoted to the Algerian Crisis in the wake of the massacres of Sétif and Guelma – where Camus denounces the French and European unwillingness to solve the Colonial question:

Aujourd'hui, les hommes libres de cette Europe ont la victoire, ils ont arrêté un moment le terrible cours de cette *décadence*. Ils veulent maintenant renverser l'Histoire. Et ils le peuvent assurément, s'ils y mettent le prix du *sacrifice*. Mais il ne feront cette révolution que s'ils la font totalement. Ils ne sauveront l'Europe de ses démons et de ses *dieux lâches* que s'ils libèrent tous les hommes qui dépendent de l'Europe.

[...] je demande seulement aux Français qui savent aujourd'hui ce qu'est la haine : « Voulez-vous sérieusement être haïs par des millions d'hommes [i.e. the eight million of Arabo-Berberian people living in Algeria] comme vous avez haï des milliers d'autres hommes [i.e. the Nazi occupant] ? Si oui, laissez faire les choses en Afrique du Nord. Si non, accueillez ces hommes auprès de vous et fait-en vos égaux, par les moyens qui conviendront. »

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, p. 260.

<sup>56</sup> Dadoun associates the an-archic suppression of anteriority and authority with nihilism: «Lorsqu'on a mis les primo-géniteurs à la trappe et le pouvoir suprême à l'égoût, d'où probablement il a surgi, on a l'impression qu'il ne resterait que le néant, et que cette double fondation (suppression de l'antériorité et suppression de l'autorité) accule l'anarchisme au nihilisme [...]» (in Roger Dadoun, "Albert Camus: Fondations d'anarchie", art. cit., p. 262).

[...] peut-être est-il temps d'envisager l'époque où les gouvernants gouverneront selon la raison, c'est-à-dire, aujourd'hui, selon l'*audace* et la *générosité*. (CAC8, 532) [My italics]

Generosity cannot be separated from the (*tragic*) notion of happiness, and from the *aesthetic* or lucid thought, which emerges in the lyrical essays and in the MdS. In the novel *La Peste*, Camus would explicitly talk of «l'exigence *généreuse* du *bonheur*» (T, 1329), the meaning of which, I suggest, can be fully grasped in the light of the openness and plurality which constitute the sensory *toucher-à* - of the «horizontal transcendence» brought about in the tragic *bonheur* of the *revolted* man.

The urge to bring the *aesthetic* judgement of revolt at the core, as *archê*, of the political is further highlighted in the editorial of the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1945,<sup>57</sup> where Camus comments, in terms unparalleled in the French press at that date, on the news of the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August:<sup>58</sup>

Nous nous résumerons en une phrase: la civilisation mécanique vient de parvenir à son dernier degré de sauvagerie. Il va falloir choisir, dans un avenir plus ou moins proche, entre le *suicide collectif* ou l'utilisation intelligente des conquêtes scientifiques.

En attendant, il est permis de penser qu'il y a quelque indécence à célébrer ainsi une découverte, qui se met d'abord au service de la *plus formidable rage de destruction* dont l'homme ait fait preuve depuis des siècles.

Que dans un monde livré à tous les déchirements de la violence, *incapable d'aucun contrôle, indifférent à la justice et au simple bonheur des hommes*, la science se consacre au *meurtre organisé*, personne sans doute, à moins d'idéalisme impénitent, ne songera à s'en étonner. (CAC8, 569-570). [My italics]

An-*archê* thus characterises the scientific, *abstract*, thought, whose in-difference to *bonheur* and justice is the mark of a loss/lack of imagination and *aesthetic con-tact*, which goes together with an incapacity for moderation, as discipline or «*ascèse*», and culminates in collective suicide.

I take the reference to the Nazi nihilistic/*blind* logic toward collective suicide to be intentional, hinting at a continuity, confirmed in the 1951-52 writings, between the power politics of Hitlerism and the power politics of the Western so-called democratic world.

The urge to contain, and finally replace, the imperialist drives of the free democratic states, that were, thus, prolonging «les politiques de tyrannie» (CAC8, 351), by the constitution of a «popular» and «international» democracy – «une véritable société internationale, où les grandes puissances n'auront pas de droits supérieurs aux petites et aux moyennes nations, où la guerre, fléau devenu définitive par le seul effet de l'intelligence

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<sup>57</sup> Camus will include this editorial in the chapter "Morale et politique" in *Actuelles*.

<sup>58</sup> As Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi points out, among the «formidable concert que la radio, les journaux et les agences d'information viennent de déclencher au sujet de la bombe atomique», which consisted essentially of scientific articles on the atom and the fabrication of the bomb, even Mauriac's article "La bombe" in *Le Figaro* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, insisting on the «angoisse universelle», the «génie de la destruction» and «amour de la mort poussé au paroxysme», «est loin d'avoir la vigueur de celui de Camus» (CAC8, 569, notes 2 and 3).

humaine, ne dépendra plus des *appétits* ou des *doctrines* de tel ou tel État » (CAC8, 571) – seems to rest on the belief that «une politique d'entente européenne qui réduise au maximum les rivalités nationales » (CAC8,370) would, and will, reflect the economic interdependence and the *solidarity* of the European countries in the aftermath of the Liberation.<sup>59</sup>

Camus retired from *Combat* between September and November 1945, only returning one year later with a series of eight articles under the heading *Ni Victimes Ni Bourreaux*, published between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 1946.<sup>60</sup>

Earlier that year, the author of the short essay «*Remarque sur la révolte*» held a conference at Columbia University under the title «*La Crise de l'homme*», which was developed a few months later in the article «*Nous autres meurtriers*».<sup>61</sup>

It is in «*Nous autres meurtriers*» that the reference to the «appetites and doctrines», responsible, in the author's view, for having turned war into a definitive *plague* (CAC8 571), is further elucidated:

Les mots d'espoir sont le *courage*, la *parole claire* et l'*amitié*. Qu'un seul homme puisse envisager aujourd'hui une nouvelle guerre *sans le tremblement de l'indignation* et la guerre devient possible. Qu'un seul homme puisse *justifier* les principes qui conduisent à la guerre et à la terreur et il y aura guerre et terreur. Il faut donc bien que nous disions clairement que nous vivons dans la terreur parce que *nous vivons selon la puissance* et que nous ne sortirons de la terreur que lorsque nous aurons *remplacé les valeurs de puissance par les valeurs d'exemple*. Il y a terreur parce que les gens croient ou bien *que rien n' a de sens*, ou bien que seule la réussite historique en a. Il y a terreur parce que les valeurs humaines ont été remplacées par les valeurs du mépris et de l'efficacité, *la volonté de liberté par la volonté de domination*. On n'a plus raison parce qu'on a la justice et la *générosité* avec soi. On a raison parce qu'on *réussit*. Et plus on réussit, plus on a raison. À la limite, c'est la justification du meurtre.<sup>62</sup> [My italics]

This text confirms and enriches the two constellations of the political, analysed earlier on, by summarising them in the opposition (of Nietzschean memory) between *volonté de domination* and *volonté de liberté*. The fact that these two constellations correspond, in Camus's view, to

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<sup>59</sup> «Nous ne sommes pas sur la voie de cette société internationale, parce que notre temps est, en effet, celui des impérialismes. Il y a [...] un impérialisme américain comme il y a des impérialismes russe et anglais. Nous ne poussons pas l'ingénuité jusqu'à penser que ces impérialismes peuvent être négligés [...]. Le mieux nous paraît être de plaider sans relâche pour cette démocratie internationale où personne ne serait lésé et où toutes les nations se sentiraient solidaires. C'est en cela que nous pensons servir la paix [...]. Et l'on peut voir que [...] cette manière de servir la paix peut être aussi la meilleure façon de servir la France et de lui garder son honneur » (CAC8, 573-574).

<sup>60</sup> In September 1945 he noted in his *Carnets*: «Nous sommes dans un monde où il fait choisir d'être victime ou bourreau – et rien d'autre. Ce choix n'est pas facile » (CAC8, 607). For the reasons of Camus' retirement from, and later return to, *Combat*, see Albert Camus-Pascal Pia, *Correspondance 1939-1947*, Paris, Fayard/Gallimard, 2000, p. 144; and J. Lévi-Valensi Ed., *Camus à Combat*, op. cit., pp. 606- 607.

<sup>61</sup> The article was published in the review *Franchise*, in the third number (November-December 1946) devoted to "Temps des assassins", which collected a number of articles by Albert Einstein, Emmanuel Mounier, Aldous Huxley, Teilhard de Chardin, Brice Parain, Jean-Paul Sartre and Camus himself. It is significant that the various contributions around this theme were presented in the form of a tragedy in five acts, "Nous autres meurtriers" figuring in the first Act (in F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, Archives Albert Camus, n. 7, Paris, Lettres Modernes, 1995, p. 46).

<sup>62</sup> F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., p. 48.



the opposition of *valeurs de puissance/ valeurs d'exemple* is all the more significant, in that they place themselves, and must be read against the backdrop of the nihilistic belief that «rien n' a de sens, ou bien que seule la réussite historique en a», which he questions under the formula of «*crise de l'homme*».

Chiaromonte, who, as a refugee from Italy, had met Camus in Algeria in 1941 before flying to the United States,<sup>63</sup> and who received the writer and friend in New York in 1946, provides us with a detailed transcription of the conference paper, published in the review *Twice a Year* under the title of «Human Crisis»:<sup>64</sup>

Siamo nati all'inizio della prima guerra mondiale. Adolescenti, avemmo la crisi del 1929; a vent'anni, Hitler. Poi ci furono la guerra d'Etiopia, quella di Spagna, Monaco. Questi furono i fondamenti della nostra educazione. Quindi vennero la seconda guerra mondiale, la disfatta, Hitler nelle nostre città e nelle nostre case. Nati e formati in tale modo, in che cosa credevamo? In nulla. Nulla, tranne la negazione ostinata in cui ci chiudemmo, costretti, fin da principio. *Il mondo in cui eravamo chiamati ad esistere era un mondo assurdo, e un altro in cui potessimo rifugiarsi non esisteva: quello della cultura era un mondo bello, certo, ma non era reale.* E allora, quando ci trovammo dinanzi al terrore hitleriano, da quali valori potemmo trarre conforto, per opporli a quella negazione? Da nessuno. Se il problema fosse stato quello del fallimento di un'ideologia politica, o di un sistema di governo, sarebbe stato abbastanza semplice. Ma quel che accadeva veniva dal fondo stesso dell'uomo e della società: su questo non c'era da sbagliarsi, ne avevamo conferma ogni giorno, e *più ancora nel comportamento dei mediocri che in quello dei criminali.* A guardare i fatti, gli uomini meritavano quel che stava loro capitando: il loro modo di vita valeva veramente troppo poco, e la violenza della negazione hitleriana, in sé e per sé, era logica. Ma era insopportabile, e l'abbiamo combattuta.<sup>65</sup> [My italics]

The «*human crisis*» is related to the question of nihilism, the latter being characterised by the historical awareness of the absurdity of the world, or the loss of a transcendent Foundation,

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<sup>63</sup> In the United States Chiaromonte came in contact with Mary McCarthy e Dwight MacDonal: his collaboration to *Partisan Review* is significant throughout the Forties and Fifties.

<sup>64</sup> The manuscript of the conference is missing. The contents of the intervention can nonetheless be reconstructed through Chiaromonte's notes (in N. Chiaromonte, *Albert Camus*, in "Tempo Presente", gennaio 1960, in N.C., *Il tarlo della coscienza*, Bologna, Mulino 1992, 217-222). Chiaromonte is among the first to draw the attention to the question of nihilism as a pivotal element in the ethical and political reflection of the French author. Remembering Albert Camus in an essay, published in "Tempo Presente" in January 1960, Nicola Chiaromonte, wrote (see my article S. Novello, "Nichilismo, totalitarismo e tragedia nel Caligola di Albert Camus", in *Parénklisis. Rassegna annuale di cultura della Editrice Clinamen*, 2003/1, pp. 87- 103).

<sup>65</sup> «We were born at the beginning of the First World War. As adolescents we had the crisis of 1929; at twenty, Hitler. Then came the Ethiopian War, the Civil war in Spain, and Munich. These were the foundations of our education. Next came the Second World War, the defeat, and Hitler in our homes and cities. Born and bred in such a world, what did we believe in? Nothing. Nothing except the obstinate negation in which we were forced to close ourselves from the beginning. The world in which we were called to exist was an absurd world, and there were no other in which we could take refuge[...] when we found ourselves face to face with Hitler's terror, in what values could we take comfort, what values could we oppose to negation? None. If that problem had been the bankruptcy of a political ideology or a system of government, it would have been simple enough. But what happened came from the very root of man and society...the violence of the Hitlerian negation was in itself logical. But it was unbearable, and we fought it.

[...] the poison which impregnated Hitlerism has not been eliminated; it is present in each of us. Whoever today speaks of human existence in terms of power, efficiency, and "historical tasks" spreads it. He is an actual and potential assassin. For if the problem of man is reduced to any kind of "historical task", he is nothing but a raw material of history, and one can do anything one pleases with him... We opposed terror because it forces us to choose between murdering and being murdered; and it makes communication impossible. This is why we reject any ideology that claims control over all of human life.» (Ibidem) [ My highlighting]

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entailing the loss of (higher) values by means of which to justify the resistance against the power politics and terrorist regime of Hitlerism.

But in Camus' understanding, the question of nihilism and terror (la «*crise de l'homme*») clearly exceeds the problem of the break-down of traditional moral values, and touches more crucially, in terms that anticipate Hannah Arendt's analysis in the OT (explored in Chapter 3),<sup>66</sup> upon the «*mediocre*» conduct, than upon what is, the properly speaking, criminal conduct.<sup>67</sup>

As he writes in the 1946 article «*Nous autres meurtriers*»:

[...] la terreur et la fatalité sont faites pour moitié au moins de *l'inertie* et de la fatigue des individus en face des principes stupides ou des actions mauvaises dont on continue d'empoisonner le monde. La tentation la plus forte de l'homme est celle de l'inertie. [...] il est plus facile de faire son travail quotidien et d'attendre dans une *paix aveugle* que la mort vienne un jour, les gens croient qu'ils ont assez fait pour le bien de l'homme en ne tuant personne directement.<sup>68</sup> [My italics]

In the 1949 conference «*Le Temps des meurtriers*», the problem of nihilism brings in the problem of *judgement*. When describing the generation between the two World Wars, Camus insists that

[c]ette generation a donc vécu dans le nihilisme. Bien entendu, cela non plus n'était pas nouveau. D'autres générations, d'autre pays ont vécu à d'autres périodes de l'histoire cette expérience. Mais, ce qu'il y a de nouveau, c'est que ces mêmes hommes, étrangers à toutes valeurs, ont eu à régler leur position personnelle par rapport au meurtre et à la terreur. [...] Ils n'aimaient ni la guerre ni la violence. Ils ont dû accepter la guerre et exercer la violence. Ils n'avaient de haine que pour la haine. Il leur a fallu apprendre cette difficile science. Pour se battre, il faut croire à quelque chose. Ces hommes-là, apparemment, ne croyaient à rien. Ils pouvaient donc ne pas se battre. Mais si l'on ne se bat pas, on adopte alors les valeurs de l'ennemi, même si ce sont des valeurs méprisables, puisqu'on les laisse triompher.

Nous savions instinctivement que nous ne pouvions pas céder aux bêtes qui s'élevaient aux quatre coins de l'Europe. Mais nous ne savions pas justifier cette obligation où nous étions. Ceci était la maladie de l'Europe qu'on peut encore définir ainsi : il n'y a pas si longtemps, c'étaient les mauvaises actions qui demandaient à être justifiées, et aujourd'hui, ce sont les bonnes. Et elles n'étaient pas faciles à justifier, puisque les plus conscients d'entre nous apercevaient qu'ils n'avaient encore dans la pensée aucun principe qui pût leur permettre de s'opposer à la terreur et de désavouer le meurtre. Car si on ne croit à rien [...] si rien n'a de sens et si nous ne pouvons affirmer aucune valeur, alors tout est permis et rien n'a d'importance. Alors, il n'y a ni bien ni mal, et Hülser, par exemple, n'a ni tort ni raison. [...]

Et lorsque nous pensons que rien n'a de sens, il faut conclure que celui qui a raison, c'est celui qui réussit. La seule règle est de se montrer le plus efficace, c'est-à-dire le plus fort. Le monde n'est plus partagé entre les justes et les injustes, mais entre *les maîtres et les esclaves*.<sup>69</sup> [My italics]

<sup>66</sup> Camus' article «*The Human Crisis*» figures among the bibliographical sources of the OT since the first edition. The French writer's reflection is taken up, and further developed, in the Conference in São Paulo in 1949, where he describes the perspective of the Front generation faced to nihilism in terms very close to the ones employed by Hannah Arendt in the III part on Totalitarianism.

<sup>67</sup> In the editorial of the 27th of June 1945 in *Combat*, Camus explicitly refers to the «*élites de la médiocrité*» and to the «*vertus moyennes*» of the «*morale sans obligation ni sanction*» of the bourgeoisie in the French Third Republic («*la France de boutiquiers, de bureaux de tabac et de banquets législatifs*») (CAC8, 554).

<sup>68</sup> F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*, p. 56-57.

Now, according to Camus, «la volonté d'efficacité, c'est la volonté de *domination*», and the will to dominion over something or somebody coincides with the desire for its/his sterility, silence and death – that is, with «le *mal d'abstraction*».<sup>70</sup>

This idea is first formulated by Camus in the *Carnets* between September 1944 and the early months of 1945:

Démonstration. Que *l'abstraction est le mal*. Elle fait les guerres, les tortures, la violence, etc. Problème : comment la *vue abstraite* se maintient en face du *mal charnel* – l'idéologie face à la torture infligée au nom de cette idéologie. (CII, 133) [My italics]

The conceptual couple *torture (terror)/ abstraction* is contraposed in the notebooks to the couple *communication/ complicité*, the latter being possible exclusively within the finite sphere of the *aesthetic* touching-upon:

*Communication. Entrave pour l'homme parce qu'il ne peut dépasser le cercle des êtres qu'il connaît. Au-delà, il en fait une abstraction. L'homme doit vivre dans le cercle de la chair.* (CII, 135) [My italics]

Camus' diagnosis at the turn of 1944-45 is that «[f]inalement la politique aboutit aux partis qui desservent la communication (complicité)» (CII, 134), namely, to (traditional) forms of power politics, founded on the will to dominion (master-slave/friend-enemy relationship), and organised around the systematic use of violence and murder, which destroy the *aesthetic contact* («cercle de la chair»): «Le monde – he wrote in the article «*Les Embarras de la violence*» - n'est plus pour nous qu'une épure. Et dans les cadres de cette épure, s'ordonnent *les symboles qui consacrent la domination de l'homme sur l'homme*. Les tickets remplaçant le pain, des vies entières renfermées dans une fiche de police [...]. Et à force de papiers et de fonctionnaires, *on crée un monde où la chaleur humain disparaît, où aucun homme ne peut en toucher un autre*, si ce n'est pas à travers le dédale de ce qu'on appelle les formalités ».<sup>71</sup>

In «Le Temps des meurtriers», Camus relates the *nihilistic* principle of efficacy to the (negative) constellation of the politics of dominion, as constitutive of, and founding the philosophical justification for, the master/slave or «victimes/bourreaux» relationship (*see diagram*).

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<sup>70</sup> Ivi, p. 59-60.

<sup>71</sup> Ivi, p. 61, note 18.



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|--------------------------|---|
| <p><b>Efficacité</b></p> | <p><b>Son langage: polémique et insulte.</b></p> <p>«Le XXe siècle est, chez nous, le siècle de la polémique et de l'insulte. Elle tient, entre les nations et les individus la place que tenait traditionnellement le <i>dialogue réfléchi</i>. Des milliers de voix, jour et nuit, poursuivant chacune de son côté un <i>tumultueux monologue</i>, déversent sur les peuples un torrent de paroles mystificatrices.» ( F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 60)</p> <p><b>Mécanisme de la polémique:</b></p> <p>«consiste à considérer l'adversaire en ennemi, à le simplifier par conséquent et à refuser de le voir. Celui que j'insulte, <i>je ne connais pas la couleur de son regard</i>. Grâce à la polémique, <i>nous ne vivons plus dans un monde d'hommes, mais dans un monde de silhouettes.</i>»<sup>1</sup></p>  |
|                          | <p><b>Sa politique: l'intimidation.</b></p> <p><b>Logique de domination:</b></p> <p><b>A) le maître/le bourreau</b></p> <p>«il y a des hommes qu'on ne persuade pas. Il était et il est impossible à une victime des camps de concentration d'expliquer à ceux qui l'avilissent qu'ils ne doivent pas le faire. <i>C'est que ces derniers ne représentent plus des hommes, mais une idée portée à la température de la plus inflexible volonté</i>. Celui qui veut dominer est sourd. En face de lui, il faut se battre ou mourir. C'est pourquoi les hommes d'aujourd'hui vivent dans la terreur.»</p> <p><b>B) l'esclave/la victime:</b></p> <p>« Quoi d'étonnant à ce que ces <b>silhouettes désormais sourdes et aveugles, terrorisées, nourries de tickets</b>, et dont la vie entière se résume dans une fiche de police, puissent être ensuite traitées comme des <b>abstractions anonymes</b>. Il est intéressant de constater que les régimes qui sont issus des idéologies dont je parle sont précisément ceux qui, par système, <b>procèdent au déracinement des populations, les promenant à la surface de l'Europe, comme des symboles exsangues qui ne prennent une vie dérisoire que dans les chiffres des statistiques</b>. Depuis que ces belles philosophies sont entrées dans l'histoire, d'énormes masses d'hommes, dont <i>chacun pourtant avait autrefois une manière de serrer la main</i>, sont <b>définitivement ensevelis sous les deux initiales des personnes déplacées</b> qu'un monde très logique a inventées pour elles.»</p> |

The «régimes qui sont issus des idéologies» of (historical) efficacy, to which Camus refers in his 1949 conference, as realizing a systematic politics of *déracinement* - of what Hannah Arendt analysed around the same years in terms of rootlessness or statelessness, or the mass production of refugees – are Nazism<sup>72</sup> on the one hand, and the Communist regime as the murderous *mise en œuvre* of Historicism on the other.<sup>73</sup>

In Camus' argument, Materialist Historicism only apparently overcomes the nihilistic reasoning «rien n'a de sens», introducing - «*toujours en rejetant les principes d'explication supérieurs*», and by fully assuming the «longue aventure de *l'esprit moderne*» which started with Nietzsche's announce of God's death (*i.e.*, of *modern nihilism*) – the value of History.<sup>74</sup>

Mais, pensant cela, ils arrivaient au même résultat que s'ils avaient pensé que rien n'avait de sens. Car si l'Histoire a un sens c'est un sens total ou ce n'est rien. Ces hommes pensaient et agissaient comme si l'Histoire obéissait à une *dialectique souveraine* et comme si nous nous dirigeons tous ensemble vers un but définitif. Ils pensaient et agissaient suivant le principe de Hegel : « L'homme est fait pour l'Histoire et non l'Histoire pour l'homme ». En vérité, tout réalisme politique et moral qui guidait et guide encore les destinées du monde obéit, souvent sans le savoir, et avec 100 ans de retard, à une philosophie de l'Histoire née en Allemagne, selon laquelle l'humanité entière se dirige selon des voies rationnelles vers un Univers définitif. On a remplacé le nihilisme par un rationalisme sans nuances et dans les deux cas, les résultats son les mêmes.<sup>75</sup> [My italics]

Thus, the «logique *souveraine*» of 20<sup>th</sup> century Historicist ideology does not escape, but instead coincides with, the *bad* logic of *incomplete nihilism*, identified in the LAA with Hitlerism.

What emerges in Camus' political writings as early as '46-'49, is the rejection of the bio-political reduction of human life to «naked life», symbolized by the figure of the refugee, as sheer *abstraction* (the «*vie dérisoire*» resumed in the «*chiffres des statistiques*»), as the

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<sup>72</sup> LAA, 222.

<sup>73</sup> The link between politics of dominion, nihilism and Historical efficacy reflects the intellectual debate in France at the time. As Tony Judt points out, since the early Thirties in France «Kojève's reading of Hegel placed an overwhelming emphasis upon the master-slave relationship, in which each comes to know himself a situation only to be overcome by action, by a struggle for truth (that is, self-recognition), which necessarily entailed the destruction of the authority and claims of the oppressor. This was not an option for the slave (or the master [...]) – "History", and more particularly the violence that Kojève claimed was its very essence, would bring the slave face to face with his situated condition. The practical lesson of such a heady doctrine amounted to this: whatever happened in human history, and especially those events that seem most terrible and total, has the ineluctable result of furthering the unfolding of the master-slave dialectic that *is* the meaning of that history. [...] there was no basis in Kojève's teaching for the rejection of any historical act or epoch, however *prima facie* meaningless and obscene. Like Carl Schmitt, he opened up the possibility for rendering anything respectable, even Nazism, whose very success might be construed as the verdict of history» (Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect*, University of California Press, pp. 76-77).

<sup>74</sup> F. Bartfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> Ivi, p. 58.

product of an incapacity for (*aesthetic*) thought and judgement,<sup>76</sup> which he traces at the root of both ideologies (Material Historicism and Hitlerism):

On ne pense pas mal parce qu'on est un meurtrier, mais *on est un meurtrier parce qu'on pense mal.*<sup>77</sup>  
[My italics]

It is here, I argue, that we measure the continuity between the 1944-49 political writings and the *absurd* thought developed in the MdS. In the article «Vers le dialogue», which concludes on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 1946 the series of *Ni Victimes Ni Bourreaux*, Camus would explicitly refer to the *aesthetic* finite thought of the finite as the only viable alternative to the Historicist «logique *souveraine*»: «Ce qui nous broie aujourd'hui, c'est une logique historique que nous avons créée de toutes pièces et dont les nœuds finiront par nous étouffer. Et ce n'est pas le sentiment qui peut trancher les nœuds d'une logique qui déraisonne, mais seulement *une raison qui raisonne dans les limites qu'elle se connaît* » (CAC8, 640).

He notes in the *Carnets* by the end of 1946:

Relation de l'absurde à la révolte. Si la décision finale est de rejeter le suicide pour soutenir la confrontation, c'est reconnaître implicitement la vie comme seule valeur de fait, celle qui permet la confrontation, qui est la confrontation, « celle sans quoi rien ». D'où il ressort que pour obéir à cette valeur absolue, qui rejette le suicide rejette également le meurtre. Notre époque est celle qui, ayant poussé le nihilisme à ces conclusions extrêmes, a accepté le suicide. Cela se vérifie dans la facilité avec laquelle elle accepte le meurtre, ou que le meurtre soit justifié.

[...] les hommes de la terreur ont poussé les valeurs du suicide jusqu'à leur conséquence extrême qui est le meurtre légitime, c'est-à-dire, le suicide collectif. Illustration : l'apocalypse nazie en 1945. (CII, 190-191)

It is in the light of these texts that, I suggest, we interpret Camus' opposition, in two notes in the *Carnets* also dated October 1946, between «actions *messianique*», associated to the terms abstraction/terror/history, and what he calls the «actions *réfléchies*» (CII, 220). And it is the light of Camus' rejection of the category of historicity that the *aesthetic* moment of the sensory/sensual touching-upon nature, in beauty, and touching-upon other individual beings, in love, acquires its full (*im-*)political meaning,<sup>78</sup> as constitutive of Camus' notion of *reflection*.

<sup>76</sup>We should not forget that *to live*, in Camus's terminology, is *to judge*, and that «life» is assured exclusively in/as sensory *con-tact* in the sense of the aesthetic thought in MdS - «Il n'y a pas de vie sans dialogue [...]. Il n'y a pas de vie non plus sans persuasion» (in F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., p. 60).

<sup>77</sup>In F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>78</sup>«*Id.* L'historicité laisse sans explication le phénomène de la beauté, c'est-à-dire les rapports avec le monde (sentiment de la nature) et les êtres en tant qu'individus (amour). [...]» (CII, 174). «*Id.* Tout l'effort de la pensée allemande a été de substituer à la notion de nature humaine celle de situation humaine et donc d'histoire à Dieu et la tragédie moderne à l'équilibre ancien. L'existentialisme moderne pousse cet effort encore plus loin et introduit dans l'idée de situation la même incertitude que dans celle de nature. Il ne reste plus rien qu'un mouvement. Mais comme les Grecs je crois à la nature.» (Id.).

Life is identified precisely with that *con-frontation* or *con-tact*, which is nothing but the *aesthetic* or *absurd* thought aware of its limits (E, 134), and «l'avenir du monde [ne] peut se passer de nos forces *d'indignation* et *d'amour*» (CAC8, 640). He anticipated with extraordinary clear-sightedness in «Vers le dialogue»:

Une grande expérience met en marche aujourd'hui toutes les nations du monde selon *les lois de la puissance et de la domination*. Je ne dirai pas qu'il faut empêcher ni laisser se poursuivre cette expérience. Elle n'a pas besoin que nous l'aidions et, pour le moment, elle se moque que nous la contrarions. L'expérience se poursuivra donc. Je poserai simplement cette question : qu'arrivera-t-il si l'expérience échoue, si la logique de l'histoire se dément sur laquelle tant d'esprits se reposent pourtant ? Qu'arrivera-t-il si, malgré deux ou trois guerres, malgré le sacrifice de plusieurs générations et de quelques valeurs, nos petits-fils, en supposant qu'ils existent, ne se retrouvent pas plus rapprochés de la société universelle ? Il arrivera que les survivants de cette expérience n'auront même plus la force d'être les témoins de leur propre agonie. Puisque donc l'expérience se poursuit et qu'il est inévitable qu'elle se poursuive encore, il n'est pas mauvais que des hommes se donnent pour tâche de préserver, au long de l'histoire apocalyptique qui nous attend, *la réflexion modeste* qui, sans prétendre tout résoudre, sera toujours prête à un moment quelconque, pour fixer un sens à la vie de tous les jours. L'essentiel est que ces hommes pèsent bien, et une fois pour toutes, le prix qu'il leur faudra payer. (CAC8, 642-643) [My italics]

As he notes in his *Carnets* (April 1948), the «pensée *réfléchie*» is precisely the opposite of a messianic thought (CII, 244), the latter justifying «un monde où le meurtre est légitimé et où *la vie humaine est considérée comme futile*» (CAC8, 612): «*la peur* – he writes in *Combat* on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 1946 – n'est pas le climat *de la juste réflexion*», fear belonging to the political constellation of dominion/abstraction/messianism/terror.

It is in the legitimization of terror, founded on the idea of the futility of life, that Camus would trace the primary political problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century world politics (Ibid.), as the mark of a generalized will to abstraction and loss of imagination, the acceptance/justification of violence and murder, as constitutive of the political realm, being especially diffused among those people who

*n'avaient pas d'imagination pour la mort des autres. C'est un travers de notre siècle. De même qu'on s'y aime par téléphone et qu'on travaille non plus sur la matière mais sur la machine, on y tue et on y est tué aujourd'hui par procuration. La propreté y gagne, mais la connaissance y perd.* (CAC8, 614).<sup>79</sup> [My italics]

The inter-textual reading of Camus' writings between 1943 and 1946 seems to confirm our thesis that «reflection», in the author's understanding, is only possible under the conditions of, and may therefore be traced back to, that *aesthetic awareness* or *pensée lucide*, which emerges in the MdS and runs through the political articles in *Combat*.

If, as Camus wrote in the introduction to HR in terms that echoed the 1949 Conference, the «*sentiment de l'absurde*, quand on prétend d'abord en tirer une règle

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<sup>79</sup> In a note in the *Carnets* in November 1945, Camus would write: «Je ne suis pas fait pour la politique puisque je suis incapable de vouloir ou d'accepter la mort de l'adversaire» (CII, 154).



d'action, rend le meurtre au moins indifférent et, par conséquent, possible» (HR, 415), it is in the «volonté de l'absurde» (E, 1667), I would argue in the light of the letter to Ponge, namely, in the *aesthetic* or tragic thought of the revolted man, that we may search for a principle of *just* action beyond the moral and political *impasse* of nihilism - a principle which provides the conditions for a «pensée *juste*» (CAC8, 616), and which breaks the «victime/bourreaux» logic of the politics of dominion.

As he wrote in the 1949 Conference in Saõ Paolo: «la révolte peut encore nous donner [...] une règle d'action qui diminue la douleur des hommes au lieu de l'accroître» :<sup>80</sup>

*Dans ce monde privé de valeurs, dans ce désert du cœur où nous avons vécu, que signifiait en effet cette révolte ? Elle faisait de nous des hommes qui disaient Non. Mais nous étions en même temps des hommes qui disaient Oui. Nous disions non à ce monde, à son absurdité essentielle, aux abstractions qui nous menaçaient, à la civilisation de mort qu'on nous préparait. En disant non, nous affirmions que les choses avaient assez duré, qu'il y avait une limite qu'on ne pouvait dépasser. [...]*

*Mais ce quelque chose [que nous affirmions] avait-il une valeur générale, dépassait-il l'opinion d'un individu, pouvait-il servir de règle de conduite ? La réponse a déjà été donné. Les hommes dont je parle acceptaient de mourir dans le mouvement de leur révolte. Et cette mort prouvait qu'il se sacrifiaient au bénéfice d'une vérité qui dépassait leur existence personnelle [...].<sup>81</sup> Ce que nos révoltés défendaient contre un destin ennemi, c'était une valeur commune à tous. Quand les hommes étaient torturés avec application, quand des mères se voyaient obligées de condamner leurs enfants à mort, quand les justes étaient enterrés comme des pourceaux, ces révoltés jugeaient que quelque chose en eux était nié qui ne leur appartenait pas seulement, mais qui était un lieu commun où les hommes ont une solidarité toute prête.<sup>82</sup> [My italics]*

Now, the «value common to all» is *created* by the act of revolt in the sense, I argue, that it is brought forth *in/as* the «common space», which founds men's solidarity and fraternity,<sup>83</sup> in the liminal, *aesthetic*, «le cercle de la chair», which is inherently plural.

The impossibility for the victim to persuade his/her torturer/executioner not to commit the murderous act lies precisely, in Camus's argument, in the fact that the latter has lost the *aesthetic* awareness (*lucidity*), which is primarily related to the withdrawal from sensory *contact* («On ne veut plus savoir qu'il a un rire éclatant.», CII, 232), ideology working toward the abstraction of men: «Chaque fois que l'on a décidé de considérer un homme comme ennemi, on le rend abstrait. On l'éloigne» (Id.).

This would explain why, in the *Carnets* in September 1949, Camus would (provocatively) plead in favour of man-to-man murder, as against the «destruction anonyme et froide, et *abstraite*» in contemporary societies (from the execution of death sentences, in

<sup>80</sup> F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>81</sup> The reference to the sacrifice of revolted men, also recurring in the articles of *Combat*, is taken over in a note in the *Carnets* in 1948 (CII, 244), which provides the link to Camus's reflection on tragedy. A note for the tragedy *Les Justes* in the notebooks in 1947: «Pièce Kaliayev: Impossible de tuer un homme en chair, on tue l'autocrate. Pas le type qui s'est rasé le matin etc. etc.» (CII, 207).

<sup>82</sup> F. Bartfeld, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>83</sup> «la longue fraternité des hommes en lutte contre leur destin» (F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 67).

both the democratic and non-democratic world, to systematic state terror) as «une étape sur le chemin de la *révolte*» (CII, 275).

## 2.2. THE FUNCTIONARY AND THE REBEL: POLITICS AND AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT.

It is significant that, in 1945, Camus chose the figure of the functionary to illustrate the «revolted» (*révolté*) man: «Un fonctionnaire qui a reçu des orders toute sa vie juge soudain inacceptable un nouveau commandement. Il se dresse et dit *non*.» (E, 1682).<sup>1</sup>

In the same year of the *Remarque sur la révolte*, where the figure of the revolted functionary makes its first appearance, the Nuremberg trials seemed to offer its historical confutation. In the article «German Guilt»,<sup>2</sup> also published in 1945, Arendt posed the problem of «how to conduct ourselves and how to bear the trial of confronting a people among whom the boundaries dividing criminals from normal persons, the guilty from the innocent, has been so completely effaced that nobody will be able to tell in Germany whether in any case he is dealing with a secret hero or with a former mass murderer» (EU, 125).

It is precisely in discussing the inadequacy of traditional legal categories (*i.e.*, “war criminal”) to judge the modern *political* organization, staged under Himmler’s direction as a «vast machine of administrative mass murder» in which «*everyone is either an executioner, a victim, or an automaton, marching onward over the corpses of his comrades*» (EU, 126),<sup>3</sup> that she comes to focus on «this *new* type of functionary» supplied and exploited by the unprecedented terror organization.

Not a fanatic, sadist or murderer, but a jobholder and a family man (EU, 129), this type of man, a purely modern product, «has driven the dichotomy of private and public functions, of family and occupation, so far that *he can no longer find in his own person any connection between the two*»:

When his occupation forces him to murder people he does not regard himself as a murderer because he has not done it out of inclination but in his professional capacity. *Out of sheer passion* he would never do harm to a fly.

If we tell a member of this new occupational class which our time has produced that he is being held to account for what he did, he *will feel nothing* except that he has been betrayed. *But if in the shock of the catastrophe he really becomes conscious that in fact he was not only a functionary but also a murderer, then his way out will not be that of rebellion, but suicide* – just as so many have already chosen the way of suicide in Germany, where *it is plain that there has been one wave of self-destruction after another*. (EU, 130).<sup>4</sup>[My italics]

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<sup>1</sup> My italics.

<sup>2</sup> Republished in *Essays in Understanding* as «Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility» (EU, 121- 132).

<sup>3</sup> In the report of his journey to Germany, published in *Combat Magazine* (30<sup>th</sup> of June- 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1945) under the heading «Images de l’Allemagne occupée», Camus also used this image, used in 1946 for his famous series of articles *Ni Victimes Ni Bourreaux*: «[...] j’y voyais l’image des déchirements de cette *malheureuse Europe, partagée entre ses victimes et ses bourreaux* [...]» (CAC8, 560).

<sup>4</sup> Arendt was further concerned with these «*waves of self-destruction*» in another article in June 1945, «The Seeds of a Fascist International», which echoes Camus’s editorial of the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1944 (CAC8, 216) about the «*theatrical, suicidal urge*» of Nazism (EU, 145). According to Arendt the German «self-staged ruin [...] can be

What the Nuremberg trials brought forth in this new figure of the functionary, was the separation of responsibility from guilt as the key-problem of 20<sup>th</sup> century politics.<sup>5</sup>

The dissociation between co-responsibility in the crimes of Nazism and effective guilt in a stricter sense (EU, 126), which emerged in the post-war trials, is resumed by Camus in a short note in 1947: crime, in the author's view, can be personally imputed only in as far as its dimension of violation is acknowledged, «[a]utrement elle [la violence] est *par ordre*, elle est *dans l'ordre* – ou la loi ou la métaphysique. Elle n'est plus rupture. Elle elude la contradiction. Elle représente paradoxalement un saut dans le confort. *On a rendu la violence confortable*» (CII, 214).<sup>6</sup>

A political order, in which crime is legalised, thus, loosing its character of dis-order, as well as its imputability to trial, is precisely «[l'ordre] où *personne n'est jamais reconnu*»,<sup>7</sup> that is, one that instaures the abstracting, God-like perspective, through the systematic dissolution of *aesthetic* con-tact,<sup>8</sup> which is precisely, in Camus' view, the mark of the Nazi nihilistic «*loss of lucidity*».

The starting point being the *feeling* of the absurd, «[s]i l'on ne croit à rien, si rien n'a de sens et si nous ne pouvons affirmer aucune valeur, tout est possible et rien n'a d'importance» - the *point zero* of human action (*absolute nihilism*).

Three years later, in *The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany*, Hannah Arendt traced in analogous terms a generalized «*nihilistic relativity* about facts» - assumed in 1950 Germany (and Europe) to be «*the essence of democracy*» (EU, 252) - and a «*general lack of emotion*», as well as to a widespread «*[i]ndifference* and the irritation that comes when

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only partially explained by the long-pilloried *nihilistic tendencies of Nazism*: anticipating her later argument, namely her thesis of a process of de-materialization of power instaured by the totalitarian regime(s), Arendt would see in the *complete destruction* of Germany, thoroughly and systematically brought about by the Nazis up to the last dramatic phases of the war, the calculated effort to turn the outcome of the war «into a merely temporary defeat of the movement», by offering up Germany «as a sacrifice to the future of fascism» (EU, 145). «However correct it may be to regard the purely *destructive tendency of fascism* as one of the most active forces of the movement, it would be dangerously misleading to interpret these destructive impulses as culminating in a theatrical, suicidal urge directed *against the movement as such*. The Nazis may have planned to destroy Germany completely, they may have calculated on impoverishing the whole European continent by ruining German industry, they may hope to leave the Allies the burden and responsibility of governing ungovernable chaos, but certainly they never wished to liquidate the fascist movement.» (Ibidem). [My italics]

<sup>5</sup> «The number of those who are responsible *and* guilty will be relatively small. There are many who share responsibility without any visible proof of guilt. There are many more who have become guilty without being in the least responsible» (EU, 125).

<sup>6</sup> My italics.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Dadoun, art. cit., p. 260.

<sup>8</sup> He noted in the *Carnets* in 1947: «Paris-Alger. L'avion comme un des éléments de la négation et de l'abstraction modernes. Il n'y a plus de nature ; la gorge profonde, le vrai relief, le torrent infranchissable, tout disparaît. Il reste *une épure* – un plan. *L'homme prend en somme le regard de Dieu. Et il s'aperçoit alors que Dieu ne peut avoir qu'une vue abstraite.*» (CII, 232). See also CII, 206.

indifference is challenged» (EU, 249), back to the legacy of the Nazi regime, identifying in this «*escape from reality [...] an escape from responsibility*» (EU, 250), the mark of a «*pervasive public stupidity which cannot be trusted to judge correctly the most elementary events*» (EU, 253).<sup>9</sup>

As she points out in *At Table with Hitler*, her review of Henry Picker's 1951 book *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, capacity for judgement coincides with «the fact that one not only *has* an opinion but also *embraces* that opinion»: nihilistic relativity is therefore the mark of an a- or anti-political *irresponsibility*, in the sense of a withdrawal from the living community of those who act and speak, and a refusal to judge.<sup>10</sup>

Now, Arendt relates stupidity, as the incapacity to judge, on the one side, to the incapability of thinking.<sup>11</sup> As she argued more than twenty years later, in her essay on *Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship*:

the only ones who *dared judge by themselves*, [...] were capable of doing so *not because they disposed of a better system of values or because the old standards of right and wrong were still firmly planted in their mind and conscience*. On the contrary, all our experiences tell us that it was precisely the members of *respectable society* [...] who were the first to yield. They simply exchanged one system of values against another. I therefore would suggest that the nonparticipants were those whose consciences did not function in this, as it were, *automatic way* [...], *they asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds*; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing [...] they refused to murder, not so much because they still held fast to the command "Thou shalt not kill", but because they were unwilling to live together with a murderer – themselves. *The precondition for this kind of judging is not a highly developed intelligence or sophistication in moral matters, but rather the disposition to live together explicitly with oneself, to have intercourse with oneself, that is, to be engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which, since Socrates and Plato, we usually call thinking. This kind of thinking [...] is not technical and does not concern theoretical problems. The dividing line between those who want to think and therefore have to judge by themselves, and those who do not, strikes across all social and cultural or educational differences. In this respect, the total moral collapse of respectable society during the Hitler regime may teach us that under such circumstances those who cherish values and hold fast to moral norms and standards are not reliable: we now know that moral norms and standards can be changed overnight, and that all that then will be left is the mere habit of holding fast to something. Much more reliable will be the doubters and sceptics, not because scepticism is good or doubting wholesome, but because they are used to examine things and to make up their own minds.*<sup>12</sup> [My italics]

Thinking, as the silent dialogue between me and myself, «which is given in consciousness, [and] produces conscience as a by-product»,<sup>13</sup> is connected to the activity of judging in the sense, pointed out by M. Passerin d'Entrèves, in that it «dissolves the fixed habits of thought

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<sup>9</sup> My italics.

<sup>10</sup> EU, 293.

<sup>11</sup> See M. Passerin d'Entrèves, "Arendt's theory of judgement", in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, CUP, 2000, pp. 248-249 (quoted as CCA).

<sup>12</sup> H. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement*, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

<sup>13</sup> M. Passerin d'Entrèves, "Arendt's theory of judgement", op. cit., p. 249.

and the accepted rules of conduct, and thus prepares the way for the activity of judging particulars without the aid of pre-established universals» - <sup>14</sup> as *critical thought*.

Quiescence in the sheer *possession* of admitted norms and rules, as opposed to the thorough *examination* of their content by the critical «wind of thought», is, in Arendt's view, the source of the banality of evil under Hitler's regime.<sup>15</sup> In the editorial in *Combat* (17<sup>th</sup> September 1944), Camus described in analogous terms the irresponsible and comfortable «*paix de l'esprit*» of (a part of) the German people, which consisted of «à laisser à d'autres le *soin de penser pour lui*. Ce peuple n'aime pas la liberté, puisqu'il *hait la critique*» (CAC8, 195-196).

It is in the relationship between freedom and critical thought that, I suggest, we fully grasp the meaning of Camus's «libertarian» political project. As he noted in his *Carnets* in July 1945:

Révolte. Finalement je choisis la liberté. Car même si la justice n'est pas réalisée, la liberté préserve le pouvoir de protestation contre *l'injustice* et sauve la communication. La justice dans un monde silencieux, la justice des muets détruit la complicité, nie la révolte et restitue le consentement, mais cette fois sous la forme la plus basse. C'est ici qu'on voit la primauté que reçoit peu à peu la valeur de liberté.

[...] La liberté c'est pouvoir défendre ce que je ne pense pas, même dans un régime ou un monde que j'approuve. *C'est pouvoir donner raison à l'adversaire*. (CII, 136-137) [My italics]

Freedom, which is defined by Camus as the capability to *give reason*, that is, to *accept* the point of view of the opponent, implies critical thinking in the sense of a capacity for seeing the other's point of view.<sup>16</sup>

We should not forget that it is precisely by virtue of such capacity for critical thinking that Camus was compelled to admit the irrefutability of the nihilistic argument of the Nazis in the LAA. In his notebooks in 1944, he explicitly used the adjective «totalitarian» to designate the systematic application of the nihilistic *tabula rasa* realised under the Nazi regime (CII, 127). As *irrefutable* as it may be, the logic of the nihilistic argument is *unacceptable*: under the conditions of the Nazi regime, the act of giving reason to the political opponent (the Nazi) coincided with the legitimation of murder, with the acceptance (“yes-saying”) of the murder of innocent people and the destruction of the human living community. For this reason, the «totalitarian attitude» is characterised, in the 1944 notes, as a total *negation of freedom*.

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<sup>14</sup> Ivi, p. 248.

<sup>15</sup> Fabio Ciaramelli, « Le mal totalitaire et la phénoménologie de la condition humaine », in *L'humaine condition politique. Hannah Arendt*, sous la direction de Étienne Tassin, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2001, p. 181.

<sup>16</sup> Two-sided thinking can be read together with Camus' insistence on «*dédoublement*» as the mark of the critical or lucid thinker (CI, 41).

Now, the problem of freedom, which in Camus' 1945 note is inseparable from revolt, touches upon the question of irresponsibility from the viewpoint of *aesthetic* thought, in the sense that it draws the attention to the «*paix aveugle*» of those who, if they chose not to commit the criminal acts in the first place, were nevertheless *blind and deaf to the suffering of tortured men*,<sup>17</sup> choosing to withdraw from, and not to participate in, an order of legalized murder.

Arendt's 1965-66 text *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy* is, in this respect, elucidatory. When examining the problem of irresponsibility, she observed that

[...] the very few, who in the moral collapse of nazi Germany remained completely intact and free of all guilt [...] never doubted that crimes remained crimes even if legalized by the government, and that it was better not to participate in these crimes under any circumstances. In other words, they did not feel an obligation but acted according to something which was self-evident to them even though it was no longer self-evident to those around them. Hence their conscience, if that is what it was, had no obligatory character, it said, "This I *can't* do", rather than, "This I *ought* not to do".

The positive side of this "I can't" is that it corresponds to the self-evidence of the moral proposition; it means: I can't murder innocent people just as I can't say, "two and two equal five". You can always counter the "thou shalt" or the "you ought" by talking back: *I will not or cannot for whatever reasons. Morally the only reliable people when the chips are down are those who say "I can't"*. The disadvantage of this complete adequacy of the alleged self-evidence or moral truth is that it *must remain entirely negative. It has nothing whatsoever to do with action, it says no more than "I'd rather suffer than do"*. *Politically speaking – that is, from the viewpoint of the community or of the world we live in – it is irresponsible; its standard is the self and not the world, neither its improvement nor change.* (RJ, 78-79) [My highlighting]

Critical thought, as the nay saying capacity for autonomous examination and exercise of doubt, is, in itself, purely negative - in this sense, I would say, «*nihilistic*». If we may argue, with Passerin d'Entrèves, that (critical) thinking prepares the way for the activity of judgement,<sup>18</sup> the former is nevertheless insufficient to step into action, for *revolt* to take place.

What provides, in both Camus and Arendt, a way out of the nihilistic *impasse* of in-action «when the chips are down» is the capacity for *imagination*, as the most «concrete» faculty of human thought, which is immediately linked to sensory experience as opposed to the abstracting and simplifying powers, and to the stringent logicity of the "totalitarian attitude".

For both these authors, what failed in Hitler's listeners, and allowed them to fall prey to the "philosophy" of Hitlerism, was a general lack of *practical imagination* (EU, 295).

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<sup>17</sup> In «*Nous autres meurtriers*» Camus referred to «*les gens [qui] croient qu'ils ont assez fait pour le bien de l'homme en ne tuant personne directement. Mais, en vérité, aucun homme ne peut mourir en paix s'il n'a pas fait tout ce qu'il faut pour que les autres vivent [...]. Et d'autres encore, qui n'ont pas envie de penser trop longtemps à la misère humaine, préfèrent parler d'une façon très générale et dire que cette crise de l'homme est de tous les temps.*» (F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 47).

<sup>18</sup> M. Passerin d'Entrèves, op. cit., pp. 248-249.

which, according to Arendt, is inseparable from modern men's inability to judge (EU, 292), and is the precondition to the totalitarian overturning of thinking into sheer giving/executing orders (EU, 294).

In her view, in the midst of the modern nihilistic feeling of helpless nonsense, faced with the chaos of discordant but equally sustainable opinions, Hitler «had discovered one fine day that if you really hang onto any one of the current opinions and develop it with (as he was fond of saying) “ice-cold” consistency, then everything would somehow fall back into place again. Hitler's real superiority consisted in the fact that under any and all circumstances he had an opinion and that this opinion always fit perfectly into his over-all “philosophy”» (EU, 293), with «a total *disregard for all reality and all experience*» (EU, 294).

By contrast, in Camus' *Remarque*, the revolted functionary «*juge soudain inacceptable un nouveau commandement*» under the impulse of a «*répulsion à l'égard de l'intrus [...] [et] une adhésion entière et instantanée de l'homme à une certaine part de l'expérience humaine*» (E, 1682-3):

[...] la révolte amène seulement à dire qu'on ne voit pas qui, en dehors de l'être humain, est digne d'amour – et de *cet amour supérieur qui naît d'une condition partagée*. On n'élit pas dans un cas un idéal abstrait par pauvreté de cœur, dans une idée de revendication stérile, mais on choisit, au contraire, *la part la plus concrète de l'expérience* pour la défendre contre ce qui l'opprime.» (E, 1686). [My italics]

The «yes-saying» dimension in the rebel's judgement is rooted in the *aesthetic* awareness of «*la part la plus concrète*» of human experience, as opposed to the abstract ideal of mankind, which Camus associates to the expression «*pauvreté de cœur*», as the incapacity for a sensory touching-upon (*aisthesis*). Revolt calls upon the capacity for *imagination*, already recurring in the 1944-45 editorials as the pre-condition for *reflection*.

Throughout the political articles of *Combat*, imagination is the condition for thinking a *shared condition* («*condition partagée*»), against the abstracting drives of modern nihilistic reasoning, at work in the Nazi power politics and under the Vichy regime, and still operating in the post-war restoration of traditional political practices.

Now, in her four lectures on *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy* in 1965-66, Hannah Arendt draws on Kant's *Critique of Judgement* to deal with the moral and political issues raised by totalitarian horrors – and, in particular, she draws on Kant's analysis of *aesthetic judgements*, as the only field in which «we judge *without having general rules* which are either demonstrably true or self-evident to go by» (RJ, 138).

The capability for judgement in the absence of universal norms and standards – as opposed to the stupidity or lack of judgment, which both Camus and Arendt relate to



contemporary «logical crimes» - is revisited against the backdrop of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's «total collapse of moral and religious standards» (RJ, 138), or of what we have addressed as *modern nihilism*. It is related to so-called *immoralism*,<sup>19</sup> and to *imagination*, as the *conditio sine qua non* of common sense –<sup>20</sup> in Kant's understanding this is not «a sense common to all of us, but strictly *that sense which fits us into a community with others*, makes us members of it and enables us to communicate things given by our five private senses» (RJ, 139).

*Common sense, by virtue of its imaginative capacity, can have present in itself all those who actually are absent. It can think, as Kant says, in the place of everybody else, so that when somebody makes the judgment, this is beautiful, he does not mean merely to say this pleases me (as if, for instance, chicken soup may please me but may not be pleasant to others), but he claims assent from others because in judging he has already taken them into account and hence hopes that his judgments will carry a certain general, though perhaps not universal, validity. The validity will reach as far as the community of which my common sense makes me member [...]. Kant calls this an "enlarged mentality", meaning that without such an agreement man is not fit for civilized intercourse. (RJ, 140) [My italics]*

I suggest that, in Camus's 1945 *Remarque*,<sup>21</sup> what revolt, in its affirmative moment,<sup>21</sup> brings about is an *aesthetic judgement* in the Kantian sense:

*[...] l'affirmation de la révolte s'étend à quelque chose qui transcende l'individu,<sup>22</sup> qui le tire de sa solitude supposée, et qui fonde une valeur. On se bornera, pour le moment, à identifier cette valeur avec ce qui, en l'homme, demeure irréductible. [...] S'il [l'individu révolté] préfère la chance de la mort à la négation de cette part de l'homme qu'il défend, c'est qu'il estime cette dernière plus générale que lui-même. La part que le révolté défend, il a le sentiment qu'elle lui est commune avec tous les hommes. C'est de là qu'elle tire sa soudaine transcendance. C'est pour toutes les existences en même temps que le fonctionnaire se dresse lorsqu'il juge que, par tel ordre, quelque chose en lui est nié qui ne lui appartient pas seulement, mais qui est un lieu commun où tous les hommes, même celui qui l'insulte et l'opprime, ont une solidarité toute prête. (E, 1683-4) [My italics]*

As «in Kant's words, "[e]goism can be opposed only by plurality, which is a frame of mind in which the self, instead of being enwrapped in itself as if it were the whole world, regards itself as citizen of the world"» (RJ, 142-3), the value defended in/by revolt cannot be identified, in Camus' view, with the individual in itself, but «[il] faut tous les hommes pour la composer» (E, 1685).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> According to Arendt, «[...] the few who managed not to be sucked into the whirlwind were by no means the "moralists", people who had always upheld rules of right conduct, but on the contrary very often those who had been convinced, even before the debacle, of the objective non-validity of these standards per se» (RJ, 138-139).

<sup>20</sup> In her 1965-66 series of lectures, Arendt defines imagination («or representation – there is a difference between the two which I can neglect here», RJ, 139) as «my ability to have an image in my mind of something that is not present» (Idem).

<sup>21</sup> «[...] le fonctionnaire révolté dit à la fois *oui* et *non*» (E, 1682).

<sup>22</sup> «Il s'agit bien entendu, dans toute cette remarque, d'une transcendance qu'on pourrait appeler horizontale, par opposition à la transcendance verticale qui est celle de Dieu ou des Essences platoniciennes » (E, 1683, note \*).

<sup>23</sup> «C'est dans la révolte que l'homme se dépasse dans autrui et, de ce point de vue, la solidarité humaine est métaphysique» (E, 1685).

As in Arendt's understanding of the Kantian «enlarged mentality», according to which «my judgment of a particular instance does not merely depend upon my perception but upon my representing to myself something which I do not perceive» (RJ, 140), such that «my judgment is no longer subjective either, in the sense that I arrive at my conclusions by taking only myself into account» (RJ, 141), Camus' revolt does not arise «seulement et forcément chez l'opprimé, mais [...] elle peut naître aussi au spectacle de l'oppression. *Il y a dans ce cas identification à l'autre individu. Il ne s'agit pas d'identification psychologique*, subterfuge par lequel l'individu sentirait en imagination que c'est à lui que l'offense se dresse (car il arrive au contraire qu'on ne supporte pas de voir infligées à d'autres des offenses que nous-mêmes avons subies sans révolte). *Il y a seulement identification de destinées et prise de parti*» (E, 1684-5).<sup>24</sup>

If we identify the « psychological subterfuge » with what Arendt calls “empathy”, as distinguished from the « enlarged mentality » in the proper sense, I argue that Camus' notion of revolt may be defined as a particular kind of judgement, rooted in the imagination and in a *common sense*, which bears the characters of the Kantian *aesthetic judgment*, namely, *desinterestedness* and *exemplary validity*.<sup>25</sup>

It is significant that, in enunciating as early as 1943-44 the conciliability of the pessimistic metaphysics, entailed by the *absurd* or tragic philosophy of the MdS, with a «pensée politique soucieuse de perfectionnement humain et plaçant son optimisme dans le relatif» (E, 1423), Camus declared in *Combat*

[...] notre foi [...] qu'aucune tâche humaine n'est impossible à l'homme. Il nous faut seulement et précisément des hommes. Des hommes, c'est-à-dire des cœurs avertis à la fois de l'audace et de la prudence, des *âmes sensibles* et des *volontés fermes*, des esprits capables en même temps de *désintéressement* et d'engagement. (CAC8, 276)

As he would write that same year, «[l]a justice sociale demande quelques *vérités de bon sens* et ces choses simples que sont la *clairvoyance*, l'*énergie* et le *désintéressement*» (CAC8, 351),<sup>26</sup> which, according to the author, is inseparable from a certain «esprit de sacrifice» (Id.).

<sup>24</sup> My italics.

<sup>25</sup> Camus writes in the 1945 *Remarque*: «[...] le mouvement de révolte n'est pas dans son essence un mouvement d'égoïsme. [...] on se révolte aussi contre soi-même et ce mouvement où l'homme se dresse contre l'homme lui-même [...] montre au moins le caractère profondément désintéressé de toute révolte.» (E, 1684).

<sup>26</sup> As he wrote to Bonnel in 1943: «l'absurde a plus de rapports qu'on ne croit avec le bon sens» (E, 1423).

The conciliability of the absurd thought of the MdS with a *certain kind* of political thought, which goes beyond the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of the universally valid norms of moral conduct lies precisely on the fact that

[...] *il y a des jugements de valeur inévitables. Même par-delà le bien et le mal, il y a des actes qui paraissent bons ou mauvais et surtout il y a des spectacles qui nous paraissent beaux ou laids. On ne préfère pas Stendhal à Georges Ohnet seulement en vertu de quelques recettes artistiques, mais aussi parce que le problème de la beauté en général se pose à leur propos. L'absurde, apparemment, pousse à vivre sans jugements de valeur et vivre, c'est toujours, de façon plus ou moins élémentaire, juger. (E, 1423) [My italics]*

In the absence of an absolute and transcendent table of moral values, Camus suggests that *some kind* of moral judgements, in the sense of the capacity of discerning good deeds from evil ones, or right from wrong conduct, is not only possible, but is also inevitable as the *aesthetic* judgements, or the capacity of discerning the beautiful from the ugly. Aesthetic and moral judgments, thus, *share the same origin*, one that is independent from the religious and metaphysical beliefs in a transcendent and universal set of absolute truths and values.

This association of moral and aesthetic judgements is all the more significant if we consider that, when focusing on the question of judgement («the true arbiter between right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, true and untrue», RJ, 137) in her *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, Hannah Arendt observes that «curiously enough, Kant himself [...] approached this problem [*i.e.*, how we tell right from wrong] with the question, *how do we tell beautiful from ugly?*»<sup>27</sup> (RJ, 137).

What we can draw from the comparative analysis of Camus' and Arendt's writings is that both authors seem to come to the conclusion that «[i]f we consider morality in *more than its negative aspect* – the refraining from doing wrong, which may mean the refraining from doing anything» (RJ, 142), which is the viewpoint of *critical thought*, disclosing the nihilistic temptation to inaction and irresponsibility, «then we shall have to consider human conduct in terms which Kant thought appropriate only for aesthetic conduct, so to speak. And the reason why he discovered moral significance in this seemingly so different sphere of human life was that *only here did he consider men in the plural, as living in a community. It is therefore in this context that we meet the impartial arbiter of the will as liberum arbitrium.* “Disinterested appreciation”, as you know, is Kant's definition of what we feel in the face of beauty» (Id.).

This would explain why, in the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of moral values, both Camus and Arendt could appeal to an ultimately unjustifiable *sense of justice* upon which to found unfoundedly action. As Camus wrote in LAA:

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<sup>27</sup> My italics.

Et à la vérité, moi qui croyais penser comme vous [the Nazis], je ne voyais guère d'argument à vous opposer, sinon un *goût violent de la justice* qui, pour finir, me paraissait aussi peu raisonné que *la plus soudaine des passions*. (LAA, 240)<sup>28</sup> [My italics]

The inexplicable and sudden « *taste for justice* », which arose in the face of terror without the need for any moral, in other words, absolute and transcendent law, should, thus, be traced, in both Camus and Arendt, to the category of aesthetic or, in Kant's terminology, *reflective judgement*.<sup>29</sup> As M. Passerin d'Entrèves points out, paraphrasing Arendt's lectures:

in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* [...] we find a conception of judgment as *the ability to deal with particulars in their particularity, that is, without subsuming them under a pre-given universal*, but actively searching the universal out of the particular. Kant formulated this distinction as that between *determinant* and *reflective* judgments. For him judgment in general is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then the judgment which subsumes the particular under it is determinant. If, however, only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgment is reflective. For Kant determinant judgments were cognitive, while *reflective judgments were non-cognitive*. *Reflective judgment is seen as the capacity to ascend from the particular to the universal without the mediation of determinate concepts given in advance*; it is reasoning about particulars in their relation to the universal rather than reasoning about universals in their relation to the particular. *In the case of aesthetic judgment this means that I can understand and apply the universal predicate of beauty only through experiencing a particular object that exemplifies it*. Thus, upon encountering a flower, a unique landscape, or a particular painting, I am able to say that it is an example of beauty, that it possesses "*exemplary validity*".<sup>30</sup>

In her 1971 lecture on *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, Arendt identifies the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, as the faculty of judging particulars which operates in the absence of those «general rules which can be taught and learned until they grow into habits that can be replaced by other habits and rules» (RJ, 189). This faculty is the manifestation, in the world of appearances, of «the wind of thought» (RJ, 189), as opposed to the sudden and automatic (*thoughtless*) exchange of one set of habits and norms for another, detected at the roots of the banal *infinite* evil of the Nazi functionary (RJ, 188).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>As Camus noted in his *Carnets* in 1948: « Pourquoi refuser la délation, la police, etc..., si nous ne sommes ni chrétiens ni marxistes. Nous n'ayons pas de valeurs pour ça. Jusqu'à ce que nous ayons retrouvé un fondement à ces valeurs, nous sommes condamnés à choisir le bien (quand nous le choisissons) de façon injustifiable [...]» (CII, 266-267). In very similar terms, Hannah Arendt would recall, almost twenty years later, in her essay «Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship», following the much controversial publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the climat of her generation, faced with the break down of traditional moral categories: «We had to learn everything from scratch, in the raw, as it were – that is, without the help of categories and general rules under which to subsume our experiences. [...] Thus, here we are, demanding and meting out punishment in accordance with our sense of justice, while, on the other hand, this same sense of justice informs us that all our previous notions about punishment and its justifications have failed us» (RJ, 25-26).

<sup>29</sup>Arendt writes in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*: «Kant himself analyzed primarily aesthetic judgments, because it seemed to him that only in this field do we judge without having general rules which are either demonstrably true or self-evident to go by. If therefore I shall now use his results for the field of morality, I assume that the field of human intercourse and conduct and the phenomena we confront in it are somehow of the same nature.» (RJ, 138).

<sup>30</sup>M. Passerin d'Entrèves, op. cit., pp. 250-251.

<sup>31</sup>«The purging element in thinking, Socrates' midwifery, that brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them – values, doctrines, theories and even convictions – is political by

Now, in her analysis of judgement, Arendt draws our attention to two aspects: firstly, that a distinction must be made between thinking and judging, namely, that whilst the former deals with «invisibles, with representations of things that are absent», the latter «always concerns particulars and things close at hand» (RJ, 189); secondly, and in relation to this first condition, if matters of right and wrong are not decided like table matters, that is, by appealing to some universal standard, «there is indeed something to which common sense, when it rises to the level of judging, can and does hold us to, and this is the *example*. [...] We cannot hold on to anything general, but to *some particular that has become an example*» (RJ, 143) – «We judge and tell right from wrong by having present in our mind some incident and some person, absent in time or space, that have become examples» (RJ, 145).

We can draw a parallel between Arendt's pages on thinking and judgment and Camus' reflection, from the *MdS* to the 1945 *Remarque*, and recognize in the «*raisonnement absurde*», identified with the negative/destructive process (*pars destruens*), which dismantles the unquestioned metaphysical and moral principles and norms, the liberating activity of thinking, which *does not create values* (RJ, 188), thus remaining, under normal conditions, a *solitary affair*, which is marginal in social and political matters.

This reading is confirmed by Arendt's later analysis of nihilism as related to the activity of thinking. In *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, she points out that:

*[w]hat we commonly call nihilism – and are tempted to date historically, decry politically, and ascribe to thinkers who allegedly dared to think “dangerous thoughts” – is actually a danger inherent in the thinking activity itself. There are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is dangerous, but nihilism is not its product. Nihilism is but the other side of conventionalism; its creed consists of negations of the current, so-called positive values to which it remains bound. All critical examinations must go through a stage of at least hypothetically negating accepted opinions and “values” by finding out their implications and tacit assumptions, and in this sense nihilism may be seen as an everpresent danger of thinking. But this danger does not arise out of the Socratic conviction that an unexamined life is not worth living but, on the contrary, out of the desire to find results which would make further thinking unnecessary. Thinking is equally dangerous to all creeds and, by itself, does not bring forth any new creed. (RJ, 177-178) [My italics]*

Thinking is not dangerous *per se*, it does not harbour a nihilistic, *i.e.*, destructive, drive *within itself*:<sup>32</sup> instead Arendt uses the term “nihilism” here to designate the *turning against itself* of thinking, which aims at extinguishing the thinking activity once and for all. In this acceptance, nihilism is associated with an extreme form of conventionalism, which is the

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implication. For this destruction has a liberating effect on another human faculty, the faculty of judgment, which one may call, with some justification, the most political of man's mental abilities. [...] judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances [...]. The *manifestation* of the wind of thought [...] is the ability to tell wright from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this indeed may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down» (RJ, 188-189).

<sup>32</sup> This is the thesis exposed by Fabio Ciamarelli in « Le mal totalitaire », in *L'humaine condition politique. Hannah Arendt*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001, p. 181.

*negation of thought*. The echoes of the Nietzschean notion of *incomplete* nihilism, stemming from an anti-metaphysical and anti-foundational *tabula rasa*, which, inconsistently with the conditions of thinking itself, culminates in the restatement (in a reversed form) of the metaphysical idols it pretended to destroy, are apparent. We should not forget that both Arendt and Camus argued that, in taking up the burden of nihilism against traditional metaphysics,<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche himself failed to remain consistent to the exercise of the methodical doubt that he propounded, which they assume as the mark of thinking.

Consequently, the «adhesion forcenée qui couronne l'œuvre de Nietzsche» in the theory of the will to power, and the positive affirmation of its new values,<sup>34</sup> falls back into an *incomplete* nihilism. The danger inherent in this *inconsistent* form of nihilism is that «[s]uch negative results of thinking will then be used as sleepily, with the same unthinking routine, as the old values; the moment they are applied to the realm of human affairs, it is as though they had never gone through the thinking process» (RJ, 177),<sup>35</sup> thus playing an important part under the conditions of totalitarian domination.

Before dwelling upon the relationship between nihilism and totalitarianism, I would like to focus on Arendt's and Camus' appropriation of Nietzsche's thought with reference to his philosophy of the will to power, and to the question of thinking and judgement, in that they offer some important insights to elucidate their political reflection.

In the 1965-66 *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, Arendt draws the attention to two unconnected and contradictory (RJ, 131) descriptions of the will, which in traditional and modern discussions of the problem were left in confusion, but which Nietzsche carefully distinguishes: namely, the commanding function of the will and the will as arbiter (RJ, 136).

In the first acceptance, the will to power is understood in the light of the element of command, or, in a more traditional way, in the light of the structures of dominion: «[...] in Nietzschean terms: "The will wants to be master of himself" and learns that if the mind commands itself and not merely the body (where it is obeyed instantly, as Augustin told us), this means that *I make a slave of myself – that I drag, as it were, the master-slave relationship, whose essence is the denial of freedom, into the intercourse and the relationship*

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<sup>33</sup> «[...] la destruction appliqué de tout ce qui masque encore le nihilisme à lui-même, des idoles qui camouflent la mort de Dieu» (HR, 477).

<sup>34</sup> «The quest for meaning, which relentlessly dissolves and examines anew all accepted doctrines and rules, can at every moment turn against itself, as it were, produce a reversal of the old values, and declare these as "new values". This, to an extent, is what Nietzsche did when he reversed Platonism, forgetting that a reversed Plato is still Plato, or what Marx did when he turned Hegel upside down, producing a strictly Hegelian system of history in the process.» (RJ, 177). See also HR, 486.

<sup>35</sup> My italics.

which I establish between me and myself. Hence, the famous harbinger of freedom turns out to be the destroyer of all freedom.» (RJ, 133).<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, there is the Nietzschean explanation of the powerfulness of the willing act itself in terms of surplus or overflow (“abundance”) of strength, «identified by Nietzsche with the *creative impulse*; it is the root of all productivity. If this is true (and I think all data of experience speak in favour of this interpretation) we could explain why the will is seen as the *source of spontaneity that prompts into action* – whereas the understanding of the will as disclosing the ultimate impotence of man through its dialectical nature could only lead to a complete paralysis of all forces unless one relies on divine help as is done in all strictly Christian ethics» (RJ, 135).

The emphasis on this «extravagant generosity or “lavish will” that prompts men in wanting and loving to do good (*Will to Power*, no. 749)» (RJ, 135) brings forth, in Arendt’s view, a distinction between the cause of acting (for Nietzsche, the surplus of strength) and «the cause of acting in such or such a way, in this particular direction, with this or that aim in mind», which Nietzsche underestimated as «insignificant» compared to the superabundant force (Id.).

Now, it is among these under-estimated «secondary causes» that Arendt traces «*the morally decisive question of whether the will to do turns in the direction of doing right or doing wrong*» (Id.),<sup>37</sup> and it is from an anti-metaphysical perspective, which does away with the question of the (ultimate) *cause* of action – be that the God of the tradition,<sup>38</sup> or a divinised superabundant force - that she draws on Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* in order to answer this question.

In a similar way, in his 1950 essay *Nietzsche et le nihilisme*, later included in HR, Camus resumes Nietzsche’s thought in the notion of *creation*: «La transmutation des valeurs consiste seulement à *remplacer la valeur du juge par celle du créateur*: le respect et la passion *de ce qui est*. La divinité sans l’immortalité définit la liberté du créateur » (HR, 483).

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<sup>36</sup> My italics.

<sup>37</sup> My italics.

<sup>38</sup> «Within the tradition, you find the whole question of free will usually discussed under the title of *liberum arbitrium*, free arbitration, so that in the discussion of moral issues the emphasis has shifted entirely from the cause of action as such to the question of what goals to seek and which decisions to make. In other words, the commanding function of the will (which raised such difficulties in Paul’s and Augustine’s minds) disappeared into the background, and its judging function (that it could clearly and freely distinguish between right and wrong) came to the foreground. [...] With Christianity [...] that which commands, appeared more and more exclusively as a voice from outside, be it the voice of God speaking directly to man or the voice of the ecclesiastical authority [...]. And the question was more and more only whether or not man possessed an organ within himself that could distinguish between conflicting voices. This organ, according to the meaning of the Latin word *liberum arbitrium*, was characterised by the same *disinterestedness* which we demand for the judging function in legal proceedings [...].» (RJ, 136) [My italics]

The notion of creation is related to the methodical application of the *tabula rasa* of transcendent foundation (HR, 475), which constitutes nihilism in its original movement as metaphysical *revolt*:

Cette impasse où Nietzsche pousse méthodiquement son nihilisme, on peut dire qu'il s'y rue avec une sorte de joie affreuse. Son but avoué est de rendre à l'homme de son temps la situation intenable. Le seul espoir semble être pour lui de parvenir à l'extrémité de la contradiction. Si l'homme alors ne veut pas périr dans les nœuds qui l'étouffent, il lui faudra les trancher d'un coup, et *créer ses propres valeurs*. La mort de Dieu n'achève rien [...] « Quand on ne trouve pas la *grandeur* en Dieu, dit Nietzsche, on ne la trouve nulle part ; il faut *la nier ou la créer*. » La nier était la tâche du monde qui l'entourait et qu'il voyait courir au suicide. La créer fut la tâche surhumaine pour laquelle il voulut mourir. Il savait en effet que *la création n'est possible qu'à l'extrémité de la solitude* et que l'homme ne se résoudrait à ce *vertigineux effort que si, dans la plus extrême misère de l'esprit, il lui fallait consentir ce geste ou mourir*. Nietzsche lui crie donc que la terre est sa seule vérité, à laquelle il faut être fidèle, sur laquelle il faut vivre et faire son salut. Mais il lui enseigne en même temps que vivre sur une terre sans loi est impossible parce que vivre suppose précisément une loi. (HR, 481)

It is significant that Camus would use here the terminology of the 1944-45 editorials of *Combat*, and in particular, the emphasis on the relation between revolt as *creation* of values, and the possibility of greatness (*grandeur*) in the absence of a transcendent foundation of moral values.

The replacement of the «*valeurs du juge*» by the values of creation entails a shift from a perspective still centred, in Arendt's terminology, on the ultimate *cause* of the will as command (God being the supreme Judge and authority) to a finite, anti-metaphysical, perspective centred on man's personal *effort* to give a certain direction or *form* to his life – the will as *arbiter*.

For Camus, to live in the anti-metaphysical horizon of a finite thought of the finite, which does away with a transcendent law outside and above man («faithful to the earth»), still entails a law. Now, to live, according to the author, is *to judge*, and judging is inseparable from the solitary intercourse of me and myself, which *is thinking*, and takes place within the limits of a *good-nihilistic aesthetic* reasoning.

What I suggest is that the internal law, which operates in the absence of transcendent moral norms and rules of conduct, lies in the lucid man's capacity for *aesthetic* judgment, that brings about a form of intra-worldly *ascèse*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> As he writes in the 1944 "*Sur une philosophie de l'expression*" de Brice Parain: « Au lieu de tirer de l'incertitude du monde ou du langage toutes les libertés, une démente calculée, l'inspiration automatique, on s'efforce à la *discipline intérieure*. Du désespoir on ne tire plus l'anarchie, mais la *domination de soi*. [...] d'une philosophie du mensonge et de la non-signification, au moins apparente, du monde, on ne tire plus l'apologie de l'instinct, mais un parti pris d'intelligence. Il s'agit seulement d'une *intelligence raisonnable revenue au concret et soucieuse d'honnêteté*. C'est un nouveau classicisme [...] » (E, 1681). (My italics). We can trace a parallel between Camus's *aesthetic* thought «*revenue au concret*» and the Arendtian appeal to a thought which «always concerns particulars and things close at hand» (RJ, 189), that is, to judgment.



It is in the light of these remarks that I suggest we interpret Camus' proposal to replace the «valeurs d'efficacité», or «valeurs de *puissance*» of traditional politics, with the (aesthetic) «valeurs d'exemple».<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3. THE ARTIST VIS-À-VIS OF NIHILISM: THE AESTHETICIZATION OF THE POLITICAL.

It is significant that Camus introduced the value of *example* together with the figure of Socrates, as related to, and entailed by, what he calls the «value of ignorance», namely, an aporetic thought aware that «la vie comporte une part d'ombre et une part de lumière, que *l'homme ne pouvait pas prétendre tout régler* [...] qu'il a des choses qu'on ne sait pas et que *si l'on prétend tout savoir, alors on finit par tout tuer*».<sup>41</sup>

The idea that «[c]elui qui ne peut tout savoir, ne peut tout tuer» is further developed in HR as the immediate consequence of a finite thought, which is consistent with the original movement of revolt as “*yes-and-no*. Now, in the 1949 Conference he wrote:

L'Europe ne guérira pas si nous ne refusons pas aux *philosophies politiques le droit de tout régler*. Il ne s'agit pas, en effet, de donner à ce monde un catéchisme politique et moral. Le grand malheur de notre temps est que justement la politique prétend nous mounir, en même temps, d'un catéchisme, d'une philosophie complète, et même quelquefois d'un art d'aimer. Or, le rôle de la politique est de faire le ménage et non pas de régler nos problèmes intérieurs. J'ignore, pour moi, s'il existe un absolu. Mais je sais qu'il n'est pas de l'ordre politique.

[...] *Aucun homme au monde, aujourd'hui ni demain, ne peut jamais décider que sa vérité est assez bonne pour pouvoir l'imposer aux autres*. Car la *conscience commune* des hommes peut seule assumer cette ambition. Et il fait retrouver les valeurs dont vit cette conscience commune. Cela signifie que nous avons tous à créer *en dehors des partis, par-dessus les frontières*, et qui affirmeront par leur vies et leurs discours que ce monde doit cesser d'être celui des policiers, des soldats et de l'argent pour devenir celui de l'homme et de la femme, du travail fécond et du loisir réfléchi.<sup>42</sup> [My italics]

Already in the article «Le siècle de la peur» (19th November 1946), Camus would warn that «[n]ous étouffons parmi les gens qui croient avoir absolument raison, que ce soit dans leur machines ou dans leurs idées. Et pour tous ceux qui ne peuvent vivre que dans le dialogue et dans l'amitié des hommes, ce silence est la fin du monde » (CAC8, 611). The correspondence with Arendt's *Thoughts About Lessing*, written thirteen years later, and included in the collection *Men in Dark Times* – probably the closest of Arendt's writings to the argument of the *tragic* thought, beautifully developed by Camus in his discourse for the Nobel Prize in 1957 - is striking and elucidating in this respect.

<sup>40</sup>F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>41</sup>Ibidem. My italics.

<sup>42</sup>F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 68-69.

As Arendt points out in 1959, in the post-metaphysical horizon disclosed by modernity, «[n]owadays [...] it is rare to meet people who believe they possess the truth; instead, we are constantly confronted by *those who are sure that they are right*» (MDT, 28).<sup>43</sup>

The notion of rightness arises in, and belongs to, the scientific discourse, as opposed to the notion of truth, traditionally related to the metaphysical, religious and philosophical, discourse, which it succeeded in replacing in 20<sup>th</sup> century thought.<sup>44</sup> Now,

[i]n spite of the difference between the notions of possessing the truth and being right, these two points of view have one thing in common: *those who take one or the other are generally not prepared to sacrifice their view to humanity or friendship in case a conflict should arise.* (MDT, 28) (My italics).

In terms that echo Camus' reflection, Arendt emphasizes a relation between what she detected in Lessing's thought as «the *theme of "limited gods"*, of the limitations of human understanding, limitations which speculative reason can point out and thereby transcend», and friendship as making *political demands*, and having political importance in preserving the reference to the world and, therefore, to *humanity* (MDT, 24-25).<sup>45</sup>

Lessing, in her view, «was content to belong to the race of "*limited gods*", as he *occasionally called men*; and he thought that human society was in no way harmed by those

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<sup>43</sup> My italics.

<sup>44</sup> « The simple fact is that even men who are utterly incapable of judging the specifically scientific aspects of an argument are as fascinated by scientific rightness as men of the eighteenth century were by the question of truth» (MDT, 28). As Arendt points out, «the "pillars of the best-known truths" [...], which at the 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. Now, in a certain sense, this could be an advantage, *promoting a new kind of thinking that needs no pillars and props*, no standards and traditions to move freely without crutches over unfamiliar terrain. But with the world as it is, it is difficult to enjoy this advantage. For long ago it became apparent that the pillars of the truths have also been the pillars of the political order, and that the world (in contrast to the people who inhabit it and move freely about it) needs such pillars in order to guarantee continuity and permanence, without which it cannot offer mortal men the relatively secure, relatively imperishable home that they need.» (MDT, 10-11). As Arendt points out in *Truth and Politics*, «[t]he modes of thought and communication that deal with truth, if seen from the political perspective, are necessarily *domineering*; they don't take into account other people's opinions, and taking these into account is the hallmark of all strictly political thinking» (TP, 556). My italics.

<sup>45</sup> According to Arendt, «humanity is exemplified not in fraternity but in friendship» (MDT, 25): it is in «dark times» that humanity manifests itself in the form of a brotherly attachment to other human beings (fraternity), especially among persecuted peoples and enslaved groups. The relationship between fraternity and pariahdom is generally accompanied «by so radical a loss of the world, so fearful atrophy of all the organs with which we respond to it – starting with the common sense with which we orient ourselves in a world common to ourselves and others and going on to the sense of beauty, or taste, with which we love the world – that in extreme cases, in which pariahdom has persisted for centuries, we can speak of real worldlessness» (MDT, 13). It is significant that, in Arendt's view, fraternity «has its natural place among the repressed and persecuted, the exploited and humiliated, whom the eighteenth century called the unfortunate, *les malheureux*, and the nineteenth century the wretched, *les misérables*» (MDT, 14), among whom it coincided with a moving so closely together «that the *interspace which we have called the world* (and which of course existed between them before the persecution, keeping them at a distance from one another) has *simply disappeared*. This produces a warmth of human relationship which may strike those who have had some experience with such groups as an almost *physical phenomenon*» (MDT, 13) (My italics). This passage echoes Camus' pages on the Russian «*meurtriers délicats*» in HR.

“who take more trouble to make clouds than to scatter them”, while *it incurred in “much harm from those who wish to subject all men’s ways of thinking to the yoke of their own”*. This has very little to do with tolerance in the ordinary sense [...], but it has a great deal to do with the *gift of friendship, with openness to the world [...]*» (MDT, 26).<sup>46</sup>

Here, Arendt refers to that independent thinking for oneself (*Selbstdenken*), which in Lessing’s understanding calls primarily for courage (MDT, 8) as the mark of a limited and modest mentality that «can never give rise to a definite world view which, once adopted, is immune to further experiences in the world because its has hitched itself firmly to one possible perspective» (Id.). She relates the capacity for independent thinking to an openness to (self)-contradiction, which entails openness to the world:

The *fermenta cognitionis* which Lessing scattered into the world were not intended to communicate conclusions, but to stimulate others to independent thought, and this for no other purpose than to bring about a discourse between thinkers. Lessing’s thought is not the (Platonic) silent dialogue between me and myself, but an *anticipated dialogue with others [...]*. (MDT, 10) [My italics]

The relationship between a modest thought aware of its limits and «humanity» calls upon the moral and political implications of thinking in times of crisis, the «dark times» when the chips are down. In «*Karl Jaspers: a laudatio*», humanity in the Roman acceptance of *humanitas*, as well as in Kant’s and Jaspers’ understanding of *Humanität*, coincides with «the *valid personality* which, once acquired, never leaves man, even though all other gifts of the body and mind may succumb to the destructiveness of time» (MDT, 73), which is never acquired in solitude, but is inseparable from the existence of a public space of appearance for a man’s acts and deeds.

Thus, in Arendt’s view, if the purely subjective dimension of the creative process - which goes into a work (artistic or intellectual) realizing it - does not concern the public, it is the «living act and voice», which accompanies such work, that allows the *person to appear together with it* (MDT, 73):

The personal element is beyond the control of the subject and is therefore the precise opposite of mere subjectivity. But it is that very subjectivity that is “objectively” much easier to grasp and much more readily at the disposal of the subject. (By *self-control*, for example, we mean simply that we are able to lay hold of this purely subjective element in ourselves in order to use it as we like.) (MDT, 73) [My italics]

This passage offers some important insights into the political implications of Camus’s notion of *example* as related, on the one hand, to the work of the artist, and, on the other, to the Socratic value of *ignorance*, as related to critical thinking.

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<sup>46</sup> My italics.

If we identify the artist's self-mastering (*domination de soi*), as the condition for the creative process and the realisation of the work of art, with what Arendt defines as the subjective element of the artist's self-control, then, in the notion of *example*, the "private" and solitary dimension of subjectivity, implicit in the creative effort, is transcended by virtue of the artist's *living* act and voice that accompanies his work, which is implicit in Camus' appropriation of Nietzsche's notion of creation in the light of the German philosopher's perspectivism.

This latter position is exposed in Arendt's *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, where she describes Nietzsche as «the last philosopher [...] who took moral issues seriously and who therefore analyzed and thought through all former moral positions. He said as follows: "It is a denaturation of morality to separate the act from the agent, to direct hatred or contempt against the 'sin' [the deed instead of the doer], to believe that an action could be good or evil in itself...[In every action] all depends upon who does it [...]. Actually, it is the self-relatedness of him who judges that interprets an action or rather its actor with respect to...resemblance or 'non-affinity' between the agent and the judge" (*Will to Power*, no. 292)» (RJ, 144-5). Thus, according to Arendt,

*[c]aught up in our modern prejudices, we think that only the "objective work", separate from the person, belongs to the public; that the person behind it and his life are private matters, and that the feelings related to these "subjective" things stop being genuine and become sentimental as soon as they are exposed to the public eye. (MDT, 72) [My italics]*

Not only do the articles and editorials of *Combat* from 1944-45, which are coherent with the finite *aesthetic* thought of the MdS, testify to Camus' unwillingness to separate the act from the agent, the doer from the deed, and of the necessity to judge the latter by taking the particular singularity of the former into account, but the emphasis on the concrete dimension of the agent/doer *as he appears publicly* in words and deeds is also related by Hannah Arendt to a finite or limited reasoning in terms of that *exemplary validity* (RJ, 144-ff.), which Camus opposes to the abstracting powers of the logic of *achèvement*. Thus, just as Socrates «gave an example and hence became an example for a certain way of conduct and a certain way of deciding between right and wrong» (RJ, 144), thus, in Camus' reflection, the artists «par leur œuvre *et par leur exemple*» prove «qu'il vaut mieux se tromper sans assassiner personne et en laissant parler les autres que *d'avoir raison au milieu du silence et des charniers*». <sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 72.

Self-mastering ceases to be confined to the purely private and subjective dimension of artistic creation, which becomes a moral and political stance in times of crisis, by virtue of its relationship to that capacity for independent thinking and dialogue, of which Socrates is, for both Arendt and Camus, the example.

It is the Greek *daimon* of Socratic memory that, in Arendt's eulogy of Karl Jaspers, is said to most closely resemble the moral, "public" dimension of personality, as distinguished from individuality (MDT, 72-73). And it is the concrete and practical (not pragmatic) activity of thought, as opposed to contemplation, which, in her view, constitutes a man into *somebody*, a person or a personality (RJ, 105). The moral and political implications of this reasoning are visible in the post-war trials against Nazi criminals, which interpreted from the standpoint of critical thinking, *i.e.*, «where all objective standards – truth, rewards and punishments in a hereafter, etc. – yield precedence to the "subjective" criterion of *the kind of person I wish to be and live together with*»(RJ, 111),<sup>48</sup> show that «the greatest evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who *refuse to be persons*» (Id.).

Now, by relating personality to humanity, and by defining the realm of *humanitas* as that which does not lie in the beyond and is not utopian, but is of the *present* and of *this world* (MDT, 80), consistently with a post-metaphysical "limited" thought of the finite, Arendt says that everyone can enter humanity *out of his own origins* (Id.).

In *Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?* the emphasis on the origin(s) is immediately related, on the one hand, to plurality, diversity and *mutual limitations* (MDT, 81) which, in Arendt's view, are at the root of the political concepts,<sup>49</sup> and, on the other, to the nightmare of a «horridly shallow unity» of mankind «based on the technical means of communication and violence» (MDT, 87) under the conditions of a world government and world empire, which would decree the end of politics (Id.). The unity of the world brought about by technological development in Europe is inseparable from what Arendt defined as the politically destructive notion of rightness proper to scientific reasoning, which lays bare its nihilistic implications:

No less manifest than the fact that technology united the world is the other fact that Europe exported to the four corners of the earth *its processes of disintegration* – which had started in the Western world with the decline of the traditionally accepted metaphysical and religious beliefs and had accompanied the *grandiose development of the natural sciences and the victory of the nation state over all other forms of government*. The

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<sup>48</sup> In this text Arendt uses the term « subjective » in a different sense from the *Laudatio*, that is, in the light of the «shift from the objective *what* somebody did to the subjective *who* of the agent» (RJ, 111).

<sup>49</sup> « A citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens of a country among countries. His rights and duties must be defined and limited, not only by those of his fellow citizens, but also by the boundaries of a territory. [...] Politics deals with men, nationals of many countries and heirs of many pasts ; its laws are positively established fences which hedge in, protect, and limit the space in which freedom is not a concept, but a living, political reality.» (MDT, 81-82).

same forces which took centuries to undermine the ancient beliefs and political ways of life, and which have their place in the continuous development of the West alone, took only a few decades to break down, by working from without, beliefs and ways of life in all other parts of the world. [...] Technology, having provided the unity of the world, can just as easily destroy it and the means of global communication were designed side by side with *means of possible global destruction*. (MDT, 82-83) [My italics]

In the loss of memory of « *the authentic origins of all human existence* » (MDT, 87) Arendt traces the danger inherent in this new reality of mankind, organized through technical means of communication and violence. In his introduction to Simon Weil's *L'enracinement* in June 1949, Camus traced in « le mot "enracinement" [...] un retour à la tradition. Non pas la tradition comme on l'entend dans certains milieux politiques et dans nos piteux manuels d'histoire, mais celle qui consiste à penser juste, à voir juste » (E, 1700).<sup>50</sup>

It should not be surprising, hence, that in *Le temps des meurtriers*, that same year, Camus related, on the backdrop of the contemporary nihilistic *refusal to judge*, especially widespread among intelligent and sceptic people, the notion of rightness to the historical "law" of efficacy and power,<sup>51</sup> opposing the master/slave relationship implicit in the latter against the category of just/unjust men.<sup>52</sup>

I would suggest that, in the notion of « *penser juste* », Camus continues a particular kind of thinking which moves *beyond* the nihilistic *impasse*, without entailing a *backward* movement that recovers the moral norms and values of the tradition. « [W]hen the chips are down », the only valid alternative to a politics of power/efficacy/achievement - related both by Arendt and Camus to technological development and logic ("scientific") murder - is a "limited" thought which goes back to, and remains aware of, the *origins*.

In this sense, power politics in its 20<sup>th</sup> century, most extreme (nihilistic) form is, for Camus as well as for Arendt, *an-archic* in the sense of an order « *où personne n'est jamais reconnu* », namely, one in which men lose their personal dimension and become abstract *silhouettes*.<sup>53</sup> In a note in the *Carnets* in 1947, taking his distances from a conservative « return » to the tradition, and its (Christian) morality, Camus wrote:

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<sup>50</sup> Camus describes Simone Weil's work as entirely devoted to justice (E, 1701), and exposing some (thought) provoking truths among the lies in « le temps de la puissance et au siècle de l'efficacité » (Id.).

<sup>51</sup> « Et lorsque nous pensons que rien n'a de sens, il faut conclure que celui qui a raison, c'est celui qui réussit. La seule règle est de se montrer plus efficace, c'est-à-dire, le plus fort. [...] « L'histoire officielle consiste à croire les meurtriers sur la parole », a dit Simone Weil. Et nous ne pouvons pas douter en vérité que l'Histoire telle que nous la concevons, aurait consacré Hitler et justifié la terreur et le meurtre, *comme nous tous les consacrons et les justifions aux moments où nous osons penser que rien n'a de sens*. Ainsi de quelque côté qu'on se tourne, au cœur de la négation et du *nihilisme*, le meurtre - et le meurtre *scientifique*, le meurtre utile - a sa place privilégiée. » (F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 57). [My italics]

<sup>52</sup> « Le monde n'est plus partagé entre les justes et les injustes, mais entre les maîtres et les esclaves » (F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 57).

<sup>53</sup> Roger Dadoun, « Albert Camus : fondations d'anarchie » in *Camus et la politique*, op. cit., p. 260. I argue that the anti-traditionalistic appeal to the origin(s) (arché), in the works of both Arendt and Camus, provides the

Si, pour dépasser le nihilisme, il faut revenir au christianisme, on peut bien alors suivre le mouvement et dépasser le christianisme dans l'héllenisme. (CII, 233)

In another note Camus claimed to agree with the view of the poet and friend René Char, according to whom the Greeks' *tragic* experience was mediated by beauty: «si les Grecs ont formé l'idée du désespoir et de la tragédie, c'est toujours à *travers* la beauté et ce qu'elle a d'oppressant. [...] Pour les Grecs, la beauté est au départ. Pour un Européen, elle est un but, rarement atteint. Je ne suis pas moderne.» (CII, 240). The overcoming of nihilism in Hellenism would, thus, mean the rejection of the "aestheticizing" perspective typical of Western modern thought, which considers beauty as the goal of the creative process, and the final result of a skilful *poiesis* out of an idea in the artist's mind. In this sense, Camus is not modern: beauty is at the beginning, as that through the experience of which a *tragic* view is acquired, by virtue of a constant effort of self-mastering.

In his letter *Les Pharisien de la justice*, published in the review *Caliban* in 1950, which took into account and replied to some objections to his play *Le Justes*, Camus opposed the terroristic "*fiat justitia pereat mundus*" («Tuons tout le monde au nom de la justice pour tous», E, 720), or what he calls «une justice morte», to the «justice vivante», which, he writes significantly enough, is not a comfort but «une brûlure, et un effort sur soi-même» (E, 721).

Among his notes for *Les Justes* in the *Carnets* in 1947 we find the following remark: «Le monde sera plus *juste* dans la mesure où il sera plus *chaste* (G. Sorel)» (CII, 234), chastity evoking the Nietzschean notion of *ascèse*, taken up by Camus as the distinctive character of the artist's revolt.<sup>54</sup>

What emerges in Camus' writings between 1947 and 1951 is a relationship between justice and beauty, which is mediated by the figure of the artist. It is in the light of this relationship that I suggest we re-interpret the author's moral and political reflection in the sense of the project of an *aesthetic* overcoming of nihilism, in which, as I will argue in Chapter 4 of this work, tragedy plays an important part.

This project should not be confused with what Hannah Arendt addresses, in her extensive analysis of Hermann Broch's artistic and political work, as the idolization of beauty

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elements for a reflection on the relation between nihilism, anarchism and the political, which is attuned with Roberto Esposito's diagnosis of the nihilistic drives inherent in the Western *immunitarian* paradigm of the political, *immunitas* coinciding with the an-archic removal of the originary *communitas*.

<sup>54</sup>In Conference for the awarding of the Nobel Prize (14th December 1957), Camus would refer to the freedom of art as «une discipline ascétique» (E, 1093), which forces the artist to live in the «risque extrême», between the two abysses of absolute negation and unconditioned assent - «[...] peut-être touchons-nous ici la grandeur de l'art, dans cette perpétuelle tension entre la beauté et la douleur, l'amour des hommes et la folie de la création, la solitude insupportable et la foule harassante, le refus et le consentement» (E, 1092).

of the «aestheticizing literary man» (MDT, 122): instead, it situates itself at the opposite of all absolutizing attempts to fill the “value vacuum” of the nihilistic “death of God” by a murderous appeal to the logical consistency of man’s system or creation.

The comparative analysis of Arendt’s text on Hermann Broch and of Camus’ reflection on the artist, from 1947 onward, is illuminating in this respect. According to Arendt, Broch

saw the criminal element and the element of radical evil as personified in the figure of the *aestheticizing literary man* (in which category, for instance, he placed Nero and even Hitler) [...] As he saw it, the real seductiveness of evil, the quality of seduction in the figure of the devil, is primarily an aesthetic phenomenon. Aesthetic in the broadest sense; the businessmen whose credo is “Business is business” and the statesmen who hold with “War is war” are aestheticizing literati in the “value vacuum”. They are *aesthetes insofar as they are enchanted by the consonance of their own system, and they become murderers because they are prepared to sacrifice everything to this consonance, this “beautiful” consistency.* (MDT, 122-3)

The relationship between radical evil and the literati’s aestheticism, emphasized by Broch in the notion of «beautiful consistency», is also the object of Camus’ reflection in the two sections of l’HR on metaphysical revolt devoted, respectively, to de Sade and to the Dandies.

### 2.3.1. BETWEEN DE SADE AND THE DANDIES.

Reporting on the state of the philosophico-political debate in France in the post-war years,<sup>55</sup> and, in particular, of what she addresses as French Existentialism, under which she places «Malraux and Camus on the one side, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on the other» (EU, 436), Arendt drastically re-dimensioned the former’s much declaimed parentage with German contemporary philosophers («Their dependence upon the work of [...] Jaspers and Heidegger, has been somewhat exaggerated», EU, 437), observing how the Marquis de Sade and Dostoevsky exercised a stronger call on the *intelligenza* than Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche - whose influence, she writes, is *less marked* in France (Id.): «But all are overshadowed by the influence of Hegel and Marx in France, as distinguished from Germany» (Id.). Thus, she adds, in Heideggerian terms, their «style and form of expression remain in the line of the French *moralistes* and that *the extreme subjectivism of Cartesian philosophy* has found here its last and most radical expression» (EU, 437).

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<sup>55</sup> *Concern with Politics...* (EU, 436-437).



The following pages refute Arendt's analysis, by showing, precisely, that Camus's political reflection stands *outside* the so-called French Existentialism. Imbued with Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche from the early 1930's through his teacher and friend, the philosopher Jean Grenier, and an attentive reader of Jaspers during the second half of the 1940's, whom he quotes in HR, Camus was extremely critical of the contemporary fascination with Hegel and Marx among French intellectuals.

Now, Camus devotes a section of l'HR to the figure and work of the Marquis de Sade, of which he explores the ethical and political implications. De Sade is «exemplary» (HR, 447) of an *absolutely negating* thought, which develops out of the author's captivity («On exalte en lui le philosophe auX fers [...]», HR, 447) into a «rêve de destruction universelle» (Id.).

De Sade is the perfect «homme de lettres» in the sense that his literary creation provided the «équivalent dérisoire» of a satisfaction, which the order of the world would deny him: imprisoned in the Bastille, the writer conceived his ideal society - «des châteaux à septuple enceinte, dont il est impossible de s'évader, et où la société du désir et du crime fonctionne sans heurts, selon un règlement implacable» (HR, 453) - a *fiction* through which he systematically attempted the impossible «attentat contre la création» (HR, 455), *i.e.*, against nature itself.

By conceiving God as «une divinité criminelle qui écrase l'homme et le nie», and recognizing in murder a divine attribute (HR, 448), de Sade negates man and his morality *because God does so*, and negates God in the name of nature, identified with the sexual «élan aveugle qui exige la possession totale des êtres, au prix de leur destruction» (HR, 449). The unleashing of the limitless and measureless energy of desire, according to the iron laws of which *nature needs crime* (Id.), culminates in self-destruction: the only law in a Godless world governed by unbridled sexual desire is force, and its motor is the will to power (HR, 452), the «licence de détruire suppose qu'on puisse être soi-même détruit» (Id.).

The identification of freedom with «l'enfer de la nécessité» of illimited desire entails total submission to evil, the absolute acceptance of universal murder, which culminates in a «horrible *acèse*» (HR, 451).<sup>56</sup> But at the climax of de Sade's self-glorification as master and

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<sup>56</sup> De Sade embodies the man of letters whose art is «perverted» from original movement of revolt, he is in this sense the anti-artist: «Posséder ce qu'on tue, s'accoupler avec la souffrance, voilà l'instant de la liberté totale vers lequel s'oriente toute l'organisation des châteaux. Mais dès l'instant où le crime sexuel supprime l'objet de volupté, il supprime la volonté qui n'existe qu'au moment précis de la suppression. Il faut alors se soumettre un autre objet et le tuer à nouveau, un autre encore, et après lui l'infinité de tous les objets possibles. On obtient ainsi ces mornes accumulations de scènes érotiques et criminelles dont l'aspect figé, dans les romans de Sade, laisse paradoxalement au lecteur le souvenir d'une *hideuse chasteté*» (HR, 454).

God, through the fictional character of the Unique, the solitary and only survivor of his ideal republic, the writer

n'a triomphé qu'en rêve et ces dizaines de volumes, bourrés d'atrocités et de philosophie, résumant une *ascèse malheureuse*, une marche hallucinante du non total au oui absolu, un constatement à la mort enfin, qui transfigure le meurtre de tout et de tous en *suicide collectif*. (HR, 456) [My italics]

It is significant that Camus used the same expression as the one employed around 1945 to describe the nihilistic power policy of the Nazi regime, and it is not without reason that de Sade is addressed as the precursor of the modern architects of the totalitarian «cité de la puissance et de la haine» (HR, 454).<sup>57</sup>

According to Camus, « [n]otre temps s'est borné à fondre curieusement [le] rêve de *republique universelle [de Sade] et sa technique d'avilissement*. Finalement ce qu'il haïssait le plus, le meurtre légal, a pris à son compte les découvertes qu'il voulait mettre au service du meurtre d'instinct » (HR, 457).<sup>58</sup>

One essential «discovery», which Camus detects at the core of de Sade's ideal universal republic (HR, 449), is the understanding of the equality of men as a *mathematical notion*, that is, in terms of «l'équivalence *des objets que sont les hommes*, l'abjecte égalité des victimes» (HR, 450). In the closed universe of de Sade's castles, governed by «*hideuse chasteté*», «la jouissance, la grande joie fleurie des corps consentants et complices» (HR, 454) is abolished through the systematic reduction of man to an object of experience and sexual pleasure, which operates via a total *abstraction* of the living human being into «une espèce de plante absolument matérielle» (HR, 453) – «Il faut encore que *les objets de jouissance n'apparaissent jamais comme des personnes*» (*Id.*).<sup>59</sup>

What Camus points out in the measureless effort of the «homme de lettres» is, firstly, an almost religious horror of the dispersedness and haphazardness which constitute the finite human condition: what drives de Sade's limitless imagination during the prison years is the *aesthetic* «exigence d'unité, déçue par la Création, [qui] se satisfait à toute force dans un microcosme», a fictional world created by the demiurgic artist «à la mesure exacte de la nouvelle loi», the law of crime *logically* deriving from unbridled desire (HR, 452).

This leads us to the question of the «*most absolute coherence*», recovered by l'«homme de lettres» *within* his own system or creation: «si le crime et le désir ne sont pas la *loi de tout l'univers*, s'ils ne règnent pas au moins sur un territoire défini, ils ne sont plus

<sup>57</sup> «Deux siècles à l'avance, sur une échelle réduite, *Sade a exalté les sociétés totalitaires au nom de la liberté frénétique* que la révolte en réalité ne réclame pas » (HR, 457).

<sup>58</sup> My italics.

<sup>59</sup> My italics. «Dans la république barbelée de Sade, il n'y a que des mécaniques et des mécaniciens» (HR, 453).

*principes d'unité, mais ferments de conflit*» (HR, 452), which dissolve the aesthetic microcosm back into the dispersedness of divine Creation. This is where, I argue, the *enjeu* of the political is brought forth.

As Georges Bataille highlighted in his notes on Sade between 1947 and '49, «l'essentiel de la révolte est qu'elle est toujours refus d'un interdit, ou plutôt son essence est un refus de *tout* interdit [...]. Le refus des interdit est le refus de la limite. [...] c'est la grandeur de Camus d'être seul à montrer ce qui rend compte de l'attitude contradictoire de Sade [...]. Il semble bien que [...] il ait obéi à la loi que Camus devait définir- avec une rigueur qui confond l'esprit : son goût pour la révolution, *son refus de la terreur*, son attitude « chrétienne » si stupéfiante à l'égard de ses beaux-parents». <sup>60</sup> In the light of revolt against law (qua law), de Sade's rejection of *legal* crime and the death sentence under the Terror is the logical consequence of the writer's identification of freedom with absolute licence and justice with «la divinité de toutes les passions» (HR, 450), which are incompatible with the cold and rational execution of crime (HR, 451). According to Camus, «[on] trouve ici l'amorce d'une idée qui sera développée encore par Sade: *celui qui tue doit payer de sa personne. Sade, on le voit, est plus moral que nos contemporains*» (Id.). <sup>61</sup>

But, as Bataille rightly points out, de Sade ended up being «*logique comme l'on est pris au piège: la révolte en lui l'avait mené à l'égalité*». <sup>62</sup> What the French philosopher fails to appreciate in Camus' analysis of de Sade's work is precisely that, by accepting desire and crime exclusively as *principles of unity*, and not as fermentation of conflict, the "aestheticizing" effort of the literary man, born out of revolt against (moral and divine) *law*, eventually falls back into the metaphysical affirmation of a *new law* (*incomplete nihilism*) out of sheer contempt for the finitude of ex-istence - and the *new law*, systematically applied in de Sade's microcosm of crime, is interwoven with the notion of power (HR, 452).

What characterises the law of this new "aesthetic" system is the rejection of the *aesthetic* con-tact, which, in the MdS, is at the root of the tragic finite thought of the finite. Thus, in spite of Hermann Broch's contempt for the figure of the aestheticizing literary man - whose "closed system", which provides a justification of crime in the foundationless horizon of the nihilistic "value vacuum", is identified with radical evil (MDT, 123) - his «man in his uttermost abstraction» bears striking affinities with de Sade's *objects* of sexual

<sup>60</sup> G. Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, VII, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 634.

<sup>61</sup> My italics. It is significant that, around 1949, Bataille conceived a book on Camus' moral and political thought, a part of which should have been devoted, in the author's intention, to a comparative analysis of de Sade and Camus, touching upon their common rejection of terror. See, also, the article « La morale du malheur: *La Peste* » in *Critique* (June-July 1947, n. 13-14).

<sup>62</sup> Bataille, op. cit., p. 634. My italics.

pleasure/murder: it is precisely in this *abstracting* logic, visible in both de Sade and Broch's (diametrically opposed) writings, that we grasp the link between what Camus addresses as «total negation» – resumed in de Sade's notion of freedom as limitless destructiveness, culminating in total crime - and «absolute affirmation» – embodied by Broch's quest for an «earthly absolute», and redemption from death as radical evil (MDT, 149).

As the French author points out,

[le] succès de Sade à notre époque s'explique par un rêve qui lui est commun avec la sensibilité contemporaine : la revendication de la liberté totale, et la *déshumanisation opérée à froid par l'intelligence*. La *réduction de l'homme en objet d'expérience*, le règlement qui précise les rapports de la volonté de puissance et de l'homme objet, le *champ clos de cette monstrueuse expérience*, sont des leçons que les théoriciens de la puissance retrouveront, lorsqu'ils auront à organiser le temps des esclaves. (HR, 457) [My italics]

If de Sade's work anticipates *in fiction* the de-humanizing techniques operated in the totalitarian camps, and systematically employed by totalitarian terror, Camus' reflection on Dandyism and Romantic Satanism brings to our attention another aspect, pointed out in Arendt's text on Hermann Broch, namely, the relationship between the artistic creation of an aesthetic unity and the justification of crime («the real seductiveness of evil, the quality of seduction in the figure of the devil, is primarily an aesthetic phenomenon», MDT, 122), and a certain «goût de l'apocalypse» (HR, 464), which the French author traces at the core of the 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary experience.

The dandy represents, in Camus' view, the most original figure of the Romantic defiance of moral and divine law: in the works of Blake, Vigny, Lermontov, Baudelaire, Lacenaire, and Lassailly, dandyism is inseparable from Satanism, identified with the apology and exercise of evil and murder as a revolt against God's violence and injustice – «Le héros romantique s'estime donc contraint de commettre le mal, par nostalgie d'un *bien impossible*» (HR, 459). The dandy's Luciferian obstination in (the imagination of) evil is rooted in the repetition of injustice and suffering (HR, 460-461) in order to secure meaning to (his) existence.

The romantic «*métaphysique du pire*» (HR, 461) is grounded on a solitary experience of suffering, which authorises all kinds of excess (HR, 460): it is not «une *communion*, moins encore une *construction*». <sup>63</sup> The highest value in the romantic constellation being *frenzy* (*frénésie*), «la terrible *exaltation* d'une action brève et dévorante» (Id.) finds its ultimate meaning in *apocalypse*: «La frénétique ivresse et, à la limite, le *beau crime* épuisent alors en

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<sup>63</sup> Ms Char, E, 1638, note to p. 460. My italics.

une seconde tout le sens d'une vie» (Id.). The dandy's aesthetic indulging in evil and murder («Le mélodrame sanglant et le roman noir triomphent. », Id.),

délivre [...], et à moindres frais, ces appétits affreux de l'âme que d'autres satisferont dans les camps d'extermination. (HR, 460).

What is interesting to point out is that at the roots of this attitude, Camus traces the notion of fatality, which is precisely the *exclusion of value judgements*, replaced by the « [...] "C'est ainsi" qui excuse tout, sauf le Créateur, responsable unique de ce scandaleux état de fait» (HR, 458), which justifies the Romantic hero's confusion of good and evil.

Fatalism, in the author's view, goes together with the Romantic ideal end of man's (self)-deification:

Un baroque romantique [...] prétend que le but de toute vie intellectuelle est de devenir Dieu. Ce romantique, au vrai, *est un peu en avance sur son temps*. Le but n'était alors que d'égaliser Dieu, et de se maintenir à son niveau. On ne le détruit pas, mais, par un effort incessant, on lui refuse toute soumission. Le dandysme est une *forme dégradée de l'ascèse*. (HR, 461). [My italics]

The dandy's murderous effort to parallel divine injustice with human injustice (HR, 459) cannot be confused with the tragic *ascèse* of Camus' artist: in the haphazardness of a finite existence shattered by God's violence, «[le] dandy *crée sa propre unité par des moyens esthétiques*. Mais c'est une *esthétique de la singularité et de la négation*. « Vivre et mourir devant un miroir », telle était, selon Baudelaire, la devise du dandy.» (HR, 462). The aesthetic unity is that of the character, *le personnage*, as opposed to the *person*, a term which also belongs to the theatrical constellation, but which acquires a precise moral connotation both in Camus and Arendt's work:

Le romantisme démontre en effet que la révolte a partie liée avec le dandysme ; l'une de ses directions est le *paraître*. Dans ses formes conventionnelles, le dandysme avoue la nostalgie d'une morale. Il n'est qu'un honneur dégradé en point d'honneur. Mais *il inaugure en même temps une esthétique qui règne encore sur notre monde, celle des créateurs solitaires, rivaux obstinés d'un Dieu qu'ils condamnent*. A partir du romantisme, la tâche de l'artiste ne sera plus seulement de créer un monde, ni d'exalter la beauté pour elle seule, mais aussi de définir une attitude. L'artiste devient alors modèle, il se propose en exemple : *l'art est sa morale*. Avec lui commence l'âge des *directeurs de conscience*. (HR, 463) [My italics]

Against the backdrop of the post-metaphysical horizon disclosed by modern European nihilism, in which Camus conducts his analysis, (anti-)metaphysical revolt and dandyism are seen as being rooted in a common anti-Platonic reduction of being to appearance. But dandysm remains, nevertheless, anchored to a foundational perspective, traceable in its

«nostalgie d'une morale», in which art takes over, and fills, the absolute space left vacant by a contested, but yet not "murdered" (HR, 461), God.<sup>64</sup>

The dandy as *personnage* is the "aesthetic", *i.e.*, fictional, product of the artist's metaphysical revolt against the injustice and dispersedness of divine creation (HR, 462). The metaphysical refusal of finitude (identified with God's "bad" unity) drives the dandy's effort toward the absolutisation of sheer appearance (*paraître*), and to the sacrifice of "reality" to the internal consistency of his own system - «[d]issipé en tant que *personne privée de règle*, [le dandy] sera cohérent en tant que *personnage*» (HR, 462).

The opposition «*personne*»/«*personnage*» is amplified by the reference to the dandy's incessant search for a public that will secure his own existence, that will *create* him by reflecting his own image as in a mirror: «un *personnage* suppose un *public*; le dandy ne peut se poser qu'en s'opposant. Il ne peut s'assurer de son existence qu'en la retrouvant dans le visage des autres. *Les autres sont le miroir.*» (Id.).<sup>65</sup>

It is not excellence or greatness, which result from words and deeds in the plural *appearing-together*, but *splendour* which is the mark of the dandy's attitude (Id.), as the *solitary* effort to provoke the attention of the public, which is reduced to an abstract and monolithic entity - «Sa vocation est dans la *singularité*, son perfectionnement dans le *surenchère*» (Id.).

The image of the mirror – which traditionally belongs to the constellation of knowledge, and figures in the rich metaphorical texture of the absurd in the MdS as that which «*fait apparaître l'étranger*» (MdS, 108), disclosing the tragic awareness of the fictional or illusory character of man's identity - <sup>66</sup> exposes, from the 1943 notebooks onwards, the danger inherent in the "aesthetic" de-foundation brought forth by the absurd thought, which lies precisely in the absolutisation of the fiction itself, and in the withdrawal from the *con-tact* with reality:

L'absurde, c'est l'homme tragique devant un miroir (Caligula). Il n'est donc *pas seul*. Il y a le germe d'une satisfaction ou d'une complaisance. Maintenant, il faut supprimer le miroir. (CII, 94).

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<sup>64</sup> « Le dandysme, quel qu'il soit, est toujours un dandysme par rapport à Dieu. L'individu, en tant que créature, ne peut s'opposer qu'au créateur. Il a besoin de Dieu avec qui il poursuit une sorte de sombre coquetterie. Armand Hoog a raison de dire que, *malgré le climat nietzschéen de ces œuvres, Dieu n'est pas encore mort.* » (HR, 465). [My italics]

<sup>65</sup> «Toujours en rupture, en marge, il force les autres à le créer lui-même, en niant leur valeurs. Il joue sa vie, faute de pouvoir la vivre.» (HR, 462). The absolutization of the fictional dimension of the character is visible in the fact that, in Camus's words, in solitude, that is, without a public – without a mirror to reflect his image – the dandy is *no-body* («Être seul pour le dandy revient à n'être rien», Id.).

<sup>66</sup> M.-L. Audin, *op. cit.*, p. 206-ff.

It is significant that Camus employed the same image in the Introduction to the 1951 philosophical essay:

D'une certaine manière, l'absurde qui prétend exprimer *l'homme dans sa solitude* le fait vivre devant un *miroir*. Le déchirement initial risque alors de devenir confortable. La plaie qu'on gratte avec tant de sollicitude finit par donner du plaisir. [...] Si donc il était légitime de tenir compte de la sensibilité absurde, de faire le diagnostic d'un mal tel qu'on le trouve en soi et chez les autres, il est impossible de voir dans cette sensibilité, et dans le nihilisme qu'elle suppose, rien d'autre qu'un point de départ, une critique vécue, l'équivalent, sur le plan de l'existence, du doute systématique. Après quoi, *il faut briser les jeux fixes du miroir et entrer dans le mouvement irrésistible par lequel l'absurde se dépasse lui-même* (HR, 418-419). [My italics]

The reference to Caligula, the «*empereur artiste*» (T, 1753) of the tragedy of the same name, acquires a peculiar relevance in the 1943 *Carnets*: in the 1939 version of the manuscript of the play, the redaction of which runs parallel to that of the MdS, Caligula resigns the finite *aesthetic* awareness, rooted in love as sensual touching-upon, which is shattered by the sudden death of his sister and lover Drusilla:

Mais aujourd'hui *son corps pour moi n'est pas plus réel que l'image de ce miroir. Ce dialogue de ce miroir à moi, et de son ombre à moi, si tu savais, Caesonia, l'affreuse envie que j'ai de le jouer. [...] vivre, c'est le contraire d'aimer. [...] Le beau spectacle, Caesonia. Et il me faut du monde, des spectateurs, des victimes et des coupables. [...] Je veux qu'on fasse entrer les condamnés à mort. Du public, du public, Caesonia. Je leur montrerai ce qu'ils n'ont jamais vu [...] – Je leur montrerai un homme libre [...]* (T, 1760-1) [My italics]

We can trace some important affinities between the dandy's "aestheticizing" *attitude* and Caligula reduction of life to a «*beau spectacle*», in which the Emperor plays his pedagogic role with murderous coherence.<sup>67</sup> The figure of Caligula is essential, in my view, to elucidate the link and the transition from the figure of the dandy to Camus' political reflection on the 20<sup>th</sup> century policies of terror.

Remembering their first encounter in Oran in 1941, the anti-fascist writer Nicola Chiaromonte recalls his own perplexities, when the young Camus confided to him that he was writing a tragedy on the Roman Emperor. In his view, the analogies between Caligula's tyranny and the 20<sup>th</sup> century forms of total dominion could not justify the interest of a modern, politically-concerned writer.<sup>68</sup> I suggest that the political meaning of the tragedy *Caligula* transcends the analogical level: its focus is not on *forms of government* (on the affinities between ancient and modern tyrannies, in the specific case), but on the *logic* that

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<sup>67</sup> «J'ai décidé d'être logique. [...] J'ai le pouvoir. J'exterminerai les contradicteurs et les contradictions.» (T, 1757).

<sup>68</sup> «Camus mi disse allora che stava scrivendo una tragedia su Caligola, e io cercai di immaginare che cosa potesse attirare uno scrittore moderno in un tal soggetto: la tirannia sfrenata? Ma la tirannia contemporanea non mi sembrava aver molto in comune con quella di un Caligola» (in N. Chiaromonte, *Albert Camus*, in "Tempo Presente", gennaio 1960, raccolto in N.C., *Il tarlo della coscienza*, Bologna, Mulino 1992, pp. 219.)

governs what is also addressed in Arendt's essay on Broch as the "aestheticizing" drives at the core of contemporary politics.

It is significant, in this respect, that, in his 1949, notes for the project of a book on *Albert Camus, la Morale et la Politique*, Georges Bataille would bring together the figure of Caligula and that of de Sade as illustrations of the position of evil «comme souveraineté de fait dans la vie». Both shatter the utilitarian logic of «le monde qui rassure, qui est à la mesure de l'homme»,<sup>69</sup> bringing about revolt as transgression of law *qua* law.<sup>70</sup>

In his 1947 critical review, *La morale du malheur: "La Peste"*, Bataille drew a strong contrast between what he defined as *la morale du malheur ou morale déprimée* of Camus' novel *La Peste*, published with an immediate widespread success in 1947, and the *morale de la révolte* of the tragedies, «dont l'œuvre la plus belle est sûrement *Le Malentendu* (mais la plus riche de sens *Caligula*) », <sup>71</sup> the former resting precisely on the immunitarian «souci de protection de la vie» (resumed by the notion of *santé*),<sup>72</sup> governed by the logic of utility, as the effort to pre-serve life against suffering and death (*malheur*).

As legal power is the institutional embodiment of that «soif de sécurité», which is the effort to ban murder and death from the body politic, in order to secure *happiness* (le *bonheur*) by sanctifying the limits of human action, the *morale de la révolte* is seen as expressing the limitless tragedy of sovereign thought (*la pensée souveraine*) which destroys the logic of the object – *de la chose, du sérieux, du devoir, de la morale* – at the very core of the poetic principle of creation,<sup>73</sup> by consecrating that of *le jeu – du désir, du rien*.<sup>74</sup>

Now, it is clear that, in his "aestheticizing" «*ascèse dégradée*», the Emperor-Artist Caligula, like de Sade or the dandy, turns his art into a moral system, the (Nietzschean) "innocent" game (*jeu*) into a new murderous law, man into an *object* to be manipulated. Caligula becomes the Plague to eradicate death and suffering,<sup>75</sup> namely, the finiteness of the

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<sup>69</sup> G. Bataille, *ŒC*, op. cit., p. 413. My italics.

<sup>70</sup> «La révolte [du héros tragique] est toujours la contestation d'un pouvoir légal et celle de la légitimité de la loi» (Ivi, p. 10).

<sup>71</sup> G. Bataille, «La morale du malheur: *La Peste*», *Critique*, Juin-Juillet 1947, n. 13-14, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> «La valeur n'est pas celle que l'insoumission, la révolte fonde: c'est la «santé», le fait d'éviter la mort sans souffrir», Ivi, p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> «L'objectivité de Dieu répond à ceux qui demandent *l'origine des choses*: le cordonnier fit la chaussure et de même Dieu créa le monde», G. Bataille, op. cit., p. 408.

<sup>74</sup> G. Bataille, op. cit., p. 409.

<sup>75</sup> As Bataille points out, «c'est justement la crainte du malheur qui réintroduit dans l'État la passion nécessaire au meurtre. Le souci du malheur est générateur de toute morale haineuse, qui donne la bonne conscience au procureur et au juge. Il est surtout l'origine des terreurs légales [...]» - of the legalization of violence and murder at work in (totalitarian) terror, as well as in the concepts of just war and death penalty (G. Bataille, «La morale du malheur: *La Peste*», art.cit., p. 15).



human condition: his quest for the moon represents the absolute attempt to realize the definitive unity (*bonheur*) "aesthetically".<sup>76</sup>

What is interesting to bring into focus here is the relationship, highlighted by Camus in his 1951 essay, between the "aestheticizing" attitude of the dandy and the 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionaries («les "conquérants" du XXe siècle», HR, 464). The figure of the Romantic dandy – of which Byron and Shelley offer the clearest example – illustrates the transition of metaphysical revolt from «le monde du *paraître*» to «le monde du *faire*» (Id.):

Les étudiants français de 1830 et les décembristes russes apparaîtront alors comme les inclinations les plus pures d'une révolte d'abord solitaire et qui cherche ensuite, à travers les sacrifices, le chemin d'une réunion. Mais, inversement, *le goût de l'apocalypse* et de la *vie frénétique* se retrouvera chez nos révolutionnaires. La *parade* des procès, le *jeu terrible* du juge d'instruction et de l'accusé, la *mise en scène* des interrogatoires, laissent parfois deviner une tragique *complaisance au vieux subterfuge* par lequel le révolté romantique, refusant ce qu'il était, se condamnait provisoirement au paraître dans le malheureux espoir de conquérir un être plus profond.(HR, 464). [My italics]

The strongly negative connotation of the metaphoric constellation of theatricality, employed in this passage to convey the transition from *appearing* into *doing*, from the aesthetic sphere of artistic creation into the political sphere of revolutionary action, brings forth two related remarks: firstly, that revolutionary action was sought by the Romantic dandys as a (sacrificial) means of recovering some kind of contact (*reunion*) beyond the solitary movement of metaphysical revolt – in order, that is, for the "aesthetic" creation to acquire some "reality"; secondly, that the «*goût de l'apocalypse*» and the frenzy, which characterises the latter, finally succeeded in dissolving the *aesthetic* and pluralistic sphere of the political *acting-together*.

The political sphere is, thus, "aestheticized", emptied of its sensory, contingent, and risky elements, and is devoided of *ex-istence*. Hence the clear pejorative sense of the theatrical metaphors ("parade", "jeu terrible", "mise en scène", "subterfuge") applied to the human activity of judgement, whose institutional locus is in trial, and which, in Camus' understanding, is inseparable from an *aesthetic* thought/appraisal of man qua *person* responsible for his conduct, as opposed to man as an abstract *silhouette*.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> In this identification of Caligula/Emperor, Law and Plague we can, finally, *boucler le boucle* of our argument, by linking the *Caligula* to the 1944-45 notebooks, analysed earlier on, where the Plague is precisely related to what Camus addresses as the problem of abstraction, in other words, of the loss of *aesthetic* awareness, which is the mark of a finite or *tragic* thought of the finite.

<sup>77</sup> We observe an analogous negative connotation of the metaphoric constellation of theatricality applied to judgment in the opening pages of Hannah Arendt's report on Eichmann's trial.

In order to elucidate Camus' reference to the «*goût de l'apocalypse*» inherent in the dandy's aestheticizing attitude,<sup>78</sup> I will now proceed to investigate a source, which recurs in both the French author's political reflection and in Hannah Arendt's 1951 study on totalitarianism, which played a pivotal part in the development of Camus' definition of nihilism after 1947.

### 2.3.2. REVOLUTIONARY "APOCALYPTISM" AND "ABSOLUTE" NIHILISM.

In the *Carnets*, we find a considerable amount of notes, taken around 1947, simultaneously, and in preparation to, the writing of *Les Justes* and *L'Homme Révolté*, on the Russian intelligentsia till the Bolshevik Revolution (C II, 224-229). The comparative study of the notebooks has allowed to trace the source for Camus' notes at that date in the 1938 essay by the Russian philosopher Nikolaj Berdiaev, *Sources et sens du communisme russe*.<sup>79</sup>

In the scholarly critique of Camus' political writings the work of Berdiaev is usually noticeably overlooked;<sup>80</sup> indeed his name is almost completely absent from even the general studies on the political debate of the thirties and forties.<sup>81</sup>

What I suggest is that Berdiaev's definition of Nihilism, and his emphasis on the apocalyptic drives of the Russian movement, as passing over in the theories of Russian revolutionaries, and culminating in the Soviet system as «*totalitarian state*», offers some important insights into the continuity, suggested by Camus in HR, between the aestheticizing

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<sup>78</sup> One of its illustrations is the Russian writer Lermontov, quoted by Camus in HR, 460.

<sup>79</sup> For the comparative analysis of Camus' notebooks and Berdiaev's work see my article «*Du nihilisme aux théocraties totalitaires: Les sources et le sens du communisme russe de Berdiaev dans les Carnets d'Albert Camus*», *Cahiers Albert Camus 20, La revue des lettres modernes*, Paris, Minard, 2004, pp. 175-195.

<sup>80</sup> While it has been widely accepted that the Russian writer was an authoritative source for Camus' plays and essays in the late forties, the impact of his reflections on the Russian intelligentsia and the Communist Revolution on Camus' political thought has not yet been seriously explored (See Viggiani's intervention in *Albert Camus 1980, Second International Conference*, ed. R. Gay-Crosier, University Presses Florida, Gainesville, 1980, 218-219; and Paul Archambault "Albert Camus et la métaphysique chrétienne", in *Albert Camus 1980*, op. cit., 211-219).

<sup>81</sup> A leading figure, with Simon Frank and Shestov, of the neo-Idealistic movement, which played an important role in the philosophical and religious ferments in Russia between 1890 and the beginning of the XXth century, Berdiaev was exiled in 1922, and lived first in Berlin, and then in Paris from 1924 onwards. Here, he revived his philosophical Academy and the review *Put*, and came close to Jacques Maritain and the intellectual circle of *Esprit*. During his exile, Berdiaev published two of his major works, *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski*, first appearing in Russian in 1923, and translated into French in 1929, and *Un Nouveau Moyen-Âge*, published in Berlin in 1924, and in French in 1930. A year before being appointed professor at the Sorbonne in 1939, Gallimard published his *Sources et sens du Communisme russe*, in which the author develops his thesis of a connection between Nihilism, Russian Socialism and Stalin's "Totalitarian" State.

attitude of the dandy and the totalitarian revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thus shedding further light into Camus' political reflection.

In *Les sources et le sens du communisme russe*, Berdiaev defines nihilism as a purely Russian phenomenon (SS, 82). That is to say, he distinguishes a strict sense of the term - used to describe the Russian intellectual movement of the 1860's, represented by Pissarev - from a broader sense, including, in Berdiaev's view, all the Russian social movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and culminating in Lenin's political thought.<sup>82</sup> Nihilism is identified with the negation of God, and all spiritual, theoretical and moral dimensions of human existence («l'esprit, l'âme, les idées, les normes et les valeurs suprêmes...», Id.). However, as Berdiaev points out, this remains nonetheless an ultimately religious phenomenon, stemming from orthodoxy, as a *deviate ascesis* («ascèse déviée») or an ascesis without the grace (SS, 83):

*Au fond le nihilisme est l'ancien apocalypitisme russe avec un signe négatif. Il en a tous les caractères: révolte contre l'injustice de l'histoire, contre le mensonge de la civilisation, aspiration vers la fin des temps historiques, avènement d'une nouvelle vie extra-historique et supra-historique (SS, 84).*<sup>83</sup>

Berdiaev poses nihilism as the source of the Russian revolutionary ideas of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Pissarev, but also Tchernichevski, Dobrolioubov, and later in a more extreme form, in Netchaev, which are taken over at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Lenin and Bolshevism.

In order to understand Berdiaev's argument in *Sources*, it is useful to go back to another text, a collection of essays by Berdiaev, Frank, Struve and others, published in Moscow in 1909 under the title *Vechi*. The various essays collected in *Vechi* are complementary and extraordinarily homogeneous in their intentions and conclusions: this allows us to clarify certain aspects of Berdiaev's definition of nihilism in *Sources* through a comparison with his 1909 article on "*Philosophical truth and the truth of the intelligentzia*", but also with S. Frank's illuminating essay on "*The ethics of nihilism*", which shows many similarities with the former's later argument.

In *Vechi*, nihilism is defined as the negation of absolute or objective values, that is, of the transcendent values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. As a Russian phenomenon, it coincides with a moralistic divinization of the material, "earthly" happiness of the majority of

<sup>82</sup> «Il y a des racines nihilistiques chez Lénine [...] *Nous sommes tous nihilistes*" disait Dostoïevski» (SS, 82).

<sup>83</sup> Berdiaev had already developed this idea in an essay published in Russian in 1918, *Duchi russoj revoljucij*, in which he highlighted the relation between nihilism and Russian traditional "apocalypitism". If the former is total negation - of the state, of morals, and of culture, art and science - and the latter is the expectation of the end of the world; apocalypitism turns into nihilism as the negation of the highest values of the historical and earthly sphere, so that nihilism is apocalyptic, in that it entails the expectation of the end. In Russian thought, states Berdiaev, these two elements - the nihilistic and the apocalyptic - are closely intertwined, and very difficult to separate.

the people - that is, in Frank and Berdiaev's terms, with the absolutisation of relative and purely *subjective* values and interests (V, 179).<sup>84</sup>

It is precisely in the light of this "divinization" of (material) happiness that, as Berdiaev points out in 1909 and again in 1938, the problem of nihilism coincides, and is founded on the problem of evil. In *Sources*, the russian "apocalyptic" nihilism stems from *contempt of the world* as evil, and is defined as an exit from the «kingdom of evil» («Qu'est-ce en effet que le nihilisme, sinon une issue hors d'un monde qui croupit dans le mal [...]?»), SS, 86), identified with the historical world of despotism, servitude, and social injustice (V, 24, 27).

The link between nihilism and the socialist revolutionary ideas of the Russian intelligentsia is spelt out clearly by Frank: if life has no *objective* meaning - a sense *in se* («*intrinsic*») of life - the only real and necessary end of existence is the satisfaction of material (*subjective*) needs. However, in the Russian intelligentsia the nihilistic disbelief and rejection of metaphysical principles is combined with a *moralistic* and ascetic abnegation of the individual to the «empirical» - i.e., conditioned and subjective - principle of the «good of the people». The interest of the people is divinized, and everything that may distract from this exclusive end must be destroyed as evil (V, 177).

We are faced here, in Frank's definition, with a "religion" of socialism, that is, with an optimistic *faith* in the radical realization of an ultimate and absolute happiness: however, the «good of the people» is not the love for the immediate and proximate, an altruistic feeling towards living men, but the love for an abstract ideal (Mankind) - the «far away» (V, 181-2).<sup>85</sup>

Now, as Frank points out in 1909, this love for future mankind turns into hatred for present men, and the passion for the realization of an earthly paradise develops into a passion for sheer destruction. The populist and socialist intelligentsia becomes revolutionary *in a moral, rather than political sense*: destruction becomes the only means to remove the historical events hindering the realization of their moral and social Ideal (V, 184). The nihilistic theory of happiness, thus, leads to a metaphysical absolutization of the principle of destruction. This recurs in *Sources* (SS, 74-77) where Berdiaev identifies Russian nihilism as an eschatological movement aiming at the destruction of the historical order, and at the rebuilding of a new one that will emancipate human beings.

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<sup>84</sup>Populism is pointed out as the ethical drive of the Russian intelligentsia, dominated in an exclusive and dispotical way by the *utilitarian-moralistic* end of the "good of the people" (V, 16). Frank talks about a "utilitarian nihilism" or a "nihilistic utilitarianism", which erases all transcendent principles, and absolutizes "the satisfaction of the subjective needs in life" (V, 178). The Russian intelligentsia is in this sense *nihilistic*, in that it does not conceive anything outside the love for justice and the people, its only aim being human happiness.

<sup>85</sup> SS, 56-57.

What emerges from *Vechi* and Berdiaev's later works is a definition of nihilism that has strong escathological or *messianic* implications. In *Duchi*, Berdiaev highlights the '*hubris*' of the russian *nihilistic-moralists* who have the presumption of loving men more than God, and of being able to correct God's plan in their favour (SRR, 35). Here he echoes Frank's definition of Russian «*moralistic nihilism*», as a contradictory combination of an absence of principles with a personal ascetism and faith in a universal utilitarianism (V, 190): in that it rejects the divine order of the world, nihilism represents, in Berdiaev's view, a hubristic thought that judges God's creation in the name of the superior value of justice.

Both Berdiaev and Frank insist on the co-implication of nihilism and atheism in the thought of the Russian intelligentsia since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: God as the creator of this world does not exist, because if He did, He could not be but evil (SS, 77). However, the Russian *nihilistic-atheistic* revolt against God is still a *religious* phenomenon.

Founded on a total love for justice, it finds its extreme expression in the fanaticism and intolerance of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia (SS, 78). This latter is at the same time nihilistic and idealistic in that it replaces the transcendent idea of the Judaeo-Christian tradition with an earthly ideal (human happiness and emancipation), which becomes the new object of their dogmatic belief. Nihilism can therefore be defined as an «*ascèse orthodoxe transposé*» (SS, 116), a pseudo-religious phenomenon, or even a reversed religion (SRR, 32).<sup>86</sup>

The echoes of Nietzsche's posthumous fragments on nihilism dated 1886, and in particular of the affinity between socialism and Christian tradition betrays the German philosopher's profound and widespread influence among the Russian thinkers.<sup>87</sup>

Now, according to Mihajlov, Dostoevsky's influence on Russian philosophers is even more significant.<sup>88</sup> In *Duchi*, Dostoïevski is the author who has analysed Russian apocalyptic

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<sup>86</sup> This idea is confirmed by Frank, who goes as far as to define the Russian intellectual as a «militant monk of the nihilistic religion of material welfare» (V, 191).

<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche, F., *Al di là del bene e del male - Scelta di frammenti postumi (1885-1886)*, a cura di G. Colli e M. Montinari, Mondadori, 392 (Fr. 2, 127). As Glatzer Rosenthal points out, «Nietzsche's influence in Russia was profound, widespread, and enduring» (NR, 3), and that his work had been translated into Russian since 1898. It was precisely in 1909 - the date of the appearance of *Vechi* - that the full academic edition of his complete works was planned, and one of the editors was the philosopher Simon Frank» (NR, 11). Thus Nietzsche was a crucial figure in the Russian philosophical and religious "renaissance" of the 1890's, and his thought inspired the neo-idealistic reflections of the "legal Marxists" - Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Struve, and Frank (NR, 18). In an important collection, *Problems of Idealism* (1902), Berdiaev dedicated a long article to Nietzsche, «The problem of ethics in the light of philosophical Idealism»; and Frank produced an essay on «Friedrich Nietzsche and the ethics of love of distant and remote» (INR, 140). However, as Mihajlov points out, «Shestov, Berdiaev, Frank [...] all read and reread Dostoevsky before anyone began to read Nietzsche in Russia». (Mihajlov, Mihajlo, "The Great Catalyzer: Nietzsche and Russian Neo-Idealism", in B. Glatzer-Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, op. cit., p. 139). Nietzsche himself «studied Dostoevsky especially intensely at the very last stage of his life while he was contemplating nihilism. Nietzsche even made an abstract of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (...)» (Ivi, p. 138).

Nihilism. The novelist revealed how the problem of the Russian Revolution coincided with the nihilistic and atheistical question of the Tower of Babel, built without God not in order to reach the skies, but to pull the skies down to earth (SRR, 33). In this sense, the problem of socialism is the apocalyptic search towards an end that would redeem everything.

In his critical study on the work of Dostoyevsky - published in Russian in 1923 and translated into French in 1929 under the title *L'esprit de Dostoïevski* - Berdiaev described Ivan, the character from the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, as nothing less than «the philosopher of Russian nihilism and atheism» (SRR, 34), who embodies the atheistic and rationalistic revolt against God's creation in the name of the innocent's suffering. In the same book, he also highlights the idea of Russian Socialism as a «laic catholicism» (CD, 141), referring to Dostoyevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*.

For Dostoyevsky, in both the Catholic Inquisition and the Russian socialists, individual freedom is incompatible with the eudemonistic ideal of universal happiness (CD, 190). The Grand Inquisitor knows the weaknesses of humankind and is aware that its happiness lies in the negation of freedom of will: according to Berdiaev, through this figure Dostoyevsky was denouncing not so much the papist theocracy of the past but the socialist religion of the present (FM, 281).

This idea of a link between the traditional religion and the nihilistic-Socialism of the Russian intelligentsia is stressed again in chapter IV of *Sources*, where Dostoyevsky's name of recurs again as the prophet of the Russian Revolution, who foresaw the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (SS, 166). According to René Fülöp-Miller, in the 1927 *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*:

Dostoïevski [...] in his "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor", which now seems prophetic, intuitively grasped and developed the identity between the peculiar variety of socialism long cherished in Russia and the ideas of the Jesuits. Dostoïevski found the same spirit in this Socialism and in Jesuitism. [...] Berdiaev has shown in an excellent analysis of "Dostoïevski's *Weltanschauung*" that this writer found in the nihilistic and terroristic socialism of this time an idea which was identical with that at the root of the Catholic Inquisition.<sup>89</sup>

It comes as no surprise to find this idea in Camus' HR: «Le socialisme moderne tend à créer une forme de *jésuitisme séculier*, à faire de tous les hommes des instruments» (E, 488-

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<sup>88</sup>The «Nietzschean "revaluation of all values", "beyond good and evil", his radical nihilism and theomachy, even the idea of a "superman", can all be easily found in Dostoevsky's novels [...]. Almost all of the Russian neo-Idealists «wrote a major work about Dostoevsky, and were intimate with Dostoevsky's "Nietzschean" ideas well before they became acquainted with Nietzsche himself» (M. Mihajov, "The Great Catalyzer: Nietzsche and Russian Neo-Idealism", in B. Glatzer-Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, op. cit., p. 132, 139).

<sup>89</sup> René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, op. cit., pp. 280-281.

9).<sup>90</sup> Camus was a passionate reader not only of Nietzsche but also of Dostoyevsky, whom he had read through the critical interpretation of Shestov (E, 1625). This emerges clearly in the chapter on metaphysical revolt («Le refus du salut») in HR, where he discusses Ivan Karamazov's argument, and sees with Berdiaev the starting point of *modern nihilism* in his protest against evil.

Ivan rejects God's creation in the name of justice, and refuses the pivotal principle of Christian morality, that is immortality (HR, 467), - «Je crois qu'il n'y a pas de vertu sans immortalité» (*Id.*). However, if there is no immortality, there is no moral law, or distinction between good and evil: if there is no immortality - confirms Berdiaev in his *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski - everything is permitted*.

Glatzer Rosenthal draws the attention to the affinity with Nietzsche's sentence in *The Genealogy of Morals*,<sup>91</sup> where the philosopher states «Nothing is true, everything is permitted» (GM, III, 24). But, as Camus points out, Ivan does not say that there is no truth. He says that if there is a truth, it is not acceptable because it is unjust (HR, 466): his revolt remains within a metaphysical horizon, which is precisely erased in Nietzsche's argument. What Camus seems aware of is that Nietzsche represents a further step in the movement of nihilism, which starts with Karamazov's «Tout est permis» (HR, 467).<sup>92</sup>

What it is interesting to point out is that, where Berdiaev conceives Ivan as the embodiment of *Russian nihilism*, and Dostoyevsky as the prophet of the nihilistic roots of *Russian socialism*, Camus turns Berdiaev's notion of Nihilism from a purely Russian eschatological movement into a cornerstone-event in the Western tradition between the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in 'individual' terrorism (the Russian intelligentsia till the 1905 revolution) and State terrorism (under Fascism, Nazism and Soviet Communism).

As for Berdiaev in his book on Dostoyevsky, nihilism for Camus stems from modern rationalism, what the Russian calls the «Euclidean mind», which brings into question, and thus to final dissolution, traditional theodicy (E, 438). We find in HR the same argument as

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<sup>90</sup>My italics. The source of this quote is not, as we might imagine, Berdiaev, but Nietzsche, who in *Human, All too Human* (aph. 473) points out the terroristic character of Socialism, which outbids all the despotism of the past inasmuch as it expressly aspired to the annihilation of the individual, who appears to it like an unauthorized luxury of nature, destined to be improved into a useful *organ of the community*. Socialism thus desires a more completely subservience of the citizen to the *absolute state* than has ever existed before, through the means of extreme terrorism.

<sup>91</sup>Glatzer Rosenthal, *Nietzsche in Russia*, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>92</sup> Even though it is not possible to trace the unequivocal influence of Berdiaev's work on Camus, it is nonetheless possible to detect many affinities in HR with the Russian's argument in *Sources*. Camus, like Berdiaev, traces in this idea the root of a nihilistic religion that divinises man, and leads to the justification of murder (E, 468-9). And Dostoïevski becomes the "prophet" of this new religion, who foresaw it and announced it through his novels.

Berdiaev's critique of Dostoyevsky: illimited freedom without God only generates illimited despotism.

The rejection of transcendency leads to the absolutisation of this world, and to the deification of man's arbitrary will (CD, 81) in order to realize the moralistic and socialist ideal of man's ultimate emancipation. But this does not culminate historically in the «earthly paradise» of the nihilistic rationalists; instead it opens the way to tyranny and the destruction of personal freedom (CD, 83), illustrated by Chigalev and the Grand Inquisitor.

In HR we find the two sides of the "rational dialectics" of nihilism highlighted both by Frank and Berdiaev, that is, the absolutization and deification of the relative and conditioned sphere of the human, on the one hand, and the destruction of the world in the name of an abstract ideal, on the other.<sup>93</sup>

It is in *Sources* that Berdiaev first develops his thesis of a Gnostic matrix of modern nihilism, stressing the analogy between Bielinski's atheistic theses - but also Bakunin and Lenin's (SS, 77, 91) - with the Gnostic doctrine of the evil God, which the Russian author attributes to Marcion. It is interesting to notice that the name of the Gnostic philosopher Marcion, quoted by Berdiaev in his analysis of Russian nihilistic thought, also recurs in the chapter on metaphysical revolt in l'HR.<sup>94</sup>

Now, in his analysis of the Russian intelligentsia Berdiaev raises the question of the relation between nihilism and contemporary forms of apocalypticism, which draw upon, and are inseparable from the messianic («idolatrours») affirmation of a *totalistic* or *totalitarian* "Weltanschauung". The co-implication of nihilism and *totalism* or *totalitarianism* in

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<sup>93</sup> In discussing the atheistic revolt of Ivan Karamazov, Berdiaev traces the contradictory outcomes of nihilism: on the one hand, it leads to the deification of the world. If there is no divine Sense, there is nothing outside "this world", and man can be the author of the future universal harmony. We find here a principle of metaphysical optimism, already pointed out by Frank in *Vechi*. However, on the other, the nihilistic revolt taken to its extreme consequences culminates in the destruction of the world - *nihil*. The illusoriness of the revolutionary religion of progress is therefore revealed (CD, 152). «La négation - voilà mon dieu!» (SS, 74) states Bielinski. The Gnostic motive of the *annihilatio mundi* is apparent here.

<sup>94</sup> Camus was well acquainted with Gnosticism, and with Marcion in particular, from his graduation thesis in philosophy on *Métaphysique Chrétienne et Néoplatonisme* in 1936 (E, 1255-ff). However, the link between Marcion's Gnosticism and the nihilistic movement of revolt seems to be a later formulation. If it is not possible to say whether Camus borrowed the idea of a relation between the Gnostic contempt of the world and modern Nihilism from Berdiaev alone, there is no doubt that *Sources* - which, as we believe, Camus read in 1947 - confirmed, if not forming the original suggestion in the first place, this thesis in HR. In the Introduction to *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* Eric Voegelin mentions Camus' *L'Homme Révolté* as one of the most comprehensive studies of the post-war years (along with the work of Henri de Lubac) on Gnosticism and the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century movements. As he points out, the interest in the Gnostic roots of modern philosophies (from Positivism, to Hegelianism and Marxism) goes back to the 1930's, namely to Jonas's *Gnosis und Spätantiker Geist*, and von Balthasar's *Prometheus*: he does not mention Berdiaev (See Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Regnery Company, Chicago, 1968, pp. v and 7). In the chapter on "Nihilism, Existentialism and Gnosticism" Volpi focuses on Voegelin's contribution, and praises Camus for having pointed out the gnostic root in the nihilistic principle of the *annihilatio mundi* (Id., 84), but he does not seem to be aware that Berdiaev had already formulated this thesis in 1938 in *Sources* (Volpi, *Il Nichilismo*, Laterza, Bari, 1999).



Berdiaev's work emerges from his definition of the Russian attitude as an «integral affirmation» of a religious kind (SS, 86). This idea is developed in *Sources*, in the pages on Lukacs and the Russian revolutionary attitude:

*Le sens révolutionnaire, c'est la totalité, c'est l'intégralité au regard de chacun des actes de la vie. Le révolutionnaire est celui qui, dans chaque acte particulier accompli par lui, se réfère au tout, à la société entière, se soumet à son universalité. Pour le révolutionnaire, il n'est pas de sphères délimitées, il n'admet pas le morcellement, il n'admet pas l'autonomie de l'action vis-à-vis de la pensée. Le révolutionnaire possède une conception du monde totale où la théorie et la pratique sont organiquement fondues. Le totalisme - c'est le principe fondamental de l'attitude révolutionnaire par rapport à la vie. [...] Car les révolutionnaires russes, même dans le passé, avaient toujours été totalistes ou "totalitaires". La révolution était pour eux à la fois une religion et une philosophie, et non seulement un combat lié aux côtés politique et social de l'existence. (SS, 204-206) [My italics]*

Berdiaev uses the terms *totalistic/totalitarian*, referring to the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia, in the sense of a total or integral conception of the world that embraces every aspect of existence - the fusion of theory and practice, annihilation of the dualism between the private sphere of the individual and the political sphere of the social and political struggle, devoting the life of the single individual to a transcendent aim.<sup>95</sup> Hence, the definition of Russian communism as a *secularised religion*, which replaces the Judeo-Christian God with a rational idea (social collectivity, the mission of the proletariat).<sup>96</sup>

Like Frank (V, 183), Berdiaev emphasizes the philosophical and moral dimension of the notion of *totalism/totalitarianism*, identifying it with the nihilistic faith of the Russian revolutionary. *Totalitarianism* is the urge for an *integral* faith as the moral and political foundation, which stems from a messianic and eschatological form of nihilism: «Le totalitarisme, la nécessité d'une foi intégrale comme bases d'un royaume, répondent aux besoins profonds des instincts religieux et sociaux du peuple russe» (SS, 285).<sup>97</sup>

We must not forget that at the time Berdiaev was writing *Sources et sens du communisme russe* the term 'totalitarianism' was no longer a neutral philosophical concept, but had already entered the intellectual debate with a strong political connotation. Abbott

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<sup>95</sup> Berdiaev clearly stresses the Hegelian root of the term 'totalistic'/totalitarian' in the opening pages of *Sources*, where he focuses on the opposition between the "Occidentalists" and the "Slavophiles", and highlights the influences of German Idealism on the Russian thought of the 1830-40's (SS, 49).

<sup>96</sup> Berdiaev uses the term "totalitarian" to describe the Russian revolutionary conception of existence, as a secularized religious perspective "totally" and idealistically projected towards the realization of a future aim - the communist society without classes, as the ultimate liberation of man from oppression and alienation. Berdiaev talks about a «conception totale du monde» (SS, 220) among Russian intellectuals, which echoes Struve's definition of a Russian "maximalist" conception («all or nothing») of existence (V, 155), and Frank's definition of *revolutionarism* as the moral-social conception of the world of the Russian intelligentsia (V, 183). Camus uses the expression «All or nothing» to describe Ivan Karamazov's revolt against God's unjust order (HR, 467).

<sup>97</sup> My italics.

Gleason highlights the ideological roots of the use of the term 'totalitarianism' in the intellectual debate of the Thirties:

The idea of totality, like the idea of totalitarianism, is ultimately derived from the organic thinking of nineteenth-century Romantics. It was given classic formulation by Hegel and has become central to the whole history of Marxism [...]. There is some overlap between "totality", grasping/understanding the world as an integral whole, and "totalitarianism", making it a whole [...]. It is easy to see how the statism that derived from conservative followers of Hegel set as a goal the absorption of the individual by the state. [...] this project is easily seen in the philosophical system of Giovanni Gentile [...]. But it may also be that the Left Hegelianism of Marx and others pushed humanity in the same direction. As A. Walicki noted in 1983, Marx was quite willing to sacrifice the human beings of his present day for the better ones that the revolution would create. In addition, he "saw no positive value in privacy; his ideal of the total subordination of the private sphere to the public sphere [...] deserves to be classified as a kind of democratic totalitarianism."<sup>98</sup>

Berdiaev highlights the nihilistic and messianic roots of the Bolshevik idea of totality. In chapter VI of his work he traces a clear line of continuity between the nihilists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - Tchernichevski, Netchaev, Tkachev and Jeliabov - and Lenin (SS, 225-6).

Nihilism in this sense coincides with a form of immoralism, which negates all transcendent values and divinizes the political ends of revolution – hence Netchaev's idea, taken over by Lenin, that moral is only what serves the aim of revolution (SS, 119).

Materialism is, in Berdiaev's view, the intellectual expression of this form of nihilism. But, as he had already stressed in *Vechi*, the Russian moralistic need for an integral conception of the world, for an absolute and pseudo-religious truth, entails the opportunistic and utilitarian use of every possible philosophical doctrine that could confirm the social and political interests of the party (V, 16). A disinterested love for truth is reduced among the Russian intelligentsia to a means for social revolution, that is, for the realization of the material happiness of mankind («paradise on earth», V, 21). Thus, the escathological perspective of the Russian nihilistic *tabula rasa* of transcendence betrays an idealistic conception of a *total* system that could unify the theoretical and practical aspects of human life in view of a superior end.

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<sup>98</sup> Gleason, A., *Totalitarianism: the inner history of the Cold War*, op. cit., 9. It is interesting to notice that the expression «total conception of life», used by Berdiaev to describe Russian revolutionary Socialism, also recurs in Giovanni Gentile's definition of Fascism. In the early twenties the Italian philosopher had taken over the use of the notions of 'totality' and 'totalitarianism' in a strong statist sense, to describe the Fascist «all-embracing state which would overcome the state-society divide». The term 'totalitarian' was first introduced in the political debate by Giovanni Amendola in 1923, and soon employed by Liberal opponents of fascism to describe the regime (see Tarchi, "Il Totalitarismo nel dibattito politologico", *Filosofia Politica*, XI, aprile 1997, 63 ff.; I. Kershaw, *Che cos'è il Nazismo?*, op. cit., 41; and S. Forti, *Il totalitarismo*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2001). Berdiaev seems to be aware of these acceptions when he stresses in *Sources* the "totalitarian" absorption of the private in the public sphere, of the individual in the collectivity, realized by Russian Marxism. The author distinguishes a "critical" Marxism from what he defines as the «nouveau marxisme orthodoxe totalitaire» (SS, 209), that is, Bolshevism. «Orthodox» in that it constitutes a philosophy/religion of revolution (SS, 206), Bolshevism is *totalistic* or *totalitarian* in that it propounds an ideal of integrity, of non-dispersal, which involves and unifies every sphere of life.

One of its logical consequences is the idea of man's freedom as "collective", what Camus defines as *total* freedom: «Ce qui existe en Russie, - he notes in his *Carnets* - c'est une liberté collective "totale" et non personnelle. Mais qu'est-ce qu'une liberté totale? On est libre de quelque chose - par rapport à. Visiblement, la limite c'est la liberté par rapport à Dieu. On voit alors clairement qu'elle signifie l'asservissement à l'homme» (CII, 229).

The problem, that Camus synthesizes here, is developed by Berdiaev in chapter VI of *Sources*, where he discusses the problem of freedom in Soviet Union from a Christian viewpoint. Freedom in the Russian «Communist Empire» (SS, 304), argues Berdiaev, is conceived as freedom of action, as the realization of a *creative* drive, which culminates in social reconstruction and revolution:

Mais comprendre ainsi la liberté comme un acte, et ne pas vouloir considérer ce qui intérieurement précède cet acte [...] c'est nier la liberté de conscience, la liberté de pensée. L'une comme l'autre, en effet, sont totalement annihilées dans l'empire communiste russe. La liberté ne s'y entend que dans un sens collectif et non personnel. La personnalité n'a aucune autonomie au regard de la collectivité sociale, il n'existe ni liberté, ni conscience personnelles. La personne humaine n'est libre qu'autant qu'elle s'incorpore à la communauté. (SS, 304)

As Berdiaev points out, this type of community, which absorbs the individual, historically developed in Russia in the form of an extreme statism, in perfect continuity with the ancient Russian tradition of government (SS, 284-5).

The nihilistic-materialistic reduction of the Kingdom of God to the Kingdom of Caesar (SS, 305), and the Idealistic conception of a superior political aim pursued by Russian communism, entails the annihilation of personality and the reduction of the living individual to a means for the building of the communist society: «La morale communiste révolutionnaire se révèle *sans merci envers l'homme concret, vivant, envers le prochain*. L'individu n'est rien qu'un brique indispensable pour la construction de la société communiste, il n'est qu'un *moyen*» (Id.).<sup>99</sup>

The nihilistic and totalitarian character of the Russian Revolution, which, in Berdiaev's, view brings forth the apocalyptic and messianic tendencies of Russian thought, led the author in 1935 to the conclusion that «l'État communiste russe est à l'heure actuelle *le*

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<sup>99</sup> My italics. Berdiaev's stress on the *étatist* implications of the notion of Totalitarianism, and on *totalism* as the ideological dimension of a phenomenon that erases all distinction between private and public sphere, between the individual and the collectivity, shows many affinities with a certain political debate, that developed from Italy (1923) to Germany, and to the English-speaking world during the Thirties. There is a clear affinity, for instance, between Berdiaev's argument in *Sources* and Waldemar Gurian's definition of the Bolshevik state as a "totalitarian state that cannot, like the Fascist, leave particular spheres of life - for example religion - outside its orbit" (*Bolshevism*, New York, Macmillan, 1932), see A. Gleason, *Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 223-224, note 12.

*seul exemple qui existe d'un État "totalitaire", fondé sur la dictature d'une conception du monde, sur une doctrine orthodoxe, imposée à la population entière» (SS, 284).*

In the intellectual debate of the thirties and forties Berdiaev was not the only one to stress a connection between Nihilism and Totalitarianism: as we have already pointed out, in 1938 Hermann Rauschning had published in Zürich *Die Revolution des Nihilismus*, where he offered an interpretation of National Socialism in terms of a movement of «sheer destruction» and «utter nihilism» (RD, xii).

But, while the German writer conceives nihilism as the outcome of a sceptical movement that swept Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; not only does Berdiaev exclude scepticism as a possibility of Russian thought, but he conceives Nihilism as the product of a peculiar combination of the Russian dogmatical and *apocalyptic* attitude with an extreme rationalism (the «*Euclidean Mind*», CD, 151).<sup>100</sup>

Thus conceived, nihilism is the intellectual source of a *totalitarian* conception of the world, which characterizes Russian revolutionary thought from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which culminates into Bolshevism, resulting in the institution under Stalin's regime of a *totalitarian* State.

Berdiaev is surely aware of the similarities with the regimes in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.<sup>101</sup> The difference, in his view, between Fascism and Nazism, on the one hand, and

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<sup>100</sup>Even though both Berdiaev and Rauschning analyse the problem of Nihilism from a Christian point of view - which identifies Nihilism with the *tabula rasa* of spiritual values (*immoralism*), they develop the notion of Nihilism in different directions. For Rauschning, nihilism is «belief in nothing», a total lack of faith and moral disintegration, leading to an unscrupulous cynicism (RD, 99) and to an «unprincipled policy of violence» (RD, 29). The logical consequence of the nihilistic «loss of standards» is the reduction of man to his animal instincts and drives, and the idea of violence as *prima et unica ratio*. Nihilism, in Rauschning's view, entails a radical and all-embracing «permanent revolution of sheer destruction» of the political sphere, disguised under a surface of discipline and order. Rauschning's definition of nihilism allows him to formulate the paradoxical thesis that those policies which come «before the world in the heavy armour of a comprehensive and absolutely binding philosophy» are actually revolutions without a doctrine, or rather, with doctrines that are reduced to «philosophies for show», carefully manufactured by the élite for propaganda purposes, in order to mobilize the masses. Rauschning's focus is on National Socialism in Germany, although in the concluding section of his book he suggests that the notion of nihilism may be extended also to describe the Russian communist regime under Stalin (RD, 60). Rauschning distinguishes Stalinism, as total nihilism, from Leninism - the backbone of which, he argues, is still an unshaken belief in human reason. The anti-metaphysical negation of all traditional and transcendent values is masked, in his view, by the fact that «*political nihilism* has dressed itself up in the paradox of an absolutely binding, more or less rationally argued, philosophy or doctrine realised to a religion» (ibidem). The distance from Berdiaev's definition of nihilism as a religious phenomenon stemming from the anti-sceptical and messianic tendency of Russian spirit in *Sources* is apparent.

<sup>101</sup>In *Sources* he defines Stalinism as «une sorte de fascisme à la manière russe»: «Les caractères essentiels du fascisme sont là ressemblés; le capitalisme d'État, servant de base à l'État total, le nationalisme, le césarisme suscitant une jeunesse militarisée. [...] si Lénine n'était pas encore dictateur, au sens actuel du mot, Staline l'est pleinement» (SS, 292-3). And further down he adds: «La société et l'État communistes prétendent à l'intégralité. Mais seul un Royaume de Dieu peut être intégral, le royaume de César sera toujours partiel. Or, le communisme a érigé le royaume de César en royaume divin, comme a fait le national-socialisme allemand [...]» (SS, 307).

Stalinism, on the other, is precisely that the latter has realized the integral or totalitarian idea «d'une façon plus cohérente et plus complète» (Id.). This is the reason why only the Communist State fully realizes the «totalitarian State», which is according to Berdiaev, a state founded on the dictatorship of a Weltanschauung, on an “orthodoxe” doctrine imposed on the entire population (SS, 284).<sup>102</sup>

That Camus was familiar with *La révolution du nihilisme* is stressed by JeanYves Guérin,<sup>103</sup> and emerges clearly from the chapter on «Terrorisme d'État et la Terreur irrationnelle», where the author discusses the German's thesis of National Socialism as a nihilistic mouvement of pure dynamism (HR, 584). However, Berdiaev's use of the terms *nihilism* and *totalitarian* in SS is clearly the source for his argument on «Le terrorisme individuel» in the section devoted to Historical Revolt, especially dealing with Russian early Nihilism, from Pisarev to Bakounine and Netchaev (HR, 556-570), and in the section on «Terrorisme d'État et la Terreur Rationnelle», where Berdiaev figures,<sup>104</sup> together with Simone Weil's *La condition ouvrière* (HR, 619),<sup>105</sup> and Grenier's *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie*, among the sources for Camus's critique of Marxism.

The relevance of this source is all the more significant if we compare Camus's use of the term “nihilism” in HR with the earlier (*ante* 1947) writings.

In the 1946 article «Le socialisme mystifié» the author still distinguished the «ideologies nihilistes» - by which he refers in particular to Hitlerism, that Camus resumed in the idea «tout est permis, ce qui compte est de réussir» (CAC8, 617) - from the «philosophies qui font de l'histoire un absolu (Hegel, puis Marx: le but étant la société sans classes, tout est

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<sup>102</sup>It is interesting to point out that the very idea of a “totalitarian State” is rejected by Rauschning in 1938: he uses the term ‘totalitarianism’ in the sense of ‘totalism’, but he refuses the equation ‘totalism’=‘statism’, pointing out the contradictory nature of the notion of “totalitarian State” - «Nothing is more mistaken than to talk of a ‘totalitarian State’ or ‘classless society’ within the realm of a nihilist revolution. In the place of these there is the machinery of absolute dominion, recognizing independence in no sphere at all, not even in the private life of the individual; and the *totalitarian collectivity* of the Volksgemeinschaft, the ‘national community’, a euphemism for an atomized, structureless nation» (RD, 28). Rauschning's definition of *total Nihilism* as an omnipervasive movement of destruction is incompatible, in his view, with the idea of State: «There is no true sphere of the State in the Third Reich» (RD, 28). Franz Neumann comes to similar conclusions in the chapter “Is Germany State?” in *Behemoth*. Rauschning's thesis on nihilism is also discussed by Leo Strauss in a conference paper on “*German nihilism*”, presented at the *New School for Social Research* of New York in 1941. Exiled in the USA, and professor at the Faculty of Political and Social Science from 1938 on, Strauss analyses the problem of nihilism, and its identification with National Socialism. Echoing Rauschning he identifies nihilism with the rejection of civilization («the conscious culture of human reason» in science and moral) and with the reduction of man to the «natural» foundation of human existence, culminating in the heroic exaltation of war and conquest, as a Hobbesian “state of nature”. (Leo Strauss, “Il nichilismo tedesco”, in Esposito, Galli, Vitiello, *Nichilismo e Politica*, Laterza, 2000, pp. 111-134).

<sup>103</sup> JeanYves Guérin, “L'Europe entre la démocratie et le totalitarisme”, in *Camus. Portrait de l'artiste en citoyen*, Bourin, Paris, 1993, p. 205.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. E, 603 with SS, 193.

<sup>105</sup> On the influence of Simone Weil's critique of Marxism in *L'Homme Révolté* see Rosen, F., “Marxism, Mysticism, and Liberty. The influence of Simone Weil on Albert Camus”, *Political Theory*, 7(3), 1979.

bon qui y conduit)» (Id.). Both ideologies are seen as justifying political realism and terror by elevating the efficacy of action to an absolute and unconditional end - «Car la terreur ne se légitime que si l'on admet le principe: "La fin justifie les moyens".» (CAC8, 617) - implying the consequent de-valuation of life to sheer expendable means - «[...] le meurtre est légitimé et [...] la vie humaine est considérée comme futile. Voilà le premier problème politique d'aujourd'hui» (CAC8, 612). Camus is, here, still using the adjective *nihilist* in the sense of Rauschnig's loss of belief, or «néant de toute morale» (HR, 508), thus insisting on the relation between *moral nihilism* and power policies or will to power (HR, 511).

Echoes of this use may still be found in the Introduction to HR: «Si notre temps admet aisément que le meurtre ait ses justifications, c'est à cause de *cette indifférence à la vie* qui est la marque du nihilisme» (HR, 416). This nihilistic «indifference to life», in the sense of an absolute negation of all value to human life and personal dignity, already recurred in Camus's LAA to describe the Nazi philosophy of violence (E, 240-241): the affinity with Rauschnig's thesis of the Nazi power policy as the outcome of the nihilistic reduction of man to the instinctual being is apparent.

I would argue, nevertheless, that after 1947 Camus complements the earlier thesis with his appropriation of Berdiaev's thought. In HR Camus identifies nihilism with an absolutist thought (*pensée absolutiste*) (HR, 692): «On peut être nihilistes de deux façons – he writes in 1951 - et chaque fois par une intempérance d'absolu». The Nietzschean motif of the death of God, coupled with Karamazov's *immoralistic* awareness that «if there is no immortality, everything is permitted» (HR, 467), may be traced at the root of a twofold attitude: the superhuman love of this world (*amor fati*), culminating in a unconditional consent to evil, or the *absolute yes* to reality and crime (HR, 509), on the one hand; and the Gnostic contempt of the world, the *absolute no* to the finitude of existence, which leads to the hubristic project of destroying the evil creation to build a new order, on the other.<sup>106</sup>

Now, in both cases we are dealing, in Camus's view, with forms of «*secularized religion*», these nihilistic perspectives culminating logically in the God-making of man, that is, in the negation of all transcendent limit to human power and the deification of human beings, which in both cases justifies terror or «*absolute destruction*» (E, 510).

Like Berdiaev, Camus traces nihilism back to man's revolt against an evil condition, to a revendication, that is, of unity (happiness and eternity) against the unjust finitude of an existence of suffering and death (HR, 508). This metaphysical revendication of unity enters

<sup>106</sup> We can trace a strong affinity with Dostoïevski's two sides of nihilism, *total deification* and *total annihilation* of the world, stressed by Berdiaev in his *L'Esprit de Dostoïevski* (CD, 151-152).

history through the violent means of revolution, «la révolution obéiss[e] au nihilisme», (HR, 649) - «Le nihilisme, étroitement mêlé au mouvement d'une religion déçue, s'achève ainsi en terrorisme» (E, 572). New transcendentless "religions" are defined by Camus the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian ideologies of State terrorism, that is, Nazism and Soviet Communism.

Now, according to Pisier and Bouretz :<sup>107</sup>

Camus rejoint tous ceux penseurs contemporains qu'essayent à penser ensemble stalinisme et nazisme, et particulièrement Hannah Arendt ou Raymond Aron. Singulièrement, dès 1944, Aron proposait, pour analyser ce phénomène double, le concept de « religion séculière » [...]. Même si la construction aronienne est théoriquement plus solide que celle de Camus, il est clair que l'intuition est similaire. On ne sait si Camus avait lu Arendt ou Aron, mais en voyant dans le totalitarisme le jeu d'idéologies qui fonctionnent sur un mode religieux, adapté certes aux exigences d'un univers désenchanté, il rejoint ce dernier (CP, 273-4).

As the two authors point out to confirm their argument, Camus uses the expression «théocratie totalitaire» (HR, 581) to refer to the Communist regime. What they both overlook, in my view, is not only that the formula already figures in, and was plausibly taken from, Berdiaev's *SS* (« Lorsque la politique obéit ainsi aux mots d'ordre de l'orthodoxie, l'État devient une Église. Telle fut la théocratie chrétienne du moyen âge, telle est la "théocratie" soviétique, et il en sera de même pour tout gouvernement qui prétendra au "totalitarisme" », *SS*, 337), but that Camus' use of the same exceeds all attempts to place his analysis among Christian-Conservative (Berdiaev), as well as Liberal (Aron) theories of totalitarianism.

The fact that Camus did not share, as the lyrical essays and the articles of *Combat* prove, the philosophico-political and religious premises of conservative thinkers such as Berdiaev and Rauschnig,<sup>108</sup> makes the appropriation of their arguments all the more significant. The author's choice, in 1950-51, to take over the terminology and diagnosis of Soviet Communism by an eminent outsider in the French intellectual panorama of the '40's and '50's, deserves a particular attention, forcing us to reconsider the critical intentions of the author against the hastily dismissal of the argument of HR as outmoded and dated,<sup>109</sup> or against the socio-political scientists' critique of lack of analytical rigour.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Éveline Pisier, Pierre Bouretz, « Camus et le marxisme », *Camus et la politique*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1986, 269-280.

<sup>108</sup> For both Rauschnig and Berdiaev the revaluation or "return" to Christian values of the tradition is the only possible solution against nihilism and its totalitarian offspring (see Camus' draft for an insert to the first edition of *MdS*).

<sup>109</sup> Chiaromonte defines as « dated » the arguments and conclusions of the essay on revolt, and further on he writes that « Camus formulates against the modern world the same indictment as Tolstoy », in N. Chiaromonte, « Sartre versus Camus: A Political Quarrel », art. cit., p. 147.

<sup>110</sup> According to Pisier and Bouretz, « l'analyse camusienne du totalitarisme pêche quelque peu du côté de la précision méthodique [...] » (*Camus et la politique*, op. cit., p. 274).

Although we have no proof as to whether Camus had read Arendt, we have textual evidence that Arendt had read Camus' work - the 1946 article *The Human Crisis*, which she cites in OT, and HR - but at no time does she suggest that HR might fall into, and be reduced to, the categories of Conservative political theories, which were the object of extensive criticism in her writings of the Fifties.

The point that I want to make is that Camus' analysis of totalitarian ideologies in HR cannot, and is not intended to be read through the lenses of the Political Sciences.<sup>111</sup> The argument for such thesis is provided by Hannah Arendt herself in the 1953 essay *Religion and Politics*. As she points out, in terms that echo Camus' argument on metaphysical revolt in HR, the «interpretation of the new political ideologies [such as Communism] as political, or secular, religions has paradoxically, though perhaps not accidentally, followed Marx's well-known denunciation of all religions as mere ideologies. But its true origin is even older. Not Communism, but atheism, was the first ism to be denounced or praised as a new religion. [...] For atheism was something more than the rather stupid claim to be able to prove the non-existence of God; it was taken to mean an actual rebellion of modern man against God himself. In Nietzsche's words: "If there were gods, how would I bear not to be one".» (EU, 369). Now,

[...] recently the term of "political or secular religion" has been adopted by two quite distinct trends of thought and approach. There is first the historical approach for which a secular religion is quite literally a religion growing out of the spiritual secularity of our present world so that Communism is only the most radical version of an "immanentist heresy". And there is second the approach of the social sciences which treat ideology and religion as one and the same thing because they believe that Communism (or nationalism or imperialism, etc.) fulfills for its adherents the same "function" that our religious denominations fulfill in a free society. (EU, 372)

Arendt's argument is of a particular interest for it can be read *en filigrane* with Camus' *raisonnement absurde* in the first part of the MdS: by defining secularity as the key-feature of the modern world, which coincided with the entering of doubt into «belief no less than non-belief», historically brought about by the rise of natural sciences in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Arendt

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<sup>111</sup> We know, nevertheless, that Camus was well aware of the contemporary debate on Totalitarianism: for HR he had read, among the philosophical works (Heidegger, and Lenin in particular), Halévy's *L'Ère des tyrannies*, and Popper's *The Open Society*. Between 1943 and 1947 he was in touch, and exchanged views with Aron and Nicola Chiaromonte, who represents an important *trait-d'union* with the American debate on Totalitarianism prior to the publication of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Dwight MacDonald and Mary McCarthy). In the post-war years Camus had become close to Arthur Koestler, and the *Carnets* testify of political discussions with Manès Sperber (C II, 185).



argues that modern belief, represented by Kiekegaard («which has leaped from doubt into belief»), and modern atheism («which has leaped from doubt into non-belief»),<sup>112</sup>

[...] have this in common: both are grounded in modern spiritual secularism and have *evaded* its inherent perplexities by *a violent resolution once and for all*. (EU, 369) [My italics]

Secularity is inseparable from a philosophy of doubt, which Arendt traces at the root of modern science, as opposed to the ancient philosophy of *thaumadzein*, or «wonder at that which is as it is» (EU, 370):

Instead of marveling at the miracles of the universe which revealed themselves in their appearance to human senses and reason, we began to suspect that things might not be what they seemed. [...] From this basic distrust of appearances, this doubt that appearance reveals truth, two radically different conclusions could be drawn: Pascal's despair that "les sens abusent la raison par de fausses apparences" from which comes the "recognition of human misery without God", or the modern scientific pragmatic affirmation that truth itself is by no means a revelation but, rather, a process of ever-changing patterns of working hypotheses.

[...] *This suspicion could only rise out of so passionate a desire for security* that men forgot that human freedom of thought and action is possible only under conditions of insecure and limited knowledge, as Kant demonstrated philosophically. (EU,370) [My italics]

Now, her main argument against the identification of Communism as a secular religion, in the sense traditionally ascribed to atheism, is that the former «never tries to answer religious questions specifically, but makes sure that its ideologically trained adherents *will never raise them*. Nor do ideologies, which always are concerned with the explanation of the movement of history, give the same kind of explanation as theology. Theology treats man as a reasonable being that asks questions and whose reason needs reconciliation [...]. An ideology, and Communism in its politically effective totalitarian form more than any other, *treats man as though he were a falling stone, endowed with the gift of consciousness* [...]» (EU, 371).<sup>113</sup> According to Arendt, totalitarian ideology (Communism in the specific case) «though it grew out of Western history, *no longer belongs in the same tradition of doubt and secularity*», so that to use the notion of «secular religion» to describe this new *ism* is not only inappropriate, but an «entirely undeserved compliment» (EU, 371).

This argument is further elucidated in another essay, *The Concept of History. Ancient and Modern*, where Arendt dwells upon the question of secularisation:

If by "secularization" one means no more than the rise of the secular and the concomitant eclipse of a transcendent world, then it is undeniable that modern historical consciousness is very intimately connected with it. This, however, *in no way implies the doubtful transformation of religious and transcendent categories into*

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<sup>112</sup> EU, 369.

<sup>113</sup> My italics.

*immanent earthly aims* and standards on which the historians of ideas have recently insisted. Secularization means first of all simply the *separation of religion and politics* [...]. (BPF, 69) [My italics]

Arendt suggests that this separation entailed the coming to the fore of the political dimension in the modern age, in terms which had been unknown to the Western world since ancient, pre-Socratic, Greek culture - with a renewed emphasis on the experience of action (BPF, 85), as the most fragile, futile and unpredictable of human capacities:

Action, [...] as the Greeks were the first to discover, is in and by itself utterly futile; it never leaves an end product behind itself. If it has any consequences at all, they consist in principle in an endless new chain of happenings whose eventual outcome the actor is utterly incapable of knowing and controlling beforehand. The most he may be able to do is to force things into a certain direction, and even of this he can never be sure. (BPF, 59-60)

Thus, the modern separation of political thinking from theology entailed that «[p]olitically speaking, within the secular realm itself secularization meant nothing more or less than that men once more had become mortals» (BPF, 74), in other words, they were exposed to that fragility and contingency of human action, against which the Western tradition – summarised by Arendt in the Greek-Roman, on the one hand, and the Christian notion of History, on the other (Augustine) (Id.) – can be read as an attempt to secure, to bring stability, in the realm of human affairs - what Arendt addresses, through Aristotle, as the activity of “immortalizing” (BPF, 71).

As immortalizing is defined by Arendt as «an activity of *mortal men*, [which] can be meaningful only if there is no guarantee of life in the hereafter» (BPF, 74), the author summarises the traditional alternative to the *necessity* of immortalizing in the twofold solution of bestowing immortality upon the world – illustrated by the Greek and Roman emphasis on the foundation of the body politic, as an artificial imperishable “space”, within and through which men’s life could exclusively acquire that meaning and dignity that would overcome its mortality and futility -<sup>114</sup> and of bestowing immortality upon life, represented by Christian thought, whose radical anti-political attitude, which took over and developed the apolitical tradition of ancient philosophy, was transformed into a political theory by Augustine («who,

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<sup>114</sup> «For Greeks and Romans alike, all differences notwithstanding, the foundation of the body politic was brought about by man’s need to overcome the mortality of human life and the futility of human deeds. Outside the body politic, man’s life was not only and not primarily insecure, i.e., exposed to the violence of others; it was without meaning and dignity because under no circumstances could it leave any traces behind it. [...] What Homer had done was to immortalize human deeds, and the polis could dispense with the service of “other of his craft” because it offered each of its citizens that public-political space that it assumed would confer immortality upon his acts. » (BPF, 71-72).

though hardly the father of our concept of history, is probably the spiritual author and certainly the greatest theorist of Christian politics» (BPF, 73).<sup>115</sup>

The modern emancipation of the secular sphere of human life from religion, generally addressed as “secularization”, entailing the dissolution of the Christian identification of political life with the immortal life realized by Augustine (BPF, 73), rendered the former to its mortality and futility without, nevertheless, being able to recover the «ancient trust in the world’s being more permanent than individual men and in political structures as a guarantee of earthly survival after death» (BPF, 74). The modern age, thus, coincides, in Arendt’s words, with the emergence and affirmation of the notion of *absolute mortality*, which is intimately linked to the renewed emphasis, in contemporary times, on political action.<sup>116</sup>

This development is visible, according to Arendt, in the modern concept of History, which has its most accomplished formulation in Hegel’s philosophy.

Hegelian metaphysics breaks with the tradition of Western (Platonic) metaphysics, which Arendt traces back to the philosophers’ a-political effort to add to that human artifice, which is the *polis*, something more permanent (the eternal Being, or the everlasting Ideas) than the insecure and contingent realm of human affairs (BPF, 68, 71): «To think, with Hegel, that truth resides and reveals itself in the *time-process* itself is characteristic of all modern historical consciousness» (BPF, 68).

Now, the notion of *process* «does not denote an objective quality of either history or nature; it is the *inevitable result of human action*» (BPF, 62), and its emergence in modern time proceeds from, and is the mark of, the progressive retreat of the world or the loss of the human artifice, concomitant with the blurring of the boundaries between nature and history.

The splitting of the atom as a «*man-made natural process*» is, in Arendt’s view, the climatic moment of the obliteration of the «defensive boundaries between natural elements and the human artifice», and the entering of human action («up to our own age [...] confined to the human world», BPF, 60) into nature, which, only apparently, meant the incorporation and mastering of the natural elements into the stable man-made world. Technology, «the

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<sup>115</sup> «To Christians only individual men were immortal, but nothing else of this world, neither mankind as a whole nor the earth itself, least of all the *human artifice* [i.e. the world]. Only by transcending this world could immortalizing activities be performed, and the only institution that could be justified within the secular realm was the Church, the *Civitas Dei* on earth [...]» (BPF, 72). It was Augustine, «still firmly rooted in the Roman tradition» (BPF, 73), who added to «the Christian notion of an everlasting life the idea of a future *civitas*, a *Civitas Dei*, where men even in the hereafter would continue to live in a community.» (Id.). As Arendt points out, «the insight into the perishability of all human creations had no great relevance for Christian thought and could even in its greatest thinker be in accord with a conception of politics beyond the secular realm [...]» (BPF, 73).

<sup>116</sup> «Now both life and world had become perishable, mortal, and futile» (BPF, 74.).

ground on which the two realms of history and nature have met and interpenetrated each other in our time» (BPF, 61), by starting *natural artifices* decreets the ultimate and irreparable defeat of *homo faber*:

The dangers of this acting into nature are obvious if we assume that the aforementioned characteristics of human action are part and parcel of the human condition. Unpredictability is not lack of foresight, and no engineering management of human affairs will ever be able to eliminate it, just as no training in prudence can ever lead to the wisdom of knowing what one does. Only total conditioning, that is, the total abolition of action, can ever hope to cope with unpredictability. And even the predictability of human behaviour which political terror can enforce for relatively long periods of time is hardly able to change the very essence of human affairs once and for all; it can never be sure of its own future. [...] If, therefore, by starting natural processes, we have begun to act *into* nature, we have manifestly begun to carry our own unpredictability into the realm which we used to think of as ruled by inexorable laws. The "iron law" of history was always only a metaphor borrowed from nature; and the fact is that this metaphor no longer convinces us because it has turned out that natural science can by no means be sure of an unchallengeable rule of law in nature as soon as men, scientists and technicians, or simply builders of the human artifice, decide to interfere and no longer leave nature to herself. (BPF, 60-61)

Arendt's inquiry into the contrast between the ancient (Greek and Roman-Christian) and the modern (Hegelian) concept of history is guided by the focus on action, which allows her to refute the thesis that «the modern historical consciousness has a Christian religious origin and came into being through a secularization of originally theological categories» (BPF, 65).<sup>117</sup>

Not only does the latter reject the notions of exemplarity and of the repetition of secular events at the core of the ancient understanding(s) of history, but also nothing is «more alien to the modern concept of history [than] the Christian notion that mankind has a beginning and an end, that the world was created in time and will ultimately perish, like all things temporal» (BPF, 67).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> «This similarity between the Christian and the modern concept of history is deceptive, however. It rests on a comparison with the cyclical history-speculations of late antiquity and overlooks the classical history-concepts of Greece and Rome.» (BPF, 65) «To the Christian, as to the Roman, the significance of *secular events lay in their having the character of examples likely to repeat themselves, so that action could follow certain standardized patterns.* (This, incidentally, is also very far removed from the Greek notion of the heroic deed, related by poets and historians, which serves as a kind of yardstick with which to measure one's own capacities for greatness. The difference between the faithful following of a recognized example and the attempt to measure oneself against it is the difference between Roman-Christian morality and what has been called the Greek agonal spirit, which did not know any "moral" considerations [...].) For us, on the other hand, history stands and falls on the assumption that the process in its very secularity tells a story of its own and that, strictly speaking, repetitions cannot occur.» (BPF, 66-67). My italics.

<sup>118</sup> « [...] now, for the first time, the history of mankind reaches back into an infinite past to which we can add at will and into which we can inquire further as it stretches ahead into an infinite future. This twofold infinity of past and future eliminates all notions of beginning and end, establishing mankind in a potential earthly immortality» (BPF, 68).

According to Arendt, the modern concept of history comes to terms with the experience of action, from which the notion of process has its origin, and to which the modern phenomenon of secularization is seen to lend an emphasis (BPF, 85).<sup>119</sup>

So while, on the one hand, secularization, exposing men to absolute mortality, coincided with the revival of the old desires for earthly immortality,<sup>120</sup> which were satisfied by Hegel's philosophy of history in the notion of immortality of mankind,<sup>121</sup> on the other, the conditions were laid for the "melancholy haphazardness" of human action to catch up with modern men and pursue them «into the very region where the generations before us had fled in order to escape it» (BPF, 89), namely, into history.

In *The Concept of History*, Arendt traces this experience at the root of the totalitarian phenomenon, which

[...] with its striking anti-utilitarian traits and its strange disregard for factuality, is based in the last analysis on the conviction that *everything is possible – and not just permitted, morally or otherwise, as was the case with early nihilism.* (BPF, 87). [My italics]

This passage is pivotal, for here Arendt identifies the idea that «everything is permitted» - quoted by Berdiaev as the central idea of Russian Nihilism, expressed in the words of Dostoevsky's character Ivan Karamazov - as the mark of a specific historically situated moral attitude, which she addresses as «early nihilism», thus, suggesting that we distinguish it from another *later* form of nihilism – the one, as we will see in more detail in Chapter 3, summarised in the 20<sup>th</sup> century idea that «everything is possible».

In the cited essay, it is possible to trace a link between this form of nihilism - as distinguished from the nihilism of the «metaphysical rebel» (Karamazov) (HR, 467) - and the aestheticizing drives, which Arendt detects in the process of action.

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<sup>119</sup> «The conviction of the modern age that man can know only that which he himself has made seems to be in accordance with a glorification of action rather than with the basically contemplative attitude of the historian and of the historical consciousness in general.» (BPF, 76).

<sup>120</sup> « Our concept of history, though essentially a concept of the modern age, owes its existence to the transition period where religious confidence in immortal life had lost its influence upon the secular and the new indifference toward the question of immortality had not yet been born.» (BPF, 74).

<sup>121</sup> «History, stretching into the twofold infinity of past and future, can guarantee immortality on earth in much the same way as the Greek polis or the Roman republic had guaranteed the human life and human deeds, insofar as they disclosed something essential and something great, would receive a strictly human and earthly permanence in this world. The great advantage of this concept has been that the twofold infinity of the historical process establishes a time-space in which the very notion of an end is virtually inconceivable, whereas its great disadvantage, compared with ancient political theory, seems to be that permanence is entrusted to a flowing process, as distinguished from a stable structure. At the same time the immortalizing process has become independent of cities, states, and nations; it encompasses the whole of mankind, whose history Hegel was consequently able to see as one uninterrupted development of the Spirit. Therewith mankind ceases to be only a species of nature, and what distinguishes man from the animals is no longer merely that he has speech [...] or that he has reason [...]: his very life now distinguishes him, the one thing that in the traditional definition he was supposed to share with the animals.» (BPF, 75).

The process of action is thus conceived as inherently entailing a *destructive* dimension - of nature and of the human artifice, hence, of all history (BPF, 89) - and a *creative* one, of «a world in which the assumption becomes axiomatic and self-evident» (BPF, 88), to the point, made visible in totalitarian terror,<sup>122</sup> that

[w]hat was originally nothing but a hypothesis, to be proved or disproved by actual facts, will in the course of consistent action always turn into a fact, never to be disproved. (BPF, 87-88).

The “paradox” of human action, which is exposed and has its climatic manifestation in the totalitarian phenomenon, lies in its peculiar *creativity*, one which is brought about through the erosion or de-materialising of reality (of the «world»), and the rea-lisation of an idea or intellectual construction («of what was originally nothing but an hypothesis», BPF, 87):<sup>123</sup>

These processes, *after having devoured, as it were, the solid objectivity of the given*, ended by rendering meaningless the one over-all process which originally was conceived in order to give meaning to them, and to act, so to speak, as the eternal time-space into which they could all flow and thus be rid of their mutual conflicts and exclusiveness. (BPF, 89) [My italics]

If we admit that Arendt thought of a *later* (i.e., 20<sup>th</sup> century) form of nihilism, one that cannot be reduced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century contestation of traditional moral norms and values, and expressed by the idea that everything is possible, which she traces at the core of totalitarian terror; this latter form of nihilism is not only inscribed in human action - unrestrained and unchecked under the modern conditions of “loss of the world”, which the process of action itself contributes to bring about, but is also linked to, and is inseparable from, the *aestheticisation* of the human world, and of the political as *human artefact*, which, in the essay on Broch, is the mark of the totalitarian phenomenon. This thesis will be articulated in more detail in Chapter 3.

If we, now, compare these pages with Camus’ HR, we observe that in the chapter on «Le terrorisme d’état et la terreur irrationnelle», devoted to the Nazi-Fascist *nihilist* revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (E, 583), the author insists, in analogous terms, on the aestheticizing attitude shown by Nazi political leaders,<sup>124</sup> which he relates to the primacy of action at the core of Hitlerism, as stemming from *moral* nihilism.

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<sup>122</sup> «The totalitarian systems tend to demonstrate that action can be based on any hypothesis and that, in the course of *consistently guided action*, the particular hypothesis will become true, will become actual, factual reality. [...]» (BPF, 87).

<sup>123</sup> «[...] we can take almost any hypothesis and *act* upon it, with a sequence of results in reality which not only make sense but *work*. This means quite literally that everything is possible not only in the realm of ideas but in the field of reality itself.» (BPF, 87).

<sup>124</sup> « On sait que Goering recevait parfois en costume de Néron, et fardé » (HR, 585, note \*\*).

Hitlerism is discussed partially through Rauschning, and partially through Ernst Junger,<sup>125</sup> who according to Camus «a d'ailleurs choisi les formules mêmes du nihilisme» to define Nazism (HR, 584).<sup>126</sup>

The French writer focuses on the emphasis, within Nazism, on the sheer *movement of action* – what Rauschning describes as «pure dynamism» (HR, 584) – and on its relationship, on the one hand, with a total absence of values and principles,<sup>127</sup> which according to Camus (as for Arendt in Section III of OT), is the source that provides both Nazism and Communism with the means of political cynicism (HR, 649), and, on the other, with aestheticism.

Quoting Frank's deposition at the Nuremberg trial, Camus draws the attention to

*«la haine de la forme» qui animait Hitler. [...] cet homme était seulement une force en mouvement [...]. Seule, l'action le tenait debout. Être pour lui, c'était faire. Voilà pourquoi Hitler et son régime ne pouvaient se passer d'ennemis. Ils ne pouvaient, dandys forcenés, se définir que par rapport à ces ennemis, prendre forme que dans ce combat acharné qui devait les abattre. Le Juif, les francs-maçons, les plutocraties, les Anglo-Saxons, le Slave bestial se sont succédé dans la propagande et dans l'histoire pour redresser, chaque fois en peu plus haut, la force aveugle qui marchait vers son terme. Le combat permanent exigeait des excitants perpétuels.*

Hitler était l'histoire à l'état pur. «Devenir, disait Junger, est mieux que vivre.» Il prêchait donc l'identification totale avec le courant de la vie, au niveau le plus bas et contre toute réalité supérieure. *Le régime qui a inventé la politique étrangère biologique allait contre ses intérêts le plus évidents. Mais il obéissait au moins à sa logique particulière.* (HR, 585) [My italics]

It is significant that Camus used the term «dandyism» to characterise the Nazi attitude: the notion brings forth the coincidence of the aesthetical dimension – illustrated in the anecdote of Göring receiving, like the Caligula-Venus of Camus' tragedy, dressed and made-up as the Roman Emperor Nero – with the oppositional logic, already pointed out in the chapter on Romantic revolt (HR, 462). The oppositional logic is also visible in the totalitarian *creation* of the «objective ennemi», entailed by the process of action itself,<sup>128</sup> and determining its anti-utilitarian internal consistency («logique particulière»): «[...] l'ennemi perpétuel, c'est la terreur perpétuelle» (HR, 587).

Beyond the apparent affinity with the conservative theses (Berdiaev, Rauschning), the emphasis in Camus' analysis of Nazism is not so much on the «idolâtrie et [...] sacré dégradé», restored in the nihilistic *tabula rasa* of moral values and principles through «le

<sup>125</sup> «Le seul homme de culture supérieure qui ait donné au nazisme une apparence de philosophie [...],» (E, 584).

<sup>126</sup> Camus quotes the following passage as an example of formula of nihilism employed by Junger to address Nazism: «La meilleure réponse à la trahison de la vie par l'esprit, c'est la trahison de l'esprit par l'esprit, et l'une des grandes et cruelles jouissances de ce temps est de participer à ce travail de destruction.» (E, 584).

<sup>127</sup> «Dans l'Allemagne, secouée jusqu'aux racines par une guerre sans précédent, la défaite et la détresse économique, aucune valeur ne tenait plus debout. [...] Il n'y avait plus de valeur, à la fois commune et supérieure à tous ces hommes, au nom de laquelle il leur fût possible de se juger les uns les autres. L'Allemagne de 1933 a donc accepté d'adopter les valeurs dégradées de quelques hommes seulement [...].» (HR, 584-585).

<sup>128</sup> «Le pur dynamisme doctrinal ne peut se diriger vers le bien, mais seulement vers l'efficacité. Aussi longtemps qu'il y aura des ennemis, il y aura terreur; et il y aura des ennemis aussi longtemps que le *dynamisme* sera [...].» (HR, 589).

premier et le seul principe de cette basse mystique, le *Fuhrerprinzip*» (HR, 588): at no time does Camus seem to believe that Hitlerism *is* a “secularized religion”, the Nazi use of religious language being reduced to a purely rhetorical device for propaganda purposes (Id.). Instead, the emphasis is on the term, «*individualisme romantique*» (HR, 589), used to denote Nazism, which integrates the formula «*dandys forcenés*» by recalling the chapter on aestheticizing rebellion:

L'individualisme romantique de la révolution allemande s'assouvit enfin dans le monde des choses. La terreur irrationnelle transforme en choses les hommes, « bacilles planétaires » selon la formule de Hitler. Elle se propose la destruction, non seulement de la personne, mais des possibilités universelles de la personne, la réflexion, la solidarité, l'appel vers l'amour absolu. (HR, 589) [My italics]

The textual correspondence with the chapter on de Sade, the «*homme de lettres parfait [...]* qui a orienté la révolte sur les chemins de l'art où le romantisme l'engagera encore plus avant» (HR, 456-457),<sup>129</sup> opening the way to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary attempts to leave the (aesthetic) realm of appearance (*paraître*) through action (HR, 464), immediately suggests that the aestheticizing drive, made visible in the *creation* of closed spaces - be it de Sade's «*château tragique*» or the 20<sup>th</sup> century concentration camps, «où, selon sa propre règle, régnait farouchement l'homme sans dieu» (HR, 510) - culminates in a process of de-humanisation and reduction of man to an object (HR, 457).

It is significant that in his 1951 philosophical essay, Camus designated as «*nihilisme historique*» both Russian Communism and the Nazi affirmation of history («Hitler était l'histoire à l'état pur», HR, 585), identified with the sheer, unprincipled, movement of action (HR, 648). As the latter coincided with the affirmation of power and efficacy, and thus with the perpetuation of the master-slave relationship of dominion, it culminated, in Camus' own words, which are strikingly similar to Arendt's, in a systematic and consistent *fabrication of corpses*:

Si l'homme veut se faire Dieu, il s'arroge le droit de vie ou de mort sur les autres. *Fabricant de cadavres*, et de sous-hommes, il est sous-homme lui-même et non pas Dieu, mais serviteur ignoble de la mort. (HR, 648) [My italics]

The focus on the aestheticizing drives of 20<sup>th</sup> century nihilistic movements is even more prominent in Camus' criticism of Communism, in the light of which, I argue, his appropriation of Berdiaev's argument and terminology acquires a specific meaning - «dès l'instant où [le nihilisme historique] veut *créer* dans le siècle, hors de toute règle morale, il bâtit le temple de César. [...] Ceux qui se ruent dans l'histoire au nom de l'irrationnel [i.e. the

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<sup>129</sup> My italics.



Nazis], criant qu'elle n'a aucun sens, rencontrent la servitude et la terreur et débouchent dans l'univers concentrationnaire. Ceux qui s'y lancent en prêchant sa rationalité absolue [i.e. the Communists] rencontrent servitude et terreur, et débouchent dans l'univers concentrationnaire» (HR, 648).

Now, according to Camus, the Nazi revolution

n'était qu'une poussée primitive dont les ravages ont été plus grands que l'ambition réelle. Le communisme russe, au contraire, a pris en charge l'ambition métaphysique que cet essai décrit, l'édification, après la mort de Dieu, d'une cité de l'homme enfin divinisé. (HR, 592)

For this reason the «aventure hitlerienne» cannot, strictly speaking, be defined as “revolution”, the latter implying, in the author's understanding, the totalistic and totalitarian aim of «l'unification finale du monde» (HR, 592).<sup>130</sup>

It is significant that, in HR, Camus not only used the adjective «totalitarian», and always referred, in Berdiaev's acceptance, to the philosophical notion of “totality”, which the French writer identifies with «le vieux rêve d'unité commun aux croyants et aux révoltés, mais projeté horizontalement sur une terre privée de Dieu» (HR, 636).

It is with Russian Communism, he argues, that, for the first time in history, «une doctrine et un mouvement appuyés sur un Empire en armes se proposent comme but la révolution définitive [...]» (HR, 592).<sup>131</sup> Thus,

[...] les révolutions fascistes du XXe siècle ne méritent pas le titre de révolution. *L'ambition universelle leur a manqué.* [...] dans l'héritage nihiliste, ils ont choisi de déifier l'irrationnel, et lui seul, au lieu de diviniser la raison. Du même coup, ils renonçaient à l'universel. (HR, 583)

Now, as Hannah Arendt points out in very similar terms in *The Concept of History*, the idea of a completion, inscribed in the Marxian notion of an «end to history» through the ultimate realisation of a classless society (HR, 627), betrays the reduction of history to the object of a process of fabrication.<sup>132</sup>

Firstly, the Marxian notion of “making history”, taken over by revolutionaries, is, in Arendt's view, the result of a combination of the idea that history is man-made (Vico), with «the teleological political philosophies of the earlier stages of the modern age, so that in his thought the “higher aims” – which according to the philosophers of history revealed

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<sup>130</sup> «L'héritage conjugué de Netchaiev et de Marx - writes Camus echoing Berdiaev's *Sources* - donnera naissance à la révolution totalitaire du XXe siècle» (HR, 579).

<sup>131</sup> My italics.

<sup>132</sup> «[...] if one imagines that one can “make history”, one cannot escape the consequence that there will be an end to history. Whenever we hear of grandiose aims in politics, such as establishing a new society in which justice will be guaranteed forever, or fighting a war to end all wars or to make the whole world safe for democracy, we are moving in the realm of this kind of thinking» (BPF, 79).

themselves only to the backward glance of the historian and philosopher – could become aims of political action» (BPF, 77).

The consequence of this combination is the reduction of meaning, which is disclosed by the backward-directed glance of the historian on human deeds *after* the process of action has come to an end, to the aim of action itself, as the end-product of a *manufacturing* process (BPF, 78). Secondly, she highlights, as a consequence, the Marxian combination of the old-age (Platonic) identification of action with fabricating, and the identification of the «contemplative gaze of the historian with the contemplation of the model» (*eidōs*) that guides the work of the craftsman (BPF, 78).<sup>133</sup>

According to Arendt, in the Marxian attempt to derive political conscience from historical conscience «we can easily detect the age-old attempt to escape from the frustrations and fragility of human action by construing it in the image of making.» (BPF, 79).

A similar remark can be traced in HR, where Camus points to the revolutionary attempts at *creating* or re-making the world in conformity to a superior idea or higher end, which he sees as stemming from the modern metaphysical rebellion against a transcendent Creator - « Dans toute révolte se découvrent l'exigence métaphysique de l'unité, l'impossibilité de s'en saisir, et la *fabrication* d'un univers de remplacement. La révolte, de ce point de vue, est *fabricatrice d'univers*. Ceci définit l'art, aussi. L'exigence de la révolte, à vrai dire, est en partie une *exigence esthétique*.» (HR, 659).<sup>134</sup>

Now, in Arendt's view, the Marxian notion of “making history” harbours the possibility of a further degradation of all ends into means (BPF, 79), which is the mark of the utilitarian reasoning in which she traces the modern loss of meaning.<sup>135</sup> So, if Marx's mistaking of “man-made” patterns for historical meaning inscribes his thought into a fabrication model of political action – hence, the need to “close” the process of history, to conceive its ultimate end -<sup>136</sup> this process

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<sup>133</sup> The same argument is formulated by Camus: « L'originalité de la révolution du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle est que, pour la première fois, elle prétend ouvertement réaliser le vieux rêve d'Anacharsis Cloots, *l'unité du genre humain*, et en même temps, le couronnement définitif de l'histoire. [...] » (HR, 517). «La révolution commence [...] à partir de l'idée. Précisément, elle est l'insertion de l'idée dans l'expérience historique [...], une révolution est une tentative pour modeler l'acte sur une idée, pour façonner le monde dans un cadre théorique. [...] La révolution totale finit ainsi par revendiquer, nous verrons pourquoi, l'empire du monde.» (HR, 516)

<sup>134</sup> My italics.

<sup>135</sup> «The trouble lies in the nature of the categorical framework of ends and means, which changes every attained end immediately into the means of a new end, thereby, as it were, destroying meaning wherever it is applied.» (BPF, 80). «[...] it was as though meaning itself had departed from the world of men and men were left with nothing but an undending chain of purposes in whose progress the meaningfulness of all past achievements was constantly canceled out by future goals and intentions» (BPF, 78).

<sup>136</sup> «[...] here the process of history, as it shows itself in our calendar's stretching into the infinity of the past and the future, has been abandoned for the sake of an altogether different process, that of *making something which*

is incapable of guaranteeing men any kind of immortality because its end cancels out and makes unimportant whatever went before: in the classless society the best mankind can do with history is to forget the whole unhappy affair, whose only purpose was to abolish itself. It cannot bestow meaning on particular occurrences either, because it has dissolved all of the particular into means whose meaningfulness ends the moment the end-product is finished: single events and deeds and sufferings have no more meaning here than hammer and nails have with respect to the finished table. (BPF, 79-80)

The irreconcilability of the utilitarian perspective with its emphasis on *achievement*, which is inherent in the teleological idea of the “end of history”, and Hegelian dialectics, which provide the «law of all movements, natural and historical», taken over and adapted by Marx in the notion of “class struggle” (BPF, 80), is repeatedly pointed out both by Arendt and Camus. In his extensive commentary of the Communist revolutionary theory, in the chapter on «L’*échec de la prophétie*», the latter observes:

Un mouvement [i.e. Hegel’s dialectics of history], auquel on refuse un commencement, ne peut avoir de fin. « Si le socialisme, dit un essayiste libertaire [i.e. Ernestan], est un éternel devenir, ses moyens sont sa fin ». Exactement, il n’y a pas de fin, il n’y a que des moyens qui ne sont garantis par rien s’ils ne le sont par une valeur étrangère au devenir. En ce sens, il est juste de remarquer que *la dialectique n’est pas et ne peut pas être révolutionnaire*. Elle est seulement, selon notre point de vue, *nihiliste, pur mouvement qui vise à nier tout ce qui n’est pas lui-même*. (HR, 628) [My italics]

Here, Camus opposes the Hegelian dialectics – whose concept of history as a pure movement he calls *nihilistic* (what Arendt defines as the de-realising *process* of action, infinitely stretching in past and in the future, thus without beginning nor end) – to the notion of «revolution», with its marked aesthetic and totalizing dimension, rooted in a fabricating model of human action.

Here, Camus uses the term “nihilism” in a strictly Nietzschean sense to address all thinking, which dwells in the systematic «*calomnie de ce monde*» (HR, 651), stripping man of the means and reasons to live. We touch, here, upon the problem of the world’s meaninglessness, addressed by Arendt in her discussion of the end-means category.

According to Camus, the Marxian «end of history» is an arbitrary principle, a value introduced from without a nihilistic process of endless reduction, and consequent devaluation, of end into means. From this perspective, «la seule histoire n’offre aucune fécondité. *Elle n’est pas source de valeur*» - as, he argues, the Communists would have it - «*mais encore de nihilisme*» (HR, 651).

Thus, the future, identified in Marxian thought with the advent of a classless society and the end of history, is turned into a value (HR, 613) «en même temps étrangère à la

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*has a beginning as well as an end*, whose laws of motion, therefore, can be determined (for instance as dialectical movement) and whose innermost content can be discovered (for instance as class struggle).» (BPF, 79).

morale, elle n'est pas à proprement parler une valeur sur laquelle on puisse régler sa conduite, elle est un *dogme sans fondement* qu'on peut faire sien dans le mouvement désespéré d'une pensée qui étouffe de solitude ou de nihilisme, ou qu'on se verra imposer par ceux à qui le dogme profite.[...] La fin de l'histoire n'est pas une *valeur d'exemple* et de perfectionnement. Elle est un principe d'arbitraire et de terreur. » (HR, 628).<sup>137</sup>

It is in this sense that all utopian political thinking - and «tout socialisme est utopique, et d'abord le scientifique» (HR, 613) - replaces God by the future, the latter being the (immanent or secularised) foundation for a morality in the Nietzschean acceptance of the term, a transcendent (nihilistic) table of norms:<sup>138</sup> «L'âge d'or renvoyé au bout de l'histoire et coïncidant, par un double attrait, avec une apocalypse, justifie donc tout» (HR, 612).

Apocalypticism, and the twofold tradition of historical and bourgeois messianism - which Camus emphasises, with Berdiaev, in Marxian revolutionary thought - are traced back to the notion of totality, and to the *teleological* dimension implied in the idea of the *revolution définitive*: «Pour les chrétiens – he writes in the *Carnets* between the end of 1947 and the beginning of '48 – la Révélation est au début de l'histoire. Pour les marxistes, elle est à la fin. Deux religions.» (CII, 240).

It is significant that Camus define as «fatalisme *créateur*» (HR, 597) an attitude, in his view, common to Marx and the Christian conservative thinker Joseph de Maistre, which orients human action toward a higher end (the final realisation of a mysterious unity, be it «la cité chrétienne universelle» (HR, 596) or the classless society), and aims at *making truth*.<sup>139</sup>

[...] l'esprit historique de totalité que le christianisme a inventé [...], coupé de ses origines religieuses, risque aujourd'hui de tuer l'Europe (HR, 598).

What Arendt observes three years later, in *Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought*, is that Hegel's concept of history, not only gave the realm of human affairs a dignity that it never enjoyed before among philosophers, but, more importantly, that it enabled philosophers – and Marx, especially (BPF, 80) - «to discover meaning in the political realm, and yet to understand this meaning as an *absolute truth* which transcended all willed intentions and worked behind the back of the political actor. [...] In Hegel's solution,

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<sup>137</sup> My italics.

<sup>138</sup> The echoes of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* may be easily detected in Camus's remark: «L'avenir est la seule sorte de propriété que les maîtres concèdent de bon gré aux esclaves » (HR, 599), thus confirming our reading of the French writer's identification of future/God with a nihilistic or religious thought.

<sup>139</sup> «[Maistre] citait saint Jean qui demande que nous *faisons* la vérité, ce qui est proprement le programme de l'esprit révolutionnaire moderne» (E, 596). My italics.

*individual actions remain as meaningless as before, while their process in its entirety reveals a truth that transcends the realm of human affairs.»* (CP, 430).

Furthermore, to the modern (Hegelian) notion of *process* Camus relates that of *progress*, which 19<sup>th</sup> century Positivism had posed as the iron law of a necessary evolution of society, and which the author traces at the core Marx's scientific messianism («d'origine bourgeoise», HR, 598):<sup>140</sup>

[...] la religion de l'humanité a été effectivement prêchée vers la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et Marx, bien qu'il n'ait sans doute lu Comte, fut l'un de ses prophètes. Marx a seulement compris qu'une religion sans transcendance s'appelait proprement une politique. Comte le savait, au demeurant, ou du moins il comprenait que sa religion était d'abord une sociolâtrie et qu'elle supposait le réalisme politique, la négation du droit individuel et l'établissement du despotisme. Une société dont les savants seraient les prêtres, deux mille banquiers et techniciens régnant sur une Europe de cent vingt millions d'habitants où la vie privée serait absolument identifiée avec la vie publique, où une obéissance absolue « d'action, de pensée, et de cœur » serait rendue au grand prêtre [...], telle est l'utopie de Comte qui annonce ce qu'on peut appeler *les religions horizontales de notre temps*. Elle est utopique, il est vrai, parce que, convaincu du pouvoir illuminant de la science, il a oublié de prévoir la *police*. D'autres seront plus pratiques ; et la religion de l'humanité sera fondée, effectivement, mais sur le sang et la douleur des hommes. (HR, 600-601) [My italics]

In the article "*Le monde va vite*" (27<sup>th</sup> November 1946), Camus had already denounced the disastrous attempts of the two «*grandes politiques d'aujourd'hui*» - the Marxist ideology on the one hand, and the Capitalist ideology on the other, as being both grounded on the idea of *progress* -<sup>141</sup> to "square the circle" of the historical reality of post-war Europe, by fixing «l'avenir du monde au moyen de principes formés au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle en ce qui concerne le libéralisme capitaliste, et au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle en ce qui regarde le socialisme dit scientifique. Dans le premier cas, une pensée née dans les premières années de l'industrialisme moderne et dans le deuxième cas une doctrine contemporaine de l'évolutionnisme darwinien et de l'optimisme renanien se proposent *de mettre en équation l'époque de la bombe atomique, des mutations brusques et du nihilisme*. Rien ne saurait mieux illustrer *le décalage de plus en plus désastreux qui s'effectue entre la pensée politique et la réalité historique* » (CAC8, 630).

It is, precisely, this gap, detected by Camus between the historical reality of the post-Atomic bomb world, and the two "ideologies of progress", which had emerged victorious from the end of the war and the defeat of the Nazi regime, that justifies the author's effort to

<sup>140</sup> «Le progrès, l'avenir de la science, le culte de la technique et de la production sont des mythes bourgeois qui se sont constitués en dogme au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. [...] l'esprit révolutionnaire a repris ce thème ambigu et commode de progrès. Certes, il ne s'agit pas de la même sorte de progrès ; Marx n'a pas assez de railleries pour l'optimisme rationnel des bourgeois. Sa raison [...] est différente. Mais la marche difficile vers un avenir réconcilié définit cependant la pensée de Marx. Hegel et le marxisme ont abattu les valeurs formelles qui éclairaient pour les Jacobins la route droite de cette heureuse histoire. Ils ont cependant conservé l'idée de cette marche en avant, confondue simplement par eux avec le progrès social et affirmée comme nécessaire. Ils continuaient ainsi la pensée bourgeoise du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. » (HR, 599).

<sup>141</sup> «Les idéologies marxiste et capitaliste, basées toutes deux sur l'idée de progrès, persuadées toutes deux que l'application de leurs principes doit amener fatalement l'équilibre de la société, sont des utopies d'un degré beaucoup plus fort. En outre, elles sont en train de nous coûter très cher.» (« Sauver les corps », 20 Novembre 1946, CAC8, 615).

make sense of the disquieting continuity between nihilism and terror, which Camus individuates as one of the fundamental problems of contemporary society, and with which post-war political thought proved incapable of dealing.

I argue that Camus' appropriation of the «political or secular religion» thesis, widespread among Conservative and Liberal political thinkers, from Berdiaev to Aron, does not fall within either of the «two quite distinct trends of thought and approach», exposed by Arendt in her 1953 essay *Religion and Politics* (EU, 372), in other words, neither in the historical approach («for which a secular religion is quite literally a religion growing out of the spiritual secularity of our present world so that Communism is only the most radical version of an “immanentist heresy”, Id.), nor in the social sciences approach («which treat ideology and religion as one and the same thing because they believe that Communism (or nationalism or imperialism, etc.) fulfills for its adherents the same “function” that our religious denominations fulfill in a free society», Id.).

Secondly, Camus' use of the term «nihilism» to approach the problem of totalitarianism cannot be placed either among the Existentialist or among the Christian-Conservative perspective, analysed by Arendt in the 1954 essay *Concern with Politics*.

We must not forget that Camus approaches the problem of the Nazi and Communist ideologies when dealing with the problem of state terror, the two aforementioned ideologies providing a justification, respectively, for an *irrational* and a *rational* form of state conducted political practice of violence and murder. Now, the author uses the formula «[l]es théocraties totalitaires du XXe siècle» as synonymous with «la terreur d'État» (HR, 581), and in the course of his argument he suggests, along with Berdiaev's argument in *Sources* (SS, 307), that *not every nihilistic revolution* may be defined as *totalitarian*, the term «totalitaire» implying a metaphysics of man's godhood, structured on the fabrication model of God as *maker* of the world.<sup>142</sup>

The analogy with religion is not developed from the Social Sciences perspective of functional equivalence with totalitarian ideologies (EU, 374), but from the philosophical focus on notion of «totality», identified with the end-product of man's refusal of the fragility and finitude of the human condition, and with the god-like *hubristic* attempt to re-make the world (HR, 597).

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<sup>142</sup> « La révolution nihiliste, qui s'est exprimée historiquement dans la religion hitlérienne, n'a ainsi suscité qu'une rage démesurée de néant» (HR, 590). Camus shifts away from Rauschning's thesis of the nihilistic revolution of destruction when he compares the Fascist revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the Communist revolution: we must distinguish, he argues, two forms of nihilism - a purely *negative* or destructive form of nihilism, represented by Hitlerism, which culminates in collective suicide (HR, 591); and a *creative* one, which aims at «l'édification d'une cité de l'homme enfin divinisé» (HR, 592), represented by the Soviet regime.

Pointing to the parallels between Comte's religion of humanity as an immanent «*religion de l'espèce*» (HR, 600), and the 20<sup>th</sup> century ideologies, also referred to as ideologies of consent (HR, 649) and conformism, Camus insists that «[l']homme qui haïssait la mort et le dieu de la mort [...] – namely, the metaphysical rebel in the modern nihilistic horizon of the death of God - *a voulu se délivrer dans l'immortalité de l'espèce*» (HR, 649).

In terms that recall Arendt's essays, Camus highlights the modern resentment against the frailty and finitude of the human condition. In his view, the 20<sup>th</sup> century men resorted to terror in their attempt to realise their metaphysical need for unity against their finitude, the definitive “redemption” of humanity from its mortality, into some kind of immortality of future mankind:

la terreur reste donc le plus court chemin de l'immortalité. [...] La terreur et les camps de concentration sont les moyens extrêmes que l'homme utilise pour échapper à la solitude. La soif d'unité doit se réaliser, même dans la fosse commune. S'ils tuent des hommes, c'est qu'ils refusent la condition mortelle et veulent l'immortalité pour tous. (Id.).

Thus, from a Nietzschean perspective, religion (“totality” being the Christian divine City projected horizontally in the future) and totalitarian ideology are both rooted in a *ressentiment* against life. They are, in this sense, an *absolute* or *incomplete* form of *nihilism*.

I suggest that Camus's anti-Platonism, mediated by Nietzsche, is the key to understand his critique of what he defines as «*totalitarian revolution*».

In a long letter to *Les Temps Modernes*, written in June 1952,<sup>143</sup> Camus stresses that «le nihilisme pour moi *coïncide* aussi avec les valeurs désincarnées et formelles» (E, 762). His critique of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cynical, *i.e.*, Communist, revolution, runs parallel to the critique of the French Revolution («la révolution bourgeoise et formelle de 89», *Id.*), to which he devotes the first two sections of «La révolte historique» («Les régicides» and «Les déicides»):<sup>144</sup>

[...] dans les deux cas, quoique par des excès contraires, soit que *les valeurs soient placées au-dessus de l'histoire, soit qu'elles y soient absolument identifiées, le nihilisme et la terreur sont justifiés.* (E, 762).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> “Révolte et servitude” (30<sup>th</sup> June 1952), letter addressed to the Director of *Les Temps Modernes* (E, 754-774). In replying to the attacks of *Les Temps Modernes*, Camus defines l'HR as a study of the ideological aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutions: «J'ai montré seulement, et je le maintiens, qu'il y a dans les révolutions du XX siècle, parmi d'autres éléments, une évidente entreprise de divinisation de l'homme et j'ai choisi d'éclairer spécialement ce thème» (E, 759). By placing itself in the midst of historical actuality and bringing its protest against the present situation, the essay on revolt was in itself conceived by its author as a (though modest) *act* (E, 757).

<sup>144</sup> «[...] les juristes bourgeois du XVIIIe siècle, en écrasant sous leurs principes les justes et vivantes conquêtes de leur peuple, ont préparé *les deux nihilismes contemporains* : celui de l'individu et celui de l'État» (HR, 539).

<sup>145</sup> In *L'artiste et son temps* Camus declares : «Il me semble au contraire que je plaide pour un vrai réalisme contre une mythologie à la fois illogique et meurtrière, et contre le nihilisme romantique, qu'il soit bourgeois ou prétendument révolutionnaire.» (E, 801).

The emphasis on the aesthetic or fabricating paradigm of political action, made visible in the concepts of totality/achievement/end, under the conditions of a totalitarian or absolute revolution are further stressed in an interview to *Gazette des Lettres* in February 1952, which offers some interesting parallels with Arendt's argument in the section on work in HC.

Questioned on the ethical and political role of the intellectuals in the post-war context, Camus replies:

Les intellectuels n'ont tant d'importance aujourd'hui que parce que deux fois en cent cinquante années ils ont inspiré et, dans le deuxième cas, *exécuté*, une grande révolution. *Sur des centaines de millions d'hommes règne aujourd'hui le gouvernement des philosophes dont la tradition occidentale a tant rêvé.* Mais voilà, les philosophes n'ont pas la tête qu'on croyait. C'est que, pour régner, la philosophie a dû passer par la police [...]. *Les deux formes du nihilisme contemporain, bourgeois et révolutionnaire, ont été lancées par des intellectuels.* (E, 739) [My italics]

By tracing in the Communist regime the «*gouvernement des philosophes dont la tradition occidentale a tant rêvé*», Camus' emphasis is on the concept of *execution* - revolution, thus, being identified with the end-product of a process of *mise en œuvre* of a superior Idea, the Marxian *creative fatalism*, which in Camus' view «*fait passer le système avant la réalité*» (HR, 609) for the definitive reconciliation and the building of «*le royaume des fins*» (HR, 610).<sup>146</sup>

From an unmistakable Nietzschean perspective, the term «*revolutionary nihilism*», employed by Camus in HR, aims to denounce and reject the Platonism inscribed in the Communist concept of revolution, which combines the philosophical moment of contemplation of the Idea with the aesthetic dimension of fabricating, and with a power policy sustained by the principle that the *end justifies the means*.

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<sup>146</sup> In discussing Marx's theory of the mission of the proletariat, Camus quotes the following passage: «*La philosophie ne peut se réaliser sans la disparition du prolétariat, le prolétariat ne peut se libérer sans la réalisation de la philosophie*» (HR, 610). Beside her emphasis on Marx's break with the philosophic (Platonic) tradition, made visible in the reduction of work to labor, in *The Concept of History* Arendt observes that Marx's notion of "making history" is the specific result of the philosopher's perspective on the political: «*It was the historian and the philosopher of history who were politicalized. By the same token, the age-old identification of action with making and fabricating was supplemented and perfected, as it were, through identifying the contemplative gaze of the historian with the contemplation of the model (the εἶδος or "shape" from which Plato has derived his "ideas") that guides the craftsmen and precedes all making.*» (BPF, 78). Arendt seems to take her distances from the argument of HR when she writes that «*the danger of these combinations did not lie in making immanent what was formerly transcendent, as is often alleged, as though Marx attempted to establish on earth a paradise formerly located in the hereafter. The danger of transforming the unknown and unknowable "higher aims" into planned and willed intentions was that meaning and meaningfulness were transformed into ends [...] – the progressive unfolding and actualisation of the idea of Freedom – to be an end of human action, and when he furthermore, in accordance with tradition, viewed this ultimate "end" as the end-product of a manufacturing process.*» (BPF, 78). In a similar way, Camus observes: «*Le socialisme autoritaire a confisqué [...] cette liberté vivante [des ouvriers] au profit d'une liberté idéale, encore à venir. Ce faisant [...] il a renforcé l'entreprise d'asservissement commencée par le capitalisme d'usine.*» (HR, 622).



Developing an idea, already formulated in *Ni victimes ni bourreaux* (« Le socialisme mystifié », 21<sup>st</sup> November 1946),<sup>147</sup> Camus maintains in HR that revolution (be it «bourgeoise ou socialiste») «renvoie la justice à plus tard, au profit de la seule puissance» (HR, 623).

It is significant to observe that Camus defines power (or *will to power*) as «frénésie historique» (HR, 629).<sup>148</sup> Now, frenzy is together with apocalypticism, the key feature, which revolutionary nihilism has in common with the dandyism (HR, 464).<sup>149</sup> Their common aestheticism, summarised in the nihilistic notion of «le règne de l'homme»,<sup>150</sup> elevates *action to the unique principle*, and it is here that Camus traces the root of the totalitarian «camps retranchés» in post-war Eastern Europe (HR, 630).

«[F]antômes, victorieux ou asservis, de la *puissance*» is the description of the inhabitants of the 20th century «Europe *décharnée*» (HR, 643).<sup>151</sup> The metaphoric constellation, emphasised in these passages, points to the interwovenness of contemporary power policy with the problem of abstraction, which Camus identifies with the *creation* of a state of siege (HR, 643), or what he refers to as «rational terror»:

L'abstraction, *propre au monde des forces et du calcul*, a remplacé les vraies passions qui sont du domaine de la chair et de l'irrationnel. Le ticket substitué au pain, l'amour et l'amitié soumis à la doctrine, le

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<sup>147</sup> CAC8, 617. It is interesting to observe that in 1946, Camus, like Hannah Arendt in the same years, is still insisting on a distinction between the *nihilistic* ideologies – which he, much in the line of Rauschnig, identified as the condition of Nazi power policy, electing efficacy as the highest value in the general moral “vacuum” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (“*tout est permis*”)– and the Philosophies of History, fostering the messianic idea of a Paradise on earth (CAC8, 616).

<sup>148</sup> «La volonté de puissance est venue relayer la volonté de justice, faisant mine d'abord de s'identifier avec elle, et puis la reléguant quelque part au bout de l'histoire, attendant que rien sur la terre ne reste à dominer» (HR, 629).

<sup>149</sup> «La question du XX siècle [...]: comment vivre sans grâce et sans justice? À cette question, seul le nihilisme, et non la révolte, a répondu. Seul, jusqu'à présent, il a parlé, reprenant la formule des révoltés romantiques: «Frénésie». » (HR, 629).

<sup>150</sup> Camus's Nietzscheanism in apparent in his view that the Marxian «*royaume des fins est utilisé, comme la morale éternelle et le royaume des cieux, à des fins de mystification sociale.* [...] Comment vivre sans la grâce, c'est la question qui domine le XIXe siècle. «Par la justice», ont répondu tous ceux qui ne voulaient pas accepter le nihilisme absolu. Aux peuples qui désespéraient du royaume des cieux, ils ont promis le royaume de l'homme. La prédication de la cité humaine s'est accélérée jusqu'à ce la fin du XIXe siècle où elle est devenue proprement visionnaire et a mis les certitudes de la science au service de l'utopie. Mais le royaume s'est éloigné, de prodigieuses guerres ont ravagé la plus vieille des terres, le sang des révoltés a couvert les murs des villes, et la *justice totale* ne s'est pas rapprochée.» (HR, 629) (My italics). According to Camus, «[la] révolution, dans l'impasse où l'ont engagée ses ennemis bourgeois et ses partisans nihilistes, est l'esclavage. À moins de changer de principes et de voie, elle n'a pas d'autre issue que les révoltes serviles, écrasées dans le sang, ou le hideux espoir du suicide atomique. La volonté de puissance, la lutte nihiliste pour la domination et le pouvoir, ont fait mieux que balayer l'utopie marxiste. Celle-ci est devenue à son tour un fait historique, destiné à être utilisé comme les autres. [...] asservir tous les moyens, a été réduite à l'état de moyen et cyniquement manœuvrée pour la plus banale et la sanglante des fins. Le développement ininterrompu de la production [...] a ruiné également la société bourgeoise et la société révolutionnaire au profit d'une idole qui a le mufle de la puissance.» (HR, 623-624)

<sup>151</sup> My italics.

destin au plan, *le châtement appelé norme, et la production substituée à la création vivante.* (HR, 642-643) [My italics]

By *rational* terror Camus designates, in the chapter on «La totalité et le procès» devoted to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Communist system of secret police and show trials, the refusal, which the author attributes to Russian Marxism, of the world of the irrational, by which he means man's spontaneity and unpredictability:

Les personnes ne sont pas hostiles à l'Empire en tant qu'individus seulement : *la terreur traditionnelle pourrait alors suffire.* Elles lui sont hostiles dans la mesure où la nature humaine jusqu'ici n'a jamais pu vivre de l'histoire seule et lui a toujours échappé par quelque côté. L'Empire suppose une négation et une certitude : la certitude de l'infinie plasticité de l'homme et la négation de la nature humaine. Les techniques de propagande servent à mesurer cette plasticité et tentent de *faire coïncider réflexion et réflexe conditionné.* (HR, 640) [My italics]

The pivotal point which Camus makes here is that traditional terror and rational or totalitarian terror are not the same, and what distinguishes them is the assault, systematically brought about by the latter, against the human condition in its uncalculable «originality» - which, in Arendtian terms, is the endless capacity to begin something new.<sup>152</sup> Camus' emphasis on the reduction of man's free thinking to a «réflexe conditionné» immediately recalls Arendt's passage in OT on the totalitarian effort to transform man into Pavlov's dog (see Chapter 3).

In a passage, which has a striking echo in Arendt's 1953 pages on totalitarian terror, Camus declares that «*la seule révolution psychologique que notre temps ait connue, après Freud, a été opérée par le N.K.V.D. et les polices politiques en general*» (HR, 642),<sup>153</sup> which allowed the Russian «système concentrationnaire» to enact the transition from the government of people, under which traditional terror can still be subsumed, to the administration of *things* (HR, 641).

What characterises «rational» terror is, in Camus's view, the con-fusion of person and thing: totalitarian police techniques, he argues, «[g]uidées par une hypothèse déterministe, calculant les points faibles et le degré d'élasticité des âmes, [...] ont encore repoussé une des

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<sup>152</sup> «L'irrationnel [...] échappe au calcul et le calcul seul doit régner dans l'Empire. L'homme n'est qu'un jeu de forces sur lequel on peut peser rationnellement. Des marxistes inconsidérés ont cru pouvoir concilier leur doctrine avec celle de Freud, par exemple. On leur fit bien, et rapidement, voir. Freud est un penseur hérétique et « petit bourgeois » parce qu'il a mis au jour l'inconscient et qu'il lui a conféré au moins autant de réalité qu'au sur-moi, ou moi social. *Cet inconscient peut alors définir l'originalité d'une nature humaine, opposée au moi historique.* L'homme, au contraire, doit se résumer au moi social et rationnel, objet de calcul. *Il a dont fallu asservir, non seulement la vie de chacun, mais encore l'événement le plus irrationnel et le plus solitaire, dont l'attente accompagne l'homme tout au long de sa vie. L'Empire, dans son effort convulsé vers le royaume définitif, tend à intégrer la mort.»* (HR, 641). My italics.

<sup>153</sup> My italics.

limites de l'homme et s'essaient à démontrer [...] [que] la commune mesure des caractères est la chose. *Elles ont littéralement créé la physique des âmes.*» (HR, 642).<sup>154</sup>

The focus on the rational-terroristic annihilation of human nature - thus not identified with some transcendent and a-historical entity, but precisely designating all which characterises the human condition in its utter fragility, and, in this way, escaping all metaphysical and nihilistic objectivization - into a calculable and manipulable thing, recalls the pages on de Sade and the dandies, which lend the following passage its full meaning:

S'il n'y a pas de nature humaine, la plasticité de l'homme est, en effet, infinie. *Le réalisme politique, à ce degré, n'est qu'un romantisme sans frein, un romantisme de l'efficacité.* (HR, 640) [My italics]

In Camus' understanding, political realism, grounded on the principle that the end justifies the means, under the conditions of *rational* or *totalitarian* terror is coupled with, and overshadowed by, that same aestheticising drive, analysed in the chapters of HR on the *homme de lettres* and the Romantic rebels, and is identified by Camus with the murderous reduction of man to a thing, according to the perfect consistency of a pre-conceived system or hypothesis.

Thus, the infinite plasticity of human nature is nothing other than what Arendt defines as the totalitarian nihilistic principle that *everything is possible* (EU, 431). Thus,

La contradiction ultime de la plus grande révolution que l'histoire ait connue n'est point tant, après tout, qu'elle prétende à la justice à travers un cortège ininterrompu d'injustices et de violences. Servitude ou mystification, ce malheur est de tous les temps. *Sa tragédie est celle du nihilisme, elle se confond avec le drame de l'intelligence contemporaine qui, prétendant à l'universel, accumule les mutilations de l'homme.* (HR, 643) [My italics]

I suggest that we read Camus' thesis in HR together with Arendt's 1953 review of the the nihilism/totalitarianism debate of the Forties and Fifties in order to bring forth the distinctiveness of the French writer's position against the post-war panorama of political theory.

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<sup>154</sup> «Sur un autre plan, la fureur irrationnelle d'une brute peut seule imaginer qu'il faille torturer sadiquement des hommes pour obtenir leur consentement. Ce n'est alors qu'un homme qui en subjugué un autre, dans un immonde accouplement de personnes. Le représentant de la totalité rationnelle se contente, au contraire, de laisser dans l'homme la chose prendre le pas sur la personne. L'esprit le plus haut est d'abord ravalé au rang de l'esprit le plus bas par la *technique policière de l'amalgame*. Puis, cinq, dix, vingt nuits d'insomnie viendront à bout d'une illusoire conviction et mettront au monde une nouvelle *âme morte*. » (HR, 642). My italics.

#### 2.4. HISTORY AND NARRATIVE: FROM *LE GRAND STYLE* TO COUNCIL SYSTEM.

In *Concern with Politics* Arendt takes into examination the two main post-war approaches, which recur of the concept of nihilism in their diagnoses of the contemporary (especially political) world: the Heideggerian approach – which considers nihilism in terms of *historicity* as «the innermost fate of the modern age, which sent modern man along his road and therefore can be overcome only on its own terms» (CP, 433) – and the Christian-Conservative approach – which views nihilism as «that which happened to man when the modern age wandered in error from the “right path”, strayed from the road of ancient and Christian tradition» (EU, 433-434).<sup>155</sup>

From the latter perspective, she points out, «[the] reality of totalitarian domination is depicted almost exclusively under its ideological aspect, with ideologies understood as “secular religions” which either grow out of the “heresy” of secularization and immanentism or are supposed to answer *men’s assumed eternal need for religion*. In both cases, *a simple return to right religion appears to be the adequate cure*. This interpretation minimizes the shock of the crimes actually committed and dodges the question posed by that aspect of modern society most conspicuous in, but not confined to, totalitarianism – the tendency to deny the relevance of religion and profess an atheism of utter indifference.» (EU, 435).

This «return to tradition», understood as the «re-subordination of the temporal-political realm to the spiritual, in which the spiritual can be represented by the Catholic Church or the Christian faith in general or by all sorts of *revived Platonism*»<sup>156</sup> - thus, resting on the assumption of the «inherent superiority of the ends over the means, the eternal over the temporal» (EU, 434) – is what Camus had strongly rejected, on the grounds of his Nietzschean anti-Platonism, since the 1942 *prière d’insérer* to the MdS.<sup>157</sup>

As we have extensively shown, the «*raisonnement absurde*» of the MdS rejects as metaphysical fallacy the «main impulse [...] *to bring order into the things of the world, which cannot be grasped and judged without being submitted to the rule of some transcending principle*» (Id.).<sup>158</sup> In the MdS, from the anti-metaphysical horizon of the nihilistic absence of

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<sup>155</sup> My italics. Berdiaev’s *Origins of Russian Communism*, focusing on the relation between Russian nihilism and German (Hegelian) Historicism, is a vivid example of the Christian approach to modern nihilism from, in the specific case, the Russian «experiences with continental, particularly Central European, historicism», and figures among those thinkers who «no longer believe with Meinecke that historicism will be able “to heal the wounds it inflicted [on modern man] through the relativization of values.» (EU, 434)

<sup>156</sup> My italics.

<sup>157</sup> Already in 1942 Camus, like Arendt (EU, 435), insisted on the utter inadequacy of sheer «restatements of “old truths”» in order to solve the problems posed by modern nihilism.

<sup>158</sup> My italics.

transcendent principles, the aestheticizing drive to unify or give a form to the haphazardness and chaos of existence is recomprised within the limits highlighted by the *tragic* or *aesthetic* thought.

Moreover, we should not overlook the important point that, in the 1951 essay, Camus' focus is not on the ideological dimension of the totalitarian phenomenon *per se*, but – as in Arendt's analyses – in that the former plays a pivotal role in the functioning of rational or totalitarian *terror*. When pointing to the affinity between Christianity and Marxism (HR, 436), his perspective is neither *sociological* (focusing, in Arendt's words, on men's assumed eternal need for religion, according to which totalitarian ideology plays within society the same function as religion),<sup>159</sup> nor *historical*,<sup>160</sup> but, we could argue, *genealogical*.

In the 1953 manuscript *L'artiste et son temps*, a selection of extracts from interviews concerning the ethical and political role of the artist in the post-war age published in *Actuelles II*, Camus confirmed his refusal of «le *nihilisme romantique*, qu'il soit *bourgeois* ou prétendument *révolutionnaire*» (E, 801), thus identifying «romanticism» with all which «choisit le *mouvement perpétuel de l'histoire*, la grandiose épopée, et l'annonce d'un événement miraculeux, à la fin des temps» (E, 800-801).

Even though Camus had considered the Marxist and the capitalist ideologies of progress as two equally dangerous «utopie[s] absolue[s]» (CAC8, 615) ever since 1946, in *Ni victimes ni bourreaux* he still distinguished the «ideologies *nihilistes*» (identified with the ideologies of the «*tout est permis*»), from the «*philosophies qui font de l'histoire un absolu* (Hegel, puis Marx [...])» (CAC8, 617). In HR this distinction is clearly dropped: the Nazi and the Communist ideologies are both addressed in terms of a «*romantisme sans freins*», which uses, but cannot by any means be reduced to (HR, 579), an unprincipled and cynical political realism:<sup>161</sup>

La suppression de toute valeur morale et des principes, leur remplacement par le fait, roi provisoire, mais roi réel, n'a pu conduire, on l'a bien vu, qu'au cynisme politique, qu'il soit le fait de l'individu ou, plus

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<sup>159</sup> When employing the metaphor of «immanent or horizontal religion», the author insists that the totalitarian terrorist machine uses 19<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. Marxian) messianism for mystifying purposes.

<sup>160</sup> «L'histoire de la révolte métaphysique – in which Camus in HR roots revolutionary thought – ne peut donc pas se confondre avec celle de l'athéisme» (HR, 436).

<sup>161</sup> It is significant that Camus, like Arendt (see Chapter 3), linked the unprincipled and cynical realism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to the Hegelian philosophy of History: «Hegel détruit définitivement toute transcendance verticale et surtout *celle des principes*, voilà son originalité incontestable. Il restaure, sans doute, dans le devenir du monde, l'immanence de l'esprit. Mais cette immanence n'est pas fixe [...]. L'esprit est, et n'est pas, dans le monde ; il s'y fait et il y sera. La valeur est donc reportée à la fin de l'histoire. Jusque-là point de critère propre à fonder un jugement de valeur. Il faut agir et vivre en fonction de l'avenir. Toute morale devient provisoire. Le XIX et le XX siècle, dans leur tendance la plus profonde, sont des siècles qui ont essayé de vivre sans transcendance.» (E, 550). My italics.

gravement, celui de l'État. Les mouvements politiques, ou idéologiques, inspirés par Hegel, se réunissent tous dans l'abandon ostensible de la vertu. [...] Après tout, dire que la négation est en elle-même un acte positif justifiait par avance toutes les sortes de négation et annonçait le cri de Bakounine et Netchaïev : « Notre mission est de détruire, non de construire. » *Le nihiliste pour Hegel était seulement le sceptique qui n'avait d'autre issue que la contradiction ou le suicide philosophique. Mais il donnait lui-même naissance à une autre sorte de nihilistes qui, faisant de l'ennui un principe d'action, identifieront leur suicide avec le meurtre philosophique. Ici naissent les terroristes qui ont décidé qu'il fallait tuer et mourir pour être, puisque l'homme et l'histoire ne peuvent se créer que par le sacrifice et le meurtre.* (HR, 551-552) [My italics]

Now, Camus adds that the nihilism of the terrorists «malgré les apparences, est encore nihilisme au sens nietzschéen, dans la mesure où il est calomnie de la vie présente au profit d'un au-delà historique auquel il s'efforce de croire» (HR, 552 note \*).

There is sufficient evidence that Camus knew, and incorporated, Nietzsche's critique of Historicism : notes in the *Carnets* attest that, in May 1943, he was reading the French edition of the II volume of the *Intempestives* (CII, 96).

Furthermore, the note on Nietzsche's remark on beauty (CII, 60) could antedate the reading of *La Généalogie de la morale* from 1948-53 to the early '43. It is in this latter work that Nietzsche comprises, under the term nihilism, both the suicidal drive to nothingness and the priestly ascetic ideal, which offers a reason and a meaning, an "anaesthetics" (GM, III, 15) to human suffering (GM, III, 28). Thus, modern science is not the «natural antagonist» of the religious ascetic ideal but, is, instead, the latter's own «most recent and noble manifestation» (GM, III, 23), the so-called scientific conscience being nothing else than a sublimated form of *Christian morality* (GM, III, 22).

Camus' own use of the term "idealism" in HR is much in the line of Nietzsche's argument in GM III, 24, where the Medieval invincible order of the Assassins, defined as the free-spirits *par excellence*, and founded on the *secretum* that «nothing is true, everything is permitted», is opposed to the European and Christian *so-called* free spirits, whose unconditional will to truth («more absolute and rigid than anyone else») is the ascetic ideal.

According to Nietzsche, the «truthful man» affirms *another* world against this world of life, nature and history: his scientific ideal is a metaphysical faith that *denies this world*,<sup>162</sup> and this was also for Camus. In the chapter on «L'échec de la prophétie» Camus writes:

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<sup>162</sup> It is in a Nietzschean sense that Camus resorts to the notions of « nihilism » and « religion » to define Marxian political philosophy, and in particular the philosophy of history on which it rests. It is significant, in this respect, that, in his analysis of Marx's thought, he drew especially on the commentaries of Karl Jaspers: «En opposition au monde antique, l'unité du monde Chrétien et du monde marxiste est frappante. Les deux doctrines ont, en commun, une vision du monde qui les sépare de l'attitude grecque. Jaspers la définit très bien: « C'est une pensée chrétienne que de considérer l'histoire des hommes comme strictement unique ». Les chrétiens ont, les premiers, considéré la vie humaine, et la suites des événements, comme une histoire qui se déroule à partir d'une origine vers une fin, au cours de laquelle l'homme gagne son salut un mérite son châtement. » (HR, 594).

Hegel termine superbement l'histoire en 1807,<sup>163</sup> les saint-simoniens considèrent que les convulsions révolutionnaires de 1830 et 1848 sont les dernières, Comte meurt en 1857, s'appêtant à monter en chaire pour prêcher le positivisme à une humanité enfin revenue de ses erreurs. À son tour, *avec le même romantisme aveugle*, Marx prophétise la société sans classes et la résolution du mystère historique. Plus avisé, cependant, il ne fixe pas de date. (HR, 614)

[...] Le marxisme n'est pas scientifique; il est au mieux, scientiste. Il fait éclater le divorce profond qui s'est établi entre la raison scientifique, fécond instrument de recherche, de pensée, et même de révolte, et la raison historique, inventée par l'idéologie allemande dans sa négation de tout principe. La raison historique n'est pas une raison qui, selon sa fonction propre, juge le monde. [...] Si l'on réduit l'homme à l'histoire, il n'a pas d'autre choix que de sombrer dans le bruit et la fureur d'une histoire démentielle ou de donner à cette histoire la forme de la raison humaine. *L'histoire du nihilisme contemporain n'est donc qu'un long effort pour donner, par les seules forces de l'homme, et par la force tout court, un ordre à une histoire qui n'en a plus.* Cette pseudo-raison finit par s'identifier alors avec la ruse et la stratégie, attendant de culminer dans l'Empire idéologique. [...] La raison ne prêche pas, ou si elle prêche, elle n'est plus raison. C'est pourquoi la raison historique est une raison irrationnelle et romantique, qui rappelle parfois la systématisation de l'obsédé, l'affirmation mystique du verbe, d'autre fois. (HR, 624-625)

Aestheticism, implicit in the term "romantic/romanticism" and identified with the effort to *give order* to a senseless chain of events, and anaesthetics, brought about by historic reason - which providing a meaning that coincides with absolute truth, allows us to evade the absurdity of a finite condition into a comfortable and thoughtless conformism - concur in Camus's definition of contemporary nihilism.<sup>164</sup>

Now, the French writer opposes the Historic reason of the nihilistic/totalitarian «*romantisme sans freins*», which, in his view, reduces political action to the sheer exercise of force (will to power) to *another kind of reason*, characterised as «fécond instrument de recherche, de *pensée*, et même de *révolte*», whose proper function is *judgement*. In terms that echo Arendt's later writings, Camus identifies Historic reason (or the reason of the philosophies of History) with the negation of judgement (HR, 625), opposing the contemporary revolutionary thought, that stems from the former, with revolt.

Historical or totalitarian revolution is «une tentative pour conquérir un être neuf, par le faire, *hors de toute règle morale*» (HR, 652): totality is the *object* or the end-product of a limitless fabrication process projected in the future. In its effort, revolution «part de la *negation absolue* et se condamne à toutes les servitudes pour *fabriquer* un oui rejeté à l'extrémité des temps» (HR, 653), «[l']homme n'est rien, selon elle, s'il n'obtient pas dans l'histoire, de gré ou de force, le consentement unanime» (HR, 652).

Totality is opposed to unity, which, as Camus carefully points out, is not produced or made, but endlessly *created* through «l'affirmation d'une *limite*, d'une *dignité* et d'une *beauté communes aux hommes*» (HR, 653). On this ineliminable "yes" rests («[est] appuyé») the

<sup>163</sup> Camus, like Arendt, points out that Hegelian dialectics «appliqué correctement ne peut pas et ne doit pas s'arrêter. [...] Un mouvement, auquel on refuse un commencement, ne peut avoir de fin.» (HR, 627-628).

<sup>164</sup> It is significant that in the manuscript version of *L'artiste et son temps* Camus had noted (and successively erased) the following sentence: «Après tout *L'Homme révolté* est dans son entier une critique du romantisme.» (E, 1742).

“no” of the rebel - <sup>165</sup> «[la révolte] n’a jamais affirmé *dans son mouvement le plus pur* que l’existence d’une limite, justement, et *l’être divisé que nous sommes* : elle n’est pas à l’origine la négation totale de tout être» (HR, 652).

Now, according to Camus, «l’une [la révolte] est *créatrice*, l’autre [la révolution] *nihiliste*. La première est vouée à *créer* pour être de plus en plus, la seconde forcée de *produire* pour nier de mieux en mieux. La révolution historique s’oblige à faire toujours dans l’espoir, sans cesse déçu, d’être un jour» (HR, 653).

The genealogical approach is apparent in the concluding pages of the chapter on «La révolte historique», which introduce the IV Section of HR on *Révolte et Art*. Here Camus insists on the revolutionary denial or *loss of the origins*: what I suggest is that the normativeness of the original movement (*arché*) of revolt may be re-thought in an extra-moral sense:

*La révolution pour être créatrice ne peut se passer d’une règle, morale ou métaphysique, qui équilibre le délire historique. Elle n’a sans doute qu’un mépris justifié pour la morale formelle et mystificatrice qu’elle trouve dans la société bourgeoise. Mais sa folie a été d’étendre ce mépris à toute revendication morale. À ses origines mêmes, et dans ses élans les plus profonds se trouve une règle qui n’est pas formelle et qui, pourtant, peut lui servir de guide. La révolte, en effet, lui dit et lui dira de plus en plus haut qu’il faut essayer de faire, non pour commencer d’être un jour, aux yeux d’un monde réduit au consentement, mais en fonction de cet être obscur qui se découvre déjà dans le mouvement d’insurrection. Cette règle n’est ni formelle ni soumise à l’histoire, c’est ce que nous pourrions préciser en la découvrant à l’état pur, dans la création artistique. [...] la révolte aux prises avec l’histoire ajoute qu’au lieu de tuer et mourir pour produire l’être que nous ne sommes pas, nous avons à vivre et faire vivre pour créer ce que nous sommes.* (HR, 653).<sup>166</sup>

Communist or totalitarian revolution is justified, according to Camus, in its rejection of the formal or mystifying morality of bourgeois society, but it falls back upon nihilism – namely, in Nietzschean terms, upon the calumny of life – in its absolute negation of all moral value and norm. This passage explicitly points to the need for a «*règle, morale ou métaphysique*», which is extra-moral or anti-metaphysical in the (anti-Platonic) sense of Nietzsche’s GM, and is, thus, «moral and metaphysical» in the narrow acceptance of a tragic or *aesthetic* thought, as outlined in Chapter 1.

The folly of totalitarian revolution, in the a-moral and anti-foundational horizon disclosed by the «death of God», and the collapse of transcendent, *i.e.*, formal, table of values, lies precisely in its incapability to draw *from its very origin* an altogether different kind of moral norm or principle, neither formal, nor reduceable to sheer becoming (history)– which in the WP is addressed by Nietzsche as *aesthetic* morality.

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<sup>165</sup> «[La révolte] dit en même temps oui et non. Elle est le refus d’une part de l’existence au nom d’une autre part qu’elle exalte. Plus cette exaltation est profonde, plus implacable est le refus.» (HR, 652).

<sup>166</sup> My italics.



Significantly, Camus turns to artistic creation in order to grasp («à l'état pur») this peculiar type of norm: «L'art – he writes in the IV part on *Révolte et art* – nous ramène [...] aux origines de la révolte, dans la mesure où il tente de donner sa forme à une valeur qui fuit dans le devenir perpétuel, mais que l'artiste pressent et veut ravir à l'histoire» (HR, 662).

The point of art is brought forth in the analysis of three artistic forms : sculpture, painting, and novel writing:

Le plus grand et le plus ambitieux de tous les arts, la sculpture, s'acharne à fixer dans les trois dimensions la *figure fuyante* de l'homme, à ramener le désordre des gestes à l'unité du grand style. [...] Son propos n'est pas d'imiter, mais de *styler*, et d'emprisonner dans une expression significative la *fueur passagère* des corps ou le tournoiement infini des attitudes. [...] Le principe de la peinture est aussi dans un choix. [...] Le peintre isole son sujet, première façon de l'unifier. *Les paysages fuient, disparaissent de la mémoire ou se détruisent l'un l'autre*. C'est pourquoi le paysagiste ou le peintre des natures mortes *isole dans l'espace et dans le temps ce qui, normalement, tourne avec la lumière, se perd dans une perspective infinie ou disparaît sous le choc d'autres valeurs*. Le premier acte du paysagiste est de cadrer sa toile. Il élimine autant qu'il élit. De même, *la peinture de sujet isole dans le temps comme dans l'espace l'action qui, normalement, se perd dans une autre action*. Le peintre procède alors à une fixation. [...] Tous les personnages [de grands créateurs] donnent alors l'impression que, *par le miracle de l'art, ils continuent d'être vivants, en cessant d'être périssables*. [...] «Vaine chose que la peinture qui nous plaît par la ressemblance des objets qui ne sauraient nous plaire.» [...] Ces objets *ne sauraient nous plaire puisque nous ne les voyons pas ; ils sont ensevelis et niés dans un devenir perpétuel*. [...]

[L'Art réalise] sans effort apparent, la réconciliation du singulier et de l'universel [style residing, precisely, in this conjunction of nature and history] cette *présence imposée à ce qui devient toujours* (HR, 660-661). [My italics].

I have quoted extensively from Camus' commentary as it allows us to bring forth the following point : the «exigence esthétique», that the author traces at the core of revolt (HR, 659), coincides with man's rejection of the futility and dispersedness of existence, and of the impossibility of accomplishment that haunts the mortal condition of men. This is all the more visible, according to Camus, in novel writing: Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé* illustrates, in this sense, «l'une des entreprises les plus démesurées et les plus significatives de l'homme *contre sa condition mortelle*» (HR, 671), his work of art marks the victory over death and the perennial «fuite des choses» (HR, 669) through *remembrance*.<sup>167</sup>

Proust's *souvenir* summarises the twofold movement of revolt as yes-and-no: in *Le Temps retrouvé* the artist «rassemble un monde dispersé et lui *donne une signification* au niveau même du déchirement» (HR, 670). Thus, meaning stems from the artist's recollection, which intails a rejection of reality that is not a negation: «Mais *le goût des visages et de la lumière l'attachait en même temps à ce monde*. Il n'a pas consenti à ce que les vacances heureuses soient à jamais perdues. Il a pris sur lui de *les recréer à nouveau et de montrer,*

<sup>167</sup> «D'immenses espaces morts sont ainsi rejetés de la vie parce qu'ils n'ont rien laissé dans le souvenir. [...] le monde de Proust n'est à lui seul qu'une mémoire. Il s'agit seulement de la plus difficile et de la plus exigeante des mémoires, celle qui refuse la dispersion du monde tel qu'il est et qui tire d'un parfum retrouvé le secret d'un nouvel et ancien univers.» (HR, 670)

*contre la mort, que le passé se retrouvait au bout du temps dans un présent impérissable»*  
(Id.).<sup>168</sup>

There is a part of human experience that the artist strives to rescue from, and preserve against the mortality and futility of human existence (HR, 669):

Chacun, dans ce sens, *cherche à faire de sa vie une oeuvre d'art*. Nous désirons que l'amour dure et nous savons qu'il ne dure pas ; si même, par miracle, il devait durer toute une vie, il serait encore inachevé. Peut-être, dans cet insatiable besoin de durer, comprendrions-nous mieux la souffrance terrestre, si nous la savions éternelle. Il semble que les grandes âmes, parfois, soient moins épouvantées par la douleur que par le fait qu'elle ne dure pas. À défaut d'un bonheur inlassable, une longue souffrance ferait au moins un destin. Mais non, et nos pires tortures cesseront un jour. [...] les êtres s'échappent toujours et nous leur échappons aussi ; ils sont sans contours fermes. La vie de ce point de vue est sans style. [...] L'homme, ainsi déchiré, cherche en vain cette forme qui lui donnerait les limites entre lesquelles il serait roi. *Qu'une seule chose vivante ait sa forme en ce monde et il sera réconcilié !* (HR, 664-665) [My italics]

In this creative "yes-and-no" we cannot fail to recognize the elements of that «reconciliation with reality», which, in Arendt's words, since «the moment when Ulysses, at the court of the king of the Phaeacians, listened to the story of his own deeds and sufferings, to the story of his life, now a thing outside himself, and "object" for all to see and to hear» (BPF, 45), is the mark of storytelling. It is in this peculiar kind of «*poiesis* or fabrication which eventually becomes *the written word*» (Id.) that, according to Arendt, the «deepest human motive for history and poetry appears [...] in unparalleled purity» (Id.), as men's strive for "immortalizing".<sup>169</sup>

This striving for immortalising, man's «*désir éperdu de durer*» (HR, 665), which is inseparable from his rejection of the mortality and futility of life, is designated throughout HR as man's desire for unity and coherence, which is nothing but the *aesthetic drive* that Camus traces in both the rethoric of the literary men, on the one hand - from Lucrece to de Sade, to the Romantics, Nietzsche, Lautréamont and Rimbaud, and to the Surrealists - and in the

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<sup>168</sup> My italics.

<sup>169</sup> «All things that owe their existence to men, such as works, deeds, and words, are perishable, infected, as it were, by the mortality of their authors. However, if mortals succeeded in endowing their works, deeds, and words with some permanence and in arresting their perishability, then these things would, to a degree at least, enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness, and the mortals themselves would find their place in the cosmos, where everything is immortal except men. The human capacity to achieve this was remembrance, Mnemosyne, who therefore was regarded as the mother of all the other muses.» (BPF, 43). Now, according to Arendt, «the works of human hands owe part of their existence to the material nature provides and therefore carry within themselves some measure of permanence, borrowed, as it were, from the being-forever of nature. But what goes on between mortals directly, the spoken word and all the actions and deeds which the Greek called πράξεις or πράγματα, as distinguished from ποιήσις, fabrication, can never outlast the moment of their realisation would never leave any trace without the help of remembrance. The task of the poet and historiographer (both of whom Aristotle still puts in the same category because their subject is πράξις) consists in making something lasting out of remembrance. They do this by translating πράξις and λέξις, action and speech, into that kind of ποιήσις or fabrication which eventually becomes the written word.» (BPF, 44-45)

«univers clos [...], la nation retranchée, le camp de concentration, l'empire des libres esclaves» (HR, 659), on the other.

Religion and crime are the nihilistic and totalizing extremes of the same aestheticising «fièvre d'unité», that inspires «la création romanesque» (HR, 666), the novel being «une *belle histoire*» in which «l'action trouve sa forme, [...] où toute vie prend le visage de destin» (Id.). In the manuscript for a conference, used for *Roman et révolte* and of the *Discours de Suède*,<sup>170</sup> Camus points out that «[la] révolte de l'homme contre sa condition a deux expressions historiques: celle qui vise à (*rebâtir* [?]) le monde dans l'histoire et celle qui le *refond* complètement dans l'art» (E, 1653).

What emerges in these passages is the distinction/opposition between two “aesthetic” paradigms: the fabrication paradigm, structured on the constellation production-power-nihilism; and the creation paradigm, associating art, revolt and *grand style*.

According to Camus, revolt is *creative* (HR, 671) in the sense, made visible in «l'art romanesque», that it brings about an alliance «à la beauté du monde ou des êtres contre les puissances de la mort et de l'oubli» (Id.). The artist's selective remembrance is at the same time a “yes” to the beauty of the creature *and* a “no” to its futility and mortality, brought about in the «correction, que l'artiste opère *par son langage et par une redistribution d'éléments puisés dans le réel*, [qui] s'appelle le *style*» (HR, 672).<sup>171</sup>

Style is a *law*, which traces the unity and perfect limits of the artist's *re-created* universe (Id.) – <sup>172</sup> the «perfection close» of an eternity «[au] visage de l'homme» (HR, 671).

Camus' insistence on the opposition between the constellations of creation and fabrication, suggests that style should be understood as a peculiar kind of shape donation, which has nothing to do with the one entailed in the *poietic* act of (re)-building. The distinction is clearly made even in 1944, between «reconstruire le monde» and «repenser [le monde]»- «Cela [*i.e., repenser le monde*] revient à lui donner un *langage* » (E, 1680).<sup>173</sup>

The creation of a beautiful story is possible, in Camus' understanding, precisely when the artist applies his own *language* to his selective memory of reality - «Écrire, c'est déjà choisir» (HR, 673):

La vraie création romanesque [...] utilise le réel et n'utilise que lui, avec sa chaleur et son sang, ses passions et ses cris. Simplement, elle y ajoute *quelque chose qui le transfigure*. (Id.) [My italics]

<sup>170</sup> Ms. Agnely.

<sup>171</sup> My italics.

<sup>172</sup> Camus quotes Shelley: « Les poètes, dit Shelley, sont les législateurs, non reconnus, du monde » (HR, 672).

<sup>173</sup> My italics. In this sense Camus' conception of art reflects, and must be inscribed in, an aesthetics of failure – what Eduard Morot-Sir defined as *esthétique de la pauvreté* (see E. Morot-Sir, “Logique de la limite, esthétique de la pauvreté: théorie et pratique de l'essai”, in *Albert Camus 1980*, op. cit., pp. 192-208).

Thus, to (re)-think the world is the same as to bestow language upon the chaos and dispersedness of life:<sup>174</sup> «le choix et le dépassement de la réalité sont la condition même *de la pensée et de l'expression*» (HR, 673). The futility and mortality of the human condition are overcome (*dépassés*) through «un *exercice de l'intelligence* au service d'une *sensibilité nostalgique ou révoltée*» (HR, 668),<sup>175</sup> which Camus defines, in Nietzschean terms, as *grand style* (HR, 674): «Le grand style est la *stylisation* invisible, c'est-à-dire *incarnée*» (HR, 675), where by stylisation he means that *fixation*, in remembrance and words, which rescues from death «la fureur passagère» of bodies and actions (HR, 660).

The *grand style*, as the essence of novel writing and, consequently, in Camus' argument, of creation, coincides with a restless correction «que l'artiste effectue sur son expérience» (HR, 668), which is *not moral* or merely *formal*.

The equation of “moral” with “formal” rests on the *aesthetic* premises analysed in Chapter I: it is in perfect continuity with the argument of the MdS that the *creative* act cannot be confused with a mediocre «*évasion*» (HR, 666) from reality, in that it takes in, and cannot be conceived without, the sensory dimension of *la chair*.

It is, therefore, in a Nietzschean sense that Camus qualifies as *nihilistic* the total negation of reality, i.e. of that *aesthetic* «goût des visages et de la lumière» (HR, 670) («chaleur et [...] sang, [...] passions et [...] cris», HR, 673), brought about in what he addresses as “formal art”.<sup>176</sup>

Equally nihilistic is the specular logic, that governs all form of artistic realism, as illustrated in contemporary American novel and in Russian Communist cultural policies and aesthetics. The latter has its roots in the theory of the 19<sup>th</sup> century so-called Russian nihilists, which Camus designates, with Berdiaev, as the «gentilshommes repentants» (HR, 659),

<sup>174</sup> «Une belle histoire ne va pas sans cette continuité imperturbable qui n'est jamais dans les situations vécues [...]» (HR, 667).

<sup>175</sup> «Le roman fabriqué du destin sur mesure. C'est ainsi qu'il concurrence la création et qu'il triomphe, provisoirement, de la mort» (HR, 668).

<sup>176</sup> « À la limite, si le refus est total, la réalité est expulsée dans son entier et nous obtenons des œuvres purement formelles. [...] le mouvement primitif de création, où révolte et consentement, affirmation et négation, sont étroitement liés, est mutilé au profit du refus. C'est alors l'évasion formelle dont notre temps a fourni tant d'exemples et dont on voit *l'origine nihiliste*. » (HR, 671). My italics. Earlier in the chapter Camus observed: «L'art réalise [...] la réconciliation du singulier et de l'universel dont rêvait Hegel. Peut-être est-ce la raison pour laquelle les époques folles d'unité, comme est la nôtre, se tournent vers les arts primitifs, où la stylisation est plus intense, l'unité plus provocante? La stylisation la plus forte se trouve toujours au début et à la fin des époques artistiques; elle explique la force de négation et de transposition qui a soulevé toute la peinture moderne dans un élan désordonné vers l'être et l'unité. » (HR, 661).

whose thought is summarised in Pissarev's sentence, «Une paire de bottes vaut mieux que Shakespeare» (HR, 657).<sup>177</sup>

Pissarev, according to Camus, «proclame la déchéance des valeurs esthétiques au profit des valeurs pragmatiques» (Id.), deferring beauty to the end of history :<sup>178</sup> in this sense he embodies the «folie ascétique» in the acceptation of Nietzsche's GM, which translates itself in the metaphysical fallacy of realist aesthetics.

The latter aims at the reduction of artistic creation to the sheer reproduction and enumeration of "naked" reality («le réel à l'état brut», HR, 672) through the total expulsion of form, that is, of choice. But, by assimilating art to the sterile repetition of creation, «le réalisme ne devrait être que le moyen d'expression du génie religieux» (HR, 673), which is bound to a logical *échec* :<sup>179</sup> «Que l'événement asservisse le créateur [as in the modern aesthetics of realism] ou que le créateur prétende nier l'événement tout entier [as in formal art], et la création s'abaisse donc aux formes dégradées de l'art nihiliste » (HR, 673-674).<sup>180</sup>

Now, in Camus's view,

Il en est de la création comme de la civilisation : elle suppose une tension ininterrompue entre la forme et la matière, le devenir et l'esprit, *l'histoire et les valeurs*. Si l'équilibre est rompu, il y a *dictature ou anarchie, propagande ou délire formel*. Dans les deux cas, *la création, qui, elle, coïncide avec une liberté raisonnée*, est impossible. Soit qu'il cède au vertige de l'abstraction et de l'obscurité formelle, soit qu'il fasse appel au fouet du

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<sup>177</sup> The notes on Pissarev and the «gentilhomme repentant» in the *Carnets* (CII, 225) are taken from Berdiaev's *Sources et sens du communisme russe* (SS, 70-79). In this latter work the Russian author insists on the cynical rejection of all "higher idea" («idées élevées») and the reduction of literature to a purely social mission. Pissarev is the emblem of a feeling of guilt, widespread among the intelligentsia: «C'est en Russie, précisément dans les classes dites privilégiées, que naît ce type particulier du "gentilhomme repentant". Repentant, non d'une faute qu'il aurait commise personnellement, mais de la faute, du péché social » (SS, 79). See also my article, «Du nihilisme aux théocraties totalitaires. Les sources et le sens du communisme russe de Berdiaev dans les *Carnets* de Camus», *Albert Camus 20. «Le Premier homme» en perspective*, Paris, Minard, 175-195.

<sup>178</sup> Camus insists, with Berdiaev, on the Hegelian influences in Russian revolutionary thinkers: «Selon les interprètes révolutionnaires de *La Phénoménologie*, il n'y aura pas d'art dans la société réconciliée. La beauté sera vécue, non plus imaginée. Le réel, entièrement rationnel, apaisera, à lui seul, toutes les soifs. La critique de la conscience formelle et des valeurs d'évasion s'étend naturellement à l'art.» (HR, 658).

<sup>179</sup> «Pour être vraiment réaliste, une description se condamne à être sans fin. Là où Stendhal décrit, d'une phrase, l'entrée de Lucien Leuwen dans un salon, l'artiste réaliste devrait, en bonne logique, utiliser plusieurs tomes à décrire personnages et décors, sans parvenir encore à épuiser le détail. Le réalisme est l'énumération indéfinie. Il relève par là que son ambition vraie est la conquête, non de l'unité, mais de la totalité du monde réel. On comprend alors qu'il soit l'esthétique officielle d'une révolution de la totalité. Mais cette esthétique a déjà démontré son impossibilité. Les romans réalistes choisissent malgré eux dans le réel, [...]. Écrire, c'est déjà choisir. Il y a donc un arbitraire du réel, comme un arbitraire de l'idéal, et qui fait du roman réaliste un roman à thèse implicite. Réduire l'unité du monde romanesque à la totalité du réel ne peut se faire qu'à la faveur d'un jugement *a priori* qui élimine du réel ce qui ne convient pas à la doctrine. Le réalisme dit socialiste est alors voué, par la logique même de son nihilisme, à cumuler les avantages du roman édifiant et de la littérature de propagande.» (HR, 673) My italics.

<sup>180</sup> My italics. In his analysis of modern American novel, Camus also insists on the nihilistic logic implicit in the former's reduction of man «soit à l'élémentaire, soit à ses réactions extérieures et à son comportement.» (HR, 668). The identification of the logic of nihilism with an abstracting process is further confirmed: «La vie des corps, réduite à elle-même, produit paradoxalement un univers abstrait et gratuit, constamment nié à son tour par la réalité» (HR, 669).

réalisme le plus cru ou le plus naïf, l'art moderne, dans sa quasi-totalité, est un *art de tyrans et d'esclaves, non de créateurs*. (HR, 674) [My italics]

The intratextual analysis of the chapter on Revolt and Art highlights two aesthetic paradigms of contemporary *nihilism*, which betray a strong political connotation: Camus associates *an-archy* to «délire formel» or «délire verbal», which he traces in an *irrational negation*, which is destructive of language (HR, 676) - «Le formalisme appartient aussi bien à la société du passé, quand il est *abstraction gratuite, qu'à la société qui se prétend de l'avenir*; il définit alors la *propagande*» (Id.). *An-archy* is, thus, inseparable from abstraction, which Camus traces at the core of state terror, which exploits propaganda for the purposes of the systematic manipulation of human nature.

The other side of «la frénésie formelle» is the realism of the «esthétique *totalitaire*» (HR, 676), *i.e.*, of the Communist revolution - «Le réalisme, d'ailleurs, est aussi bien bourgeois – mais il est alors noir – que socialiste, et il devient édifiant », reducing language to «le mot d'ordre» and submitting it to a determinist ideology (Id.).

Politics, like art, strives between «le nihilisme des principes formels» (*anarchy*), and the «nihilisme sans principes» (Id.), made visible in the cynical policy of 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian revolution, and in its “realist” reduction of man to history and to the sheer exteriority of a predictable behaviour, which culminated in total dominion and control (*dictature*).

Both forms of nihilism do not operate in HR as separate Ideal-types, but as two interwoven dimensions of one and the same political paradigm, already traced in the articles for *Combat*, one, that is, constructed on the vertical power structure of master/slave (E,674).<sup>181</sup>

The whole chapter on revolt and art, in perfect continuity with the 1949 Conference, is structured around the opposition between two aesthetic-political paradigms: one, founded on the notion of power (*puissance*), developed around the master/slave (*tyran/esclave* or *bourreau/victime*) relationship, and associated to *nihilism*, in its twofold expression of *an-archy* and dictatorship; the second, founded on the notion of creation, as inseparable for «le grand style».

This, I argue, had already emerged in the opposition *valeurs d'exemple/ valeurs de puissance* in the conclusion to the Conference of São Paulo, where Camus developed the distinction between the artist and the conqueror (the latter embodying, in the Cold-war

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<sup>181</sup> My italics.

climate of the Iron Curtain, the policy of power/conquest/dominion/world empire: the shift from MdS is apparent), repeated in the opposition *chair/loi*:

Et ici, je me souviendrai que *je suis écrivain*. Car un des sens de l'histoire d'aujourd'hui et plus encore de demain, c'est *la lutte entre les artistes et les conquérants*, et si dérisoire que cela puisse paraître, entre les mots et les balles. Les conquérants et les artistes veulent la même chose et vivent la même révolte. *Mais les conquérants modernes veulent l'unité du monde et ils ne peuvent l'obtenir qu'en passant par la guerre et la violence. Ils n'ont qu'un rival, et bientôt qu'un ennemi, qui est l'art. Car les artistes veulent aussi cette unité mais ils la recherchent et la trouvent [sic] parfois dans la beauté, au terme d'une longue ascèse intérieure.* « Les poètes, dit Shelley, sont les législateurs non reconnus du monde. » Mais par là il définit, en même temps, la grande responsabilité des artistes contemporains qui doivent reconnaître ce qu'ils sont, et que, par exemple, qu'ils sont du côté de la vie, non de la mort. *Ils sont les témoins de la chair, non de la loi. [...] leur aptitude à vivre la vie d'autrui leur permet de reconnaître la constante justification des hommes, qui est la douleur.*<sup>182</sup> [My italics]

Law is, here, associated to *abstraction* as coupled to the concept of legal murder (state terror). Its relationship to the master/slave power structure is confirmed twice in HR and in the 1957 *Discours de Suède*: in both texts Camus provocatively draws on Nietzsche - «Au lieu du juge et du répresser, le créateur» (HR, 676) - «C'est pourquoi les varies artistes ne méprisent rien; ils s'obligent à comprendre *au lieu de juger*. Et, s'ils ont un parti à prendre en ce monde, ce ne peut être que celui d'une société où, selon le *le grand mot de Nietzsche, ne régnera plus de juge, mais le créateur* [...] <sup>183</sup>» (E, 1072).

That Camus conceives the figure of the creator as alien to the logic of power/force/oppression, which he identifies with modern politics, is confirmed in the chapter on Revolt and Art, where the author explicitly rejects the idea of a city governed by artists (HR, 676), specular image of the rule of the (Platonic) philosopher-kings.

Camus couples his reading of Nietzsche with Simone Weil's commentaries on the relationship between production and technocratic dominion,<sup>184</sup> thus pointing to «le drame de notre époque où le *travail*, soumis entièrement à la *production*, a cessé d'être *créateur*» (HR, 676):

Simone Weil a raison de dire que la condition ouvrière est deux fois inhumaine, privée d'argent, d'abord, et de dignité ensuite. Un travail auquel on peut s'intéresser, un travail *créateur*, même mal payé, ne dégrade pas la vie. Le socialisme industriel n'a rien fait d'essentiel pour la condition ouvrière parce qu'il n'a pas

<sup>182</sup> Fernande Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., pp. 71-72. My italics.

<sup>183</sup> My italics.

<sup>184</sup> «Aux deux formes traditionnelles d'oppression qu'a connues l'humanité, par les armes et par l'argent, Simone Weil en ajoute une troisième, l'oppression par la fonction. [...] (HR, 619). Les illusions bourgeoises concernant la science et le progrès technique, partagées par les socialistes autoritaires, ont donné naissance à la civilisation des dompteurs de machine qui peut, par la concurrence et la domination, se séparer en blocs ennemis mais qui, sur le plan économique, est soumise aux mêmes lois : accumulation du capital, production rationalisée et sans cesse accrue. *La différence politique, qui touche à la plus ou moins grande omnipotence de l'État, est appréciable, mais pourrait être réduite par l'évolution économique. Seule, la différence des morales, la vertu formelle s'opposant au cynisme historique, paraît solide. Mais l'impératif de la production domine les deux univers et n'en fait, sur le plan économique, qu'un seul monde.* » (HR, 622-623). [My italics]

touché au principe même de la production et de l'organisation du travail, qu'il a exalté au contraire. Il a pu proposer au travailleur *une justification historique de même valeur que celle qui consiste à promettre les joies célestes à celui qui meurt à la peine* ; il ne lui a jamais rendu la *joie du créateur*. *La forme politique de la société n'est plus en question à ce niveau, mais les credo d'une civilisation technique de laquelle dépendent également le capitalisme et le socialisme*. Toute pensée qui ne fait pas avancer ce problème ne touche qu'à peine au malheur ouvrier. (HR, 620-621) [My italics]

It is clear from this passage that «tyrannie» (and its correlative, which is «servitude»), «dictature» and «anarchie» are used by Camus not to refer to specific political forms of society - or to name the “new”, *i.e.*, 20<sup>th</sup> century so-called totalitarian forms of government, by the old, as pointed out by Hannah Arendt - but rather to designate a nihilistic or abstracting logic, which preserves a certain pattern of domination, founded on the reduction of work (*travail*) to the productive process of the factory, and therefore, of the craftsman to the labourer.

Production is seen as divesting the *creative act (travail)* of the actor's interest and reflection, which are consequently limited to the *thing* or the end-product (HR, 676): intelligence (*l'esprit*), which Camus conceives as the ineliminable condition of creation, cannot, therefore, be identified with the craftsman's idea *tout court*, which is at the core of the modern assimilation of work and labour which was extensively analysed by Hannah Arendt in her commentaries on Marx.<sup>185</sup>

I would suggest that there is more in these passages than the simple re-statement of the traditional reconciliation of intellectual and manual work, or than the wish to transform the conditions of factory work by turning the labourer into an artisan.<sup>186</sup>

Reflection, I would argue, is not the artisan's skill and idea, realised by taming a shapeless matter: Camus does not separate intelligence from the revolted, namely, tragic or *aesthetic*, sensibility (HR, 668) of the actor or creator, and the *mise en forme* of man's need for the impossible (HR, 674), rooted in remembrance, has the character of the *grand style*, the «stylisation incarnée» (HR, 675): «Lorsque le cri le plus déchirant *trouve son langage* le plus ferme, la révolte satisfait à sa vraie exigence et tire de cette fidélité à elle-même une force de création.<sup>187</sup> Bien que cela heurte les préjugés du temps, le plus grand style en art est

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<sup>185</sup> See HC, 85-ff.

<sup>186</sup> According to Fred Rosen, author of an article on “Marxism, Mysticism, and Liberty. The influence of Simone Weil on Albert Camus” ( *Political Theory*, 7(3), 1979, pp. 301-319), «[Camus] advocated [...] the transformation of the industrial worker into an artisan [...] Camus proposed what Simone Weil continually emphasized in her early writings, namely the abolition of the separation of intellectual and manual labor which Marx wrongly thought would disappear with the proletarian revolution.» (art. cit., p. 306). I would argue, in contrast, as emerges from our textual analysis, that Camus' creator is not, strictly speaking, an artisan in the Arendtian sense.

<sup>187</sup> As Camus writes in the preface to the re-edition of his first collection of essays *L'Envers et l'endroit*, drafts of which date back to 1954, to be is to «savoir unir à doses à peu près égales le naturel et l'art» (E, 12): «Stendhal s'écriait un jour: «Mais mon âme à moi est un feu qui souffre, s'il ne flambe pas ». Ceux qui lui ressemblent sur



l'expression de la plus haute révolte» (HR, 674). Comme le vraie classicisme n'est qu'un *romantisme dompté*, le génie est une révolte qui a créé sa propre mesure» (Id.). The analogy between creative action and «*romantisme dompté*» immediately recalls, in contrast, the dandy's *romantisme sans freins*, whose reifying and abstracting logic Camus traces at the core of the 20<sup>th</sup> century nihilist attempts at aestheticising the political.

Now, Camus, like Nietzsche in *The Greek State*, insists on the powerful necessity – the flame from which stems the revolted cry (E, 1184, note 8) - which compels the artist to create. The genesis of artistic creation, like that of the political agon, is *in nature*, but the artist's pleased astonishment at *beauty* exceeds man's wonder at nature: «Breton a raison. – Camus notes in 1946 – *Moi non plus je ne crois pas à la fracture entre le monde et l'homme*. Il y a les instants de l'accord avec la nature brute. Mais la nature n'est jamais brute. Mais les paysages fuient et s'oublent. C'est pourquoi il y a des peintres. [...] [l'] erreur [de la peinture surréaliste] a été de vouloir préserver ou imiter seulement la part miraculeuse de la nature. Le vraie artiste révolté ne nie pas les miracles mais les dompte » (CII, 184).<sup>188</sup>

Creative action couples the wonder at the miracle of what is (nature) with the *maîtrise*, which corrects necessity, sublimating it. Being *is* (in) such correction (E, 12) - what Camus defines as *grand style* - which transcends, in a Nietzschean sense, the sheer work of the craftsman.

Camus' distance from the Existentialist reduction of *être* to *faire* is rooted in the author's rejection of the fabrication paradigm, which he traces at the core of the modern philosophy of History. The critique of historicism is the cornerstone of Camus' critique of Existentialism, and especially of the "Existentialo-Marxism" of the Sartrean family of *Les Temps Modernes*, which, in the author's view, remains trapped in nihilism:<sup>189</sup>

Libérer l'homme de toute entrave pour ensuite l'encager pratiquement dans une nécessité historique revient en effet à lui enlever d'abord ses raisons de lutter pour enfin le jeter à n'importe quel parti, pourvu que celui-ci n'ait d'autre règle que l'efficacité. C'est alors passer, *selon la loi du nihilisme, de l'extrême liberté à l'extrême nécessité* ; ce n'est rien d'autre que se vouer à *fabriquer des esclaves*. (E, 770) [My italics]

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ce point ne devraient créer que dans cette flambée. Au sommet de la flamme, le cri sort tout droit et crée ses mots qui le répercutent à leur tour. Je parle ici de ce que nous tous, artistes incertains de l'être, mais sûrs de ne pas être autre chose, attendons, jour après jour, pour consenir enfin à vivre » (Id.).

<sup>188</sup> My italics.

<sup>189</sup> «Mais l'histoire, seule raison et seule règle, serait alors divinisée, et c'est l'abdication de la révolte devant ceux qui prétendent être les prêtres et l'Église de ce dieu. Ce serait aussi la négation de la liberté et de l'aventure existentielles. Tant que vous n'aurez pas éclairé ou démenti cette contradiction, défini votre conception de l'histoire, colonisé ou proscrit le marxisme, comment donc ne serions-nous pas fondés à dire que vous ne sortez pas, quoi que vous en ayez, du nihilisme ? Et ce nihilisme, malgré les ironies de votre article, est aussi celui de l'inefficacité. Une attitude semblable cumule deux sortes de nihilisme, celui de l'efficacité à tout prix et celui de l'abstention pratique.» (E, 770-771).

We can, now, clearly see how far removed Camus' position is from the «Existentialist leap» into action described by Hannah Arendt in 1954. Echoing Heidegger, Arendt interprets the Existentialist equation of freedom with man's self-*creation* in the light of Cartesianism, which she traces to the origin of Sartre's "jump" from an absurd situation, made visible in the awareness that «man is condemned to be free», into action («just as Kierkegaard jumped into belief out of universal doubt», CP, 438).<sup>190</sup> She, thus, traces in the apparently new insight, at the core of the Existentialist activist or radical humanism, that Man can create himself (CP, 440), the very old (modern) claim that «Man is the highest being for man, that Man is his own God».

I suggest that Arendt interprets (Heideggerianly) – and, I would add, incorrectly when referring to Camus' concept of rebellion – the concept of *défi*, that guides political action under the conditions of modern nihilism, in the light of the fabrication model.

She, thus identifies, in French Existentialism, the philosophers' extreme (political) attempt to eradicate the human condition and the absurdity of human life by artificial means (CP, 440): «From the paradox that man, though he did not make himself, is held responsible for what he is, Sartre concludes that he therefore must be held to be his own *Maker*.»<sup>191</sup>

As I have attempted to show, Camus' concept of *creation* not only strongly refuses the God-like perspective, which he repeatedly refers to as *absolute* nihilism, as made visible in the modern "aestheticising" frenzy (from de Sade to Hitlerism); but, in its very definition, contains plurality and communicability as its ineliminable conditions, which draw him closer to the position of the German Existentialist thinker Karl Jaspers (CP, 441).

Camus opposes to the abstract law of the philosophies of History, which reduce man to a corpse or a silhouette, the living law of the creator's *grand style*. The *grand style* breaks with the fabrication/production paradigm, around which contemporary society has articulated:

Toute création nie, en elle-même, le monde du maître et de l'esclave. La hideuse société de tyrans et d'esclaves où nous nous survivons ne trouvera sa mort et sa *transfiguration* qu'au niveau de la création. (HR, 677) [My italics]

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<sup>190</sup> We should not forget that in MdS Camus rejects this "leap" as a metaphysical fallacy, what he addresses as "philosophical suicide" in MdS. In her 1946 article on *French Existentialism* Arendt points out «the nihilistic elements, which are obvious in spite of all protests to the contrary» in Camus's MdS and Sartre's *La Nausée*, which according to her are «not the consequences of new insights but of some very *old ideas*» (EU, 193), by which, I take it, she means with Heidegger the Cartesianism and god-like perspective of the unconditioned modern subject. For an extensive reply to this criticism, see chapter 1 of the present work.

<sup>191</sup> Arendt explicitly draws a parallel between the Existentialist concept of political action, interpreted as an attempt to «save the human nature» (or mankind) «at the expense of the human condition» (EU, 440), and the familiar attempts, in 20<sup>th</sup> century politics - «in totalitarian regimes and, unfortunately, not only there - [...] to change the human nature by radically changing traditional conditions.» (Id.)

I suggest that Camus' reflection on creation anticipates certain elements of Vattimo's interrogation on the question of nihilism as the *end of the political*,<sup>192</sup> or more precisely, the end of a *certain concept* of the political, which has its origin in dominion (the master/slave relationship) and its consolidation in the state as abstract entity. The end of politics – the latter being identified by Camus with the “space” of dominion (*puissance*) – would, as Vattimo points out, coincide with the generalisation of the political conceived, in a Nietzschean sense, *as the sphere of creative action*.<sup>193</sup>

It is between February 1950 and February 1951 that Camus conceives the titles of his «essais solaires» or Mediterranean Essays (CII, 311) - «l'Été. Midi. La Fête». The second essay of the collection *L'Été*, a text written in 1940 in the immediate aftermath of the French defeat, and republished in 1954 under the title *Les amandiers*, opens with a quotation: «Savez-vous, disait Napoléon à Fontanes, ce que j'admire le plus au monde? *C'est l'impuissance de la force à fonder quelque chose*. Il n'y a que deux puissances au monde: le sabre et l'esprit. À la longue le sabre est toujours vaincu par l'esprit» (E, 835).<sup>194</sup>

Now, «esprit» in Camus' definition is brought forth by *taste* («goût de l'esprit»),<sup>195</sup> and its two essential joys are «*sentir et créer*» (E, 1824). It is significant that, as early as 1940, Nietzsche would provide the source for those «*vertus conquérantes de l'esprit*», among which each man is expected to choose against the modern «esprit de lourdeur», related by Camus to the dominion of force: «Pour lui [Nietzsche], ce sont la *force de caractère, le goût, le "monde"*, le bonheur classique, la dure fierté, la *froide frugalité* du sage. Ces vertus, plus que jamais, sont nécessaires [...]» (E, 837). «L'esprit – he wrote in the early Forties- a perdu cette royale assurance qu'un conquérant savait lui reconnaître; il s'épuise maintenant à maudire la force, faute de savoir la *maîtriser*» (E, 835). The virtues of intelligence (*esprit*) are extra-moral or aesthetic, in that they exercise their relative and finite regulating force within the anti-metaphysical horizon of modern nihilism.

In his letter to *Libertaire* in May 1952 (*Révolte et romantisme*), Camus explicitly refers to a *good use* of nihilism, as the way out of the political and moral impasse of the 20<sup>th</sup>

<sup>192</sup> G. Vattimo, *Introduzione a Nietzsche*, Laterza, pp. 102- ff.

<sup>193</sup> It is significant that in the 1954 draft of his preface to *L'Envers et l'endroit* Camus identified the artist with the adventurer, the Nietzschean illustration of the (anti-metaphysical) creative “great health” of the over-man (see G. Vattimo, op. cit.). This should come as no surprise, as the *Carnets* attest that around 1953 Camus was re-reading Nietzsche's work.

<sup>194</sup> The quotation is noted, with a significant variation, in the *Carnets* in 1939: «[...] l'impuissance de la force à garder quelque chose. [...]» (CI, 186). In the light of the chapter on Revolt and Art in HR, «garder» and «fonder» are interchangeable, the latter being identified with the aesthetic effort to rescue from oblivion («garder») some elements of reality.

<sup>195</sup> E, 1824, note 3.

century.<sup>196</sup> For Camus, as for Arendt, the solution to the question of nihilism does not lie in the simple revival of traditional principles and values: there can be no *going back* to the Western (Platonic-Christian) tradition. The only *retour à la tradition* is the one formulated in Simone Weil's *Enracinement*, as the capacity «à penser juste, à voir juste » (E, 1700).

Le monde d'aujourd'hui est un, en effet, mais son unité est celle du nihilisme. La civilisation n'est possible que si, renonçant au nihilisme des principes formels et au nihilisme sans principes, ce monde retrouve le chemin d'une synthèse créatrice. (HR, 676)

The possibility of overcoming nihilism, and of «la renaissance d'une civilisation», in which the question of creation and the question of revolution coincide (HR, 675), is traced by Camus in a genealogical thought that goes *back to the « roots »* (*enracinement*). This movement cannot be confused with the revival of primitive mentality, or with the celebration of sheer "natural" life, forms that harbour a conservative drive: nihilism, according to Camus, is conservative (HR, 690), only creation is truly revolutionary, that is, it *transfigures* reality.

According to Camus, it is «la limite découverte par la révolte [qui] *transfigure tout*» (HR, 697). The key, I argue, can be found in what the author calls «les antinomies de la pensée révoltée» (HR, 698):

On ne peut pas dire que rien n'a de sens puisque l'on affirme par là une valeur consacrée par un jugement ; ni que tout ait un sens puisque le mot tout n'a pas de signification pour nous. L'irrationnel limite le rationnel qui lui donne à son tour sa mesure. Quelque chose a du sens, enfin, que nous devons conquérir sur le non-sens. *De la même manière*, on peut dire que l'être soit seulement au niveau de l'essence. Où saisir l'essence sinon au niveau de l'existence et du devenir ? Mais on ne peut dire que l'être n'est qu'existence. Ce qui devient toujours ne saurait être, *il faut un commencement*. L'être ne peut s'éprouver que dans le devenir, le devenir n'est rien sans l'être. Le monde n'est pas dans une pure fixité ; mais il n'est pas seulement mouvement. Il est mouvement et fixité. La dialectique historique, par exemple, ne fuit pas indéfiniment vers une valeur ignorée. *Elle tourne autour de la limite, première valeur.* (HR, 699)<sup>197</sup> [My italics]

What we find here is the intuition, striving to find its language, of the origin as creative action, as (new) *beginning*, which ex-poses the limit, not as some-thing to be found in or bestowed upon being, but the *limit as being* - our being-at-the-limit as finite *être*.

Being is not reduced to the flux of existence (what Arendt designated as sheer life, "zoè"), nor to an abstract «*fixité*» - the latter coinciding, throughout l'HR, with the limitless

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<sup>196</sup>«Nous n'avons donc pas d'autre issue que d'étudier la contradiction où s'est débattue la pensée révoltée, entre le nihilisme et l'aspiration à un ordre vivant, et de la dépasser dans ce qu'elle a de positif. Je n'ai mis l'accent avec tant d'insistance sur l'aspect négatif de cette pensée que dans l'espoir que nous pourrions alors en guérir, tout en gardant le *bon usage* de la maladie» (E, 751-752) [my italics]. The metaphor of sickness to designate nihilism already recurred in the 1942 *prière d'insérer* to MdS (see O. Todd, op. cit, p. 303).

<sup>197</sup> My italics.

effort of the nihilistic «esprit historique» (E, 856) to «*bâtir sur l'espèce une farouche immortalité*» (HR, 684).<sup>198</sup>

What emerges from the passage quoted above is that the principle (*la règle*) of being is the same as the principle of revolt, which Camus identifies with that of creation. The author defines the latter as a revendication of the unity of the human condition: now, in the light of our reading of the chapter on Revolt and Art, we are inclined to recognize, in the difference between unity and totality, that very difference, which Hannah Arendt traces in her analyses of the modern concept of History, between the finite “immortalizing”, brought about in the act of remembrance and story-writing or story-telling, and the modern notion “immortality” (of mankind).

*In the same way as naming despair, to say that nothing has meaning, conquers a meaning, and overcomes despair* (HR, 666) – language being, as we have seen, constitutive of Camus' definition of *grand style* – a *beginning* is needed for being (*l'être*) to come into being («la vie [...] est sans *style*», HR, 665).

It is the beginning (*le commencement*) that inaugurates the finitude of being (summarised in the notion of «être double», HR, 708),<sup>199</sup> which is the mark of *le grand style* as «stylistation [i.e., fixation] incarnée». So, as «l'art nous ramène [...] aux origines de la révolte» (HR, 662), «[à] la source de la révolte où refus et consentement, singularité et universel, individu et histoire s'équilibrent dans la tension la plus dure» (HR, 676), Camus identifies the principle (*règle*) of revolt with the principle of beauty.<sup>200</sup>

The revolted revendication of unity coincides with, and is brought forth as, the revendication of «cette partie intacte du réel dont le nom est la *beauté*» (HR, 679). Beauty – which Plato situated above the world, and the nihilists and revolutionaries exiled to the end of history (HR, 657-658) – is neither a transcendent Idea, nor in the world *per se*, but as «image du bonheur», it is (in) the *creative touching-upon of man-to-the-world*.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>198</sup> «[Les hommes de l'Europe] désespèrent de la liberté des personnes et rêvent d'une étrange liberté de *l'espèce*» (E, 708): mankind or the human species constituting the eternal essence, to which, according to Camus, «la proie des êtres» (Id.) is sacrificed.

<sup>199</sup> Camus qualifies the nihilistic hatred of life («[Les hommes d'Europe] *ne croient plus à ce qui est, au monde et à l'homme vivant*») as «impatience des limites», which is nothing but the contemporary «refus de leur être double, le désespoir d'être homme [...]» (HR, 708).

<sup>200</sup> «La beauté, sans doute, ne fait pas les révolutions. Mais un jour vient où les révolutions ont besoin d'elle. Sa règle qui conteste le réel en même temps qu'elle lui donne son unité est aussi celle de la révolte, Peut-on, éternellement, refuser l'injustice sans cesser de saluer la nature de l'homme et la beauté du monde? Notre réponse est oui. Cette morale, en même temps insoumise et fidèle, est en tout cas la seule à éclairer le chemin d'une révolution vraiment réaliste.» (HR, 679).

<sup>201</sup> In *L'énigme* (1950) and *Retour à Tipasa* (1952), Camus associates beauty, «et le *bonheur sensuel* qui lui est attaché» (E, 871), to light (*lumière, soleil*), the memory of which (E, 870 and 861) he situates as the centre of his work: «Au centre de notre œuvre, fût-elle noire, rayonne un soleil inépuisable [...]» (E, 865). The meaning of

Camus' creative act, I argue, is the finite thought (of the finite) *as form-of-life*,<sup>202</sup> as *grand style*.<sup>203</sup> The experience of thought, in which form and life, as the sensory dimension (*aisthesis*) of our futile being-to-the-world,<sup>204</sup> are not separable – is always inevitably, in Agamben's terms, the experience of a «common potentiality», which is inherent in the futility of ex-istence.<sup>205</sup>

In the section “Révolte et style”, Camus designates as *style* the correction operated by the artist through language and the selective remembrance of reality (*aisthesis*), «[qui] donne à l'univers recréé son unité et ses limites» (HR, 672). According to Camus, «[l'art romanesque] ne peut ni consentir totalement au réel – that is, to the dispersedness and futility of becoming, as sheer “potentiality” – ni s'en écarter absolument. Le pur imaginaire – as “pure act” or fixed idea – n'existe pas et, si même il existait dans un roman idéal qui serait purement désincarné, il n'aurait pas de signification artistique, la première exigence de l'esprit en quête d'unité étant que cette unité soit communicable» (Id.).<sup>206</sup> The

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the artist's work lies in the constant effort to name the light of this «soleil enfoui» (E, 866). It is, precisely, in the artist's «fidélité instinctive à une lumière où je suis né et où, depuis des millénaires, les hommes ont appris à saluer la vie jusque dans la souffrance» (Id.) that Camus traces the key to the overcoming of nihilism.

<sup>202</sup> Giorgio Agamben situates thought as form-of-life at the centre of his reflection in *Mezzi senza fine. Note sulla politica* (1996), as the guiding-concept of the politics to come («la politica che viene»): «Solo se io non sono già sempre e soltanto in atto, ma sono consegnato a una possibilità e una potenza, solo se, nei miei vissuti e nei miei intesi, ne va ogni volta del vivere e dell'intendere stessi – se vie è, cioè, in questo senso, pensiero – allora una forma di vita può diventare, nella sua fatticità e cosalità, *forma-di-vita*, in cui non è mai possibile isolare qualcosa come una nuda vita» (G. Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1996, 18-19).

<sup>203</sup> «[...] la seule pensée qui soit fidèle à ces origines, la pensée des limites» (HR, 697). It is possible to observe an affinity between Agamben's definition of thinking («Chiamiamo *pensiero* il nesso che costituisce le forme di vita in un contesto inseparabile, in *forma-di-vita*», op. cit., 17) and Camus's notion of *grand style*.

<sup>204</sup> In analogous terms, Agamben defines thinking as «non semplicemente essere affetti da questa o da quella cosa, da questo o da quel contenuto di pensiero in atto, ma essere, insieme, affetti dalla propria ricettività, far esperienza, in ogni pensiero di una pura potenza di pensare.» (G. Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, op. cit., 17).

<sup>205</sup> «L'esperienza del pensiero [...] è sempre esperienza di una potenza comune. Comunità e potenza si identificano senza residui, perché l'inerire di un principio comunitario in ogni potenza è funzione del carattere necessariamente potenziale di ogni comunità. Fra esseri che fossero già sempre in atto, che fossero sempre questa o quella cosa, questa o quella identità e avessero, in queste, esaurita interamente la loro potenza, non vi sarebbe alcuna comunità, ma solo coincidenze e partizioni fattuali. Possiamo comunicare con altri solo attraverso ciò che in noi, come negli altri, è rimasto in potenza e ogni comunicazione (come Benjamin aveva intuito per la lingua) è innanzitutto comunicazione non di un comune, ma di una comunicabilità.» (G. Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, op. cit., 18).

<sup>206</sup> Camus's reflection on language dates back to 1942-44, and coincides with his engagement in critical journalism. As he wrote in the 1944 article on the philosophy of language of Brice Parain, «[n]ous ne connaissons que par les mots. Leur inefficacité démontrée, c'est notre aveuglement définitif. [...] Si les mots justice, bonté, beauté, n'ont pas de sens, les hommes peuvent se déchirer.» (E, 1673- 74). Camus praised Parain for approaching the question of language as an inquiry into the finiteness of the human condition, and the root of *all* metaphysics («[...] il s'agit de savoir si même nos mots les plus justes et nos cris les plus réussis ne sont pas privés de sens, si le langage n'exprime pas [...] la solitude définitive de l'homme dans un monde muet.» E, 1673) – the tragic of the problem lies precisely in that «[si] notre langage n'a pas de sens, rien n'a de sens» (CII, 35).

communicability of such unity excludes, by its very definition, its reduction to a *thing*, as is the case, in contrast, for the notion of totality.<sup>207</sup>

The unity brought about in the act of creation is always liminal – it is (at) the limit. It is in this sense, I take it, that beauty «[fait la promesse d'] une *transcendance vivante* [...] qui peut faire aimer et préférer à tout autre ce monde mortel et limité» (HR, 662) :

En maintenant la beauté, nous préparons ce jour de renaissance où la civilisation mettra au centre de sa réflexion, loin des principes formels et des valeurs dégradées de l'histoire, *cette vertu vivante qui fonde la commune dignité* du monde et de l'homme, et que nous avons maintenant à définir en face d'un monde qui l'insulte. (HR, 679-680).<sup>208</sup>

The limit, ex-posed in the act of revolt as creation, *founds* a community, which is not reified, but lies in the «reconnaissance mutuelle d'une destinée commune et la communication des hommes entre eux» (HR, 686). The *living* transcendence is the *être-à* that de-fines the finitude of the human condition in/as the plural ex-perience of the «Nous sommes», on the verge of which thinking brings forth «la longue *complicité* des hommes aux prises avec leur destin» (HR, 687):

*L'injustice, la fugacité, la mort se manifestent dans l'histoire. En les repoussant, on repousse l'histoire elle-même. Certes, le révolté ne nie pas l'histoire qui l'entoure, c'est en elle qu'il essaie de s'affirmer. Mais il se trouve devant elle comme l'artiste devant le réel, il la repousse sans s'y dérober. [...] La révolte, elle, ne vise qu'au relatif et ne peut promettre qu'une dignité certaine assortie d'une justice relative. Elle prend le parti d'une limite où s'établit la communauté des hommes. Son univers est celui du relatif.* (HR, 693)

As the principle (*règle*) of revolt is the principle of artistic creation (beauty), «[la] révolte n'est pas en elle-même un élément de civilisation. Mais elle est préalable à toute civilisation » (HR, 676) : it is by ex-posing the limit, on which the community of men situates

<sup>207</sup> It is not without reason that Camus insists, throughout his political writings, on the co-implication of totality and silence or *mensonge* (HR, 687). See also my article "Du nihilisme au silence totalitaire: le mensonge dans la réflexion politique et morale d'Albert Camus", in *Albert Camus et le mensonge*, Actes du colloque organisé par la Bpi les 29 et 30 décembre 2002, Bibliothèque Publique d'Information, Paris, 2004, 129-144).

<sup>208</sup> All thought that expels beauty is, thus, a nihilistic thought, one, that is, which eradicates the liminality of being, reducing the latter to the end-product (a thing) of a process of fabrication. As R. Gay-Crosier points out, «au cœur de la trinité existentielle de *l'être, de l'avoir et du faire*, l'homme doit opérer un choix. On sait que pour Sartre c'est le *faire* qui représente le *summum bonum* alors que pour Camus c'est plutôt *l'être*. Sur le plan temporel, la disposition de la pyramide des valeurs a pour conséquence que l'on opte soit pour l'avenir (c'est la morale de Sartre), soit pour le présent (c'est ce qu'exige *L'Homme révolté*).» (R. Gay-Crosier, *Albert Camus : Paradigmes de l'ironie –révolte et négation affirmative*, Éditions Paratexte, Trinity College, Toronto, Canada, 2000, p. 156). I disagree with Serge Doubrovsky when he maintains that «[l']éthique de Sartre et celle de Camus sont ce qu'on pourrait appeler des éthiques à une dimension, la première reposant tout entière sur la notion de liberté, la seconde sur celle de vie » (S. Doubrovsky, « La morale d'Albert Camus », *Preuves*, n. 116, oct. 1960, 45). As I attempted to show, Camus's notion of life, precisely in that it is always already *form-of-life*, escapes the unidimensionality of sheer life - what Agamben would define as "naked life" (*nuda vita*) - defined by Camus as pure abstraction. Life as *form-of-life* carries *dédoublement* within itself.

itself as finite *être(-à)*, that revolt poses the conditions for overcoming the moral and political *impasse* of nihilism.

Revolt dis-closes thinking as *form-of-life (grand style)*, which is always *risky*, in the sense of a thought of/at the limit - «Si la révolte pouvait fonder une philosophie [...], ce serait une philosophie des limites, de l'ignorance calculée et du risque. Celui qui ne peut tout savoir ne peut tout tuer» (HR, 693).

It is, thus, consistent with the *aesthetic* premises of the absurd argument in the Mds that Camus rejects the notion of History as totality, thus appealing, once again, to the thought of Karl Jaspers:

La pensée de Jaspers, par exemple, dans ce qu'elle a d'essentiel, souligne l'impossibilité pour l'homme de saisir la totalité, puisqu'il se trouve à l'intérieur de cette totalité. L'histoire, comme un tout, ne pourrait exister qu'aux yeux d'un observateur extérieur à elle-même et au monde. Il n'y a d'histoire, à la limite, que pour Dieu. Il est donc impossible d'agir suivant des plans embrassant la totalité de l'histoire universelle. Toute entreprise historique ne peut être alors qu'une aventure plus ou moins raisonnable ou fondée. *Elle est d'abord un risque*. En tant que risque, elle ne saurait justifier aucune démesure, aucune position implacable et absolue. (HR, 692-693)

As early as 1948, Camus posed this finite, «modest»,<sup>209</sup> thought of the finite as the premise to a political reflection touching upon the meaning of democracy. In the article *La démocratie exercice de la modestie*, the author denounced the fallacy at the core of all argument, which introduces «dans le problème social une *fixité* ou un *déterminisme absolu* qui ne peuvent raisonnablement s'y trouver» (E, 1581). Liberalism and Communism, according to the author, rest on an equally murderous «certitude absolue» (Id.), which simplifies reality, founding their policy of dominion and conquest on abstraction.<sup>210</sup>

Nihilism is, thus, identified with all form of “unidimensional” reasoning : opposed to the «penser juste, voir juste», it coincides with «aveuglement [et] haine» (E, 725),<sup>211</sup> namely, with the negation of that *creative* act, which is the finite thought of the finite as *forme-de-vie*:<sup>212</sup> « La démocratie, qu'elle soit sociale et politique, ne peut se fonder sur une philosophie

<sup>209</sup> « Il s'agit, en somme, de définir les conditions d'une *pensée politique modeste*, c'est-à-dire délivrée de tout messianisme, et débarrassée de la nostalgie du paradis terrestre. » (CAC8, 616)

<sup>210</sup> «Je connais deux sortes de raisonnements réactionnaires ([...] nous appellerons réactionnaire toute attitude qui vise à accroître indéfiniment les servitudes politiques et économiques qui pèsent sur les hommes). Ces deux raisonnements vont en sens contraire, mais ils ont pour caractère commun d'exprimer une certitude absolue. Le premier consiste à dire : « On ne changera jamais rien aux hommes. » Conclusion : les guerres sont inévitables, la servitude sociale est dans la nature des choses [...]. L'autre consiste à dire : « On peut changer les hommes. Mais leur libération dépend de tel facteur et il faut agir de telle façon pour leur faire du bien ». Conclusion : il est logique d'opprimer [...]» (E, 1580-1581).

<sup>211</sup> Hatred (*la haine*) is opposed to com-prehension, which, as Camus points out, should not be confused with neutrality, and goes together with com-passion (E, 725). It is significant that Camus had chosen as the epigraphy for his collection of political writings, *Actuelles I*, published in 1950, a passage by Nietzsche: «Il vaut mieux périr que haïr et craindre; il vaut mieux périr deux fois que se faire haïr et redouter; telle devra être un jour la *suprême maxime de toute société organisée politiquement* » (E, 249). [My italics]

<sup>212</sup> It is in this sense that all nihilistic thought opens the way to conformism, which Camus associates to oppression (*servitude*) (see “Révolte et conformisme”, *Arts*, 19 octobre 1951, E, 731).



politique qui prétend tout savoir et tout régler, pas plus qu'elle n'a pu se fonder jusqu'ici sur une morale de conservation absolue.» (E, 1581-82).

Against old and new «reactionary», i.e. nihilistic, reasoning, «le démocrate est modeste, il avoue une certaine part *d'ignorance*,<sup>213</sup> il reconnaît le caractère en partie *aventureux* [i.e. open to risk] de son effort et que tout ne lui est pas donné» (E, 1582), aware that if «la démocratie n'est pas le meilleur des régimes, [e]lle en est le moins mauvais» (Id.).<sup>214</sup>

It has not been sufficiently pointed out that, in the chapter of HR on «la pensée de Midi», Camus explicitly traces back to the “reactionary” or nihilistic reasoning the reduction of the political community to a «*corps mystique* sous les espèces les plus basses» (HR, 694), for the restoration of which freedom is sacrificed to an ideal of absolute justice, that destroys the complicity of men.

This reified, or, to use Nancy's terminology, “immanent” community, associated by Camus to the concepts of power, dominion, violence and conquest, is opposed to a *living* community from which, in the author's view, we «receive» being.<sup>215</sup> It is significant that Camus identified *living* justice with beauty, which is liminality. As he notes in the Summer of 1956: «Paris. *La beauté c'est la justice parfaite*» (CIII, 192).

It is precisely in the light of the liminality, which constitutes Camus' conception of men's community, that violence, as a break in/of communication (HR, 695), must be rethought: the French writer distinguishes the concept of “revolted” violence («par exemple, dans le cas de l'insurrection.», Id.) from a systematic or «comfortable» violence, normalized by the 20<sup>th</sup> century terrorist regimes.

The aporia of violence, thus, reflects the aporia of the community itself.<sup>216</sup> it is only by preserving the «caractère provisoire d'effraction» (HR, 695) of crime, we could argue with

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<sup>213</sup> HR, 693.

<sup>214</sup> «La démocratie vraie se réfère toujours à la base, parce qu'elle suppose qu'aucune vérité en cet ordre n'est absolue et que plusieurs expériences d'hommes, ajoutées l'une à l'autre, représentent une approximation de la vérité plus précieuse qu'une doctrine cohérente, mais fausse. La démocratie ne défend pas une idée abstraite, ni une philosophie brillante, elle défend les démocrates [...]. J'entends bien que la majorité peut se tromper au moment même où la minorité voit clair. [...] la même modestie suppose que la minorité peut se faire entendre et qu'il sera toujours tenu compte de ses avis. C'est pourquoi je dis que la démocratie est le moins mauvais des régimes.» (E, 1582). In the article «Défense de la liberté», published in *Franc-Tireur* in December 1952 and reedited in *Actuelles II*, Camus uses the term “totalitarianism” to address a system based on the police and on the relation force-justice, tracing in «la force d'équité et le prestige de la liberté», constantly sought by maintaining freedom of expression and opposition, the guiding principles of democracy (E, 779).

<sup>215</sup> «La non-violence absolue fonde négativement la servitude et ses violences; la violence systématique détruit positivement la communauté vivante et l'être que nous en recevons. Pour être fécondes, ces deux notions doivent trouver leur limites.» (HR, 695)

<sup>216</sup> HR, 684.

Camus, that violence, while destroying the living community of men, at the same time exposes the *limit* which constitutes such a community *as crisis* - «*risque pur*» (Id.).<sup>217</sup>

Terror, in contrast, normalizes crime, instauring a permanent State of Exception, which replaces the *être-à* with an efficient fabrication of corpses - «Führerprinzip ou Raison historique, quel que soit l'ordre qui la fonde, elle règne sur un univers de choses, non d'hommes» (Id.)

This reading is confirmed by the pages on the activism of the Russian terrorists of 1905, to whom Camus devotes a chapter in HR under the title «Les meurtriers délicats», and which illustrates «le moment où l'esprit de révolte rencontre, pour la dernière fois dans notre histoire, l'esprit de *compassion*» (HR, 573).

Now, Camus relates *com-passion* to friendship/fraternity as the distinctive feature of the *meurtriers délicats*, as he describes the terrorists of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary movement, among whom he takes into consideration the cases of Kaliayev, Sasonov, Vera Zassoulitch, Dora Brilliant, who inspired his 1949 tragedy *Les Justes*.

Camus introduces friendship in his analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary thought together with the notion of love.<sup>218</sup> According to the author, it was the Russian nihilist Netchaiev who, developing a «psychologie arbitraire véhiculée par la pensée de Hegel», for the first time in history expelled love and friendship from revolutionary thought: «[Hegel] avait pourtant admis que la reconnaissance des consciences l'une par l'autre peut se faire dans *l'affrontement de l'amour*»<sup>219</sup> (HR, 567).

Love as *affrontement*, as con-frontation and touching-upon, is the experience of the liminality of human finite being *par excellence*:

Ceux qui s'aiment, les amis, les amants, savent que l'amour n'est pas seulement fulguration, mais aussi une longue et douloureuse lutte dans les ténèbres pour la reconnaissance et la réconciliation définitives. [...] La revendication de justice n'est d'ailleurs pas seule à justifier au long des siècles la passion révolutionnaire, qui s'appuie aussi sur une exigence douloureuse de l'amitié pour tous, même et surtout en face d'un ciel ennemi. Ceux qui meurent pour la justice, de tout temps, se sont appelés «frères». La violence, pour eux tous, est réservée à l'ennemi, au service de la communauté des opprimés. Mais si la révolution est l'unique valeur, elle exige tout et même la délation, donc *le sacrifice de l'ami*. Désormais, la violence sera tournée contre tous, au service d'une *idée abstraite*. (HR, 567-568)

Camus designates the concentrationary system of Soviet Communism as the Empire of «l'amitié [...] de choses»,<sup>220</sup> structured on the police techniques of delation and

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<sup>217</sup> «Il n'y a pas de justice, – he writes in 1947 – il n'y a que des limites» (CII, 236).

<sup>218</sup> The continuity between the *pensée révoltée* and the question of love is confirmed in CII, 177 and CII, 200.

<sup>219</sup> My italics.

<sup>220</sup> «L'amitié des personnes, il n'en est pas d'autre définition, est la solidarité particulière, jusqu'à la mort, contre ce qui n'est pas du règne de l'amitié. L'amitié des choses est l'amitié en général, l'amitié avec tous, qui suppose,

«l'amalgame», which reduce human beings to abstractions («âmes mortes» - E, 642) and to sheer expendable instruments (means) for the realisation of a higher end. Thus, the Soviet system is the negation of «le règne des personnes, [où] les hommes se lient s'affection» (Id.).<sup>221</sup>

The totalitarian «état de siège», as a permanent State of Emergency, negates nature and beauty in the name of the (absolute) value of History - «en retranchant de l'homme sa force de passion, de doute, de bonheur, d'invention singulière, de grandeur en un mot» (E, 643), it rejects *risk* and *creation* (E, 696).

What l'HR defines is, precisely, a «morale du *risque historique*», in opposition to the «nécessité historique qu'on trouve chez Marx et ses disciples»:<sup>222</sup> the former poses the singularity of the creative act at the beginning, as *aesthetic* or tragic *archè*, of the community.

The latter can thus be defined as the com-munity of *le malheur*, not in the Arendtian acceptance of the term, as pertaining to the bodily sphere of labour, but, instead, in the Weilian sense, as com-munity of *fragility*.<sup>223</sup> This is not to say that Camus' conception of the com-munity excludes *le bonheur*:<sup>224</sup> on the contrary, it places happiness, in its specific tragic

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quand elle doit se préserver, la dénonciation de chacun. Celui qui aime son amie ou son ami l'aime dans le présent et la révolution ne veut aimer qu'un homme qui n'est pas encore là. [...] La cité qui se voulait fraternelle devient une fourmilière d'hommes seuls. » (HR, 642)

<sup>221</sup> Netchaiev and the group of *La Volonté du peuple* elected individual terrorism as the principle of revolutionary action, inaugurating a series of murders «qui s'est poursuivie jusqu'en 1905, avec le socialisme révolutionnaire» (HR, 570). As Camus points out, «les terroristes naissent, à cet endroit, *détournés de l'amour* [...]» (Id.). As opposed to the «possédés» (HR, 560-ff.), the «meurtriers délicats» overcome solitude and negation, i.e. nihilism, in friendship: «Au milieu d'un monde qu'ils nient et qui les rejette, ils tentent, comme tous les grands cœurs, de refaire, homme après homme, une fraternité. L'amour qu'ils se portent réciproquement, qui fait leur bonheur jusque dans le désert du bagne, qui s'étend à l'immense masse de leurs frères asservis et silencieux, donne la mesure de leur détresse et de leur espoir. Pour servir cet amour, il leur fait d'abord tuer [...]» (HR, 576). It is in this sense that the «*Nous sommes*», or the com-munity of revolt, «resplendit d'un mortel éclat» in the extreme contradiction of these terrorists: «[...] ces terroristes, au même temps qu'ils affirment le monde des hommes, [as opposed to the world of things] se placent au-dessus de ce monde, démontrant, *pour la dernière fois* dans notre histoire, que la vraie révolte est *créatrice* de valeurs » (HR, 578).

<sup>222</sup> « Révolte et servitude » («*Lettres sur la révolte*», *Actuelles II*), letter to *Temps modernes* (30th of June 1952). (E, 766).

<sup>223</sup> Camus notes in his *Carnets*: «*S. Weil a raison, ce n'est pas la personne humaine qu'il faut protéger, mais les possibilités qu'elle recouvre. Et puis, dit-elle, «on n'entre pas dans la vérité sans avoir passé à travers son propre anéantissement: sans avoir séjourné longtemps dans un état de totale et extrême humiliation». La malheur (un hasard peut m'abolir) est cet état d'humiliation, non la souffrance. Et encore «L'esprit de justice et l'esprit de vérité ne font qu'un». » (CII, 338-339) (my italics). Camus's identification of a living justice with beauty would have, in this sense, no other meaning than confirming the liminality and fragility of the human condition experienced by the «*esprit de vérité*» as *malheur*. Camus insists on friendship and «la longue fraternité des hommes en lutte contre leur destin» (F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 67) which founds a «dignité partagée, une communion des hommes entre eux» (Ivi, p. 66). Communication entails freedom: Camus incorporates the dimension of plurality (as être-à) and fragility in his definition of freedom - «Notre vie appartient sans doute aux autres et il est juste de la donner quand cela est nécessaire. Mais notre mort n'appartient qu'à nous, c'est ma définition de liberté» (Camus, *Temps des meurtriers*, in F. Bartfeld, op. cit., p. 55, note 7).*

<sup>224</sup> In our definition of Camus's concept of community we must take in Camus's Pascalian (tragic) argument: «L'erreur vient toujours d'une exclusion, dit Pascal. Si on ne recherche que le bonheur, on aboutit à la facilité. Si

acceptation of « *joie étrange qui aide à vivre et à mourir* », <sup>225</sup> at the core of an alternative conception of the political, namely, of a political action “disciplined” by beauty. <sup>226</sup>

It is in this sense that we understand the opposition between the artist and the Historic(ist) conqueror:

[...] la fin [de l'esprit historique] est la tyrannie tandis que la passion [de l'artiste] est la liberté. Tous ceux qui aujourd'hui luttent pour la liberté combattent en dernier lieu pour la beauté. (E, 856). <sup>227</sup>

It is the notion of admiration, as related to that of love, which provides the meaning of Camus's concept of *creation* as a kind of *praxis-poiesis* which excludes violence and murder. In a note in the passage on Netchaiev's Hegelianism, Camus points out that:

[ la reconnaissance des consciences l'une par l'autre] peut se faire aussi dans l'*admiration* où le mot « *maître* » prend alors un grand sens : celui qui forme, sans détruire. (HR, 567 note \*)

It is most significant that the term « admiration » recurs in the final pages of l'HR as one of the distinctive marks of a tradition of thought, which, in Camus' argument, runs parallel to the dominant Platonic-Christian (i.e., nihilistic) tradition in the Western world, of which the contemporary philosophies of History are seen as the direct prosecution.

Camus designates this parallel tradition as « pensée solaire », « esprit méditerranéen », « pensée de Midi (HR, 700-703):

Le conflit profond de ce siècle ne s'établit peut-être pas tant entre les idéologies allemandes de l'histoire et la politique chrétienne, qui d'une certaine manière sont complices, qu'entre les rêves allemands et la *tradition méditerranéenne* [...] ; l'histoire enfin et la nature. Mais l'idéologie allemande est en ceci une héritière. En elle s'achèvent vingt siècles de vaine lutte contre la nature au nom d'un dieu historique d'abord et de l'histoire divinisée ensuite. [...] lorsque l'Église a dissipé son héritage méditerranéen, elle a mis l'accent sur l'histoire au détriment de la nature [...]. *La nature qui cesse d'être objet de contemplation et d'admiration ne peut être ensuite que la matière d'une action qui vise à la transformer.* (HR, 702). [My italics]

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on ne cultive que le malheur, on débouche dans la complaisance. Dans ces deux cas, une dévaluation. Les Grecs savaient qu'il y a une part d'ombre et une part de lumière. » (E, 379).

<sup>225</sup> E, 708. We can trace an interesting affinity with Agamben's argument in *Mezzi senza fine*: according to the Italian philosopher, the definition of the concept of “happy life” is among the essential tasks of «il pensiero che viene», as alternative to the traditional forms of political thought, founded on the notion of sovereignty, as well as to modern bio-politics: «La “vita felice” su cui deve fondarsi la filosofia politica non può perciò essere né nuda vita che la sovranità presuppone per farne il proprio soggetto, né l'estraneità impenetrabile della scienza e della biopolitica moderna, che si cerca oggi invano di sacralizzare, ma, appunto, una “vita sufficiente” e assolutamente profana, che ha raggiunto la perfezione della propria potenza e della propria comunicabilità, e sulla quale la sovranità e il diritto non hanno più alcuna presa.» (G. Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, op. cit., p. 91).

<sup>226</sup> « La Beauté, qui aide à vivre, aide aussi à mourir » (CII, 285. Autumn 1949).

<sup>227</sup> My italics. « Bien entendu, il ne s'agit pas de défendre la beauté pour elle-même. La beauté ne peut se passer de l'homme et nous ne donnerons à notre temps sa grandeur et sa sérénité qu'en le suivant dans son malheur. Plus jamais nous ne serons des solitaires. » (E, 856). This passage is quoted from the 1948 essay *L'exil d'Hélène*. In the 1949 *Le Temps des meurtriers*, he denounces in contemporary European thought the systematic attempt to throw man back onto «l'angoisse des solitaires» by banning love and closing «les fenêtres sur la beauté du monde» (op. cit., p. 62).

To conclude, it is thus possible to trace in Camus' work two distinct and opposed paradigms of the aesthetic *mise en forme*, which "operate" as paradigms of the political in 20<sup>th</sup> century politics: the paradigm of *transformation*, which coincides with the violent realisation of an Ideal and opens the way to a limitless manipulation of reality, which perpetuates the relationship of dominion/oppression (associated to the terms «conquête» and «tyrannie»); and the paradigm of *transfiguration*, which is rooted in admiration and coincides with «la vraie maîtrise» (HR, 703).<sup>228</sup>

Self-mastering and discipline must be understood in their inseparability from the finite law (of beauty) and «la fière compassion», at the limit of which the community of *malheur* («le "Nous sommes"») «définit paradoxalement un nouvel individualisme» (HR, 700), one which incorporates the concept of plurality of human action:<sup>229</sup> to ban the law (of beauty) from this "collective action" is to reduce the individual to the reifying concept of «un étranger ployant sous le poids d'une collectivité ennemie» (Id.).<sup>230</sup>

"Transfiguration" takes place at the level of creation,<sup>231</sup> and is brought about in the touching-upon (*être-à*) ex-posed by revolt, which, in my view, is in its very movement the continuation of the aesthetic «faire face» (HR, 708) of the absurd or tragic thought of the MdS.

The concept of "transfiguration" in HR goes together with an appropriation of historicity which refuses the absolutizing form of the state and the concept of sovereignty,<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> This is confirmed in another passage, in « Démocratie exercice de la modestie » (*Caliban*, november 1948) : « Il y a un mot que Simone Weil a eu le courage d'écrire et que, par sa vie et par sa mort, elle avait le droit d'écrire : « Qui peut admirer Alexandre de toute son âme, s'il n'a l'âme basse ? » Oui, qui peut mettre en balance les plus grandes conquêtes de la raison ou de la force, et les immenses souffrances qu'elles représentent, s'il n'a un cœur aveugle à la plus simple sympathie et un esprit détourné de toute justice ! » (E, 1581). [My italics].

<sup>229</sup> « J'ai besoin des autres qui ont besoin de moi et de chacun » (HR, 700). This thesis is confirmed by Roger Dadoun in his article, « Albert Camus : fondations d'anarchie » : « Il serait bon – he suggests – et opportune d'entendre le mot "compassion" comme marquant la passion commune, partagée, communautaire – désignant la communauté comme partage de joie, dans une radicale et nouvelle convivialité » (*Camus et la politique*, op. cit., p. 265). Dadoun seems to identify this joy with the « puissance érotique du monde » : « [...] cette joie [...] nous vient du monde. » (Id.). I would object that the joy, or tragic *bonheur*, which permeates and founds Camus's concept of the community, does not stem from the world, but is at the limit of man and world's mutual exposedness – joy is inseparable in this sense from beauty and is "submitted" to the same morality.

<sup>230</sup> « [...] société et discipline perdent leur direction si elles nient le « Nous sommes ». À moi seul, dans un sens, je supporte la dignité commune que je ne puis laisser ravalé en moi, ni dans les autres. Cet individualisme n'est pas jouissance, il est lutte, toujours, et joie sans égale, quelquefois, au sommet de la fière compassion » (HR, 700).

<sup>231</sup> The term recurs, with a different acceptance, in *L'exil d'Hélène*, where Camus denounces in contemporary European thought the rejection of beauty, which entails that « [notre époque] se raidit pour atteindre l'absolu et l'empire, elle veut transfigurer le monde avant de l'avoir épuisé, l'ordonner avant de l'avoir compris. Quoi qu'elle en dise, elle déserte ce monde. » (E, 856).

<sup>232</sup> In a manuscript drafted on the 5th September 1947, Camus rejects the politics of the Blocs and the Cold war by pointing, instead, to « la construction de l'organisation internationale que nous annonçons dès maintenant »

thus, disclosing the attempt to re-think human life and the political outside the juridical categories of traditional political thought.<sup>233</sup>

It comes, thus, as no surprise that Camus pointed to Revolutionary Syndicalism and to the French libertarian tradition as the contemporary political expression of this latter “aesthetic” attitude (E, 700) - «Car il existe heureusement une *autre* tradition révolutionnaire [...]» (740).<sup>234</sup>

Rejecting the Historicist category of efficacy, syndicalism «[part] de la *base concrète, la profession, qui est à l'ordre économique ce que la commune est à l'ordre politique, la cellule vivante sur laquelle l'organisme s'édifie, tandis que la révolution césarienne part de la doctrine et y fait entrer de force le réel*» (HR, 700-701) :<sup>235</sup>

*Le syndicalisme, comme la commune, est la négation, au profit du réel, du centralisme bureaucratique et abstrait. La révolution du XXe siècle, au contraire, prétend s'appuyer sur l'économie, mais elle est d'abord une politique et une idéologie. Elle ne peut, par fonction, éviter la terreur et la violence faite au réel. Malgré ses prétentions, elle part de l'absolu pour modeler la réalité.* (HR, 701). [My italics]

Camus' distinction between the economic and the political dimension,<sup>236</sup> formulated in the separation between profession and *commune*, echoes Arendt's analogous distinction between technological or economic liberation from poverty, and the *soviets* as the new institutions of (political) freedom, in her analysis of Lenin's formula “Electrification and *soviets*” (OR, 60).

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and aiming to «[...] une société des peuples dégagée des mythes de la souveraineté, une force révolutionnaire qui ne s'appuie pas sur la police et une liberté humaine qui ne soit pas en fait asservie par l'argent » (E, 1578).

<sup>233</sup> G. Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine*, op. cit.

<sup>234</sup> As Quillot points out, and is confirmed by the 1952 «Entretien sur la révolte», Camus showed a particular interest and sympathy toward the Revolutionary Syndicalist reviews *La Révolution prolétarienne* (E, 1730, note 1 to p. 740) and Samson and Proix's *Témoins*. Quillot recalls that «à l'époque du lancement de cette revue, [Camus] sollicita très simplement mon abonnement. « Une petite revue pas chère, et qui *pense juste* », me dit-il avec un sourire » (E, 1720). Camus collaborated to *Témoins* with a series of texts (« Discours à la Mutualité après les événements de Berlin-Est » (1954), « Réponse à Domenach » (June 1955), « Fidélité à l'Espagne » (Spring 1956), extracts from « Kadar a eu son jour de peur », texte du discours prononcé le 15 mars à la Salle Wagram, 1957) - *Ignazio Silone, que Nicola Chiaromonte lui avait fait connaître en 1948, et avec lequel il s'est presque toujours senti en accord politique jusqu'à sa mort, y collaborait également*» (E, 1720). Camus devoted an article to « *Le pain et le vin d'Ignazio Silone* » in *Alger républicain* (23 mai 1939), where he defines the antifascist novel of the Italian writer as « une grande œuvre révolutionnaire » (E, 1397), as a « livre de *révolté* [...] coulé dans la plus classique des formes» (E, 1398), in the line of the artistic creed of a «romantisme dompté » that he will formulate in HR. It is here that the political and revolutionary meaning of artistic creation finds one of its first formulations: « Si le mot poésie a un sens, c'est ici qu'il le retrouve, dans ces tableaux d'une Italie éternelle et rustique, dans ces pentes plantées de cyprès et ce ciel sans égal, et dans les gestes séculaires de ces paysans italiens. *Retrouver le chemin de ces gestes et de cette vérité, et d'une philosophie abstraite de la révolution revenir au pain et vain de la simplicité, c'est l'itinéraire d'Ignazio Silone* et la leçon de ce roman. Et ce n'est pas sa moindre grandeur que de nous inciter, nous aussi, à retrouver, à travers les haines de l'heure, le visage d'un peuple fier et humain qui demeure notre seul espoir de paix » (E, 1398-99). [My italics]

<sup>235</sup> My italics.

<sup>236</sup> This distinction is confirmed in a note, where Camus identifies in the Scandinavian co-existence and reconciliation of the political form of constitutional monarchy with a *fecund* syndicalism, the realisation of the approximation to a *just* society (E, 701, note \*\*)

Camus places «les pensées révoltées, celles de la Commune ou du syndicalisme révolutionnaire» at the margins of, and in opposition to, the Liberal («[le] nihilisme bourgeois», HR, 703) and the Communist («socialisme césarien», Id.) concept of the political, of which he, like Arendt, emphasizes the economic parentage.<sup>237</sup>

The French writer identifies, thus rejecting it, politics (*la politique*) with the party system and the abstract model of the modern sovereign state, of which the Historical or rational (terrorist) state is the extreme expression.<sup>238</sup> The latter brings the fabrication paradigm of the political, also highlighted by Arendt in HC, to paroxysmic consequences: «[la révolution du XXe siècle] tente de s'accomplir de haut en bas» (HR, 701), in other words, through a top-down movement of foundation of the body politic, which is diametrically opposed to the one entailed by the Syndicalist or Communard “revolted” politics -<sup>239</sup> «*de bas en haut*» (Id.).

It is significant that Arendt expressed herself in identical terms about council systems in the interview, published under the title *Thoughts on Politics and Revolution*:

Spontaneous organization of council systems occurred in all revolutions, in the French Revolution, with Jefferson in the American Revolution, in the Parisian commune, in the Russian revolutions, in the wake of the revolutions in Germany and Austria at the end of World War I, finally in the Hungarian Revolution. What is more, they never came into being as a result of a conscious revolutionary tradition or theory, but entirely spontaneously, each time as though there had never been anything of the sort before. Hence the council system seems to correspond to and to spring from the very experience of political action.

<sup>237</sup> In *Thoughts on Politics and Revolution* Arendt analyses capitalism and socialism not as two alternative economic systems, but as «twins, each wearing a different hat» (CR, 214): «[...] capitalism [...] owed its start to a monstrous process of expropriation such as has never occurred before in history in this form – that is, without military conquest. Expropriation, the initial accumulation of capital – that was the law according to which capitalism arose and according to which it has advanced step by step. [...] if you look at what has actually happened in Russia, then you can see that there the process of expropriation has been carried further; and you can observe that something very similar is going on in the modern capitalistic countries, where it is as though the old expropriation process is again let loose. [...] In Russia there is, of course, *not socialism but state socialism, which is the same thing as state capitalism would be – that is, total expropriation.* Total expropriation occurs when all political and legal safeguards of private ownership have disappeared.» (CR, 211-212). (My italics)

<sup>238</sup> The appeal to the libertarian tradition is justified in the light of the rejection of the nihilistic premises of “State communism”, which lie at the core of the Western political tradition. In his answer to Gaston Leval in the review *Libertaire* in May 1952 («Révolte et romantisme») explicitly referred to the «utilité passagère» of (a good use of) nihilism brought about by Bakunin, whose thought, in the author’s view, «peut utilement féconder une pensée libertaire rénovée et s’incarner dès maintenant dans un mouvement dont les militants de la C.N.T. et du syndicalisme libre, en France et en Italie, attestent en même temps la permanence et la vigueur» (E, 752). According to Camus, «[la pensée libertaire a] une fécondité toute prête à condition de se détourner sans équivoque de tout ce qui, en elle-même et aujourd’hui encore, reste attaché à un romantisme nihiliste qui ne peut mener nulle part. C’est ce romantisme que j’ai critiqué [dans l’HR], il est vrai, et je continuerai de le critiquer, mais c’est cette fécondité qu’ainsi j’ai voulu servir» (E, 752). Furthermore, in a Post-Scriptum to the letter he agreed with Leval that: «Ce n’est pas exactement contre la science que Bakounine s’élevait avec beaucoup de perspicacité, mais contre le gouvernement des savants.» (E, 753). (My italics)

<sup>239</sup> It is in the light of a distinction between political form and living community of revolt, that I suggest we read the following passage: «[...] [la révolte] s’appuie d’abord sur les réalités les plus concrètes, la profession, le village, où transparaissent l’être, le cœur vivant des choses et des hommes. La politique, pour elle, doit se soumettre à ces vérités. Pour finir, lorsqu’elle fait avancer l’histoire et soulage la douleur des hommes, elle le fait sans terreur, sinon sans violence, et dans les conditions politiques les plus différentes.» (HR, 701).

In this direction, I think, there must be something to be found, a completely *different principle of organization, which begins from below, continues upward, and finally leads to a parliament.* (CR, 231-232) [My italics]

Questioned on «what other conception of the state» she had in mind, Hannah Arendt pleads for a new concept of the state, illustrated by the council-state, «to which *the principle of sovereignty would be wholly alien*, would be admirably suited for federations of the most various kinds, especially because in it power would be constituted horizontally and not vertically» (CR, 233).<sup>240</sup>

The vertical mouvement being that of dominion, the «monstrous development of the means of violence» (CR, 229) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which culminated in the post-war bipolarism, had paradoxically brought about the impossibility of war (CR, 230), driving the sovereign state – the concept of sovereignty which rests on war as the last resort in international conflicts (CR, 229) – into an *impasse*.

By their very existence, the councils - «neighbourhood councils, professional councils, councils within factories, apartment houses, [...] by no means only workers' councils» (CR, 232) - declare the unsuitability of the party machine in providing public spaces of cumpearance.

As early as 1945, Camus had denounced the artificial and murderous character of *purely political oppositions*,<sup>241</sup> by which he designated the sterility of the traditional party system,<sup>242</sup> thus, finding himself in agreement with the ideas propounded in the aftermath of the Liberation by the French Anarcho-Syndicalist movement. The coupling of a federative solution with the binomial syndicalism *and* commune is posed as the alternative to the centralising bureaucratisation of the Historicist State, brought about by the *totalitarian revolution* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>240</sup> My italics.

<sup>241</sup> In the «Préface à un numéro spécial anniversaire de *Témoins*» (Spring-Summer 1956) Camus denounced, consistently with the line that already belonged to *Combat*, «la trahison des partis, la politique dégradé des nations» (E, 1802). Already in 1946, in the article «Le monde va vite» Camus denounced as obsolete the principle of nationality, and the national borders as sheer abstractions, an emanation of an anachronistic politics in the age of the atomic bomb (CAC8, 631). At that date, the writer proclaimed the need to constitute a supra-national and international order, founded on justice and dialogue, a world parliament which would correspond to the collectivisation on a world scale of primary resources (petroleum, coal, uranium) (CAC8, 632). In «Un nouveau contrat social» (29<sup>th</sup> November 1946) we find one of the early formulation of the idea of a *living society*, articulated, at that time, «à l'intérieur des nations, sur des *communautés de travail* et, par-dessus les frontières, sur des *communautés de réflexion*, dont les premières, selon des contrats de gré à gré sur le mode coopératif, soulageraient le plus grand nombre possible d'individus et dont les secondes s'essaieraient à définir les valeurs dont vivra cet ordre international, en même temps qu'elles plaideraient pour lui, en toute occasion.» (CAC8, 637).

<sup>242</sup> In the 1957 Conference *L'Artiste et son temps* he confirmed that «[la beauté] ne peut servir aucun parti ; elle ne sert à longue ou brève échéance, que la douleur ou la liberté des hommes» (E, 1092).



It is significant that, in both Camus and Arendt, the critique of the Socialist State, systematically eradicating the professional class (*total expropriation*)<sup>243</sup> and the autonomy of the councils,<sup>244</sup> is mediated by their critique of Historicism. Camus described his appeal to the Libertarian tradition, and to the Commune as the political expressions of a revolted thought, as true (although «utopian») realism (HR, 701), consistent with an intentionally assumed «anti-historic» and «inefficacious» approach (E, 756).

He thus roots the so-called libertarian tradition in «la *pensée solaire*», also evoked as (*pensée de*) Midi, or «esprit méditerranéen» (HR, 702-703), by which he designates a «civilisation au *double visage* [qui] attend son aurore [et qui] éclaire déjà les chemins de la *vraie maîtrise*» (HR, 703). It is significant, in this respect, that he chose a sentence by Pascal as the epigraphy to LAA: «On ne montre pas sa *grandeur* pour être à une extrémité, mais bien *en touchant les deux à la fois*» (E, 217).<sup>245</sup> Nihilism is not something «bad» (or «good», as he will declare in 1952) to be demonized/expelled from the civilized community of men, in Camus' understanding, which echoes Arendt's thought, it constitutes the human community: nihilism is traced to the core of human action («une longue et féroce aventure dont nous sommes tous solidaires», E, 734) as the *temptation* of measurelessness (*hubris*), which destroys the plural contact (aisthesis) and communication of men - «la *démésure* gardera toujours sa place dans le cœur de l'homme, à l'endroit de la *solitude*» (HR, 704).

The political meaning of the two-sided vision (*theoria*), which defines Camus' tragic thought, emerges in the author's Preface to the Italian edition of LAA in the image of «nous autres, Européens libres» (E, 219), which is developed in HR - «L'Europe n'a jamais été *que dans cette lutte entre midi et minuit*. Elle ne s'est dégradée qu'en désertant cette lutte [...]» (HR, 703).<sup>246</sup>

As Gay-Crosier points out, «[...] le pari européen dont parle Camus dépasse la dimension politique trop exclusivement associée à la notion qu'on pouvait se faire, en 1951,

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<sup>243</sup> Total expropriation occurs, in Arendt's view, when the government itself becomes the employer, invading the private sphere of its employees: «[...] the process of expropriation, which started with the rise of capitalism, does not stop with the expropriation of the means of production; only legal and political institutions that are independent of the economic forces and their automatism can control and check the inherently monstrous potentialities of this process. [...] What protects freedom is the *division between governmental and economic power*» (CR, 212-213), which is, precisely, not the case in Russia, where «a spy sits in every citizen's apartment anyhow» (CR, 213), sanctioning the extreme expropriation - of man's private life («And what else is bugging but a form of expropriation?», CR, 213).

<sup>244</sup> HR, 701, note \*\*. In *Thought on Politics and Revolution* Arendt observes that «the old "workers' councils", which, incidentally, also never became part of orthodox socialist or communist doctrine, despite Lenin's "all power to the soviets". (The councils, *the only true outgrowth of the revolutions themselves as distinguished from revolutionary parties and ideologies, have been mercilessly destroyed precisely by the Communist party and by Lenin himself*).» (CR, 216).

<sup>245</sup> My italics.

<sup>246</sup> My italics.

d'une Europe unie. Son concept opérationnel d'une Europe trouvant son unité dans la diversité est fondé sur une alliance de patrimoines intellectuels et culturels et *non pas sur une alliance de nations*. Puisque la tension et le déchirement sont le prix qu'exigent la mesure et la justice, on pourrait dire, en paraphrasant le fameux titre de Paul Hazard, que l'avenir de l'Europe dépend paradoxalement de sa *conscience toujours en crise*.<sup>247</sup> The concept of «*crise prégnante*» (Id.), inseparable from the notion of revolt, expresses, precisely, the being-at-the limit of the «*pensée solaire*», which has its *arché* in *creation*, and in beauty its finite morality (*règle*).<sup>248</sup>

What matters, we would say with Esposito, is the simultaneity (summarised in the image of the *double visage*) of two conflicting perspectives, overlapping in one look - <sup>249</sup> which is the mark of the *tragic*.<sup>250</sup> The continuity, on the one hand, of the HR with the 1948 essay *Exil d'Hélène*, and, on the other, of the latter with the earlier scattered notes on the tragic in the juvenile *Carnets*, and with the *aesthetic* perspective analysed in Chapter 1, is apparent here.

Nietzsche is, once more, the *trait-d'union* between the 1942 tragic thought and the later *pensée de Midi*: it is under the sign of the «tragic» philosopher's great word of *creation*, that Camus poses art and the figure of the artist (E, 1072).

<sup>247</sup> My italics. R. Gay-Crosier, «Pour une culture européenne sans eurocentrisme», in *Albert Camus : paradigmes de l'ironie*, op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>248</sup> On these premises, as Camus points out in an interview to *Demain* (1957), Europe «prefigure notre avenir politique» (see R. Gay-Crosier, «Pour une culture européenne sans eurocentrisme», art. cit., pp. 174-175).

<sup>249</sup> «È il medesimo rapporto che, nell'Iliade, passa tra Contesa e Armonia. L'armonia non è il contrario – ma l'altra faccia – della contesa: il ritmo stesso che la scandisce nei suoi movimenti altalenanti. Si potrebbe anche dire che: essa è la relazione che stringe in un'unica trama i due Contendenti. Che li lega all'unità di una medesima battaglia. Che li tiene in rapporto: sia pure di lotta. Senza rapporto non ci sarebbe lotta; ma senza lotta non ci sarebbe rapporto. È quanto la Weil sottolinea a partire dai frammenti di Filolao su limite e illimitato: l'uno implica necessariamente l'altro. E ciò non solo perché senza il limite non avremmo neanche la nozione di illimitato, ma perché la forzatura del limite – la *hybris* – è l'unico modo, per i mortali, di avvertire la sua presenza: appunto urtandovi contro.» (R. Esposito, *L'origine della politica. Hannah Arendt o Simone Weil?*, Donzelli, Roma, 1996, p. 78-79). The affinity between Camus's and Weil's argument, also pointed out by Esposito (Ivi, p. 75), is all the more apparent in the concluding pages on «*La pensée de Midi*» where the «*civilisation au double visage*» is grasped, precisely, as tension and constant conflict between the Nord-European, Historicist and nihilistic drive, as *measurelessness* (*hybris*), on the one side, and the Mediterranean, libertarian heritage, on the other: «*La commune contre l'État, la société concrète contre la société absolutiste, la liberté réfléchie contre la tyrannie rationnelle, l'individualisme altruiste enfin contre la colonisation des masses, sont alors les antinomies qui traduisent, une fois de plus, la longue confrontation entre la mesure et la démesure qui anime l'histoire de l'Occident, depuis le monde antique.*» (HR, 702).

<sup>250</sup> «*La Méditerranée a son tragique solaire qui n'est pas celui des brumes. Certains soirs, sur la mer, au pied des montagnes, la nuit tombe sur la courbe parfaite d'une petite baie et, des eaux silencieuses, monte alors une plénitude angoissée. On peut comprendre en ces lieux que si les Grecs ont touché au désespoir, c'est toujours à travers la beauté, et ce qu'elle a d'oppressant.*» (E, 853) [My italics]

L'œuvre la plus haute sera toujours, comme dans *les tragiques grecs, dans Melville, Tolstoï ou Molière*, celle qui équilibrera le réel et le refus que l'homme oppose à ce réel, chacun faisant rebondir l'autre dans un incessant jaillissement qui est celui-là même de la *vie joyeuse et déchirée*. (E, 1090-91) [My italics]

It is significant that in the *Discours de Suède*, the speech given by Camus on the occasion of the awarding of the Nobel Prize in 1957, the French writer qualified the artist as «être double», capable of com-prehension (E, 1072) and «partagé entre la douleur et la beauté» (E, 1074), who «forges» himself «dans cet aller-retour perpétuel de lui aux autres, à mi-chemin de la *beauté* dont il ne peut se passer et de la *communauté* à la quelle il ne peut s'arracher» (E, 1072). It is the artist, and not the intellectual, that is the central figure of an alternative conception of the political (action) against the contemporary philosophies of History, which he traces at the root of a "vertical" (fabrication) model of a politics of dominion and achievement.

To conclude, it is in the light of the *good* nihilism, in the sense of the *aesthetic* or tragic thought defined in the MdS, that, I suggest, we grasp the political meaning of Camus' *artiste-créateur*. If we compare the text of the conference, held at the University of Upsala on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1957 (*L'Artiste et son temps*), with the pages of HR on «Nietzsche et le nihilisme», we observe a striking coincidence between Camus' definition of the artist and his analysis of what the writer calls the methodical aspect of Nietzsche's thought (of which we have already emphasized the textual correspondence with the MdS):

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|---|---|
| <p><i>L'Artiste et son temps :</i></p> <p>[La liberté de l'art] «ressemble plutôt à une <i>discipline ascétique</i>» :«Cette liberté suppose une <i>santé du cœur et du corps</i>, un <i>style</i> qui soit comme la force de l'âme et un <i>affrontement patient</i>. Elle est, <i>comme toute liberté, un risque perpétuel</i>, une aventure exténuante et voilà pourquoi on fuit aujourd'hui ce risque comme on fuit l'exigeante liberté pour se ruer à toutes sortes de servitudes, et obtenir au moins le confort de l'âme. [...] Non, l'artiste libre [...] <i>n'est l'homme du confort</i>. L'artiste libre est celui qui, à grand-peine, <i>crée son ordre</i> lui-même. Plus est déchaîné ce qu'il doit ordonner, plus sa règle sera stricte et plus il aura affirmé sa liberté» (E, 1093). [My italics]</p> | <p><i>Nietzsche et le nihilisme :</i></p> <p>« [...] Nietzsche savait que la <i>liberté de l'esprit n'est pas un confort</i>, mais une <i>grandeur</i> que l'on veut et que l'on obtient [...] par une lutte épuisante. Il savait que <i>le risque est grand</i> [...]. Si rien n'est vrai, si le monde est sans règle, rien n'est défendu. [...] La domination absolue de la loi n'est pas liberté, mais non plus l'absolue disponibilité. » (HR, 480). [My italics]</p> |
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According to Camus, freedom for Nietzsche does not coincide with the «affreuse liberté de l'aveugle» (HR, 480), without direction nor limit, but is identified with a constant effort of self-mastering (*maîtrise de soi-même*). « Si nous ne faisons pas de la mort de Dieu un grand renoncement – he quotes - et une *perpétuelle victoire sur nous-mêmes*, nous aurons à payer

pour cette perte ». Autrement dit, avec Nietzsche, la révolte débouche dans *l'ascèse*. Une logique plus profonde remplace alors le «si rien n'est vrai, tout est permis» de Karamazov par un «si rien n'est vrai, rien n'est permis». » (HR, 481).

This textual correspondence seems to suggest the precise intention, on Camus' part, to present the artist as the heir and authentic prosecutor of a certain part of the thought and work of the German philosopher, namely his methodical or *active* nihilism: «À partir du moment où l'on néglige l'aspect méthodique de la pensée nietzschéenne (et *il n'est pas sûr que lui-même s'y soit toujours tenu*),<sup>251</sup> sa logique ne connaît plus de limites » (HR, 486).

The great artist lives on the verge of, or at the limit («le risque extrême », Id.), of a perpetual tension between beauty and suffering, «[entre] l'amour des hommes et la folie de la création, la solitude insupportable et la foule harrassante, le refus et le consentement» (E, 1092), between *solitude* and *solidarity*. In this sense he is the bearer of the lucid or tragic thought («intelligence lucide», HR, 479), which, in the light of Nietzsche's teaching, can «*transformer le nihilisme passif en nihilisme actif*» (Id.) through *creation*. In the light of these considerations, we can interpret Camus' political writings as an attempt toward what Mathieu Kessler recently addressed as the (political) project «de dépassement *esthétique* » of the *incomplete* forms of nihilism, which finds a pivotal source and antecedent in Nietzsche.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> My italics. Camus anticipates Jacques Sojcher's critique of Nietzsche (see, *La Question et le sens, esthétique de Nietzsche*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1972).

<sup>252</sup> Mathieu Kessler, *Nietzsche ou le dépassement esthétique de la métaphysique*, Paris, PUF, 1999, p.5.

### CHAPTER 3. NIHILISM AND TOTAL DOMINATION.

The same year that Camus' HR was published in France, Hannah Arendt published in London *The Burden of Our Time*, re-edited shortly afterwards in New York under the title of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

The affinity between the argument of the two works is striking, and can only partly be explained by the reference to common sources – as is, indeed, the case with the 1937 English translation of Nicolas Berdyaev's *The Origin of Russian Communism*, which Arendt quotes in the bibliography to OT. It is significant that Camus' article *The Human Crisis*, which according to Chiaromonte's recollection touched upon the question of nihilism in the confrontation of the Front generation with Nazism (Chapter 2.1.), also figured among the bibliographical references of OT.

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to the elucidation of the apparent affinity between Camus' argument in HR and Arendt's analysis of Totalitarianism, by attempting a systematic exploration of the notion of nihilism throughout the different parts and stages of the elaboration of OT.

In a letter in June 1952, Heinrich Blücher expressed his enthusiastic approval of Albert Camus' recently published essay, *L'homme révolté*, judging it «essential for the critique of nihilism»,<sup>1</sup> and soliciting Hannah Arendt's re-consideration of it.<sup>2</sup> We know that in April of the same year Arendt, who was spending a few weeks in Paris for research, and to find a publisher for OT,<sup>3</sup> contacted, and finally met, Albert Camus for the declared purpose of discussing HR, which she had read and deeply appreciated.<sup>4</sup> Of this meeting there remains no record, apart from a brief remark in a letter, in which she expressed her strong positive judgement on the man.<sup>5</sup>

The interest of this biographical note goes, in my view, beyond the mere «evidence of some personal relationship and, at least on Arendt's part, of some admiration» between the

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<sup>1</sup> My italics.

<sup>2</sup> «I think you've underestimated Camus's new book [*L'homme révolté*]. It is essential for the criticism of nihilism, and I've come to the same conclusion on many points. Any way, he is a true modern philosopher, and that's a damn comfort» (14<sup>th</sup> June 1952), in *Within Four Walls*, op. cit., 190.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., 281.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt's visiting-card, addressed to Camus and dated 21 April 1952 (Fonds Camus).

<sup>5</sup> In her letter to Blücher on the 24<sup>th</sup> April she wrote: «Camus just rang, and I'm seeing Raymond Aron and Jean Wahl next week. This evening Koyré [...] Sartre et al. I don't want to see; it's pointless. They have immersed themselves completely in their theories and live on a moon à la Hegel. [...]». On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1952: «Yesterday I was with Camus: he is, without doubt, the best man they have in France. [...]», in *Within Four Walls*, 162-164; cf. also E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., 281.

two authors:<sup>6</sup> the fact that, only a month after her Parisian meeting, Arendt's husband was re-directing her attention to Camus' essay *for the critique of nihilism*, draws our attention to the significance that this question had acquired in Arendt's political thinking between 1950 and 1952.

According to Blücher, Arendt had *overlooked* the contribution of Camus' controversial essay, for the same reason, I take it, pointed out by Nicola Chiaromonte in *Partisan Review* that same year:<sup>7</sup> the argument of HR, which brings into focus the relationship between nihilism and totalitarian ideology, was seemingly "old fashioned", and echoed the conservative theses that were flourishing in the social and political sciences around 1950.

As she pointed out in *Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought* in 1954, which according to E. Young-Bruehl was the result of her Parisian stay,<sup>8</sup> it is possible to distinguish two distinct approaches to or perspectives on the question of nihilism: a) the one which focuses on *contemporary nihilism*, as made visible through the 20<sup>th</sup> century crisis of civilization, and culminating in the «everything is possible» of totalitarian ideologies and terror (EU, 431);<sup>9</sup> and b) «the *opposite point of view*» (b) (EU, 433) of those who consider nihilism, respectively, in terms of *historicity* - namely, with Heidegger, as «the innermost fate of the modern age, that which sent modern man along its road therefore can be overcome only on its own terms» (Id.) - and in terms of *tradition*, which is the view of modern Catholic philosophy and «by all sorts of *revived Platonism*» (from Voegelin to Berdiaev), whose «main impulse is always to bring order into the things of this world» by appealing to the *rule* of a transcending principle (EU, 434).

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<sup>6</sup> J. C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and modern rebellion*, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Nicola Chiaromonte, "Sartre vs. Camus: A Political Quarrel", *Partisan Review*, 1952, in *A Partisan Century. Political Writings from Partisan Review*, Edith Kurzweil, Ed., Columbia UP, New York, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit. 281.

<sup>9</sup> «The political events of the twentieth century, according to a very widespread sentiment in Europe, have brought out and made public a *deep-rooted crisis of the entire civilization* including its philosophy and all its traditional concepts, a crisis of which the philosophers, at least the non-academic philosophers such as Nietzsche or Kierkegaard, have been aware before. In the *nihilistic* aspects of present political developments, which are so very obvious in the ideologies of all totalitarian movements and their inner conviction not only that "everything is permitted" but that "everything is possible", that once you make an arbitrary principle the guide of a consistent policy, everything goes - in this *contemporary nihilism* the philosopher was only too likely to detect his own predicaments [...].» (*Concern with Politics...*, 1954, folder 1, p., 3. My italics). The question of a «deep-rooted crisis» of Western civilization, generally associated with nihilism as a crucial event in the history of the West, is further developed in two other writings of the same period, that directly address the problem of understanding the totalitarian event: in *On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding* the very existence of totalitarian movements in the non-totalitarian world, according to Arendt, «bears eloquent witness to the breakdown of the whole structure of morality, the whole body of commands and prohibitions which had traditionally translated and embodied the fundamental ideas of freedom and justice into terms of social relationships and political institutions» (EU, 328).

It is from the former perspective that Arendt uses the concept of 'nihilism' to refer both to totalitarian ideologies *and* the contemporary philosophies of History («[...] the nihilistic implications of continental historicism»),<sup>10</sup> which she traces at the root of French Existentialism, on the one hand, and of the Conservative political theories on the other.

I suggest that we look for the key to Arendt's critique of nihilism in the sections of OT: in Part II on *Imperialism*, Arendt uses the term 'nihilism' to designate a «vulgar superstition of doom», which replaced the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Idealistic and Positivistic) belief in progress («[that] preached automatic *annihilation* with the same enthusiasm that the fanatics of automatic progress had preached the irresistibility of economic laws»), particularly conspicuous in France at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in Germany in the '20's (OT,144).

At a closer inter-textual reading the strong pejorative connotation of the term, associated to *superstition*, exceeds the immediate context – the analysis of the philosophy of the bourgeois elite in the Imperialist epoch – calling, at the level of meta-theory, the contemporary debate on Totalitarianism into question.

It is significant that in her Preface to the First Edition of OT in Summer 1950, Arendt pointed to a widespread «ill-defined, general agreement that the essential structure of all civilizations is at the breaking point», which, on the level of historical insight and political thought, would hinder the comprehension of the « the possibilities of the century», as well as the capacity to provide an adequate response to its horrors - « The central events of our time are not less effectively forgotten by those committed to a belief in an *unavoidable doom*, than by those who have given themselves up to reckless optimism. This book [OT] had been written against a background of both the reckless optimism and reckless despair. It holds that *Progress and Doom are two sides of the same medal*; that both are articles of *superstition*, not of faith. [...] To yield to the mere process of disintegration has become an irresistible temptation, not only because it has assumed the spurious grandeur of "*historical necessity*", but also because everything outside it has begun to appear lifeless, bloodless, meaningless, and *unreal*».<sup>11</sup>

What I intend to show is that the analysis of Arendt's critique of nihilism in OT brings forth, and is closely intertwined with, the author's critique of two concepts of power – *material* power, which she traces at the core of the bourgeois power politics and of modern Liberal political thought; and *organizational* power, as the unprecedented form realized by

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<sup>10</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Concern with Politics...* 1954, folder 1, p. 5, Library Congress.

<sup>11</sup> H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979, pp. vii-viii. My italics.

totalitarian police regimes - as playing an important part in the further development of her later critique of the “aesthetic” paradigm of the Western concept of the political.

### 3.1. THE CRITIQUE OF NIHILISM AND THE TWO CONCEPTS OF POWER: ON *THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM*.

In his book, J. Isaac devotes a chapter to *The Critique of Pure Nihilism*,<sup>12</sup> tracing, not without some misunderstanding, Arendt’s reflection on nihilism in the «often overlooked section in *The Origins* on “the temporary alliance between the mob and the elite”»: «the élite to which she refers here is the intellectual élite of the “front generation” of World War I, the literary avant-garde that gave voice to the pervasive sense of civilizational crisis that accompanied the war. [...] Like Camus, [Arendt] suggests that the nihilism of this generation expressed the nihilism of the bourgeois society (indeed, a major theme of Arendt’s writing is the “superfluosity” engendered by modern mass society)».<sup>13</sup>

What I suggest is that, relating the élite’s «antihumanist, antiliberal, anti-individualist, and anticultural instincts [...] brilliant and witty praise of violence, power and cruelty» to the post-war «atmosphere in which all *traditional values and propositions had evaporated* (after the nineteenth-century ideologies had refuted each other [...])»,<sup>14</sup> Isaac mistakes Arendt’s understanding of nihilism for the cynical *divertissements* of the literary revolutionaries of the ‘20’s, reducing the phenomenon to a moral problem, and therefore precluding a *political* understanding of the question, more in the line with Arendt’s concern in the OT.

The key to such understanding, I argue, is to be found in the paragraph on *Power and the bourgeoisie* in Part II of the OT.

In the imperialistic epoch a *philosophy of power* became the philosophy of the elite, who quickly discovered and were quite ready to admit that the thirst for power could be quenched only through *destruction*. *This was the essential cause of their nihilism* [...] which replaced the superstition of progress with the equally vulgar superstition of doom. [...] It had taken Hobbes, the great idolator of Success, three centuries to succeed. (OT, 144). [My italics]

The élite she refers to here is the bourgeois “ruling class” of Imperialist financiers and administrators, who in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century stepped into political affairs in order to secure their economic interests in the process of expansion beyond the borders of the

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*, op. cit., pp. 92- 102. My italics.

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, p. 95.



Nation-State. Arendt relates the nihilistic superstition of doom of this economic *elite* to their philosophy of *power*, as a peculiar kind of ideology stemming from the new, unprecedented, power politics of the politically emancipated bourgeoisie (OT, 144).

Imperialism was born when the ruling class in capitalist production came up against national limitations to its economic expansion. The *bourgeoisie turned to politics out of economic necessity*, for if it did not want to give up the capitalist system whose inherent law is constant growth, it had to impose this law upon its home governments and to proclaim expansion to be the ultimate political goal of foreign policy. (OT, 126)<sup>15</sup>

The exportation of power, in the form of a separation of the state's instruments of violence (police, army, etc.) from the body politic of the mother-country and their promotion and exportation as national representatives in the countries, usually uncivilized or weak, elected for Imperialist investments and exploitation, turned into reality «[t]he bourgeoisie's empty desire to have money beget money as men beget men [which] had remained an ugly dream so long as money had to go the long way of investment *in production*; not money had begotten money, but men had *made things and money*»<sup>16</sup> (OT, 137).

The secret of the new happy fulfillment was precisely that economic laws no longer stood in the way of the greed of the owning classes. Money could finally beget money because power, with complete *disregard of all laws – economic as well as ethical* – could appropriate wealth. Only when exported money succeeded in stimulating the export of power could it accomplish its owner's designs. Only the *unlimited accumulation of power* could bring about the *unlimited accumulation of capital*. (OT, 137). [My italics]

The meaning of the relationship between the Imperialist élite's nihilism, which «preached automatic annihilation with the same enthusiasm that the fanatics of automatic progress had preached the irresistibility of economic laws» (OT, 144), and its new policy of unlimited, i.e., *lawless* power, emerges in the pages on Hobbes' *Leviathan*.

Without wanting to assess the validity of her remarks, I will attempt to reconstruct, and draw the attention to, the development of Arendt's argument. According to her, Hobbes «was the true, though never fully recognized, philosopher of the bourgeoisie because he realized that the acquisition of wealth conceived as a never-ending process can be guaranteed only by the seizure of political power, for the accumulating process must sooner or later force open all existing territorial limits» (OT, 146).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See also OT, 136.

<sup>16</sup> My italics.

<sup>17</sup> «Hobbes, indeed, is the only great philosopher to whom the bourgeoisie can rightly and exclusively lay claim, even if his principles were not recognized by the bourgeois class for a long time. Hobbes's *Leviathan* exposed the only political theory according to which the state is based not on some kind of constituting law – whether divine law, the law of nature, or the law of the social contract – which determines the rights and wrongs of the individual's interest with respect to public affairs, but on the individual interests themselves, so that “the private interest is the same with the publique”» (OT, 139).

In her view, Hobbes gives «an almost complete picture, *not of Man but of the bourgeois man*», as a «being without reason, without capacity for truth, and without free will – that is, *without the capacity for responsibility*» (OT, 139):<sup>18</sup>

[...] man is essentially a function of society and judged therefore according to his “value or worth...his price; that is to say so much as would be given for the use of his power”. [...] *Power*, according to Hobbes, is the accumulated control that permits the individual to fix prices and regulate supply and demand in such a way that they contribute to his own advantage. The individual will consider his advantage in complete isolation [...]; he will then realize that he can pursue and achieve his interest only with the help of some kind of majority. Therefore, if man is actually driven by nothing but his individual interests, *desire for power* must be the fundamental passion of man. (OT, 139)<sup>19</sup> [My highlighting]

Now, Arendt argues that Hobbes’ insistence on power «as the motor of all things human and divine [...] sprang from the theoretically indisputable proposition that *never-ending accumulation of property must be based in a never-ending accumulation of power*» (OT, 143) - «the limitless process of capital accumulation needs the political structure of so “unlimited a Power” that it can protect growing property by constantly growing more powerful» (Id.). Arendt’s interest in Hobbes’ philosophy of power lies in the fact that «[h]is *Leviathan* was not concerned with idle speculation about new political principles or the old search for reason as it governs the community of men: it was strictly a “reckoning of the consequences” that follow from the rise of a *new class in society whose existence is essentially tied up with property as a dynamic, new property-producing device*» (OT, 145).

Arendt traces this birth to a change in the conception of property and wealth as centred around consumption in the bourgeoisie - « Property by itself [...] is subject to use and consumption and therefore diminishes constantly. The most radical and only secure form of possession is *destruction*, for only what we have destroyed is safely and forever ours» (Id.). The so-called accumulation of capital marked the transformation of property and wealth from the results of economic accumulation (commodities for consumption) into the new beginnings of a *never-ending process* of property enlargement and growth of wealth.

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<sup>18</sup> My italics.

<sup>19</sup> «It would be a grave injustice to Hobbes and his dignity as a philosopher to consider this picture of man as an attempt at psychological realism or philosophical truth. The fact is that Hobbes is interested in neither, but concerned exclusively with the political structure itself, and he depicts the features of man according to the needs of the *Leviathan*. For argument’s and conviction’s sake, he presents his political outline as though he started from realistic insight into man, a being that “desires power after power”, and as though he proceeded from this insight to a plan for a body politic best fitted for this power-thirsty animal. The actual process, i.e. the only process in which his concept of man makes sense and goes beyond the obvious banality of an assumed human wickedness, is precisely the opposite. *This new body politic was conceived for the benefit of the new bourgeois society as it emerged in the seventeenth century and this picture of man is a sketch for the new type of Man who would fit into it. The Commonwealth is based on the delegation of power, and not of rights*» (OT, 140-141). (My italics)

Now, as Arendt points out, this new class, founded by and on capital accumulation, did not fall prey to the «*naïve delusion of the limitless growth of property*» (OT, 143): accumulation of capital being hindered by natural limits – the finiteness of the personal life of the owner («Property owners who do not consume but strive to enlarge their holdings continually find one very inconvenient limitation, the unfortunate fact that *men must die*» OT, 145) – and by national, territorial, boundaries (OT, 144); the bourgeoisie was aware that constant growth of property and wealth could only realise its potential in never-ending accumulation of power, namely, by entering the political sphere.

By transcending the limits of human life in planning for an automatic continuous growth of wealth beyond all personal needs and possibilities of consumption, individual property is made a public affair and taken out of the sphere of mere private life. Private interests which by their very nature are *temporary*, limited by man's natural span of life, can now escape into the sphere of public affairs and borrow from them that *infinite length of time* which is needed for continuous accumulation. (OT, 145) [My italics]

What Arendt hints at in this paragraph is a *peculiar* definition of the public sphere, which she identifies as typical of the Western world, founded on a concept of temporality that exceeds the natural limits of human finite condition – which she will address in her later studies, from the lecture *Philosophy and Politics* (1954) to HC, as the question of *immortality*.

It is the modern (Hobbesian) philosophy of power that provides the notion of history as necessary for the “eternalising” of the private process of capital accumulation, and allowing the limits of human finitude to be overcome: it is to Hobbes, that Arendt attributes the indisputable merit of having understood that «[t]he philosophical correlative of the inherent instability of a community founded on *power* is the image of an *endless process of history* which, in order to be consistent with the constant growth of power, inexorably catches up with individuals, peoples, and finally all mankind» (OT, 143).

The eighteenth-century notion of progress, as conceived in pre-revolutionary France, intended criticism of the past to be a means of mastering the present and controlling the future; progress culminated in the emancipation of man. But this notion had little to do with the *endless progress of bourgeois society*, which not only did not want the liberty and autonomy of man, but was *ready to sacrifice everything and everybody to supposedly superhuman laws of history*. (OT, 143) [My highlighting]

It is in this “endless process of history”, as the philosophical correlate of a limitless power-accumulating process, that Arendt traces the roots of the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressive ideology – determined, in her argument, precisely by that «process of never-ending accumulation of power necessary for the protection of a never-ending accumulation of capital» (Id.).

The result is that the so-called *liberal* concepts of politics, which she addresses as the pre-imperialist bourgeois political notions - unlimited competition regulated by secret

balance, pursuit of “enlightened self-interest” as adequate political virtue, unlimited progress inherent in the mere succession of events - are constructed on the «*temporary* compromise between the old standards of Western culture and the new class’s faith in property as a dynamic, self-moving principle» (OT, 146).

In Arendt’s view, this compromise, grounded on the delusory notion of the public life as mere sum or total of private interests, is bound to dissolve since, in appropriating the limitlessness of political action, and replacing the latter in the public sphere, capital accumulation is destructive of the old standards and of the body politic itself (Id.) - «[Hobbes] could already detect in the rise of the bourgeoisie all those *anti-traditionalist qualities* of the new class which would take more than three hundred years to develop fully» (OT, 144-145).

It is in this destructive principle of power accumulation that the meaning of nihilism as the Imperialist élite’s “superstition of doom” is to be found:

When the accumulation of capital had reached its natural, national limits, the bourgeoisie understood that only with an “expansion is everything” ideology, and only with a corresponding power-accumulating process, would it be possible to set the old motor into motion again. At the same moment, however, when it seemed as though the true principle of perpetual motion had been discovered, the specifically optimistic mood of the progress ideology was shaken. Not that anybody began to doubt the irresistibility of the process itself, but many people began to see what had frightened Cecil Rhodes: *that the human condition and the limitations of the globe were a serious obstacle to a process that was unable to stop and to stabilize, and could therefore only begin a series of destructive catastrophes once it had reached these limits.* (OT, 144) [My italics]

Thus nihilism is on the one hand, related to the modern concept of history, as necessarily inherent in the notion of unlimited accumulation of power, and inscribed in the Hobbesian philosophy of power of a politically emancipated bourgeoisie, and, on the other, it touches upon the question, which will prove to be of crucial concern in Arendt’s reflection on totalitarian domination, of the *limits* of the political community and the destructive logic of *limitless* power.

From this perspective, what is truly relevant for our analysis of nihilism in OT is not so much the chapter on the temporary alliance between the mob and the intellectual élite, pointed out by Isaac, as the pages on the *Alliance between Mob and Capital*.

The mob was not only «the refuse but also the by-product of bourgeois society, directly produced by it and therefore never quite separable from it» (OT, 155); moreover, it was a composed social entity which stood *outside* the class-divided nation, permanently excluded from the productive society, gathering the superfluous human material (“human debris”) that economic crises of overproduction had expelled from the productive chain (OT, 150).

What characterises the Imperialist age is the alliance, under the new political banner of expansion, between these superfluous men («[p]rospectors, adventurers, and the scum of the big cities [...]») and the owners of the superfluous capital, made available by overproduction in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup>

Arendt focuses on this alliance - overlooked by the historical pessimists, from Burkhardt to Spengler (OT, 155) – and in particular on the «high society's constantly growing admiration for the underworld, which runs like a red thread through the nineteenth century, its continuous step-by-step *retreat on all questions of morality*, and its growing taste for *the anarchical cynicism of its offspring*» (Id.):

This feeling of kinship, the joining together of begetter and offspring, already classically expressed in Balzac's novels, antedates all practical economic, political, or social considerations and recalls those *fundamental psychological traits of the new type of Western man that Hobbes outlined three hundred years ago*. But it is true that it was mainly due to the insights acquired by the bourgeoisie during the crises and depressions which preceded imperialism that high society finally admitted its readiness to accept the *revolutionary change in moral standards which Hobbes's "realism" had proposed, and which was now being proposed anew by the mob and its leaders*.<sup>21</sup> (OT, 156) [My highlighting]

Now, Arendt addresses the cynical "realism" of the mob, which exercised an intellectual attraction on the bourgeoisie, as «*nihilistic*». That the term primarily designates a political, rather than moral issue, clearly emerges in the preceding passage:

[...] the *political principles* of the mob as encountered in imperialist ideologies and totalitarian movements, betray a *surprisingly strong affinity with the political attitudes of bourgeois society*, if the latter are cleansed of hypocrisy and untainted by concessions to Christian tradition. What more recently made the nihilistic attitudes of the mob so intellectually attractive to the bourgeoisie is a *relationship of principle that goes far beyond the actual birth of the mob*. (OT, 156) [My highlighting]

Arendt clearly suggests that the alliance between the superfluous wealth created by over-accumulation and the mob «*set in motion a force that had always lain in the basic structure of bourgeois society*, though it had been hidden by nobler traditions and by that blessed hypocrisy which La Rochefoucault called the compliment vice pays to virtue» (OT, 156), and that «*completely unprincipled power politics* could not be played until a mass of people was

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<sup>20</sup> «The mob, begotten by the monstrous accumulation of capital, accompanied its begetter on those voyages of discovery where nothing was discovered but new possibilities for investment. The owners of superfluous wealth were the only men who could use the superfluous men who came from the four corners of the earth. Together they established the first paradise of parasites whose lifeblood was gold.» (OT, 151).

<sup>21</sup> «The very fact that the "original sin" of "original accumulation of capital" would need additional sins to keep the system going was far more effective in persuading the bourgeoisie to shake off the restraints of Western tradition than either its philosopher [i.e. Hobbes] or its underworld. It finally induced the German bourgeoisie to throw off the mask of hypocrisy and openly confess its relationship to the mob, calling on it expressly to champion its property interests. [...] High society's affinity with the mob came to light in France earlier than in Germany, but it was in the end equally strong in both countries. France, however, because of her revolutionary traditions and her relative lack of industrialization, produced only a relatively small mob, so that her bourgeoisie was finally forced to look for help beyond the frontiers and to ally itself with Hitler Germany.» (OT, 156).

available *who were free of all principles* and so large numerically that they surpassed the ability of the state and society to take care of them» (Id.).

The “nihilistic attitude” of the mob is briefly but efficaciously outlined in that being *free of all principles* which, far from contradicting, actually constitutes the *political* principles of its organisation. Arendt insists on the affinity between the nihilistic attitude of the mob and the political attitude of the bourgeoisie *cleansed of hypocrisy and freed from all concession to Christian moral values*: the mob is seen to embody the «revolutionary change in moral standards which Hobbes’ “realism” proposed» (OT, 156), i.e., that being without the capacity for truth, without free will, and therefore, incapable of responsibility, whose value is priced exclusively in terms of power (OT, 139). It is significant, in this respect, that the historical pessimists had already repeatedly pointed to the essential *irresponsibility* of this new social entity, parasitically living in the margins of society (OT, 155).

It is in the mob’s fascination with modern race doctrines that Arendt traces the link between the absence of principles (nihilistic attitude) and the political principles of a capital and power accumulating bourgeoisie as the emergence of a humanity, in the sense of a community of human beings, stripped of the regulating «idea of humanity». Even though we cannot confuse Hobbes’ philosophy with the modern race doctrines, she argues, «Hobbes at least provided political thought with the prerequisite of all race doctrines, that is, *the exclusion in principle of the idea of humanity* which constitutes the sole regulating idea of international law» (OT, 156),<sup>22</sup> dissolving the solidarity of men, as rooted in the symbol of the common origin of the human species, in a perpetual and (self-) destructive war of all against all.<sup>23</sup>

Now, Arendt draws the attention to the totalitarian form of modern race doctrines as bringing about «forms of organization through which humanity could *carry out the endless process of capital and power accumulation through to its logical end in self-destruction*» (OT, 157).

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<sup>22</sup> «Hobbes embodies the necessity of power accumulation in the theory of the state of nature, the condition of “perpetual war” of all against all, in which the various single states still remain vis-à-vis each other like their individual subjects before they submitted to the authority of the Commonwealth. This ever-present possibility of war guarantees the Commonwealth a prospect of permanence because it makes it possible for the state to increase its power at the expenses of other states.» (OT, 142). My italics.

<sup>23</sup> «With the assumption that foreign politics is necessarily *outside* of the human contract, engaged in the *perpetual war of all against all*, which is the law of the “state of nature”, Hobbes affords the best possible theoretical foundation for those naturalistic ideologies which hold nations to be tribes, separated from each other by nature, without any connection whatever, unconscious of the solidarity of mankind and having in common only the instinct of self-preservation which man shares with the animal world. If the idea of humanity, of which the most conclusive symbol is the common origin of the human species, is no longer valid, then nothing is more plausible than a theory according to which brown, yellow, or black races are descended from some other species of apes than the white race, and that all together are predestined by nature to war against each other *until they have disappeared from the face of the earth.*» (OT, 157) [My highlighting]

The mob's nihilistic attitude, as the cynical exclusion *in principle* of the regulating idea of humanity, reducing the political to an unprincipled «perpetual war of all against all», is, thus, the logical consequence of that «force that had always lain in the basic structure of bourgeois society» (OT, 156), namely, of that limitless process of power accumulation, unleashed by the necessity of never-ending capital accumulation, which, in the Imperialist age, with the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, enters the public sphere, replacing political action.

In her analysis of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, which echoes Heidegger's analysis of the essence of power as unconditioned super-empowering of power in his lecture on Nietzsche's *European Nihilism*, Arendt emphasised the self-destructive logic inherent in all attempt to found a political community on the limitless accumulation of power:

[...]the power-accumulating machine, without which continual expansion would not have been achieved, needs more material to devour in its never-ending process. If the last victorious Commonwealth cannot proceed to "annex the planets", it can only proceed to *destroy itself in order to begin anew the never-ending process of power generation*. (OT, 146-147) [My highlighting]

From the perspective of a Hobbesian endless process of unprincipled power accumulation, the organization of a nihilistic mob must necessarily entail, in Arendt's view, the dissolution of nations, as grounded on the regulating idea of a *common origin*, into races, «for there is, under the conditions of an accumulating society, *no other unifying bond available* between individuals who in the very process of power accumulation and expansion are losing all natural connections with their fellow-men» (OT, 157).<sup>24</sup>

As Arendt consigns the concept of "doom" to the realm of Historicist ideology, which she rejects as superstition, the meaning of the attraction, which she examines in part II of OT, of an Imperialist élite indulging in Nihilism for the mob's nihilistic freedom of all principles, lies in the very concept of power politics as based on unprincipled, i.e., limitless and destructive, power accumulation, which, as a never-ending process, inevitably clashes against, and aims at transcending, the natural limits which characterise the human condition.

As Roy T. Tsao points out,<sup>25</sup> nearly all of part II of OT, with the exception of the last chapter, was adapted from the material of a series of articles that Arendt published between

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<sup>24</sup> «If it should prove to be true that we are imprisoned in Hobbes' endless process of power accumulation, [...] [r]acism may indeed carry out the doom of the Western world and, for the matter, of the whole of human civilization. [...] race is, politically speaking, not the beginning of humanity but its end, not the origin of peoples but their decay, not the natural birth of man but his unnatural death.» (OT, 157) [My highlighting]

<sup>25</sup> R. T. Tsao, "The three phases of Arendt's theory of Totalitarianism" in *Totalitäre Herrschaft und republikanische Demokratie. Fünfzig Jahre The Origins of Totalitarianism von Hannah Arendt*, Antonia Grunenberg (Hrsg.), Peter Lang, 2003, p. 59.

1942 and 1946.<sup>26</sup> It is important to observe how, in these articles, Nazism was represented as the heir of the racist and expansionist power politics, that emerged in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Echoing Rauschning's argument in his *Germany's Revolution of Destruction*,<sup>27</sup> in her 1946 article «Imperialism: road to suicide» Arendt pointed to the Nazis' insane preoccupation with death, culminating in the systematic building and functioning of "death factories" as the extreme logical offspring of a hidden drive for suicide contained in the Imperialist principle of expansion for expansion's sake, which led the way to the nihilistic principle of total destruction for destruction's sake, that is, to collective suicide.<sup>28</sup>

The transition from Part II of the OT, almost complete by 1947, to Part III, which Arendt wrote between 1948 and '49,<sup>29</sup> is essential in order to grasp the complexity of her analysis of nihilism fully: in abandoning the thesis of her 1946 article in Part III of OT, she takes her distances from Rauschning's position, identifying totalitarian dictatorships as *unprincipled*, i.e., nihilistic, revolutions of destruction.

I argue that, in Part III, she develops a two-layered approach to the question of nihilism, which J. Isaac fails to highlight: tracing the core of Arendt's critique of "pure Nihilism" – a formula that we would unsuccessfully search for in OT – in the chapter on «*the temporary alliance between the mob and the elite*» in Part III (*A Classless Society*), Isaac focuses his attention on the rebelliousness of the intellectual elite of the Thirties, in other words, on the literary *avant-garde's* «vulgarity, with its cynical dismissal of respected standards and accepted theories [which] carried with it a frank admission of the worst». According to Isaac

*Arendt deplores the nihilism of these intellectuals*, who "did not know they were running their heads not against walls but against open doors", whose fascination with destruction and whose cynical repudiation of humanism played right into the hands of nascent totalitarian movements. Such an elite lacked any "sense of reality", and their fascination with the rhetoric of inhumanism they remained oblivious to the terrible practical consequences of their nihilistic impulses. In the sheer delight with which they welcomed the destruction of bourgeois respectability they self-indulgently flaunted all standards and irresponsibility added fuel to the fires that were to consume Europe.

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<sup>26</sup> "We refugees" (1943), "Concerning Minorities" (1944), "Imperialism, nationalism, chauvinism" (*Review of Politics* 1945), "Power Politics Triumphs" (*Commentary* 1945), "The Stateless People" (1945), "Expansion and the Philosophy of Power" (1946), "Imperialism road to suicide" (*Commentary*, February 1946), "The Nation" (*Review of Politics* January 1946).

<sup>27</sup> Hermann Rauschning, *Germany's Revolution of Destruction*, London-Toronto, 1939 (from now on RD).

<sup>28</sup> Rauschning defined «a fatal, suicidal conception» (RD, p. 127) the nihilistic conception of permanent mobilization proclaimed by the Nazi revolution of destruction, as «totalitarian dictatorship of pure violence [which] is possible on the basis of nihilism, but it destroys its own foundation in proportion as its principles become general among the masses.» (RD, p. 127). The thesis of collective suicide is also accepted by Camus: «Le déposition de Speer au procès de Nuremberg a montré que Hitler, alors qu'il eût pu arrêter la guerre avant le désastre total, a voulu le suicide général, la destruction matérielle et politique de la nation allemande » (HR, 591).

<sup>29</sup> R. T. Tsao, op. cit., pp. 61-62.



*In the face of these intellectual currents, which in different ways remained stuck in their negativity, Camus and Arendt sought some reliable basis upon which to defend positive values.*<sup>30</sup> [My italics]

I would argue that, in the chapter's overall line of argument, Arendt does not deplore the intellectual *élite's* nihilistic indulgence in cruelty, violence and passion for destruction *per se*; furthermore, it is not *in the face of these intellectual currents* that she may be seen as developing her own reflection, precisely because the nihilistic attitude of the *élite*, «who voluntarily left society before the wreckage of classes had come about, *along with the mob, which was an earlier product of the rule of the bourgeoisie*» (OT, 326), was hardly anything new and original:

No single element in this general intellectual climate in postwar Europe was very new. Bakunin had already confessed, "I do not want to be *I*, I want to be *We*", and Netchayev had preached the evangel of the "doomed man" with "no personal interests, no affairs, no sentiments, attachments, property, not even a name of his own". [...] [the] brilliant and witty praise of violence, power, and cruelty [of the front generation] *preceded by the awkward and pompous "scientific" proofs of the imperialist elite that a struggle of all against all is the law of the universe, that expansion is a psychological necessity before it is a political evidence, and that man has to behave by such universal laws.* What was new in the writings of the front generation was their high literary standard and great depth of passion. (OT, 330) [My highlighting]

As the universal "struggle-of-all-against-all" law is the central conviction of what Arendt defines in Part II as *nihilism*, or the "superstition of doom" of the Imperialist *élite*, rooted in the bourgeois philosophy of power, the intellectual *élite's* attitude defines itself in comparison with, and in strong opposition to, the historicist faith of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - «To [the intellectual elite], violence, power, cruelty, were the supreme capacities of men who had definitely lost their place in the universe and *were much too proud to long for a power theory that would safely bring them back and reintegrate them into the world.* They were satisfied with blind partisanship in anything that respectable society had banned [...], and they elevated cruelty to a major virtue because it contradicted society's humanitarian and liberal hypocrisy» (OT, 330-331).<sup>31</sup>

One "merit" of the intelligentsia of the Thirties, thus, lay in the rejection of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois belief in a universal and transcendent law of history – be it of progress or of doom -<sup>32</sup> in its doing away with the bourgeois *nihilism*, as defined in Part II, had it not remained unawares entangled in its logic (but with a reversed sign). As Arendt emphasises:

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<sup>30</sup> J. C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*, op. cit., p. 95-96.

<sup>31</sup> My italics.

<sup>32</sup> «The postwar writers no longer needed the scientific demonstrations of genetics, and they made little if any use of the collected works of Gobineau or Huston Stewart Chamberlain, which already belonged to the cultural household of the philistines. *They read not Darwin but the Marquis de Sade.* If they believed at all in universal laws, they certainly did not particularly care to conform to them» (OT, 330). My italics.

Simply to brand as *outburst of nihilism* this violent dissatisfaction with the prewar age and subsequent attempts at restoring it (from Nietzsche and Sorel to Pareto, from Rimbaud and T.E. Lawrence to Jünger, Brecht, and Malraux, from Bakunin and Netchayev to Alexander Blok) is to overlook how justified disgust can be in a society wholly permeated with the ideological outlook and moral standards of the bourgeoisie. Yet it is also true that the “front generation”, in marked contrast to their own chosen spiritual fathers, were completely absorbed by their desire to see the ruin of this whole world of fake security, fake culture, and fake life. This desire was so great that it outweighed in impact and articulateness all earlier attempts at a “transformation of values”, such as Nietzsche had attempted or a reorganization of political life as indicated in Sorel’s writings, or a revival of human authenticity in Bakunin, or a passionate love of life in the purity of exotic adventures in Rimbaud. *Destruction without mitigation, chaos and ruin as such assumed the dignity of supreme values.* (OT, 328)

According to Arendt, the only element that distinguished the intellectual elite from the 19<sup>th</sup> century *nihilistic* ideologists, «with whose theories they sometimes seem to have so much in common» (OT, 331), was the greater authenticity and passion with which the former would yearn for a violent destruction of a society erected on, and embellished by, the bourgeois double morality of respectability and hypocrisy – but these would simply be added to the *older*, i.e., modern/bourgeois, «passion for anonymity and losing oneself» (Id.) in the superhuman process of history unawares: «[...] the self-willed immersion in the superhuman forces of destruction seemed to be a salvation from the automatic identification with pre-established functions in society and their utter banality, and at the same time to help destroy the functioning itself» (Id.).

It is here that Arendt roots the intellectual élite’s attraction to the «pronounced *activism* of totalitarian movements», coupling the primacy of sheer action and the overwhelming force of necessity - what she designated as the Laws of Nature, in Nazi ideology, and the Laws of History, in Soviet Communism, and what Camus designated in HR as «l’histoire à l’état pur» (HR, 585).

It is precisely to “pure” history, or what Arendt defined as the *modern* concept of history, as a superhuman process of sheer becoming, that both Arendt and Camus trace their definition of nihilism, as immediately linked to the totalitarian election of activism or *terrorism* to the highest expression of political action.<sup>33</sup> As Arendt highlights, even before acquiring the form of State-administered terrorism, with the rise to power of totalitarianism,

[t]he pronounced activism of the totalitarian movements, *their preference for terrorism over all other forms of political activity*, attracted the intellectual elite and the mob alike, precisely because this terrorism was so utterly different from that of the earlier revolutionary societies. It was no longer a matter of calculated policy which saw in terrorist acts the only means to eliminate certain outstanding personalities who, because of their policies or position, had become the symbol of oppression. What proved so attractive was that *terrorism had become a kind of philosophy through which to express frustration, resentment, and blind hatred, a kind of political expressionism which used bombs to express oneself, which watched delightedly the publicity given to*

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<sup>33</sup> In the chapter on «Le Terrorisme individuel» Camus insists on an analogous identification of history as absolute value (HR, 579) at the roots of Russian Terrorism in its extreme form (“Chigalevisme”), preparing the way to Totalitarian State terrorism.

*resounding deeds and was absolutely willing to pay the price of life for having succeeded in forcing the recognition of one's existence on the normal strata of society.* It was still the same spirit and the same game which made Goebbels, long before the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany, announce with obvious delight that the Nazis, in the case of defeat, would know how to slam the door behind them and not to be forgotten for centuries. (OT, 331-332) [My highlighting]

The pages on the intellectual elite's attraction to totalitarian movements actually confirm, against Isaac's reading, that in OT Arendt uses the term nihilism not to designate a historically situated phenomenon of moral break-down, but rather to define a specific political attitude, which was made *visible* by such event. The image of the «evaporation» of traditional values and propositions («after the nineteenth-century ideologies had refuted each other and exhausted their vital appeal», OT, 334) stands in clear opposition to the Liberal and Humanist images of doom, as rooted in a «bitter disappointment and [...] unfamiliarity with the more general experiences of the time» (Id.), which, in her view, prevented these estranged spectators from understanding that patently absurd propositions could be accepted – thus, replacing «the old truths which had become pious banalities» (Id.) - «precisely because nobody could be expected to take the absurdities seriously. Vulgarity with its cynical dismissal of respected standards and accepted theories carried with it a frank admission of the worst [...]. In the *growing prevalence of mob attitudes and convictions –which were actually the attitudes and convictions of the bourgeoisie cleansed of hypocrisy – those who traditionally hated the bourgeoisie and had voluntarily left the respectable society saw only the lack of hypocrisy and respectability, not the content itself»* (OT, 334).<sup>34</sup>

What Arendt recognizes in the intelligentsia's celebration of cruelty and violent activism is but the spreading attitude of the mob, which in Part II of OT she defines as the *nihilistic* offspring of the bourgeois power policy, stripped of its hypocritical double morality.

To address, as Isaac does, the moral bankruptcy of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as *nihilism*, would implicitly entail, from Arendt's perspective, judging this historical moment from the Archimedean (god-like) standpoint of some transcendent (moral) values, which prevented the spokesmen of humanism and liberalism from grasping the *political* meaning of the elite's attraction to totalitarian movements, and its temporary fascination with the nihilistic attitude of the mob.

The reason why Arendt is so severe toward the intellectual elite is not, as Isaac suggests, that its «fascination with destruction and [...] cynical repudiation of humanism played right into the hands of the nascent totalitarian movements [...] [and] added fuel to the

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<sup>34</sup> My italics.

fires that were consuming Europe»,<sup>35</sup> but is instead to be found in the élite's blindness to what lay below its cynical *divertissements*, as unoriginal re-editions of the mob's dismissal of traditional moral standards – a dismissal which Arendt sees, through Hobbes, as lying at the core of the bourgeois philosophy of power.

According to the author, the intellectual élite's exaggerated exhibition of amorality, its disregard of human values, turned the revolutionary *défi* against the bourgeois double morality into a grotesque «mask of cruelty», and the «old game of *épater les bourgeois*» (OT, 334) into a parody – in the Twenties, the «avant-garde did not know they were running their heads not against walls but against open doors, that a unanimous success would belie their claim to being a revolutionary minority [...]. The bourgeoisie could no longer be shocked; *it welcomed the exposure of its hidden philosophy* [...]. » (OT, 335).<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it is not to the intellectual élite, whose lack of sense of reality and perverted selflessness are seen as going in the same direction of the masses' fictitious world and absence of self-interest (OT, 335), but it is rather the mob's cynical attitude to which we should focus our attention in order to grasp the continuity between modern (bourgeois) power politics and the nihilistic principle that «everything is permitted».

In Chapter III on «Total Domination», in the section *Totalitarianism in Power*, Arendt traces the nihilistic principle that «everything is permitted» back to 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois utilitarianism, emphasising how it was inherited and immediately taken for granted by totalitarian movements as the basis on which their methods of domination could be used, perfected and crystallised (OT, 440). This aspect is similarly highlighted by Rauschnig in his analysis of the Nazi revolution («This revolutionism stops at nothing. Its tactical principle is that *all things are permitted*»),<sup>37</sup> as the political outcome of a total devaluation of moral principles and traditional standards, culminating in unscrupulous cynicism.<sup>38</sup>

Now, unprincipled cynicism and absence of scruple are identified throughout OT as the marks of the mob's political attitude, which in the concluding pages of the section on *A classless society* (Part III) are the object of Arendt's analysis of the temporary alliance between mob and intellectual élite,<sup>39</sup> and of their common fascination with totalitarian movements.

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<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey C. Isaac, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>36</sup> My italics.

<sup>37</sup> RD, p. 84. My italics.

<sup>38</sup> RD, p. 99.

<sup>39</sup> The echoes of Berdiaev's argument on the nihilism of the Russian revolutionaries are visible in the following passage: «The truth was that the transformation of classes into masses and the breakdown of the prestige and authority of political institutions had brought to Western European countries conditions which resembled those

The mob's cynicism and political radicalism, which Arendt addresses as the extreme *enterprising spirit* of the underworld of the bourgeois class (OT, 337), still participating of the latter's recklessness in handling its private interests regardless of the common good (OT, 336), was soon dismissed by the totalitarian movements, which the mob and the elite had initially supported and helped into power.<sup>40</sup>

What Arendt wants to emphasise, in the opposition between mob and totalitarian rule, is a clash between two different conceptions of *power*. The nihilistic, *i.e.*, unscrupulous and unprincipled, conviction that "everything is permitted", contained in the 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal political philosophy, is realised in the mob's aspiration that «the helpless masses would help them into power, would support them when they attempted to *forward their private interests*, that *they would be able simply to replace the old strata of bourgeoisie society* and to instil into it the more enterprising spirit of the underworld» (OT, 337).

As the offspring of the bourgeois productive society, the mob is seen as still participating in the modern liberal concept of power, unleashed by Imperialist expansion. Now, in Arendt's view,

[t]he trouble with totalitarian regimes is not that they play power politics in an especially ruthless way, but that *behind their politics is hidden an entirely new and unprecedented concept of power*, just as behind their *Real-politik* lies an entirely new and unprecedented concept of reality. (OT, 417) [My italics]

Totalitarianism in power dissolves «[w]hatever connection power had in the minds of Western man with earthly possessions, with wealth, treasures, and riches» (OT, 418), thus, with the modern bourgeois concept of power as related to, and unleashed by capital accumulation:

Supreme disregard for immediate consequences rather than ruthlessness; rootlessness and neglect of national interests rather than nationalism; contempt for utilitarian motives rather than unconsidered pursuit of self-interest; "idealism", *i.e.*, their unwavering faith in an ideological fictitious world, *rather than lust for power*

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prevalent in Russia, so that it was no accident that their revolutionaries also began to take on the typically Russian revolutionary fanaticism which looked forward not to change in social and political conditions, but to the radical destruction of every existing creed, value, and institution. The mob merely took advantage of this new mood and brought about a short-lived alliance of revolutionaries and criminals [...]. The disturbing alliance between the mob and the elite, and the curious coincidence of their aspirations, had their origin in the fact that these strata had been the first to be eliminated from the structure of the nation-state and the framework of class-society» (OT, 337).

<sup>40</sup> «In all fairness to those among the elite [...] who at one time or another have let themselves be seduced by totalitarian movements, and who sometimes, because of their intellectual abilities, are even accused of having inspired totalitarianism, it must be stated that what these desperate men of the twentieth century did or did not do *had no influence on totalitarianism whatsoever*, although it did play some part in earlier, successful, attempts of the movements to force the outside world to take their doctrines seriously. Wherever totalitarian movements seized power, this whole group of sympathizers was shaken off even before the regimes proceeded toward their greatest crimes. Intellectual, spiritual, and artistic initiative is as dangerous to totalitarianism as the gangster initiative of the mob, and both are more dangerous than mere political opposition.» (OT, 339) (my italics).

– these have all introduced into international politics a new and more disturbing factor than mere aggressiveness would have been able to do.

*Power, as conceived by totalitarianism, lies exclusively in the force produced through organization.* (OT, 417-148) [My italics]

The replacement of *material* power (property and productive manpower) by *organizational* power is what Arendt conceives as essentially defining totalitarian regimes.<sup>41</sup>

In the de-coupling of *efficiency* and material force, of the concept of power and the utilitarian calculation of material interests and profit motives, which defined it in modern power theories, totalitarian action becomes utterly *unpredictable*:

The inability of the non-totalitarian world to grasp a *mentality which functions independently of all calculable actions in terms of men and material, and is completely indifferent to national interest and the well-being of its people*, shows itself in a curious dilemma of judgement: those who rightly understand the terrible efficiency of totalitarian organization and police are likely to overestimate the material force of totalitarian countries, while those who understand the wasteful incompetence of totalitarian economics are likely to underestimate the power potential which can be created in disregard of all material factors. (OT, 419).

The reading of the second Essay of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* offers, in this respect, some important insights into our analysis of nihilism. Approaching the question of memory and promise, Nietzsche traces the concept of responsibility in man's capability to answer and account for himself as *future*, which entails the human animal having been *made* into a necessary, uniform, peer among peers, *orderly predictable and calculable* being, capable of thinking causally and of anticipating the future (GM, § 1-2).

The "fabrication" of this truly predictable animal has its means, according to Nietzsche, in the co-operative action of society («the social strait-jacket») and the morality of custom, as the «immense amount of labour of man on himself during the longest epoch of human race», the highest product of which is the sovereign individual, as a autonomous, supra-ethical man who has freed himself from the morality of custom, becoming the *master of the free will*, in other words, a man who has the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, being aware of his freedom and power over himself and his destiny.

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<sup>41</sup> «The totalitarian division of states in Have and Have-not countries is more than a demagogic device; those who make it are actually convinced that the power of material possessions is negligible and only stands in the way of the development of organizational power. [...] [Stalin] honestly believed that the most precious treasures of the Soviet Union were not the riches of its soil or the productive capacity of its huge manpower, but the "cadres" of the party (i.e., the police), so Hitler, as early as 1929, saw the "great thing" of the movement in the fact that sixty thousand men "have outwardly become almost a unity [...]». «[...] To Stalin constant growth and development of police cadres were incomparably more important than the oil in Baku, the coal and ore in the Urals, the granaries in the Ukraine, or the potential treasures of Siberia – in short the development of Russia's full power arsenal. The same mentality led Hitler to sacrifice all Germany to the cadres of the SS; he did not consider the war lost when German cities lay in rubble and industrial capacity was destroyed, but only when he learned that the SS troops were no longer reliable» (OT, 418).

Echoing this definition in her pages on the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, Arendt described the bourgeois man, depicted in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, as a being without reason, without the capacity for truth and *without free will*, in other words, *without the capacity of responsibility* – a sheer function of society, whose value is constantly re-evaluated by the latter «depending upon the law of supply and demand», namely, upon some kind of calculation of material power (OT, 139).

By recognizing in the *nihilistic* attitude of the mob the unprincipled realisation of the irresponsible, interest-driven and power-accumulating animal, *implicit in the modern concept of power*, as contained in the bourgeois philosophy of power (which has its highest formulation in the *Leviathan*), and as consciously embraced only in the Imperialist age, Arendt is clearly suggesting, against a simplistic interpretation of totalitarian regimes as Nihilistic Revolutions of Destruction, that the problem with totalitarianism lies precisely in the fact that *it transcends the cynical break-down of the moral strait-jacket of tradition*.

The nihilistic principle that “everything is permitted”, which the totalitarian movements inherited from 19<sup>th</sup> century power politics, and which so attracted the mob and the intellectual élite in the post-war years, does not exhaust the description of totalitarian mentality. Arendt's attention thus concentrates on what she defines as the idea of organizational *omnipotence* (OT, 418) – the totalitarian belief that *everything is possible*.

In the “Concluding Remarks” to the first edition of the OT Arendt relates these two beliefs, that “everything is permitted” and “everything is possible”, to the «coming of age» of *modern man*, which she describes as the “interruption”, or the loss of faith in, the great myths of the origins – the Judeo-Christian myth of the Creation, as the foundation and source of authority for actual laws; or the universal cosmos, whose natural laws the man of the French Revolution would have to imitate and conform to.<sup>42</sup>

The origins of human history, transcending the historical process itself, provided a ultimate meaning which secured a sense which was independent of «the unreliable efforts of men and the unpredictable whims of accident»:<sup>43</sup> the difficulty of contemporary men, according to Arendt, lies in the fact that «we start from a *fundamental distrust of everything merely given, a distrust of laws and prescriptions, moral and social, that are deduced from a given, comprehensive, universal whole*. This difficulty involves the sources of authority of law and questions the ultimate goals of political organizations and communities; it forces us

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<sup>42</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1951, p. 434.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

not only to find and devise new laws, but also to find and devise their very measure, the yardstick of good and evil, the principle of their source». <sup>44</sup>

In spite and against neo-humanist thinkers, the *nature* of man is no longer a measure, which, according to Arendt, entails, at the *political* level, that, in order to draw up the constitution of a new body politic, «we shall have to *create* – not merely discover – a new foundation for human community as such». <sup>45</sup> In this sense, Arendt's Concluding Remarks are clearly resonant with Nietzsche's pages on European nihilism, and in particular with fragment n. 12, on the de-valuation of cosmological values, already analysed by Heidegger in his 1940 lecture.

As we have pointed out in Chapter 1, in section A of fragment n. 12 nihilism is defined *as a psychological state* which occurs, in the first place, as the consequence of man's unsuccessful search for a meaning or sense in events - such meaning not being there to be *found* in becoming, man resigns to the fact of having been prey of an illusion; furthermore, nihilism as a psychological condition takes place as a consequence of the loss of a *whole*, which provided man with a foundation and permanent source of value. Finally, in its third and last form, nihilism is described by Nietzsche as incorporating the absence of belief in a metaphysical world, which culminates in the recognition of *this* world as the only one (rejecting the Platonic-Christian dualism of true world and world of appearances) – but, as a result, man finds the world, *as it is, unbearable*.

Now, in the Concluding Remarks Arendt writes:

[...] the first disastrous result of man's coming of age is that modern man has come to resent everything given, *even his own existence* – to resent the very fact that he is not the creator of the universe and himself. In this fundamental resentment, he refuses to see rhyme or reason in the given world. In his resentment of all laws merely given to him, he proclaims openly that everything is permitted and believes secretly that everything is possible. And since he knows that he is a law-creating being, and that his task, according to all standards of past history, is "superhuman", he resents even his nihilistic convictions as though they were forced upon him by some cruel joke of the devil. <sup>46</sup>

The "coming of age" of modern man coincides with the *nihilistic* loss of belief in a metaphysical principle, from which all laws are derived («*everything is permitted*»): here Arendt, echoing Heidegger, points to the «*superhuman*» task of modern men as Cartesian, i.e. unconditioned, *law-creating* beings.

The crucial problem, in Arendt's view, is that the nihilistic resentment of everything *given*, that is, all transcendent law descending upon, and being imposed to man by a

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<sup>44</sup> Ivi, p. 435-436.

<sup>45</sup> Ivi, p. 436.

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, p. 438.



metaphysical principle, is brought to the extreme consequence of resenting sheer givenness as such («the few elementary things that indeed are invariably given to us, such as life itself, the existence of man and the world»<sup>47</sup>). This latter form of resentment against sheer existence is, according to Arendt, the *psychological basis of contemporary nihilism* and the key to totalitarian organizational *omnipotence*, as the essential principle of totalitarian domination.

In *The Perplexities of the Rights of Man*, in the chapter on *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man* (Part II of OT), Arendt writes:

The more highly developed a civilization, the more accomplished the world it has produced, the more *at home* men feel within the *human artifice* – the more they will *resent everything they have not produced, everything that is mysteriously given them.* (OT, 300-301) [My highlighting]

Further on, she identifies *mere existence* as that which is «mysteriously given us by birth»: «the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, [which] can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love» (OT, 301).

According to Arendt, suspicion of mere existence is inscribed in the very definition of the political, in so far as the latter is identified throughout Western political thought with a form of *organization*:

Since the Greeks, we have known that highly developed political life breeds a deep-rooted suspicion of this private sphere, *a deep resentment against the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is – single, unique, unchangeable.* This whole sphere of the merely given, relegated to private life in civilized society, is a permanent threat to the public sphere, because the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation. Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given us, but is the result of *human organization* insofar as it is *guided by the principle of justice.* [...]

*Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals.* (OT, 301)<sup>48</sup> [My highlighting]

Echoing Nietzsche's "aesthetic" definition of the political sphere (*On the use and disadvantages of history for life*), represented by the Greek *polis*, as a "horizon" drawn to define the surveyable, the clear from the unilluminated and dark, de-limiting a space in which the Greek political men expressed their *non-necessary* drives, in the HC Arendt defined the

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<sup>47</sup> Ivi. P. 438.

<sup>48</sup> In her 1954 lecture on *Philosophy and Politics: the Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution*, Arendt observes how in Greek antiquity life, in and by itself, could never become the *ariston*, the best thing: exaggerated love of life (*philopsychia*) was held to be characteristic of slaves only, that is, the *worst*, who loved that mortal and perishable thing (life) over all others, as opposed to the *aristoi*, the best men, who chose immortal fame (Library of Congress, Folder 1, pp. 4-5).

political space (*polis*) as «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 merely like other living or inanimate things* but make their appearance explicitly» (HC, 198-199), which is delimited by the stabilizing element of law.

It is precisely out of such acting and speaking together that, according to Arendt, the public realm arises - as *organization* (HC, 198). Arendt's reference to the *principle of organization* - which «has nothing to do with either work or labor but *owes its origin to the strictly political sphere of life*, to the fact of man's capacity to act and to act together and in concert» (HC, 123) - in her analysis of Totalitarian regimes is highly problematical, and draws us to the core of «one of the oldest *perplexities of political philosophy*», which she traces in the Western conception of law and political organization, exposed in its devastating implications by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century mass phenomenon of statelessness and by the end of the so-called Human Rights:

The dark background of mere givenness, the background formed by our unchangeable and unique nature, breaks into the political scene as the *alien* which in its all too obvious *difference reminds us of the limitations of human activity* - which are identical with the limitations of human equality. The reason why highly developed political communities such as the ancient city-states or modern nation-states, so often insist on ethnic homogeneity is that they *hope to eliminate as far as possible those natural and always present differences and differentiations which by themselves arouse dumb hatred, mistrust, and discrimination because they indicate all too clearly those sphere where men cannot act and change at will, i.e. the limitations of the human artifice*. The "alien" is a frightening symbol of the fact of difference as such, of individuality as such, and indicates those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to *destroy*. (OT, 301) [My highlighting]

The image of the "alien" as the residual of a highly developed, i.e., *organized*, political community, as understood in the Western tradition of political thought, from the ancient *polis* to the modern Nation-State, exposes the "immunizing" attempt to *keep out* life or mere existence, that lies at its core.<sup>49</sup> According to Dana Villa, totalitarianism is unprecedented and unquestionably *modern* in the «deeper sense that it gives exaggerated expression to what Arendt considers to be the defining spirit of the age, namely, a hubristic belief in the limitless nature of human power. For Arendt, the modern age is one of boundless self-assertion growing out of a resentment of the human condition, a resentment of the limits that define human existence (mortality, labour and natural necessity, earth-boundedness, etc.)».<sup>50</sup>

I would suggest that it is in the concepts of *organizational power* and *organizational omnipotence* that we measure the complexity of Arendt's definition of the totalitarian

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<sup>49</sup> See also Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Einaudi, Torino, 2002, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Dana Villa, "Totalitarianism, Modernity, Tradition", in *Politics, Philosophy, Terror. Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1999, p. 184.

phenomenon, visible in the analysis of her two-fold notion of nihilism, which combines, on the one hand, the modern distrust of all (moral and social) laws and prescriptions that are deduced from a *given* universal whole (*early* or modern nihilism as the belief that «everything is permitted»), and, on the other, the resentment or contempt for *life* which she associates to the belief that «everything is possible».

I suggest that the link between the totalitarian «everything is possible» and the notion of resentment against mere existence exceeds the traditional approaches to the problem of nihilism as an exclusively modern and moral phenomenon, and brings the question of nihilism to the very core of the Western concept of the political, precisely in its definition as *organization within the limits of law* («the result of *human organization* in so far as it is *guided by the principle of justice*»).

### 3.2. RADICAL NIHILISM AND CONTEMPT OF SHEER EXISTENCE.

In the concluding chapter of Part II, on *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man*, the loss of a universal whole (history or nature), from which to deduce laws and rights – which Nietzsche describes as one of the conditions of nihilism as a psychological state - <sup>51</sup> and the consequent loss of the authority of absolute and transcendent measurements of religion or the eighteenth-century law of nature, is seen to coincide with, and bring about the reduction of law to the utilitarian equation of right with “good or useful for” (the individual, the family, the people).<sup>52</sup>

Now, as she points out in the Concluding Remarks to the first edition, in a finite horizon devoid of higher sense, of a law that is *given* to us and to which we must conform, the

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<sup>51</sup> Arendt describes the modern (nihilistic) condition of loss of a transcendent and comprehensive sense or unity in terms that are close to Camus's in the *MdS*: «Ever since a deeper knowledge of natural processes instilled serious doubts about the existence of natural laws at all, nature itself has assumed a sinister aspect. How should we be able to deduce laws and rights from a universe which apparently knows neither the one nor the other category?» (OT, 298).

<sup>52</sup> «The crimes against human rights, which have become a speciality of totalitarian regimes, can always be justified by the pretext that right is equivalent to being good or useful for the whole in distinction to its parts. (Hitler's motto that “Right is what is good for the German people” is only the vulgarised form of a conception of law which can be found everywhere and which in practice will remain ineffectual only so long as older traditions that are still effective in the constitutions prevent this).» (OT, 298-299).

utilitarian categories of our common-sense reasoning (right is what is “good for”), not secured by the stabilizing and limiting boundaries of tradition, *can never prevent murder*.<sup>53</sup>

For it is quite conceivable, and even within the realm of practical political possibilities, that one fine day a *highly organized and mechanized humanity* will conclude quite democratically – namely, by majority decision – that for humanity as a whole it would be better to liquidate certain parts thereof. (OT, 299)

Hitler’s attempt in this direction is possible precisely under the conditions of a break-down of the balance, inherent in the very structure of the modern nation-state, between national interests and the legal institutions, and the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation .<sup>54</sup>

It is in the highly civilized political context of nation-states, bound together as a *family* of nations, that the post-war mass phenomenon of stateless people – people (minorities or refugees) who had lost the protection of their national governments – brought forth the structural incapability of the nation-states to provide and secure law under the conditions of loss of citizenship (OT, 287): «[...] since the man without a state was “an anomaly for whom there is no appropriate niche in the framework of the general law” – an outlaw by definition – he was completely at the mercy of the police [...]» (OT, 283).<sup>55</sup>

Arendt traces the emergence of a police, emancipated from law («it was no longer an instrument to carry out and enforce the law», OT, 287) and from government, as an independent ruling authority,<sup>56</sup> in the interwar Western European crisis of the nation-state.

It is significant that she identifies totalitarian *organizational power*, in both Stalin’s and Hitler’s regimes, with the growth and development of police cadres (OT, 418). In contrast with non-totalitarian states, the power nucleus of totalitarian countries is seen to reside in “super-efficient and super-competent” *secret police*, whose functions are essentially related to

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<sup>53</sup> «[...] we are forced to doubt the unchallenged existence of the basic tenets of morality upon which the whole structure of our life rests and which none of the great revolutionaries, from Robespierre to Lenin, ever seriously questioned», H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), op. cit., p. 438.

<sup>54</sup> «[...] insofar as the establishment of nation-states coincided with the establishment of constitutional government, they always had represented and been based upon the rule of law as against the rule of arbitrary administration and despotism. So that when the precarious balance between nation and state [...] broke down, the *disintegration of this form of government and of organization of peoples* came about with terrifying swiftness» (OT, 275). My italics.

<sup>55</sup> «[...] the state, insisting on its sovereign right of expulsion, was forced by the illegal nature of statelessness into admittedly illegal acts.» (OT, 283- 284)

<sup>56</sup> «It goes without saying that the totalitarian regimes, where the police had risen to the peak of power, were especially eager to consolidate this power through the domination of vast groups of people, who, regardless of any offences committed by individuals, found themselves anyway beyond the pale of the law.» (OT, 288)

the preparation of the totalitarian utopia of world domination,<sup>57</sup> and, primarily, to the realization of the totalitarian fiction in one country (OT, 421):

The truth of the matter is that totalitarian leaders, though they are convinced that they must follow consistently the fiction and the rules of the fictitious world which were laid down during their struggle for power, discover only gradually the full implications of this fictitious world and its rules. *Their faith in human omnipotence, their conviction that everything can be done through organization, carries them into experiments which human imaginations may have outlined but human activity certainly never realized.* Their hideous discoveries in the realm of the possible are inspired by an ideological scientificity which has proved to be less controlled by reason and less willing to recognize factuality than the wildest fantasies of prescientific and prephilosophical speculation. They establish the *secret society* [...] of the secret police [...] *in order to be able to carry out the indecent experimental inquiry into what is possible.* (OT, 436) [My highlighting]

In totalitarian regimes, the secret police *is* a secret society, which, being in possession of the *esoteric* knowledge, i.e., knowledge concerning the operational methods of the cadres, the eventual selection of new categories of undesirables, and the conditions of the concentration camps, is alone, in the whole totalitarian country, in a position to «communicate with each other about what actually constitutes the reality for all» (OT, 435):

Of course the population at large and the party members specifically know all the general facts – that concentration camps exist, that people disappear, that innocent persons are arrested; at the same time, every person in a totalitarian country knows also that it is the greatest crime ever to talk about these “secrets”. Inasmuch as man depends for his knowledge upon the affirmation and comprehension of his fellow-men, this generally shared but individually guarded, *this never-communicated information loses its quality of reality and assumes the nature of a mere nightmare.* Only those who are in possession of the strictly esoteric knowledge [...] alone are in a position to believe in what they know to be true. This is their secret, and in order to guard this secret they are established as a secret organization. (OT, 435) [My italics]

All these textual elements suggest that, in the OT, the (secret) police of totalitarian regimes, as the nucleus of organizational power, i.e. of force produced through *organization*, develop through the identification with, and on the fundamental basis of, an essentially *political* principle freed from the institutional and legal boundaries of traditional authority. What we observe is an identification of *Politik* and *Polizei* which is analogous to the identification pointed out by Agamben in his definition of Nazi bio-politics.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> «The emphasis on the police as the sole organ of power, and the corresponding neglect of the seemingly greater power arsenal of the army, which is characteristic of all totalitarian regimes, can still be partially explained by the totalitarian aspiration to world rule and its conscious abolition of the distinction between a foreign country and a home country, between foreign and domestic affairs» (OT, 420).

<sup>58</sup> Analysing the distinction between *Politik* and *Polizei* as developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century science of the police (von Justi), which assigned to the former the negative task of fighting the internal and external enemies of the State, and to the latter the positive care of the life of its citizens; Agamben defines the biopolitical programme of the Nazi regime, and of a large part of modern politics, by the identification of politics with the police, and the care of life with the fight against the enemy - the *immunitarian* paradigm pointed out by Esposito (in G. Agamben, *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, Torino, Einaudi, 1995, p. 163). According to Agamben, Arendt fails to grasp that it is precisely this identification of politics and the police (as care of life), and the consequent transformation of politics into the space of “naked life”, that legitimises and requires total domination (Ivi, p. 132).

When Claude Lefort's insists that Arendt's «notion of *organization* has nothing to do with the attempt to integrate the ruler and the ruled in "One" body», he is (unsuccessfully) challenging the Arendtian concept of organization from the viewpoint of *incorporation*.<sup>59</sup> in OT Arendt describes the unprecedented totalitarian concept of power, as a force produced through *organization*, in terms of a «kind of *dematerialised* mechanism whose every move generates power as friction or galvanic currents generate electricity» (OT, 418), therefore transcending, on the one hand, the modern form of the work-model of political action - which Villa designates as the "fabrication paradigm", visible in the Platonic State as a "man writ large" (HC, 224) – <sup>60</sup> and, on the other, the *homo laborans*' "unitedness of many into one" (HC, 214) as experienced in consumers' societies.

Totalitarianism is, thus, not understood by Arendt in terms of incorporation but of total *organization* of life, which pushes the nihilistic resentment of sheer givenness, inherent in the Western conception of the political, to its extreme consequences.

No doubt, wherever public life and its law of equality are completely victorious, wherever civilization succeeds in eliminating or reducing to the minimum the dark background of difference, it will end in complete petrification and be punished, so to speak, for having forgotten that man *is only the master, not the creator of the world*. (OT, 302) [My italics]

The world that figures among these "elementary things" that are inevitably *given*, mastery - as related to craftsmanship, which is grounded on the fundamental recognition of the *material limitation* of human activity - is opposed to the concept of *creation*, which designates the peculiar trait of human action *within the political realm* of human affairs, namely, its boundlessness.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> «Arendt fails to make a distinction between organization and *incorporation*. Organization implies the idea of a supposedly rational society, whereas incorporation refers to the notion of a collective body and appeals to a programme of social prophylactics. On the one side, the figure of the enemy is the saboteur; on the other side, it is the figure of the parasite, the vermin», C. Lefort, "Thinking with and against Hannah Arendt", in *Totalitäre Herrschaft*, op. cit., pp. 122-123.

<sup>60</sup> It is interesting to observe that Arendt uses the image of the power-accumulating machine, into which each member, deprived of his natural and human capacities and reduced to absolute powerlessness, is degraded to a cog (OT, 146), to describe Hobbes' *Leviathan* as the Artificial Man, or the Commonwealth as *One Body*. Although she is aware of a «significant coincidence» of the Hobbesian identification of public and private interests with the «totalitarian pretense of having abolished the contradictions between individual and public interests», against a certain critical literature (especially Jean Vialatoux's *La Cité de Hobbes: théorie de l'Etat totalitaire, essai sur la conception naturaliste de la civilisation*, published in 1935), Arendt is cautious in pointing out that «[h]owever, one should not overlook the fact that Hobbes wanted most of all to protect private interests by pretending that, rightly understood, they were the interests of the body politic as well, while on the contrary totalitarian regimes proclaim the non-existence of privacy» (OT, 139, n. 36). We could read this opposition between public and privacy in the light of Arendt's distinction between two different concepts of power, *material* and *organizational*, thus interpreting the totalitarian non-existence of privacy as the paroxysmal de-materialising and all-destructive affirmation of the political principle of organization.

<sup>61</sup> This aspect already emerges in the OT: in Part II on Imperialism, creation is used to designate the act of foundation of the body politic, as the beginning of a new political community (OT, 138).

I argue that between 1949 and 1954, through the gestation of Part III of OT and through her researches and lectures, which culminated in her political theory in the HC, Arendt comes to terms with, develops, and finally dismisses a *certain* definition of the problem of nihilism as internal to, and inseparable from, a *specific conception of the political* – namely, the philosophers' (Platonic) concept of the political, at the roots of the Western tradition of political thought.

In her 1954 essay on *Tradition and the Modern Age*, Arendt defines the «denial of everything given» as a *radical nihilism*, «of which the nineteenth-century rebellions against tradition as yet knew little and *which arises only in the twentieth-century society*» (TMA, 34).<sup>62</sup>

In Kierkegaard', Marx' and Nietzsche's challenge to the tradition of Western religious, ethical and political thought, Arendt draws the attention to the “rebels”' awareness of a series of new problems and perplexities, which had invaded the modern world, and which tradition was incapable to cope with (TMA, 27).

Against the “vulgarisation” of «what is *commonly* called nihilism» (TMA, 30), which identifies the latter with Nietzsche's philosophical dismantling of metaphysics, his attack against the «suprasensuous and transcendent ideas which, since Plato, had been supposed to measure, judge, and give meaning to the given» (BPF, 30), Arendt insists that

[y]et Nietzsche was no nihilist but, on the contrary, was the first to try to overcome *the nihilism inherent not in the notions of the thinkers but in the reality of modern life*. What he discovered in his attempt at “transvaluation” was that within this categorical framework the sensuous loses its very *raison d'être* when it is deprived of its background of the suprasensuous and transcendent. (TMA, 30)

Throughout the essay, Arendt traces nihilism not in the “conscious rebellions” of these thinkers - in Nietzsche's, but also Kierkegaard's and Marx's enterprises – but instead in those traits of the modern world, which these authors attempted «to overcome and resolve into something old», by turning the tradition *upside down* (TMA, 29). What she suggests is that in choosing tradition as their *antagonist*, by intentionally breaking with it, these thinkers were essentially trying to dispel the darkness and cover that «ominous silence that still answers us whenever we dare to ask, not “What are we fighting *against*” but “What are we fighting *for*?”» (TMA, 27) – which is the ultimate senselessness of existence, as experienced in and springing from the incompatibility between the tradition and modernity.

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<sup>62</sup> My italics.

Arendt focuses in particular on the incompatibility between the traditional (philosophical) conception of truth as *revelation*, entailing «the traditional *unquestioning confidence in what has been given* and appears in its true being to man's reason and senses», and the modern «spirit of doubt and distrust which ultimately *can trust only what it has made itself*» (TMA, 31).<sup>63</sup>

Bearing in mind Nietzsche's definition of nihilism as the de-valuation of the highest values, Arendt points to the thinker's unawareness of the origin of the term "value" in the modern *sociological trend*, made visible in the new economic sciences (TMA, 33).

Echoing the pages on Hobbes' philosophy of power in the OT, Arendt defines values as «social commodities that have no significance of their own but, like other commodities, exist only in the ever-changing relativity of social linkages and commerce. Through this relativization both the things which man produces for his use and the standards according to which he lives undergo a decisive change: they become entities of exchange, and the bearer of their "value" is society and not man [...]. The "good" loses its character as an idea, the standard by which the good and the bad can be measured and recognized; it has become a value which can be exchanged with other values, such as those of expediency or of power» (TMA, 32-33).<sup>64</sup> The incompatibility between traditional values, as a measure for men's thoughts and actions, and the modern dissolution of these transcendent standards into *functional* values, i.e., into «relationships between its members» (TMA, 32), is played, according to Arendt, in Nietzsche's devaluation of values, as well as in Marx's labour theory of value (Id.).

Nietzsche's "dismantling" of the tradition under the banner of a de-valuation of the highest values, by challenging the social status of the latter, exposes, in Arendt's view, the modern identification with, and dissolution of traditional absolute standards (Ideas) into *social* values.<sup>65</sup> Therefore «when Nietzsche proclaimed that he had discovered "new and higher values", he was the first to fall prey to delusions which he himself had helped to destroy, accepting the old traditional notion of measuring with transcendent units in their newest and most hideous form, thereby again *carrying the relativity and exchangeability of values into*

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<sup>63</sup> My italics.

<sup>64</sup> «The birth of the social sciences can be located at the moment when all things, "ideas" as well as material objects, were equated with values, so that everything derived its existence from and was related to society, the *bonum* and *malum* no less than tangible objects» (TMA, 33).

<sup>65</sup> «[...] at no time prior to the incipient Industrial Revolution was it held *that values, and not things, are the result of man's productive capacity*, or was everything that exists related to society and not to man "seen in his isolation. The notion of "socialized men", whose emergence Marx projected into the future classless society, is in fact the underlying assumption of classical as well as Marxian economy» (TMA, 33).



*the very matters whose absolute dignity he had wanted to assert – power and life and man's love of his earthly existence»* (TMA, 34-35).<sup>66</sup>

In this sense, Arendt's critique of Nietzsche can be seen as going in the same direction, and in a way anticipating, a more recent strand of interpretation of the philosopher's work, which identifies nihilism with the genealogical de-structuring of the traditional foundations of truth and domination, thus founding the concept of power in a boundless process of *de-materialization* or *de-realization*.<sup>67</sup> According to Ferruccio Masini, the Nietzschean story of the «great redemption» coincides with a story of human solitude – the solitude of the *aristoi*, whose “greatness” takes places in/as the *interiorization* of power,<sup>68</sup> through the erosion of the traditional concept of dominion, which discloses in its (nihilistic) withdrawal from human inter-relatedness the super-human perspective of *measurelessness*.<sup>69</sup>

But if the commentator traces in Nietzsche's “Great Politics” a meta-critique of the political which in its *nihilistic radicalisation* reveals, not only the impossibility of a foundation of the Subject, but also, most importantly, the foundationlessness of the political itself, I suggest that Arendt goes one step further by developing, through her focus on nihilism, a meta-critique of the political, which exposes its (foundation-less) foundation as a *specific* concept of the political – one which, in her terminology, belongs to, and must be traced back to, the Western tradition of political philosophy.

What lies at the roots of the question of nihilism is ultimately the relationship between philosophy and politics – a crucial concern in Arendt's early Fifties' research and lectures. However this is not in the sense, proposed by Francesco Fistetti, that this relationship undergoes a crucial evolution in the modern age, to the extent that, with the advent of totalitarian movements and ideologies, nihilism marks the *entering* or the *realization* of some

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<sup>66</sup> My italics.

<sup>67</sup> According to Ferruccio Masini, «Nietzsche non pensa più in termini tradizionali di legittimazione del dominio e neppure in termini ideologici, sulla base cioè, di quella coercizione alla razionalizzazione che [...] rivendica il carattere della scienza moderna. [...] Se l'*aristos* è il potere *sans phrases* non legittimato, ma legittimante, non giustificato, ma giustificante, ciò si spiega col fatto che esso è *funzione della dismisura*, la dismisura di un compito, di un “essere superiore”: in altri termini: proprio in virtù del carattere sovrumano della sua responsabilità, esso finisce per *ritirare* dai rapporti reali la sua rivendicazione, *interiorizzandola*», in F. Masini, “Tradizione nichilista e metapolitica dell'*aristos* nel pensiero di Friedrich Nietzsche”, in *Filosofia, religione, nichilismo*, Morano, 1988, pp. 491, 493.

<sup>68</sup> «Questa *irrealità* del potere, che fa coincidere la “storia della grande redenzione” con una storia di solitudine umana, appartiene, per quanto paradossale possa sembrare, al processo di disarticolazione delle strutture di dominio. La volontà di potenza combatte contro se stessa, nel senso che irrealizza il dominio facendo di esso [...] un “non-potere al potere”. [...] Nella nozione nietzscheana di “grandezza”, potenza si divarica dunque da dominio. I valori sono forme di dominio, la potenza, invece, non ha alcuna forma. Essa è bensì il senso di ciò che si presenta come valore – si pensi alla genealogia degli “ideali ascetici” platonico-cristiani – e quindi maschera a “volontà del nulla” che si nasconde in questi valori» (F. Masini, art. cit., pp. 493 and 495).

<sup>69</sup> According to Masini, the notion of “will to power” carries the nihilistic de-humanization of dominion, that is, its extraction from the context of human relations (F. Masini, art. cit., p. 492).

familiar philosophical categories (the old philosophical principle that “everything is permitted”) in the political realm,<sup>70</sup> but, instead, in the sense that nihilism coincides with, and exposes, the *de-realization* and *internalisation* of the political *as conceived in the Western tradition of political philosophy*.

As Hannah Arendt points out,

[f]or traditional philosophy it would have been a contradiction in terms to “realize philosophy” or to change the world in accordance with philosophy [...]. Philosophy might have prescribed certain rules of action, though no great philosopher ever took this to be his most important concern. Essentially, philosophy from Plato to Hegel was “not of this world” [...]. (TMA, 23)

Marx’s intention to *change* the world and the consciousness of men – according to the three famous sentences that “The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently; the point is, however, *to change it*”; “Labor created man”; and “Violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one” (TMA, 21) – is, in Arendt’s view, a philosopher’s decision to abjure philosophy, which, although it explodes the tradition of political philosophy from which it springs,<sup>71</sup> *is and essentially remains itself philosophical*:

[...] The challenge to tradition, this time not merely implied but directly expressed in Marx’s statement, lies in the prediction that *the world of common human affairs, where we orient ourselves and think in common-sense terms, will one day become identical with the realm of ideas where the philosopher moves*, or that philosophy, which has always been only “for the few”, will one day be the common-sense reality for everybody (TMA, 23-24)

Developing in her 1954 lecture *Philosophy and Politics: The Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution* an argument, that also recurs in other writings of the same period (*The Concept of History* and *Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought*), Arendt observes that philosophy is the *mother* of all Western sciences, although, among these, the science of Politics has always been a stepchild:<sup>72</sup> what distinguishes Physics, Ethics, Metaphysics and Logics from Politics is, in Arendt’s own

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<sup>70</sup> «Il rapporto tra filosofia e politica varca una soglia decisiva nel mondo moderno allorché con l’avvento dei movimenti e delle ideologie totalitarie il nichilismo da principio (o insieme di principi) filosofico si tramuta in una sorta di *fattore dissolutivo* del vecchio ordine classista e in *lievito potente* della trasformazione in società di massa, anonima e atomizzata. *E’ come se antiche e familiari categorie filosofiche fossero divenute realtà tangibile [...]*» (Francesco Fistetti, “Totalitarismo e Nichilismo in Hannah Arendt”, in *Logiche e crisi della modernità*, a cura di Carlo Galli, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1991, p. 405). My italics.

<sup>71</sup> «Political philosophy necessarily implies the attitude of the philosopher toward politics; its tradition began with the philosopher’s turning away from politics and then returning in order to impose his standards on human affairs. The end came when a philosopher turned away from philosophy so as to “realize” it in politics» (TMA, 17-18).

<sup>72</sup> H. Arendt, *Philosophy and Politics*, Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library Congress, folder 1, p. 3 (also in EU, 430).

words, the fact that the former are all connected to, and remain inspired by, the original *wonder* before and *gratitude* for the *miracles* of man and the universe.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, political life is seen, from Greek times, as breeding a deep *resentment* against the disturbing miracle contained in the fact that each of us is made as he is (OT, 301).

The sphere of the *merely given*, that is, of the temporally limited, instable and relative human world - the human condition as essentially miserable (the opposite of the *ariston*) because it is affected by mortality - is conceived as a permanent threat to the public sphere, as the sphere of the specifically human possibility for "greatness", where the *aristoi* - the best men, as those who have chosen immortal fame - distinguish themselves.<sup>74</sup> «Greatness - she writes in *The Concept of History* - was easily recognizable as that which *by itself* aspired to immortality - that is, negatively speaking, as a heroic *contempt* for all that merely comes and passes away, for all individual life, one's own included» (BPF, 52).

It is in this heroic contempt of mortality that Arendt detects the point of intersection between the Greek aspiration to self-immortalizing, as the foundation of the political life, and the philosophers' election of contemplation as the best and highest form of immortalizing oneself. The major shift, brought about by the latter, consisted in replacing the political notion of "immortal fame" by the philosophical concept of *immortality*, as conceived and pursued in complete isolation and independently from the human community.<sup>75</sup>

If we compare these pages with the ones on Marx's prediction of a world of human affairs identical with the philosopher's realm of ideas (TMA, 23), it is not difficult to recognize, intact under the exhortation to abjure philosophy (i.e., pure contemplation) in order to *change* the world, the philosopher's *contempt* of the merely given, or *resentment* of sheer existence.

This contempt or resentment lies at the core of the very conception of the political, which became dominant in the West and imposed itself, through the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, in the Western tradition - as the *philosopher's* concept of the political, grounded on his experience of isolation and withdrawal from the common world of men living and acting together (TMA, 17):

Our tradition of political thought began when Plato discovered that it is somehow inherent in the philosophical experience to turn away from the common world of human affairs; it ended when nothing was left of this experience but the opposition of thinking and acting, which depriving thought of reality and action of sense, makes both meaningless. (TMA, 25)

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<sup>73</sup> Ivi, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Ivi, pp. 4-5.

<sup>75</sup> Ivi, p. 6. According to Arendt, political philosophy, as a branch of philosophy, began with a profound conflict with «things that concern men insofar as they live together» (Ivi, p. 3).

If Marx's thought explodes that tradition (TMA, 24) from which, according to Arendt, the thinker himself, like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, was borrowing the conceptual tools in order to make sense of the new phenomena of the modern age (TMA, 29);<sup>76</sup> modernity, in a way, is seen as exposing a paradox that is *internal* to the great tradition of political philosophy, the destructiveness of which becomes visible in the "twilight of the idols" and the 20<sup>th</sup> century loss of *raison d'être*.

Arendt relates the destructive character of the tradition at the moment of its coming to an end (TMA, 18) with its loss of authoritativeness, and its reduction to the (philosophical) separation between thinking and acting, as resting upon the Platonic fabrication model of political action formulated in her 1953 lectures on Marx and the Tradition.

The interrelatedness between the nihilistic «everything is possible», the resentment or contempt of mere existence, which emerges in Arendt's reflection on totalitarian domination in OT, and the de-realizing or de-materializing drive inherent in the (philosophers') concept of the political of the Western Great Tradition, brought forth by her researches on philosophy and politics in 1952-54, is confirmed in an earlier version of her *Concern with Politics in Recent European Political Thought*:

[in] the nihilistic aspects of present political developments, which are so very obvious in the ideologies of all totalitarian movements and their inner conviction not only that "everything is permitted" but that "everything is possible", that once you make an arbitrary principle the guide of a consistent policy, everything goes – *in this contemporary nihilism the philosopher was only too likely to detect his own predicaments*. The predicaments of philosophy in the modern world.<sup>77</sup>

Deploring the «laughable and hopeless state of the political sciences » in a letter to Heidegger (8<sup>th</sup> May 1954),<sup>78</sup> against which she defines her own effort to «pursue issues that were already bothering me throughout the writing of the book on totalitarianism»,<sup>79</sup> between 1954 and 56, Arendt repeatedly traces the former in the so-called scientific effort to reduce the unknown or the new, i.e., totalitarian domination, to the known or the old (tyranny or one-party dictatorship), and to *explain* the tragic novelty of the event «by reducing it to historical, social, or psychological causes relevant for only one country, Germany or Russia» (UP, 313).

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<sup>76</sup> «Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche stand at the end of the tradition, just before the break came. [...] [They] are for us like guideposts to a past which has lost its authority. They were the first who dared to think without the guidance of any authority whatsoever; yet, for better and worse, they were still held by the categorical framework of the great tradition.» (TMA, 28)

<sup>77</sup> H. Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Political Thought", Library of Congress, folder 1, p. 3. (My italics)

<sup>78</sup> See also E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., p. 283.

<sup>79</sup> Hannah Arendt- Martin Heidegger, *Letters 1925- 1975*, Harcourt, 2004, pp. 120-121.

In *What is authority* she explicitly denounced the «silent agreement in most discussions among political and social scientists that we can ignore distinctions and proceed on the assumption that everything can eventually be called anything else» (WA, 95-96), founded theoretically on the concept of History as «process or stream or development» in which everything can become everything else.

Arendt's three-fold inquiry into the ruler/ruled relationship as one of the possible forms among the different forms of constitution of the political,<sup>80</sup> into the *productionist* interpretation of political action under the categories of end/means,<sup>81</sup> and into relation between philosophy and politics, is inseparable, I argue, from her critique of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Philosophies of History, in which she roots the post-war Neo-Conservative and Liberal political theories<sup>82</sup> as «two sides of the same coin, just as their *progress-or-doom ideologies correspond to two possible directions of the historical process as such*».<sup>83</sup>

According to Arendt, in the post-war context of political theory Liberalism and Conservatism are both concerned with «restoration» (of freedom or authority).<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Catholic philosophers, such as Maritain, Gilson, Guardini and Pieper, whom Arendt defines as immune to Hegelianism, and who came «to know the problems of modern nihilism from their experiences with continental, particularly Central European, historicism [...]» (CP, 434-435), propose an analogous return to the tradition, in the form of a dubious «restatement of old truths [...] the re-establishment of a world that is past» (Id.)

In order to elucidate the meaning of Arendt's approach to the *nihilistic aspects*, which she detects in the contemporary political philosophy, on the backdrop of this debate, I suggest that we examine briefly the philosopher's predicaments and their modern developments.

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<sup>80</sup> «Starting with Montesquieu, an analysis of the types of states, with the goal of uncovering where the concept of authority got into the political ("each body politic is composed of those who rule and those who are ruled")» (H. Arendt- M. Heidegger, *Letters 1925- 1975*, op. cit., p. 120).

<sup>81</sup> « Perhaps starting with Marx on the one hand and Hobbes on the other, an analysis of the completely disparate activities that, from the perspective of the *vita contemplativa*, have usually been lumped together in the *vita activa*: that is, work – production – action, whereby work and action have been understood on the model of production: work became "productive", and action was interpreted in an ends-means context.» (Ibid.)

<sup>82</sup> See Arendt's "Authority in the Twentieth Century", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 4, October 1956, pp. 404-405.

<sup>83</sup> *What is Authority?* (BPF, 101). My italics.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3. UNMASKING THE “AESTHETIC” PARADIGM OF WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT.

Arendt's threefold enquiry, described in the letter to Heidegger, which she sketches «as an experiment” in the 1953 lecture on *Karl Marx and the Western Tradition...*», and which culminates in Part II and III of *What is Authority?*, individuates in «the Platonic-Aristotelian statement that every well-ordered community is constituted of those who rule and those who are ruled» (WA, 104), the origin and introduction of the concept of domination – of mastery or rule,<sup>85</sup> as belonging to the private sphere of the household (despotism)<sup>86</sup> – into the political realm:

In Plato, the despotism originating in the household, and its concomitant destruction of the political realm as antiquity understood it, remained utopian. But it is interesting to note that when the destruction became a reality in the last centuries of the Roman Empire, the change was introduced by the application to public rule of the term *dominus*, which in Rome (where the family also was “organized like a monarchy”) had the same meaning as the Greek “despot”. Caligula was the first Roman emperor who consented to be called *dominus*, that is, to be given the name “which Augustus and Tiberius still rejected as if it was a malediction and an injury”, precisely because it implied a despotism unknown in the political realm, although all too familiar in the private, household realm. (WA, 106)<sup>87</sup>

The introduction of the private relationship master-slave (domination) into the public political sphere coincides, in Arendt's view, with the Socratic school's election of law-making and city-building - «no longer or, rather, not yet action (*praxis*), properly speaking, but making (*poiesis*)», that is, activities in which «men “act like craftsmen”: the result of their action is a tangible product, and its process has a clearly recognizable end» (HC, 195) - to the highest rank of political life (*Ibidem*).

In Arendt's argument, the *despotic* character of Plato's concept of law (“The law is the despot of the rulers, and the rulers are the slaves of the law” – WA, 106), as well as the

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<sup>85</sup>In ancient Greece absolute rule in the public realm was represented by the two extreme cases of tyranny and military leadership in times of warfare, which actually coincided with the dissolution or suspension of public life: the latter being was bound to a temporary situation of emergency, while the former, as one-man rule by sheer violence, would deprive the citizens of their faculty for political action, «which they felt was the very essence of freedom» and of the life of the polis (WA, 105).

<sup>86</sup>WA, 105.

<sup>87</sup>In the drafts of her lecture at Princeton University in 1953 on *Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought*, Arendt prefers to use the term «forms of polities», instead of the modern concept of «forms of government», to describe Aristotle's analysis of political constitutions, because «the element of rule did not strictly belong to it» (first draft, folder 1, p. 8). Rule (over slaves) did not belong to politics, but was conceived as the pre-political condition of *politeuein*. Focusing her attention, in the same paper, on the «outstanding experiences in this public field of living together» that gave rise to «the few forms of government which have accompanied us throughout our history», she insists on the distinction between monarchy and kinship, «probably the oldest, certainly the most elementary form of government», which rests on the experience of action in the sense of *beginning something new*. The latter, she writes, «makes and demands a king, (*a basileus*, not a monarch the holder of power over all) to start a new enterprise [...]» (first draft, folder 2, p. 2), in “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought”, Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library Congress, Speeches and Writings Files, 1923-1975.

attempts in the political dialogues – *The Republic, Statesman, Laws* - to establish a rule of reason in the person of the philosopher-king, which would avoid tyrannical violence without renouncing to its coerciveness and binding force (WA, 108), confirm her thesis of the Platonic substitution of the pre-political and *private* activity of making for acting, which in her view, represented the philosophic remedy to the frailty of human affairs, renouncing the «futility, boundlessness, and uncertainty of outcome» of *praxis* for the greater reliability of *poiesis* (HC, 195).<sup>88</sup>

The attempt at neutralizing the unpredictability and boundlessness of human relationships is apparent in Plato's effort to «establish[ing] reason as *ruler* in the realm of politics»,<sup>89</sup> the political implications of which Arendt traces in «the conflict between the philosopher and the polis, or in the hostility of the polis toward philosophy, which probably had lain dormant for some time before it showed its immediate threat to the life of the philosopher in the trial and death of Socrates»:<sup>90</sup>

Politically, Plato's philosophy shows *the rebellion of the philosopher against the polis*. The philosopher announces his claim to rule, but not so much for the sake of the polis and politics [...] as for the sake of philosophy and the safety of the philosopher. (WA, 107) [My italics]

The compelling power, which would “shape” the human relationship into a ruler-ruled relationship - «The master, according to the discussion in the *Statesman*, knows what should be done and gives his orders, while the slave executes them and obeys, so that knowing what to do and actual doing become separate and mutually exclusive functions» (WA, 108-109) – is granted in Plato's political theory by Ideas, as yardsticks for measuring human behaviour which are *outside* of and *beyond* the sphere of human affairs (Id.).

Now, it is not without reason that Plato «had taken the key word of his philosophy, the term “idea”, from the experiences in the realm of *fabrication* [...], whose process obviously

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<sup>88</sup> «How this remedy can destroy the very substance of human relationships is perhaps best illustrated in one of the rare instances where Aristotle draws an example of acting from the sphere of private life, in the relationship between the benefactor and his recipient. With that candid absence of moralizing that is the mark of Greek, though not of Roman, antiquity, he states first as a matter of fact that the benefactor always loves those he has helped more than he is loved by them. He then goes on to explain that this is only natural, since the benefactor has done a *work*, an *ergon*, while the recipient has only endured his beneficence. The benefactor, according to Aristotle, loves his “work”, the life of the recipient which he has “made”, as the poet loves his poem, [...]. This explanation shows clearly that he thinks of acting in terms of making, and of its results, the relationship between men, in terms of an accomplished “work” (his emphatic attempts to distinguish between action and fabrication, *praxis* and *poiēsis*, notwithstanding).» (HC, 195-196)

<sup>89</sup> «[...] the patient became subject to the physician's authority when he fell ill, and the slave came under the command of his master when he became slave. It is important to bear these examples in mind in order to realize what kind of coercion Plato expected reason to exert in the hands of the *king-philosopher*» (WA, 109).

<sup>90</sup> «It was after Socrates' death that Plato began to discount persuasion as insufficient for the guidance of men and to seek for something liable to compel them without using external means of violence. Very early in his search he must have discovered truth, namely, the truths we call self-evident, compels the mind, and that this coercion, though it needs no violence to be effective, is stronger than persuasion and argument» (BPF, 107-108).

falls into two parts: first, perceiving the image or shape (*eidōs*) of the product-to-be, and then organizing the means and starting the execution» (HC, 225) - «[t]he Platonic wish to substitute making for acting in order to bestow upon the realm of human affairs the solidity inherent in work and fabrication becomes most apparent where it touches the very centre of his philosophy, the doctrine of ideas» (Id.).

In the *Republic* the ideas perceived by the philosopher outside the cave are turned for political purposes into standards, measurements or *rules* of behaviour - variations of the idea of “good”, in the Greek sense of “good *for*” or “*fit*” (HC, 225-226). The idea of good, Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*, is the highest idea of the philosopher-king, whose aim is to rule human affairs «with the same absolute, “objective” certainty with which the craftsman can be guided in making and the layman in judging individual beds by using the unwavering ever-present model, the “idea” of bed in general» (HC, 226):

The construction of the public space in the image of a *fabricated object*, [...] carried with it only the implication of ordinary *mastership, experience in the art of politics as in all other arts*, where the compelling factor lies not in the person of the artist or craftsman, but in the impersonal object of his art or craft. (HC, 227)

Arendt traces the roots of all theories of domination in the Platonic separation of knowing and doing, entailed by the doctrine of Ideas, and in the «identification of knowledge with command and rulership and of action with obedience and execution» of orders (HC, 225).<sup>91</sup>

It is in Arendt’s critique of the Platonic work-model of action, which emerges from her analysis of fabrication (*poiesis*) as the pivotal term of the tradition of political philosophy, that the political dangers of an “aestheticization” of politics in the Platonic sense are made apparent.

We observe an immediate echo of the analysis of the Platonic substitution of making for acting in HC in Arendt’s concern for the relationship between art and politics in *What is Freedom?*.

In the *Republic*, the philosopher-king applies the ideas as the craftsman applies his rules and standards; he “makes” his City as the sculptor makes a statue; and in the final Platonic work these same ideas have even become laws which need only be executed. (HC, 227)

[...] politics has often been defined as an art. This, of course, is not a definition but a *metaphor*, and the metaphor becomes completely false if one falls into the *common error of regarding the state or government as a work of art, as a kind of collective masterpiece*.

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<sup>91</sup> «Since Plato himself identified the dividing line between thought and action with the gulf which separates the rulers from those over whom they rule, it is obvious that the experiences on which the Platonic division rests are those of the household, where nothing would ever be done if the master did not know what to do and did not give orders to the slaves who execute them without knowing.» (HC, 223)



In the sense of the creative arts, which bring forth something tangible and reify human thought to such an extent that the produced thing possesses an existence of its own, politics is the exact opposite of art [...]. (WF, 153)

What we observe in Arendt's definition of *creative art* is a strong emphasis on the notion of reification - on the fact that the «compelling factor lies *not in the person* of the artist», but instead in the *impersonal object* of his art. In HC, reification coincides with fabrication (*poiesis*), following the (narrow) definition of *homo faber* as the «artist who works upon hard *material*, such as stone or wood» (HC, 136, n.1). The artifice or final product of the work of the artist's hands (HC, 136), which enters the world and *appears publicly* - it can be *seen* (HC, 173) - is an *object*, meaning literally "something thrown", "put against" (HC, 137, n. 2):<sup>92</sup> as she confirms in *What is Freedom?*, the stress in the definition of *creative arts* is not so much on the freedom of the artist (WF, 154), than instead on the fact that the artistic process itself «is not displayed in public and not destined to appear in the world. Hence, the element of freedom, certainly present in the creative arts, remains hidden» - what appears and matters to the world is the final product, the work of art itself (WF, 153-154).

Now, it is in the very creative process - eminently *private*, as Arendt points out - and not in the final product - the work of art as the "useless" object *par excellence* - that the teleological dimension, the end-means logic of the *homo faber*, the fact that *in order to* produce a certain object according to a certain idea in the artist's mind a certain material and tools or means are needed, is inherent. This remark is essential to grasp the implications of the Platonic identification of political action with a *creative process*, private and *poietic*, aiming at a higher final end - the State as work of art.

In the first chapter of *Willing*, Arendt draws on Aristotle's definition of «*poiein*, as distinct from *prattein*, acting or praxis»:

[...] the craftsman who makes a "brazen sphere" joins together matter and form, brass and sphere, both of which existed *before* he began his work, and produces a *new* object to be added to a world consisting of man-made things and of things that have come into being independent of human doings. The human product, this "compound of matter and form" - for instance, a house made of wood according to a form pre-existing in the craftsman's mind (*nous*) - clearly was not made out of nothing, and so was understood by Aristotle to pre-exist "potentially" before it was actualised by human hands. (LM/W, 15)

As Arendt points out, *poiein* infringes the low ontological status of the realm of *prattein*, the accidental and contingent realm of human action, by replacing its uncertainty and futility, apparent in the fact that "what is brought into being by action is *that which could also*

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<sup>92</sup> In HC Arendt insists on the objectivity of the man-made world of things as that which allows men to retrieve their *sameness* or identity, «their ever-changing nature notwithstanding» (HC, 137): the relation between the notion of *subjectivity* and the reifying process of fabrication, with its emphasis on the (derivative) notion of sameness, as opposed to the uniqueness and plurality (difference) of the actor in the realm of human affairs, is essential in order to grasp fully her critique of the modern concept of individual as (sovereign) Subject.

*be otherwise*”, with the strong ontological notion of “potentiality”, «derived from the mode of being peculiar to the nature of living things, where everything that appears grows out of something that contains the finished product potentially, as the oak exists potentially in the acorn and the animal in the semen» (LM/W, 15).

The implications of Aristotle’s appeal to the sphere of natural life, as the ontological foundation of the philosophical understanding of *poiesis*, are made apparent in Arendt’s analysis of the natural functions («the labor of man to provide nourishment and the labor of the woman in giving birth», HC, 30), «subject to the same urgency of life», that is, subjected to necessity - «[n]atural community in the household therefore was born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in it» (HC, 30):

What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to *polis* life, took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a *pre-political phenomenon*, characteristic of the *private household organization*, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to *master* necessity – for instance, by ruling over the slaves – and to become free. (HC, p. 31)

Arendt traces the substitution of *praxis* with a “poietic” notion of political action as rule («the notion that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey», HC, 222), in Plato’s separation of *archein* (“beginning”) and *prattein* (achieving), conceived by the Greek as two interconnected modes of political action.

Playing on the equivocal meaning of *archein/archōn*, Plato does away with the political freedom experienced in speech and deeds by the citizens of the polis’,<sup>93</sup> turning the beginner into a ruler who «does not have to act at all (*prattein*), but rules (*archein*) over those who are capable of execution» (HC, 223).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> In the first draft of her lecture on *Karl Marx and the Tradition*, Arendt distinguishes a certain part of Aristotle’s thought, especially concerned with freedom and speech, from its Platonic appropriation: «[...] the tradition which re-interpreted Aristotle’s definition of man has eliminated from Aristotle all those insights into the nature of politics and man’s political freedom which were inconsistent with Platonism. The chief difference between Plato and Aristotle in their political philosophies was that Plato, writing consciously in opposition to the political life of the decaying Greek city-state, did no longer believe in the validity of that kind of speech which accompanied and was only the other side of political action. [...] The philosophical point was that perception of truth to Plato was essentially speechless and could only be furthered, not attained, by *dialegein*. Essential in our context is that he, probably under the impression of the fate of Socrates and the limitations of persuasion so glaringly exposed in his trial, was no longer concerned with freedom at all. [...] When Aristotle connected speech and freedom, he was on the firm ground of the still existing tradition and experience, only that Plato remained victorious in the end [...]» (folder 2, p. 13)

<sup>94</sup> «[...]it is decisive for Plato, as he says expressly at the end of the *Laws*, that only the beginning (*archē*) is entitled to rule (*archein*). In the tradition of Platonic thought, this original, linguistically predetermined identity of ruling and beginning had the consequence that all beginning was understood as the legitimation for rulership, until, finally, the element of beginning disappeared altogether from the concept of rulership. *With it the most elementary and authentic understanding of human freedom disappeared from political philosophy*» (HC, 224-225). My italics.

In political philosophy, isolated mastership becomes the condition for a stable and permanent order in human affairs in which each citizen, although retaining some part in the handling of public affairs, «would indeed “act” *like one man* without even the possibility of internal dissension [...]: through rule, “*the many becomes one* in every respect”, except bodily appearance»<sup>95</sup> (HC, 224). According to Arendt, Plato «was the first to design a blueprint for the *making* of political *bodies*», which remained the inspiration and frame of reference of all later «utopian political system which could be construed in accordance with a model by somebody who has mastered the techniques of human affairs» (HC, 227).<sup>96</sup>

As Dana Villa points out, «Arendt appropriates Heidegger’s genealogy of the technical sense of action in order to highlight the tradition’s persistent attempt to overcome plurality, the politically most relevant expression of the finitude of the human condition»: politics is reduced to a *technē*,<sup>97</sup> to an art or means by which a people is to be shaped according to an idea or ideal.<sup>98</sup>

The Platonic fabrication of a political *masterpiece*, according to a model pre-conceived in the mind of the ruling demiurge, «initiates a *paradigm of correspondence* that, as Lyotard notes, delimits the Western tradition of political philosophy».<sup>99</sup> The analogy with the artistic process, which is guided by «“ideas”, that is, by the “shapes” of objects, visualized by the inner eye of the craftsman, who then reproduces them in reality through imitation» (WA, 110), enables Plato «to understand the transcendent character of the ideas in the same manner as he does the transcendent existence of the model, which lies beyond the fabrication process it guides and therefore can eventually become the standard for its success or failure» (Id.). It is precisely because they transcend the sphere of human affairs that ideas become measures of human conduct:

In the parable of the cave in *The Republic*, the sky of ideas stretches above the cave of human existence, and therefore can be its standard. But the philosopher who leaves the cave for the pure sky of ideas does not originally do so in order to acquire those standards and learn the “art of measurement” but to contemplate the true essence of Being [...]. The ideas become measures only after the philosopher has left the bright sky of ideas and returned to the dark cave of human existence. (WA, 109)

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<sup>95</sup> My italics.

<sup>96</sup> My italics.

<sup>97</sup> «[...] the republic is to be made by somebody who is the political equivalent of a craftsman or artist, in accordance with an established τέχνη and the rules and measurements valid in this particular “art” [...].» (BPF, 112).

<sup>98</sup> Dana Villa, FP, 246.

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem. My highlighting.

Arendt's emphasis on a discrepancy «between the ideas as true essences to be contemplated and as measures to be applied» (WA, 112), fully highlights the anti-political implications of Plato's replacement of beauty with good as "supreme idea".<sup>100</sup>

In *The Human Condition* she points out that «[w]hen Plato was not concerned with political philosophy (as in the *Symposium* and elsewhere), he describes the ideas as what "shines forth most" (*ekphanestaton*) and therefore as variations of the beautiful. Only in the *Republic* were the ideas transformed into standards, measurements, and rules of behavior, all of which are variations or derivations of the idea of the "good" in the Greek sense of the word, that is, of the "good for" or of fitness. This transformation was necessary to apply the doctrine of ideas to politics [...]» (HC, 225-226). Ideas were not originally conceived to rule and master the unpredictability of human affairs, but for "shining brightness" (WA, 113): «[a]s such, the ideas *have nothing whatever to do with politics, political experience, and the problem of action*, but pertain exclusively to philosophy, the experience of contemplation, and the quest for the "true being of things"» (Id.).<sup>101</sup> It is for the political purpose of eliminating the character of frailty from human affairs that, according to Arendt,<sup>102</sup> Plato found it necessary to modify his doctrine of ideas and declare the good – in the sense of "good for" and "fit" – instead of the beautiful, as the highest idea: «If the highest idea, in which all other ideas must partake in order to be ideas at all, is that of *fitness*, then the ideas are applicable by definition, and in the hands of the philosopher, the *expert* in ideas, they can become rules and standards or, as later in the *Laws*, they can become laws» (WA, 113).

Now, what is relevant to point out for our own purpose is that, according to Arendt's analysis, the rule of the Platonic philosopher-king means the «domination of human affairs by something *outside* its own realm» (WA, 114):

The lives of the many in the cave over which the philosopher has established his rule are characterized not by contemplation but by λέξις, speech, and πράξις, action; it is therefore characteristic that in the parable of the cave Plato depicts the lives of the inhabitants as though they too were interested only in seeing: first the images on the screen, then the things themselves in the dim light of the fire in the cave, until finally those who want to see truth itself must leave the *common world* of the cave altogether and embark upon their new adventure *all by themselves*. (WA, 114) [My italics]

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<sup>100</sup> «We find in Plato either that this supreme idea is that of the beautiful, as in the *Symposium*, where it constitutes the topmost rung of the ladder that leads to truth, and in *Phaedrus*, where Plato speaks of the "lover of wisdom or of beauty" as though these two actually were the same [...]; or that the highest idea is the idea of the good, as in *The Republic*.» (BPF, 112).

<sup>101</sup> My highlighting.

<sup>102</sup> HC, 226.

The anti-political implications of the Platonic conflation of artistic and political categories,<sup>103</sup> which deprive the realm of human affairs of its own dignity by establishing the absolute priority of the solitary activity of contemplation (seeing) over the plural and communal practice of speaking and acting (doing) - «by the assumption that what makes men human is the urge to see. Hence the interest of the philosopher and the interest of man *qua* man coincide» (WA, 115) – are apparent, throughout Western political theory,<sup>104</sup> in

[t]he popular belief in a “strong man” who, *isolated against others*, owes his strength to his *being alone* is either sheer superstition, based on the *delusion that we can “make” something in the realm of human affairs* – “make” institutions or laws, for instance, as we make tables and chairs, or make men “better” or “worse” – or it is conscious despair of all action, political and non-political, coupled with the utopian hope that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other “material”. (HC, 188)<sup>105</sup>

[Note 15, p. 188:] Recent political history is full of examples indicating that the term “human material” is no harmless metaphor, and the same is true for a whole host of modern scientific experiments in social engineering, biochemistry, brain surgery, etc., all of which tend to treat and change human material like other matter.

The strength of the Platonic tropes of the state as artwork and of politics as *technē* is measured by the fact that the break-down of the tradition did not undermine the logic of justification institutionalised by the Platonic dichotomy of theory and practice.<sup>106</sup>

Arendt emphasises that «an element of violence is inevitably inherent in all activities of making, fabricating, and producing, in other words, in all activities by which men confront nature directly, as distinguished from such activities as action and speech, which are primarily directed toward human beings. The building of the *human artifice* always involves some violence done to nature – we must kill a tree in order to have lumber, and we must violate this material in order to build a table» (WA, 111). In her analysis of the substitution of making for acting and «the concomitant degradation of politics into a means to obtain an allegedly “higher” end» in *The Human Condition* (HC, 229), Hannah Arendt stresses a pivotal shift in the development of Western (Platonic) tradition:

It is true that *violence, without which no fabrication could ever come to pass*, has always played an important role in political schemes and thinking based upon an interpretation of action in terms of making; but up to the modern age, this element of violence remained strictly instrumental, a means that needed an end to justify and limit it, so that glorifications of violence as such are entirely absent from the tradition of political thought prior to the modern age. Generally speaking, they were impossible as long as contemplation and reason were supposed to be the highest capacities of man, because under this assumption all articulations of the *vita activa*, fabrication no less than action and let alone labor, *remained themselves secondary and instrumental*. [...]

<sup>103</sup> Dana Villa, FP, 246.

<sup>104</sup> BPF, 110.

<sup>105</sup> My highlighting.

<sup>106</sup> «Western political theory, [...] has always demanded that action be grounded in some *extrapolitical* first (the cosmic order, natural or divine hierarchy, Reason and natural right, History, the greatest good for the greatest number, the emancipatory interest of the discursive community). As a result, it never really abandons the view that politics is a kind of *plastic art*, the “fashioning”, more or less violent, of a people in conformity with an ideal». Dana Villa, FP, 246-247. My highlighting.

Only *the modern age's conviction that man can know only what he makes, that his allegedly higher capacities depend upon making* and that he therefore is primarily *homo faber* and not *animale rationale*, brought forth the much older implications of violence inherent in all interpretations of the realm of human affairs as a sphere of making. This has been particularly striking in the series of revolutions, characteristic of the modern age, all of which – with the exception of the American Revolution – show the same combination of the old Roman enthusiasm for the foundation of a new body politic with the glorification of violence as the only means for “making” it. (HC, 228) [My italics]

It is interesting to compare this passage with the earlier draft of the 1953 lecture on *Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought*, where Arendt traces Marx's distrust for ideology, as well as his dictum that «violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one», to an important extent, to the impact of «the tremendous fact of the French and American Revolutions in which violence had brought about, not some haphazard slaughter [...], but an entirely new body politic which in its outlines, and in the case of the United States down to many details, had been drawn up by the *philosophers* and the *ideologues*, that is by those who perceived an idea and who needed nothing but the helping hand of violence to realize it».<sup>107</sup>

Beside the visible change in the perception of the American case, what is important to emphasize is the link provided by the Marx lecture between the pages on the Platonic work-model of action and her analysis of totalitarian ideology, developed after 1953.<sup>108</sup>

In her essay *On the Nature of Totalitarianism* Arendt points to the «*arrogant emancipation from reality and experience*», which in her own view prepares the connection between ideology and terror:

[i]nsofar as ideological thinking is independent of existing reality, it looks upon all factuality as *fabricated*, and therefore no longer knows any reliable criterion for distinguishing truth from falsehood. (EU, 350)

According to Arendt, «the ideological *consistency* reducing everything to one all-dominating factor is always in conflict with the inconsistency of the world, on the one hand, and the unpredictability of human actions, on the other. Terror is needed in order to *make* the world *consistent* [...]; to dominate human beings to the point where they lose, with their spontaneity, the specifically human unpredictability of thought and action» (Id.).

The stress on the “logic of the idea”, that is, on the totalitarian transformation of an “idea”, «which *could* be applied to the whole course of events» (UP, 317), into a premise in the logical sense - «[...] some self-evident statement from which everything else can be

<sup>107</sup> “Karl Marx and...”, draft 1, folder 2, p. 7. My highlighting.

<sup>108</sup> “Ideology and Terror” was first published in the *Review of Politics* in July 1953 before appearing in definitive form in the penultimate chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, cf. E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., p. 516, n. 28.

deduced in stringent logical consistency» (Id.) - in *Understanding and Politics* as well as in *Ideology and Terror*, confirms and brings to its extreme consequences the teleocratic model of action, resulting from the (Platonic) conflation of the categories of the political and of plastic arts.

As Dana Villa points out, «[w]ith the collapse of transcendental grounds for the political, the logic of correspondence and justification built into this [teleocratic] concept turns *inward*. The result is that the fashioning or “fictioning” of the community in conformity with the ideal of Justice is transformed into an exercise in *self-production*»,<sup>109</sup> culminating in the 20<sup>th</sup> century projects of “aestheticization” of the political.<sup>110</sup>

It is in the light of the “artistic politics of National-Socialism” that we fully grasp, with Villa,<sup>111</sup> the stakes of Arendt’s rejection of the conflation of art and politics realized by the Western tradition,<sup>112</sup> as the philosopher’s predicament in the modern world - «[...] *politics has often been defined as an art*. This, of course, is not a definition but a metaphor, and the metaphor becomes completely false if one falls into the common error or regarding the state or government as a work of art, as a kind of collective masterpiece» (BPF, 153).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Dana Villa, FP, 247.

<sup>110</sup> See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La finzione del politico. Heidegger, l'arte e la politica*, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>111</sup> «The *organicity* of the political, originally laid down by Plato’s *Republic*, takes a new and extreme form: the figure of the subject who is simultaneously artist and work absorbs that of the aesthetically integrated state. The subjectivization of the state as artwork trope culminates in the totalitarian will to self-effectuation: the will to the self-creation of a people characterized by full actualisation, complete self-presence. The only community capable of achieving such self-presence is one from which plurality, difference, mediation, and alienation have been expunged [...]», Dana Villa, FP, p. 248.

<sup>112</sup> Goebbels’ favourite theme of politics as “the plastic art of the state” is confirmed in a letter to Furtwängler, published in *Lokal-Anzeiger* on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1933, cited by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: «La politica è, essa pure, un’arte, forse addirittura l’arte più elevata e più vasta che esista, e noi, che diamo forma alla politica tedesca moderna, ci sentiamo come degli artisti ai quali è stata affidata l’alta responsabilità di *formare, a partire dalla massa grezza, l’immagine solida e piena del popolo*. La missione dell’arte e dell’artista non è soltanto di unire, va ben più lontano. È loro dovere *creare*, dare forma, eliminare ciò che è malato ed aprir la via a ciò che è sano. [...] L’arte non deve essere solo di qualità, deve anche sorgere dal popolo [...]» (in P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *La finzione del politico*, op. cit., p. 80). All these elements are confirmed in an article, published in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and cited by Éric Michaud under the title “L’Art comme fondement de la force créatrice en politique”, which reads: «Il existe un lien interne et indéfectible entre les travaux artistiques du Führer et son Grand Œuvre politique. L’artistique est aussi à la racine de son développement comme politicien et homme d’État. Son activité artistique n’est pas simplement une activité de jeunesse due au hasard, [...] elle est le postulat de son idée créatrice dans sa totalité. [...] Le Führer a donné au terme de politique le sens d’une construction, et il n’a pu y parvenir parce que son idée politique s’est développée à partir des connaissances tirées d’une activité artistique dont il a fait personnellement l’expérience créatrice.» (cited from Lionel Richard, in É. Michaud, «Nazisme et Représentation», in *Critique*, Tome XLIII, No. 184. Décembre 1987, pp. 1019-1034.

<sup>113</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy defines the “productionist” model of action («l’homme définit comme producteur [...] de sa propre essence sous les espèces de son travail ou de ses œuvres [...] à la visée de la communauté humaine [...] des êtres produisant par essence leur essence comme leur œuvre», in J.-L. Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée*, op. cit., pp. 13-14) as “immanentism”: «[...] le lien économique, l’opération technologique et la fusion politique (en un *corps* ou sous un *chef*) représentent ou plutôt présentent, exposent et réalisent nécessairement par eux-mêmes cette essence. Elle y est mise en œuvre, elle y devient son propre ouvrage. C’est ce que nous avons appelé le «totalitarisme», et qui serait peut-être mieux nommé l’«immanentisme» [...] [et] y voir l’horizon

In the light of these observations, we can now go back to Arendt's analysis of contemporary nihilism, and in particular of the totalitarian ideologies as making visible, in her view, «the nihilistic aspects of present political developments», identified in the «*conviction not only that "everything is permitted" but that "everything is possible", that once you make an arbitrary principle the guide of consistent policy, everything goes*». <sup>114</sup>

As Villa remarks, «totalitarianism yields a supremely novel version of politics as making»: destroying plurality by the means of ideology and terror, it *moulds* the political community as *subject*, as «One man of gigantic dimensions» ("Ideology and Terror"), according to the Laws of Nature and History. The immanentisation of the teleological model of acting as making finds in terror the tool for realizing the totalitarian law of movement, the irresistible logicity which no longer lies in some external essence, like the Platonic Ideas, but in the internal coerciveness of a process, interpreted in the solitude of the leader's *will*. <sup>115</sup>

While resonating the philosopher's predicaments, contemporary nihilism pushes the internal paradox of the fabricating paradigm of political philosophy (logic of *incorporation*) to the extreme consequences, where the political *realization* of the philosopher's "idea" turns into the *de-realization* of the political, through the erosion of the «reality» of human co-pearance.

This two-fold process can also be traced in Nietzsche's aphorism 356 of the *Gay Knowledge*, where the age of European nihilism is seen as bringing about the end of the plastic art trope of the body politic as an edifice built or fabricated by the masters or the great architects - «we moderns» and nihilists are no longer the *material* for society. <sup>116</sup>

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général de notre temps, qui encercle aussi bien les démocraties et leur fragiles parapets juridiques. » (Ivi, pp. 15-16).

<sup>114</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Political Thought", Library of Congress, folder 1, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> As Arendt writes in 1956 «[t]he Nazis, who especially in the later years developed a surprisingly precise terminology, proclaimed that the highest law in Germany is the *will*, not the order, of the Führer», in "Authority in the Twentieth Century", *Review of Politics*, op. cit., p. 409.

<sup>116</sup> As Dana Villa has extensively shown, Arendt's theory of political action can be read within the broad Nietzschean project of overcoming Platonism: «Arendt was, of course, sceptical of Nietzsche's success on this score. Whatever we think of her assessment of Nietzsche's "inverted Platonism" (an assessment clearly influenced by Heidegger), we are nevertheless compelled to recognize the anti-Platonic impulse behind her theory of political action. Following Nietzsche, Arendt views the Western tradition of political philosophy – the "Socratic tradition" – as deeply hostile to action and the contingency and plurality that characterize the realm of human affairs. The Platonic/ metaphysical prejudice against appearance and becoming takes an explicitly *political* form in the Platonic reinterpretation of action as a kind of making, a reinterpretation that aims at nothing less than an escape from politics altogether. Nietzsche and Arendt combat the reductionist character of the teleological model of action, exposing the nihilistic consequences of denying meaning or value to the realm of action and appearances.» (Dana Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil. Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action", *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 2, May 1992, 275-276).



The paradox of the «aesthetic» paradigm of the political is made fully visible in the totalitarian concept of *omnipotence*, related in Arendt's analysis, on the one hand, with the new and unprecedented concept of *organizational* power, and, on the other, with ideology.

In the HC omnipotence is recognized as the attribute of one god, as opposed to the gods in polytheism (HC, 201-202), identifying «the strength necessary for the *production of things*» with the *boundless* power necessary for action - «[...] aspiration toward omnipotence always implies – apart from its utopian *hubris* – the destruction of plurality» as an intolerable limitation (Id.):

The fences enclosing private property and insuring the limitations of each household, the territorial boundaries which protect and make possible the physical identity of a people, and the laws which protect and make possible its political existence, are of such great importance to the stability of human affairs precisely because no such limiting and protecting principles arise out of the activities going on in the realm of human affairs itself. *The limitations of the law are never entirely reliable safeguards against action from within the body politic, just as the boundaries of the territory are never entirely reliable safeguards against action from without. The boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships*, that is, its specific productivity; this is why the old virtue of moderation, of keeping within bounds, is indeed one of the political virtues par excellence, just as the *political temptation par excellence is indeed hubris* (as the Greeks, fully experienced in the potentialities of action, knew so well) and not the will to power, as we are inclined to believe. (HC, 191) [My italics]

In the light of these passages, totalitarian organizational omnipotence represents the monstrous combination of boundless action, as experienced in the political realm but freed from all legal restriction (the modern nihilistic loss of authority), with the modern fabrication paradigm of the *homo faber*, pushing the political temptation of hubris – as related to the nihilistic resentment against sheer existence – beyond all natural and material limitation toward changing, *i.e.*, eradicating, *life*.

Agamben reproaches the absence of a bio-political perspective in Arendt's analysis of totalitarian regimes, which, in his view, overlooks the fact that it is the radical identification of politics with the space of “naked life” (“*nuda vita*”) – in and as extermination camps – that legitimises total domination (rather than the other way round).<sup>117</sup> But what he fails to observe is that, in Arendt's analysis, total domination, as global rule and total control over individual human beings, proceeds from, rather than precede as a conscious political aim,<sup>118</sup> the

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<sup>117</sup> «Solo perché nel nostro tempo la politica è diventata integralmente biopolitica, che essa ha potuto costituirsi in misura prima sconosciuta come politica totalitaria», G. Agamben, *Homo sacer*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>118</sup> Canovan carefully remarks that «totalitarianism represents *not so much a conscious project* as the set of grooves into which people are likely to find themselves sliding if they come to politics with certain sorts of aims, experiences, and deficiencies, all of them characteristic of modernity. Foremost among these *aims* is a quest for omnipotence, fuelled by the belief that everything is possible and by “the *modern man's* deep-rooted suspicion of everything he did not *make himself*”. The central *experience* is loneliness [...]. The key *deficiency* is the loss of the world of common sense and reality» (Margaret Canovan, “Arendt's theory of Totalitarianism: a reassessment”, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, D. Villa Ed., CUP 2000, p. 38).

totalitarian quest for omnipotence, which is at the core of the biopolitical programme, not so much in the sense that the space of (the care for) life is identified with politics, but rather, from Arendt's perspective, that the nihilistic *resentment* against sheer existence, at the root of the *creation* of the political artifice, as the very condition for political action, pushes the latter to the extreme artificialization, and ultimate ex-termination, of life itself.

The political *taking care of life* is visible in the extermination camps, as the laboratories where changes in human nature are tested, i.e. the annihilation of human dignity, spontaneity and unpredictability, for the sake of the consistency of an ideological super-sense.<sup>119</sup> The arbitrary system of selection on which the camps are built secures the initial steps in the process of total domination, which Arendt identifies in the destruction of the juridical person (elimination of civil rights, OT, 451), from which the destruction of the moral person immediately follows («the alternative is no longer between good and evil, but between murder and murder», OT, 452),<sup>120</sup> and which culminates in the eradication of man's individuality, that is, of the uniqueness of the human person (OT, 453):<sup>121</sup>

[...] to destroy spontaneity, man's power to begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events. Nothing then remains but ghastly marionettes with human faces which all behave like the dog in Pavlov's experiments, which all react with perfect reliability even when going to their own death, and which do nothing but react. This is the real triumph of the system [...] (OT, 455).

«Pavlov's dog, the human specimen reduced to the most elementary reactions, the bundle of reactions that can always be liquidated and replaced by other bundles of reactions that behave *in exactly the same way, is the model "citizen" of a totalitarian state*» (OT, 456),<sup>122</sup> and can only be *produced* to perfection in the camps. These are therefore the essential institutions for the realization and preservation of the totalitarian regime's *unlimited power*, as *organizational*

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<sup>119</sup> «It is chiefly for the sake of this supersense, for the sake of complete consistency, that it is necessary for totalitarianism to destroy every trace of what is we commonly call human dignity. For respect of human dignity implies the recognition of my fellow-men or our fellow-nations as subjects, as builders of worlds or cobuilders of a common world. No ideology which aims at [...] mapping out the course of all events of the future can bear the unpredictability which springs from the fact that men are creative, that they can bring forward something so new that nobody ever foresaw it» (OT, 458).

<sup>120</sup> Arendt quotes from Camus' 1946 lecture at Columbia University, published in *Twice a Year* (1947), the case of the Greek mother allowed by the Nazis to choose which of her three children should be killed (OT, 452, n. 154).

<sup>121</sup> «The killing of man's individuality, of the uniqueness shaped in equal parts by nature, will, and destiny, which has become so self-evident a premise for all human relations that even identical twins inspire a certain uneasiness, creates a horror that vastly overshadows the outrage of the juridical-political person and the despair of the moral person. It is this horror that gives rise to the *nihilistic generalizations* which maintain plausibly enough that essentially all men alike are beasts. Actually the experience of the concentration camps does show that human beings can be transformed into specimens of the human animal, and that man's "nature" is only "human" insofar as it opens up to the possibility of becoming something highly unnatural, that is, man.» (OT, 454-455)

<sup>122</sup> My italics.

power:<sup>123</sup> «Such power can only be secured if literally all men, without a single exception, are reliably dominated in every respect of their life» (OT, 456). Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only through the elimination of spontaneity and the (artificial) reproduction of man's superfluity;<sup>124</sup> it thus requires total domination and global rule as its essential condition:<sup>125</sup>

Human nature as such is at stake, and even though it seems that these experiments succeed not in changing man but only in destroying him, by creating a society in which the nihilistic banality of *homo homini lupus* is consistently realized, one should bear in mind the necessary limitations to an experiment which requires global control in order to show conclusive results. (OT, 459)

In the Concluding Remarks to the first edition Arendt describes the totalitarian attack on human nature, i.e. spontaneity and unpredictable capacity for new beginnings, as the attempt to deprive men of their *human condition* while keeping them *alive* – the systematic production of living corpses as the mass-manufacturing of “abstract” existence.<sup>126</sup>

It is in drawing the attention to the de-realizing, i.e., nihilistic, logic implicit in 20<sup>th</sup> century terror, identified with the “aestheticizing” manipulation of the human condition - which is, in Agamben's terms, the reduction of the form-of-life to the sheer abstraction of “naked life” – that Arendt joins Camus. But, we could argue, while Camus in HR pointed to total terror as the murderous prerogative of the Rational or Totalitarian revolution, realized under the Soviet regime, Arendt applied the concept of total domination primarily to Nazi organization.

Totalitarian police cadres and extermination camps are conceived as the instruments for the realisation of a fictitious world, the ideological *supersense*,<sup>127</sup> through the eyes of which the totalitarian systematic production of senselessness exclusively «[makes] too much

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<sup>123</sup> «The world of the dying, in which men are taught they are superfluous through a way of life in which punishment is meted out without connection with crime, in which *exploitation is practiced without profit, and where work is performed without product*, is a place where senselessness is daily produced anew» (OT, 457).

<sup>124</sup> «Men insofar as they are more than animal reactions and fulfillment of functions are entirely superfluous to totalitarian regimes. [...] Total power can be achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity» (OT, 457).

<sup>125</sup> «Precisely because man's resources are so great, he can be fully dominated only when he becomes a specimen of the animal-species man» (OT, 457) «In the realm of foreign affairs new neutral territories must constantly be subjugated, while at home ever-new human groups must be mastered in expanding concentration camps, or, when circumstances require liquidated to make room for others» (OT, 456).

<sup>126</sup> «[...] the abstract existence of the inmates of the concentration camps [...], H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), op. cit., p. 434.

<sup>127</sup> «While the totalitarian regimes are thus resolutely and cynically emptying the world of the only thing that makes sense to the utilitarian expectations of common sense, they impose upon it at the same time a kind of supersense which the ideologies actually meant when they pretended to have found the key to history or the solution to the riddles of the universe. Over and above the senselessness of totalitarian society is enthroned the ridiculous supersense of its ideological superstition» (OT, 457).

sense» - «[...] the problem with the camps is [...] that the execution of the doctrine is too *consistent*» (OT, 457):

Ideologies are harmless, uncritical, and arbitrary opinions as long as they are not believed in seriously. Once their claim to total validity is taken literally they become the nuclei of logical systems in which, as in the systems of paranoiacs, everything follows comprehensibly and even compulsorily once the first premise is accepted. The insanity of such systems lies not only in their first premise but in the very logicity with which they are constructed. (OT, 457-458)

In the insane «stringent logicity» which governs the ideological fiction which commands the murderous production of a consistent world (OT, 458), Arendt traces the manifest connection between the totalitarian contempt for factuality and the modern man's «deep rooted suspicion of everything he did not make himself». The political «tautologies» of totalitarian ideologies provide a «world» alternative to, and independent from, the parameters of common sense «reality».<sup>128</sup>

The chief political distinction between common sense and logic is that common sense presupposes a common world into which we all fit [...]; whereas logic and all self-evidence from which logical reasoning proceeds can claim a reliability altogether independent of the world and existence of other people. [...] Only under conditions where the common realm *between* men is destroyed and the only reliability left consists in the meaningless tautologies of the self-evident can this capacity become «productive», develop its own lines of thought, whose chief political characteristic is that they always carry with them a compulsory power of persuasion. To equate thought and understanding with these logical operations means to level the capacity for thought [...] to its lowest common denominator, where no differences in actual existence count any longer, not even the qualitative difference between the essence of God and men. (EU, 318)

For Arendt, as well as for Camus,<sup>129</sup> the « idea » from which the totalitarian ideology draws its consistent explanatory narrative is deaf and blind to the words and living appearances of men:<sup>130</sup> it is the consequence of a *de-materialization* of the political, which boundlessly erases the plurality and finitude of the human condition into the *abstract* existence of predictable specimens of the animal man, which as purely reacting beings need not be persuaded but dominated.

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<sup>128</sup> «We know how very close the people under totalitarian domination have been brought to this condition of meaninglessness, by means of terror combined with training in ideological thinking [...] the peculiar and ingenious replacement of common sense with stringent logicity, which is characteristic of totalitarian thinking, is particularly noteworthy. Logicity is not identical with ideological reasoning, but indicates the totalitarian transformation of the respective ideologies» (EU, 317)

<sup>129</sup> As Dana Villa remarks, the teleocratic logic, at work in the Platonic concept of «idea» as transcendent truth, survives the contemporary break-down of traditional metaphysics (FP, 246-247): the measure of its strength is given by the peculiar combination of the totalitarian «logic of the idea» with what Camus defines a «*philosophy without objection*» - *nihilism*. In his lecture at Columbia University in 1946, reported by the journalist and friend, Nicola Chiaromonte, and published in *Twice a Year*, Camus points to the logicity of nihilism as touching upon the very core of (modern) man and society (see Nicola Chiaromonte, «Albert Camus» in *Tempo Presente*, January 1960, in *Il tarlo della coscienza*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1992, 217-222).

<sup>130</sup> E, 402.

The ultimate *interiorisation* of the political life - the "superhuman" belief that everything is possible - thus coincides with an «aestheticizing» process, which gets rid not only of the transcendent yardsticks of the tradition, but, also most essentially, of the "material" limitation (the product), as the very condition which constitutes men, and out of which the political sphere first arose.<sup>131</sup>

I suggest, from this perspective, that Arendt's own project of «aestheticization» of political action -<sup>132</sup> which both Villa and Bonnie Honig trace back to Nietzsche's "aestheticism" -<sup>133</sup> can only partly be interpreted in the sense of a «politique esthétique [...] *sans le réification* de l'action narrative en "œuvres"»:<sup>134</sup> to do away with the dimension of *incorporation*, implicit in the aesthetic-poietic paradigm of the political action of the philosophical tradition, leaves unchallenged the problem of the *de-realizing* logic implicit in the notion of political *creation*, as exposed by the *radical* nihilism of a perspective of omnipotence.

The total «aestheticization» of the political systematically brought about through terror in the *absolute* consistency of totalitarian ideologies is ultimately related to the *political* temptation of *hubris*, rooted in the resentment against mere existence that lies at the core of the Western concept of political action.

In the light of her critique of *radical* nihilism, I propose to explore Arendt's «aesthetic» approach to the political as challenging the de-realizing or de-humanizing drives brought forth in OT toward the re-thinking of political *creation*.

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<sup>131</sup> In the totalitarian criminal attempt to change the nature of man she recognizes the «trembling insight that no nature, not even the nature of man, can no longer be considered to be the measure of all things», "measure" meaning here a yardstick or a limit to the boundlessness of action. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), op. cit., p. 434.

<sup>132</sup> Dana Villa, «Beyond Good and Evil. Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action», in *Political Theory*, vol. 20, No. 2, May 1992, 274-308. Developed in Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger. The Fate of the Political*, Princeton UP, 1996.

<sup>133</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, op. cit.

<sup>134</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Le génie féminin. I. Hannah Arendt*, Fayard, Paris, 1999, p. 356.

#### CHAPTER 4. "AESTHETICIZING" THE POLITICAL.

It is in the light of the Nietzschean "aestheticization of action" that we must understand, with Villa,<sup>135</sup> Arendt's solution to the question of meaninglessness, formulated in *What is Freedom?* precisely as a shift from the fabrication paradigm of the tradition – illustrated by the Platonic model of "creative" arts (WF, 153) – to a *performative* approach to action:

The performing arts, on the contrary, have indeed a strong affinity with politics. Performing artists – dancers, play-actors, musicians, and the like – need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their "work", and both depend upon others for the performance itself. Such a space of appearances is not to be taken for granted wherever men live together in a community. The Greek polis once was precisely that "form of government" which provided men with a space of appearances where they could act, with a kind of theatre where freedom could appear. (WF, 154).

By insisting on the "performative" self-containedness of Arendt's *aesthetical* political action, Villa seems nevertheless to underemphasize the permanence of the artistic metaphor – even though with a reversed sign - in which the public/political light is no longer on the final product, the work of art as a *thing*, but rather on the performing action itself as entailing those elements of plurality, contingency and publicity, that the Tradition of Political Philosophy had attempted, from Plato onward, to expunge, and which in the post-metaphysical "twilight of the Idols" re-emerge in all their finite unpredictability and boundlessness.

Villa's emphasis on the limits to Arendt's appropriation of Nietzsche's «masculine aestheticism», in the agonistic affirmation of the initiatory dimension human action, and in the recognition of the contingent character of human affairs – a "modest" version of the Heraclitean "innocence" of becoming but limited to the political sphere - betrays a certain uneasiness in associating Arendt's stress on *art* with Nietzsche's pages on the artist in the *Genealogy of Morals* and the *Gay Science*.<sup>136</sup>

Hinting at two possible interpretations of the Nietzschean *artist* – on the one hand, the artist as master, whose unconditional assent to existence is nothing other than the consent to violence and oppression, that culminates in domination and in contemporary glorification of murder (HR, 486); and on the other, the artist as *creator* of meaning within the anti-Platonic revaluation of appearances, the emphasis being on the *good-nihilistic* transvaluation of values, which «consiste seulement à remplacer la valeur du juge par celle du créateur» in the respect

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<sup>135</sup> Cf., Villa, FP, 81.

<sup>136</sup> Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy and Terror*, pp. 107-127.

and passion of what is (HR, 483) – Camus comes very close to Arendt in denouncing the link between the master/slave relation of dominion/oppression and the “temptation” to *absolute* nihilism, expressed in the plastic art trope.

Nietzsche’s pages in GM, II, §17, on the artists’ «terrible Egoism» that generates States through the “tyrannical” organization of human matter, find immediate echo in Arendt’s critique of the teleocratic model of Western Political Philosophy. It is under the violent/repressive acts of these masters-creators that the pernicious plant of “original”, i.e. Christian, nihilism originates, in the internal split of the resentful “bad conscience” (GM, § 18). What emerges here is the relation between the “organic” model of mastership, rooted in the Platonic understanding of politics as craftsmanship (plastic art trope of the State as *body politic*), and the Christian concept of Will, as taken over in Arendt’s *Life of the Mind*.

In this sense, Nietzsche’s “artist of violence” is to the philosopher’s genealogy of moral categories, what the ruler as craftsman (artist) is to Arendt’s genealogy of the political categories of the Western Tradition, rooted in the Platonic productionist model of action.<sup>137</sup>

It is significant that in *The Life of the Mind/Willing* Arendt referred to Nietzsche, in terms that echo Camus’ letter to Parain in 1944 (E, 1680): «Clearly, what is needful is not to change the world or men but *to change their way of “evaluating” it, their way, in other words, of thinking and reflecting about it.* In Nietzsche’s own words, what must be overcome are the philosophers [...]» (LM/W, 170).<sup>138</sup>

The problem of “re-thinking” the world after and beyond the «immanent» logic of Totalitarian domination, brings forth the question of how to re-think “thinking”, in the light of the murderous and anti-political implications of the plastic art trope of Political philosophy.

This preoccupation is apparent in Arendt’s investigation into Kant’s unwritten political thought in the 1970 lectures.

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<sup>137</sup> Bonnie Honig rightly emphasizes the Nietzschean roots of Arendt’s anti-foundational critique of the Philosophic tradition: «Arendt’s theorization of action echoes Nietzsche’s claim that the search for a doer diminishes the power of action by seeking a cause for action where there is none [...]. Arendt agrees with Nietzsche that there is no essential self, no given unity awaiting discovery and realization. There is *no being behind the doing* [...] *Freedom is not a subject-centred condition.* Arendt criticizes those who [...] take freedom out of the contingent world of action, attach it to the subject, and internalise it by attributing it to the will». <sup>137</sup> In *Willing* Arendt remains, nevertheless, heavily indebted to the Heideggerian reading of the *Will to Power* in terms of “reversed Platonism”. As we have seen, Camus comes close to the same conclusions in HR, when he denounces the metaphysical fallacy inherent in the Nietzschean divinisation of life (*amor fati*) of the yes-saying Over-man: «La prédication de la surhumanité aboutissant à la *fabrication* méthodique des sous-hommes, voilà le fait qui doit sans doute être dénoncé, mais qui demande aussi à être interprété » (HR, 485).

<sup>138</sup> My italics.

In the Fourth Session of her lectures on *Kant's Political Philosophy* Arendt distinguishes three different perspectives under which it is possible to consider, in Kant's work, the affairs of men. She summarizes them as follows:

«[...] Human species = Mankind = part of nature = subject to "history", nature's ruse = to be considered under the idea of "end", *teleological judgement*: second part of *Critique of Judgement*.

Man = reasonable being, subject to the laws of practical reason which he gives to himself, autonomous, an *end in himself* [...] = *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Men = earthbound creatures, living in communities, endowed with common sense, *sensus communis*; not autonomous, needing each other's company even for thinking [...] = first part of the *Critique of Judgement*: aesthetic judgement.» (KL, 26-27). [My italics]

The rejection of the first two perspectives in the light of a (Nietzschean) anti-foundational critique of the teleocratic model of the tradition, opens the space, in Arendt's reflection, for developing the political implications of Kant's critique of Taste (KL, 10).

It is in the *Critique of Judgement* that, I argue, Arendt finds the elements to overcome the dichotomy between theory and practice, at the roots of the teleocratic paradigm of Political Philosophy, and still at work in Kant's political writings in the opposition actor/spectator. The notion that «only the spectator but never the actor knows what it is all about – she writes - is as old as the hills; it is, in fact, among the oldest, most decisive, *notions of philosophy*. The whole idea of the superiority of the contemplative way of life comes from this early insight that meaning (or truth) is revealed only to those who restrain themselves from acting» (KL, 55)

In the Thirteen Session she comes back to the question of the «partiality of the actor, who, because he is involved, never sees the meaning of the whole. This is true for all stories; Hegel is entirely right that philosophy, like the owl of Minerva, spreads its wings only when the day is over, at dusk. *The same is not true for the beautiful or for all deeds in itself*. The beautiful is, in Kantian terms, an end in itself because all its possible meaning is contained within itself [...]» (KL, 77).<sup>139</sup>

In the opening pages of the HC Arendt examined the three ways of life (*bioi*) which, according to Aristotle, «men might choose in *freedom*, that is, in full independence of the necessities of life» (HC, 12), which «have in common that they were concerned with the "*beautiful*", that is, with things neither necessary nor merely useful: the life of enjoying bodily pleasures in which the beautiful, as it is given, is consumed; the life devoted to the matters of the polis, in which *excellence* produces *beautiful deeds*; and the life of the philosopher

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<sup>139</sup> My italics.



devoted to inquiry into, and contemplation of, things eternal [...]» of everlasting beauty (HC, 13).

If the spectator is the bearer of meaning, and the spectator and the actor become one in beautiful deeds, acting *creates* meaning – or rather, it *performs* it.

Comparing the pages on the work of art in the HC with the Eleventh and Thirteenth Sessions of Arendt's *Kant Lectures*, what we remark is a distinction between the categories of beautiful/ugly, as referring to things that can be seen, which have a shape, and her stress on beautiful deeds. Following Kant's «observation, *entirely correct*, that the true opposite of the Beautiful is not the Ugly but “that which excites disgust”» (KL, 68), Arendt hints at the possibility to transcend the reifying dimension of *creative* arts, implicit in the categories of beauty and ugliness – which in HC are based on the adequacy or inadequacy of a *thing* to what it should *look like*, «that is, in Platonic language, [...] to the *eidōs* or *idea*, the mental image, or rather the image seen by the inner eye, that preceded its coming into the world and survives its potential destruction» (HC, 173) – escaping its teleological implications into an *aesthetic* understanding of the beautiful, conceived «in Kantian terms, [as] an end in itself because all its possible meaning is contained within itself» (KL, 77). The adjective “aesthetic” must be read here in the sense of the Kantian *aesthetic* or taste judgement, to which the very opposition beautiful/disgusting refers – «Kant says: “That is beautiful which pleases in the mere act of judging it» (KL, 67).

Now, what Arendt points out, with Kant, is «the fact that, in matters of taste, “the beautiful, interests [us] only [when we are] in society...A man abandoned by himself on a desert island would adorn neither his hut nor his person...[Man] is not contented with an object if he cannot feel satisfaction in it *in common with others*.” Or: “We are ashamed if our taste does not agree with others”» (KL, 67). The Kantian definition of the beautiful calls in the question of the publicity and plurality which characterize the aesthetic judgement as defined in Arendt's lectures - «Judgement, and especially judgements of taste, always reflects upon others and their taste, takes their possible judgements into account» (KL, 67).

As Arendt highlights in the Twelfth Session of her lectures, imagination, as the discriminatory inner sense that makes the absent immediately present, «says it-pleases or it-displeases. It is called taste because, like taste, it *chooses*. But this choice is itself subject to still another choice: one can approve or disapprove of the very act of pleasing» (KL, 69). Approving/disapproving pertain to the further level of (aesthetic) judgement, which through the “enlarged thought” anchors itself in men's community sense (*sensus communis*), as distinguished from the *sensus privatus* (sensation): this extra-sense that, as Arendt writes,

«fits us in a community» is identified by Kant with the «common understanding of men... [which] is the very least to be expected from anyone claiming the name of man» (KL, 70).

It is on this *sensus communis*, as the «capability by which men are distinguished from animals and from gods» (Id.), that depends the very possibility of communication: «The it-pleases-or-displeases-me, which as a feeling seems so utterly private and noncommunicative, is actually rooted in this community sense and is therefore open to communication once it has been transformed by reflection, which takes all others and their feelings into account» (KL, 72).

Following Arendt's analysis of Kant's work, the judgement of the spectator – whose «view carried the ultimate meaning of an event» (KL, 52) – is *aesthetical* (KL, 53), and, as she points out, aesthetic judgement is always endowed with the characters of plurality and publicity, meaning – as opposed to scientific or philosophic truth – is never reached in isolation: «[Kant] believes that the very faculty of thinking depends upon its public use; without “the test of free and open examination”, no thinking and no opinion-formation are possible. Reason is not made “to isolate itself but to get into community with others”.» (KL, 40) – «unless you can somehow communicate and expose to the test of others, either orally or in writing, whatever you may have found out when you were alone, this faculty [thinking] exerted in solitude will disappear. In the words of Jaspers, *truth is what I can communicate*. [...] what Kant demanded in the *Critique of Judgement* of judgements of taste, is “general communicability”» (Id.).

Here, I suggest, is where Arendt's appropriation of Kantian aesthetics meets Camus' definition of the creator's unity («la première exigence de l'esprit est [...] que cette unité soit *communicable*» (HR, 672), which in both authors entails the rejection of the de-realizing «unité du *pur* raisonnement» (Id.).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> In his 1948 reply to Emmanuel D'Astier de la Vigerie, polemically referring to the publication of Merleau-Ponty's *Humanisme et Terreur*, Camus denounced the approach of the «philosophes-spectateurs» (E, 357), who justified the progressiveness of terror from the abstract, teleological, standpoint of the Hegelian spectator *outside* and against the concrete existence of suffering human beings (Historicism). The artist is opposed to the *philosophe-spectateur*, precisely, for his capacity to resign the abstract viewpoint of the philosopher: defined as “être double”, the artist is capable of comprehension, that is, of *thinking from both sides*. Arendt clearly uses the term “spectator” in the sense of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment when she writes of the philosopher: «[h]ad he forgotten, because of his “moral duty”, his insights as a spectator, he would have become what so many good men, involved and engaged in public affairs, tend to be – an idealistic fool» (KL, 54). The aesthetic perspective of the spectator (KL, 53), rooted in the faculty of imagination, is opposed to the moral (abstract) perspective of practical reason, as the capacity of «comparing our judgement with the possible rather than the actual judgements of others, and *putting ourselves in the place of any other man*» (KL, 43), thus, realizing Kant's notion of “enlarged mentality”.

It is not without reason that both these authors refer to the figure of Socrates.<sup>141</sup> In Kant's lectures Socrates becomes the embodiment of an *aesthetic/performative* paradigm of thought:

To think critically, to blaze the trail of thought through prejudices, through unexamined opinions and beliefs, is an old concern of philosophy, which we may date, insofar as it is a conscious enterprise, to the Socratic midwifery in Athens. [...] Socrates taught nothing; he never knew the answers to the questions he asked. He did the examining for examining's sake, not for the sake of knowledge. [...] What he actually did was to make *public*, in discourse, the thinking process – that dialogue that soundlessly goes on within me, between me and myself; he *performed* in the marketplace the way the flute-player performed in a banquet. *It is sheer performance, sheer activity.* And just as the flute-player has to follow certain rules in order to perform well, Socrates discovered the only rule that holds sway over thinking – the rule of consistency (as Kant was to call it in the *Critique of Judgement*) [...]. (KL, 36-37)

Arendt defines critical thinking as an *art* (KL, 38) with clear political implications: according to Kant and Socrates, it «exposes itself to «the test of free and open examination» (KL, 39) – which makes it «in principle antiauthoritarian» (KL, 38), and this means that the more people participate in it, the better» (KL, 39).<sup>142</sup>

Now, political thinking is for Arendt “representative” in the *aesthetic* sense, explored in the previous pages, of a (Kantian) “enlarged mentality” - «I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent» (TP, 556), that is, I represent them through *imagination* – the faculty of *spontaneity* in thinking.<sup>143</sup> «What makes particulars *communicable* is (a) that in perceiving the particular a particular we have in the back of our minds [...] a “schema” whose “shape” is characteristic of many such particulars and (b) that this schematic shape is in the back of the minds of many different people. These schematic shapes are products of the imagination, although “no schema can ever be brought into any image whatsoever”. All *single agreements or disagreements presuppose that we are talking about the same thing* – that we, who are *many*, agree, come together, on something that is one and the same for us all. » (KL, 83).<sup>144</sup>

Arendt's remarks on the principles of political action can be read in the light of her pages on imagination and aesthetic judgement, taken from her 1970 seminar on Kant's

<sup>141</sup> As Taminiaux highlights, «ce que Arendt retrouve et célèbre en Kant, c'est très exactement ce qu'elle trouvait chez Socrate, et elle souligne la parenté entre la pensée critique et la maïeutique socratique, toutes réserves faites sur le projet kantien d'un système futur de la méyaphysique [...]», in J. Taminiaux, *La fille de Thrace et le penseur professionnel*, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>142</sup> The emphasis, in Arendt's analysis of Kant's work, is on communication: the faculty of thinking depends on its public use, and entails communicability, «[f]or it is a natural vocation of mankind to communicate and speak one's mind, especially in all matters concerning man as such» (KL, 40). In a finite post-metaphysical horizon, «how much and how correctly would we think if we did not think in community with others to whom we communicate our thoughts and who communicate theirs to us!» (KL, 41).

<sup>143</sup> «[...] sensations are private; also, no judgement is involved: we are merely passive, we react, we are not *spontaneous, as we are when we imagine something at will or reflect on it*» (KL, 70):

<sup>144</sup> My italics.

*Critique of Judgement*: «The *Critique of Judgement* deals with reflective judgements as distinguished from determinant ones. Determinant judgements subsume the particular under a general rule;<sup>145</sup> reflective judgements, on the contrary, “derive” the rule from the particular. In the schema, one actually “perceives” some “universal” *in* the particular» (KL, 83). The importance of the schema in her view lies in that «*sensibility* and *understanding* meet in producing it through *imagination*. [...] In the *Critique of Judgement* we find an analogy to the “schema”: the *example*. [...] The example is the particular that contains in itself, or is supposed to contain, a concept or general rule. How, for instance, is one able to judge, to evaluate, as act as courageous? When judging, one says spontaneously, without any derivations from general rules, “This man has courage”. If one were a Greek, one would have in “the depths of one’s mind” the example of Achilles. Imagination is again necessary.» (KL, 84).

In her 1967 essay *Truth and Politics*, courage figures among those political principles – together with freedom, justice, and honor (TP, 558) – whose «*relatively* transcendent qualities» distinguish them from the (unpolitical) transcendent truth of philosophers (TP, 559).

That “*relatively* transcendent” character can be understood in the light of *What is Freedom?*, in the sense of a “general” rule which does not operate from within the Self (as motives do) – as a Platonic yardstick, contemplated with the “inner” eye of the mind – nor from *outside* action itself – some reified “universal”, external and independent from the actual realization of action (as in *creative arts*). Principles, in Arendt’s own words, «inspire, as it were, from *without*; and they are much *too general to prescribe particular goals*, although every particular aim can be *judged* in the light of its principle *once it has been started*» (BPF, 152).<sup>146</sup> The Arendtian notion of principle cannot be understood as long as we maintain ourselves in the *poietic* perspective, which informs the moral and political thought of the Tradition. The shift to a “performative” understanding of political action -<sup>147</sup> co-extensive, in Arendt’s view, with political principles – entails the shift from determinant to aesthetical judgements, with their fully political dimensions of plurality, publicity and contingency. The manifestation of these (aesthetically conceived) principles «comes about only through action, they are manifest in the world as long as the action lasts, and no longer» (BPF, 152):

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<sup>145</sup> Which belong, as Taminioux points out, to the sphere of *poiesis* (see, J. Taminioux, op. cit., p. 242).

<sup>146</sup> My italics.

<sup>147</sup> «[...] the Greek always used such metaphors as flute-playing, dancing, healing, and seafaring to distinguish political from other activities» (BPF, 153).

Such principles are honor or glory, love of equality, which Montesquieu called virtue, or distinction or *excellence* – the Greek [...] “always strive to do your best and to be the best of all” [...], but also fear or distrust or hatred. Freedom or its opposite *appears* in the world whenever such principles are actualised; the appearance of freedom, *like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act*. Men are free – as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom - as long as they act.

Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli’s concept of *virtù*, the *excellence* with which man answers the opportunities the world opens before him in the guise of *fortuna*. Its meaning is best rendered by “virtuosity”, that is, *an excellence we attribute to the performing arts (as distinguished from the creative arts of making)*, where the *accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product* which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it.<sup>148</sup> (BPF, 152-153) [My italics]

Admitting that principles are to action what the “general rule” is to the particular, as unified through *imagination* in aesthetic judgement – the *moral and political* implications of a focus on which, are recurrently emphasised by Arendt (TP, 556) – representative or critical thought would not be possible without that community sense that secures human understanding. Critical thought «[...] implies communicability. Now, communicability obviously implies a *community of men*» (KL, 40).<sup>149</sup>

Principles “anchor” the particularity of human deeds like the Kantian *sensus communis*– as that “common understanding of *men*” (KL, 70) acting in conditions of plurality and contingency - “anchors” (aesthetical) judgement in the community, «where the *many* who live together have their intercourse both in word and deed regulated by a great number of *rapports* – laws, customs, habits and the like» (LM/W, 200).

As she confirms in *Willing* (LM/W, 199-200) «the principles inspiring the actions of the citizens vary in accordance with the different forms of government, but *they are all, as Jefferson rightly called them, “energetic principles”* [...]». Now, according to Montesquieu, what transforms lawless individuals into citizens are not God’s Ten Commandments etc., but «men-made *rapports*, “relations” which, since they concern the changeable affairs of mortal men [...] must be “*subject to all accidents that can happen and vary in proportion as the will of men changes*”» (W, 200).<sup>150</sup>

In 1951 Camus described in analogous terms revolt as energetic principle (HR, 427): I suggest that the emphasis on the “energetic” definition of principles of action discloses the

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<sup>148</sup> My italics.

<sup>149</sup> Arendt is very clear in pointing out that «political freedom is possible only in the sphere of human plurality, and on the premise that this sphere is not simply an extension of the dual I-Myself to the plural We. «Action, in which a We is always engaged in changing our common world, stands in the sharpest possible opposition to the solitary business of thought, which operates in a dialogue between me and myself. Under exceptionally propitious circumstances that dialogue, [...] can be extended to another insofar as a friend is, as Aristotle said, “another Self”. But I can never reach the We, the true plural action (An error rather prevalent among modern philosophers who insist on the importance of communication as a guarantee of truth – chiefly Karl Jaspers and Martin Buber, with his I-thou philosophy – is to believe that the intimacy of the *dialogue, the “inner action”* in which I “appeal” to myself or to the “other self”, Aristotle’s friend, Jasper’s beloved, Buber’s Thou, can be extended and become paradigmatic for the political sphere).» (LM/W, 200).

<sup>150</sup> My italics.

possibility of an “aesthetic” interpretation of the community, and of the relation, brought forth earlier in the text, of beauty and law, one, that is, which exceeds the “realist” and substantialising readings of the Arendtian *sensus communis* and of Camus’ *creative art*.

As I intend to show, the comparative analysis with Camus’ pages on art and revolt brings into light the political significance of a focus on beauty *as intrinsically moral* in the two authors’ attempts at rethinking the (political) community.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, as long as community is that which, in Arendt’s view, «*arises wherever men live together [...]* and it can be constituted in many different ways, all of which rest ultimately in some form of consent [...]. Consent entails the *recognition that no man can act alone*, that men if they wish to achieve something in the world must *act in concert [...]*» (LM/W, 201),<sup>152</sup> the aesthetic perspective discloses, and is inseparable from, a *tragic* or “dramaturgic” concept of (political) agency.

#### 4.1. FOR A TRAGIC MODEL OF (POLITICAL) ACTION.

I suggest that we compare the following passages, taken respectively from Camus’ HR and Arendt’s OR:

Au midi de la pensée, le révolté refuse ainsi la divinité pour partager les luttes et le destin communs. Nous choisirons Ithaque, la terre fidèle, la *pensée audacieuse et frugale*, l’*action lucide*, la *générosité* de l’homme qui sait. Dans la lumière, le monde reste notre premier et notre dernier amour. Nos frères respirent sous le même ciel que nous, *la justice est vivante*. Alors naît la *joie étrange* qui aide à vivre et à mourir et que nous refuserons désormais de renvoyer à plus tard. (HR, 708). [My italics]

Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the play of his old age, wrote the famous and frightening lines: [...] “Not to be born prevails over all meaning uttered in words; by far the second-best for life, once it has appeared, is to go as swiftly as possible whence it came.” There he also let us know, through the mouth of Theseus, the legendary founder of Athens and hence her spokesman, *what it was that enabled ordinary men, young and old, to bear life’s burden: it was the polis*, the space of men’s free deeds and living words, which could endow life with splendor [...] (OR, 285) [My italics]

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<sup>151</sup> Simona Forti draws the attention to Lyotard’s critique of an emphasis on the aesthetic judgment related to beauty in Arendt’s work, as still carrying in itself the (meta-physical) hope in an “harmonic integration”, in the reconciliation of particularity and universality. This hope would, precisely, explain, in Lyotard’s analysis of *Sensus Communis*, the incapability of the author to escape a “realist” and “social” approach to the question of common sense and the community (in S. Forti, “Hannah Arendt e la facoltà di giudicare: considerazioni su di un’eredità contesa”, *Teoria Politica*, III, n. 3, 1992, pp. 139 and 153, note 75). I suggest that if we read Arendt’s pages on aesthetic judgment next to Camus’ pages on revolt as creative art, the question of beauty and of (Lyotard’s) “harmonious integration” can be reframed within what Camus calls men’s “desire for unity”. In this sense, liminality is inherent in the notion of beauty, exposing (against the measurelessness entailed by the aesthetic notion of the sublime) the morality of (political) action and freedom *inter pares*.

<sup>152</sup> My italics.

The «strange joy», which stems from *revolt as creation*, and coincides with men's responsible undertaking of a generous and lucid action, and which helps men to bear life under the conditions of mortality and plurality, is not different, I suggest, from the Arendtian joy in appearing and acting together in public, and designates an identical moment: that, to use Arendt's terminology, of *political* action.

As Isaac rightly points out, reading Camus and Arendt together and «against one another [...] provide[s] new and revealing interpretations of them both».<sup>153</sup> I suggest that by approaching revolt to the Arendtian notion of political action, the former offers some elucidating insights into the relation between morality and politics, and especially, in the much debated question of the «internal morality» of Arendt's tragic model of political action, outlined in HC.

The *rapprochement* is justified by a passage in *Thoughts on Politics and Revolutions*, where Arendt explicitly declares that «[if] you look at the history of revolutions, you will see that it was never the oppressed and degraded themselves who led the way, but those who were not oppressed and not degraded but *could not bear it that others were*. [...] the *moral factor* – she writes in 1971 – *has always been present* [...] » (CR, 204). What Arendt describes here is, precisely, the “founding” or disclosing moment of revolt, as described in Camus' HR:

[...] la révolte ne naît pas seulement, et forcément, chez l'opprimé, mais [...] elle peut naître aussi au spectacle de l'oppression dont un autre est victime. Il y a donc, dans ce cas, identification à l'autre individu. Et il faut préciser qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une identification psychologique [i.e. what Arendt would address as « empathy »] [...]. Il ne s'agit pas non plus du sentiment de la communauté des intérêts. [...] Il y a seulement *identification de destinées et prise de parti*. L'individu n'est donc pas, à lui seul, cette valeur à défendre. Il faut, au moins, *tous les hommes pour la composer*. (HR, 426) [My italics]

I suggest that we draw on Camus' notion of revolt, precisely, to try and shed some light into the meaning of the «*moral factor*», which Arendt traces *within* political action.

In the passage above, revolt brings about a value that is inherently « plural », relative and, in Camus' own words, it *pre-exists* to action – thus, contradicting those Philosophies of History (and the polemical target is clearly French Existentialism) which situate value at the end of action (HR, 425). But, that this pre-existing value should be understood in a anti- or post-metaphysical sense, it is confirmed by Camus' pages on *ressentiment* in HR.

In the 1951 essay, Camus rejects Scheler's identification of revolt and *ressentiment*:

Le *ressentiment* est très bien défini par Scheler comme une auto-intoxication, la sécrétion néfaste, *en vase clos*, d'une impuissance prolongée. La révolte au contraire fracture l'être et l'aide à déborder. Elle libère des flots qui,

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<sup>153</sup> J. Isaac, op. cit., p. 14.

de stagnants, deviennent furieux. [...] À la source de la révolte, il y a [...] un principe d'activité surabondante et d'énergie. Scheler a raison aussi de dire que l'envie colore fortement le ressentiment. Mais on envie ce qu'on n'a pas, tandis que le révolté défend ce qu'il est. [...] *La révolte n'est pas réaliste.* (HR, 427).

It is in the light of these remarks that the concept of a «communauté naturelle» of men (HR, 426), brought about by the act of revolt, cannot be understood in the organicistic/teleocratic perspective (implicit in *ressentiment*). I suggest that the “energetic” interpretation of revolt explodes the substantialising interpretation of the community: the latter is not some-*thing* to be achieved, it is already (there).

By opposing *ressentiment* - which Camus traces at the core of «la révolution du calcul qui, préférant un homme abstrait à l'homme de chair, nie l'être» (HR, 707) –<sup>154</sup> to love,<sup>155</sup> the “revolted” thought makes a *good use* of nihilism in a sense which couples Nietzsche's *aesthetic* virtues - especially *force de caractère* and *froide frugalité* (E, 837), that Camus takes over in the notion of the creator's *ascèse* - with the *tragic* finite thought of the finite in the MdS.

The moral factor brought forth by revolt, I would argue, is that of *discipline*: the *Genealogy of Morals* stands on the background, as the reference to Tertullian (GM, I, 15) suggests.<sup>156</sup> Now, it is the *Genealogy of Morals* that closes the chapter on action in Arendt's HC: we should not overlook the fact that, if she poses political action under the sign of Nietzsche, it is, precisely, for «his extraordinary sensibility to *moral* phenomena» (HC, 245).

We have extensively shown (Chapter 2) how the critique and “selective” appropriation of a certain part of Nietzsche's thought lies at the core of Camus' identification of revolt with a superabundant *activity* - as he defines *creative* action. In HC Arendt operates in analogous

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<sup>154</sup> Camus would associate the «techniques de la terreur» (HR, 428) to *ressentiment*, from which he distinguishes man's revolt against his finite condition.

<sup>155</sup> Camus uses the terms «love/admiration» and «friendship» as interchangeable, and coincident with the movement of revolt, as the passage on «[les] suicides de protestation, au bain, parmi les terroristes russes dont on fouettait les camarades» (HR, 426 and HR, 576) clearly shows. Arendt, on the contrary, in HC distinguishes between love, as the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces, which «destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others» (HC, 242). In terms that echo the GM, she adds that «what love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs. Respect, not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politikē*, is a kind of “friendship” without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for a person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may *admire* or of achievements which we may highly esteem.» (HC, 243). According to Arendt, «the modern loss of respect, or rather the conviction that respect is due only where we admire or esteem, constitutes a clear symptom of the increasing depersonalization of public and social life» (Id.).

<sup>156</sup> «Nietzsche et Scheler ont raison de voir une belle illustration de cette sensibilité [du *ressentiment*] dans le passage où Tertullien informe ses lecteurs qu'au ciel la plus grande source de félicité, parmi les bienheureux, sera le spectacle des empereurs romains consumés en enfer. Cette félicité est aussi celle des honnêtes gens qui aillent assister aux exécutions capitales. La révolte, au contraire, dans son principe, se borne à refuser l'humiliation, sans la demander pour l'autre.» (E, 427). It is, precisely, this kind of spectacularity or theatricality, that, I would argue, Arendt refuses to admit in the courtroom: as she states in the opening pages *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the court of *Beth Ha'am*, whose project recalled the structure of a theatre, was the perfect site for the «show trial» of Adolf Eichmann (BE, 4).



terms, disclaiming the German's philosopher's «modern prejudice to see the source of all power in the will power of the isolated individual» (HC, 245), though retaining a certain part of Nietzsche's moral reflection, namely, his critique of the faculty of promises.

Now, according to Arendt, the faculty of promising allows «to master this two-fold darkness of human affairs» - that is, the «basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow» (HC, 244), and the unpredictability of human action, or «the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a *community of equals* where everybody has the same capacity to act»<sup>157</sup> (Id.) – and, what is more important for our purpose, it is «*the only alternative to a mastery which relies on domination of one's self and rule over others*» (HC,244).<sup>158</sup> In this sense, the faculty of promises «corresponds exactly to the exercise of a *freedom which was given under the condition of non-sovereignty*» (Id.),<sup>159</sup> that is, under the conditions of *an-arché*.

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<sup>157</sup> My italics.

<sup>158</sup> My italics.

<sup>159</sup> In the HC Arendt observes that «[t]he only way out of the dilemma of meaninglessness *in all strictly utilitarian philosophy* is to turn away from the objective world of use things and fall back upon the subjectivity of use itself» (HC, 155) - that is, from within the *homo faber's* logic of ends and means the only way out of the devaluation of all things into means resides in the affirmation of an immanent "primo mobile", the *user* as "higher end" – a Subject, "measure of all things" (HC, 155). What both Arendt and Camus reject as a solution to the nihilistic devaluation implicit in the teleocratic paradigm, is the very notion of Subject that supports the utilitarian thesis. They both situate themselves in the line of Nietzsche's "decentering" of the moral – i.e. teleologic and metaphysical – concept of the Self or Ego: in her commentary of *The Will to Power*, Arendt especially takes over the link, highlighted by Nietzsche, between the notions of Self, Will, mastery and rule, thus tracing a direct continuity between the modern notion of the willing Ego and the Platonic "productionist" model of political action as rule, at work in Western Political Philosophy. For Nietzsche: «[...] the will is precisely that which treats cravings as their master and appoints to them their way and measure» (LM/W, 160).

Pointing, with Heidegger, to the *commanding thought* inherent in Nietzsche's analysis of the Will, Arendt takes over the Nietzschean genealogy of the Self, originating in the internal split of the Will – in the very fact that «we are in every given case at the same time those who issue the orders and those who obey them»: «[...] insofar as we obey – she quotes from *Beyond Good and Evil* – we experience the feelings of coercion, urging, pressing, resisting, which usually begin to manifest themselves immediately after the act of willing; insofar however [...] as we are in command [...] we experience a sensation of pleasure, and this all more strongly as *we are used to overcoming the dichotomy through the notion of the I, the Ego*» (LM/W, 161): it is by identifying the "I" or "Self" as a whole with the commanding part, and by anticipating that the resisting part will obey, that the internal and painful conflict of the I-will-and-I-cannot is solved. Arendt's critique of modern philosophic notion of Individual, developed in the concluding chapter of *Willing*, is rooted in the Nietzschean "deconstruction" of the Subject: «Just as thinking prepares the self for the role of spectator, willing fashions it into an "enduring I" that directs all particular acts of volition. It creates the self's *character* and therefore was sometimes understood as the *principium individuationis*, the source of the person's specific identity» (LM/W, 195). It is this individuation which, in Arendt's view, breeds the most serious problems for the notion of freedom, in that the individual «fashioned by the will and aware that it could be different from what it is (character, unlike bodily appearance or talents and abilities, is not given to the self at birth) always tends to assert an "I-myself" against an indefinite 'they' – all the others that I, as an *individual*, am not. *Nothing indeed can be more frightening than the notion of solipsistic freedom – the "feeling" that my standing apart, isolated from everyone else, is due to free will (...)*» (LM/W, 195-196).

The philosophic notion of individual as an abstract, in-different Subject, is directly related to the modern political concept of freedom as *sovereignty*, that is, to «the ideal of a free will, *independent from others* and eventually *prevailing* against them» (WF, 163). Now, according to Arendt, *sovereignty* is to political action what *mastery* is in the realm of *making*, which explains why «[t]he famous sovereignty of political bodies [...] can be maintained only by the instruments of *violence*. [...] Where men wish to be *sovereign*, as *individuals* or as

In OR Arendt “genealogically” reconstitutes the *origin* of the concept of freedom as a political phenomenon – against the current identification of the term, generally accepted in political theory, of political freedom with «the more or less free range of non-political activities which a given body politic will permit and guarantee to those who constitute it» (OR, 22) – in *an-archy*, that is, in the artificial horizon (of Nietzschean memory) drawn by men, but entered by citizens (*personae*), within which the latter lived together under conditions of no-rule (*an-archein*), that is, *among peers* (OR, 23). An-archy should, thus, not be understood as sheer absence of law: under such conditions, «isonomy» confirms the existence of a *law*, which grants equality and freedom,<sup>160</sup> by allowing men to act and speak as *peers*.<sup>161</sup>

In the light of the opposition of the binomial freedom/*anarchy* and oppression/rule, Arendt distinguishes between liberation («to be free from oppression») and freedom as a political way of life (OR, 25):

The point of the matter is that while the former, the desire to be free from oppression, could have been fulfilled under monarchical – though not under tyrannical, let alone despotic – rulership, the latter necessitated the formation of a new, or rather rediscovered form of government; it demanded the constitution of a republic.

[...] *the acts and deeds which liberation demanded* from [the men of the eighteenth-century revolutions] *threw them into public business*, where, intentionally or more often unexpectedly, they began to constitute that space of appearances where freedom can unfold its charms and become a visible, tangible reality. [...] It was nothing less than the weight of the entire Christian tradition which prevented them from owning up to the rather obvious fact that they were *enjoying* what they were doing far beyond the call of duty. (OR, 25-26) [My italics]

Arendt’s notes for a tutorial on Nietzsche in 1966 draw our attention to the equation «freedom= creation» in the philosopher’s definition of the Over-man.<sup>162</sup> If we admit, in the light of the passages quoted above, that the faculty of promising is what allows Arendt to

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organized groups, they must submit to the *oppression* of the will, be this the individual will with which I force myself, or the “general will” of an organized group» (WF, 164) - the roots of which are in the Traditional (Platonic) substitution of making for acting as the philosophic solution to «the threefold frustration of action – the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of the process, and the anonymity of its authors» (HC, 220). In this sense, «[...] the faculty of the will and will-power in and by itself, unconnected with any other faculties, is an essentially nonpolitical and even anti-political capacity is perhaps nowhere else so manifest as in the absurdities to which Rousseau was driven [...]. *Politically, this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will*» (WF, 164). The rejection of the metaphysical fallacy of the Subject, in Camus’ MdS as well as in Arendt’s *Life of the Mind*, and of the teleocratic paradigm implicit in it, is grounded in both these authors on their personal appropriation of Nietzsche’s *aestheticism* - of what Mathieu Kessler defines as his anti-Platonic project of an “*esthétique élargie*” as a solution to the nihilistic, i.e. metaphysical, justification of action (see Mathieu Kessler, op.cit., 8- ff.).

<sup>160</sup> «Isonomy guaranteed *ισότης*, equality, but not because all men were born or created equal, but, on the contrary, because men were by nature [...] not equal, and needed an *artificial institution, the polis, which by virtue of its νόμος would make them equal.*» (OR, 23)

<sup>161</sup> «The Greek held that no one can be free except among his peers [...]» (OR, 23).

<sup>162</sup> The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress. Courses – University of Chicago, III – Tutorial on Nietzsche (1966), p. 11.

think freedom under the conditions of no-rule - that is, outside and against the vertical structure of dominion (master/slave relationship) – promising, as the act of exchanging vows (among peers), is *creative* (action).

Arendt draws on the first two aphorisms of Dissertation II of the *Genealogy* in order to define the faculty of promising. Now, in the opening lines of aphorism 2, the human animal is said to have been trained and *disciplined* into a *moral agent*, that is, into a creature able to make promises: the fruit of the disciplining process, performed on the pre-historic man through harsh and cruel measures of coercion and violence, is the «sovereign individual»:

If sovereignty is in the realm of action and human affairs what mastership is in the realm of making and the world of things, than their chief distinction is that the one can only be achieved by the many bound together, whereas the other is conceivable only in isolation. (HC, 245). [My italics]

In this passage Arendt's emphasis in the distinction between *sovereignty* and self-domination is not so much on whether the former entails a quantum violence in order to come about, but, rather, on the fact that the former is brought about only under the conditions of concerted action (plurality) *among peers* (equality).

What distinguishes the coercion, which turns the forgetful human animal into a sovereign individual answerable for his own future, from the Self-inflicted violence perpetrated (and suffered) in isolation by a commanding (free) Will, is its *origin*, namely that acting together of the many bound together. The limit (*rapport*) of appearing-together is, thus, “carried” into sovereignty – which, I suggest, should not be thought in terms of violence (vertical relation of dominion), but in terms of *discipline*, as tension.<sup>163</sup>

According to George Kateb,

Arendt has produced not a sufficient morality – one must go outside even authentic politics to keep it sane – but, instead, the outlines of a *code of conduct*. [...] It extracts from Nietzsche [...] some of his most generous teachings on how the free person gives his word and then keeps it, despite all difficulties; cancels debts owed him and thus in going beyond the law, acts mercifully; accords justice rather than acting out of revenge or resentment; is suspicious of, even dismayed by, the will to punish; and may be said *to love his enemies* by shrugging off the slights and hurts inflicted on him. [...] She takes from [Nietzsche] some invaluable insights into a code proper to free human beings as they undertake authentic political action. [...] Alas, one must repeat that even this great code cannot by itself suffice to resolve all the questions of morality as they have inevitably appeared historically. In sum, Arendt's view of the place of morality in authentic politics remains unsatisfactory.<sup>164</sup> [My italics]

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<sup>163</sup> «In so far as morality is more than the sum total of *mores* [...], it has, at least politically, no more to support itself than the good will to counter the enormous risks of action by readiness to forgive and to be forgiven, to make promises and to keep them. These *moral precepts* are the only ones that are not applied to action from the outside, from some supposedly higher faculty or from experiences outside action's own reach. They arise, on the contrary, *directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the faculty to start new and unending processes.*» (HC, 245-246). (My italics).

<sup>164</sup> George Kateb, “Political action: its nature and advantages”, in *Cambridge Companion to Arendt*, op. cit., p. 143.

I would argue, on the contrary, that Arendt's extraction of a code of conduct from Nietzsche's work – and, more precisely, from the philosopher's remarks on the noble men's conduct *inter pares* (GM, I, 10-11) – in the post-metaphysical horizon of modern and radical nihilism, not only is consistent with her rejection of the aesthetic constellation of political action of the Tradition, structured around the concept of fabrication (*poiesis*), to which the concepts of rule and self-domination belong. In this sense, Nietzsche's notion of *creation*, as an *alternative* to that of production, provides the elements for an *alternative* aesthetic model of political action *among peers*.

Moreover, I suggest that tragedy offers a key to the question of the internal morality of political action. In the GM Nietzsche describes the free men, living together under conditions of no-rule, as *good men*, strongly *held in check* by respect, custom, habit and gratitude, who behave towards their peers by showing resourcefulness in consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride and *friendship* (GM, I, 11). Ansell-Pearson situates creative (free) action *beyond* morality, in the separation between morality and politics, which in his view is the mark of Nietzsche and Arendt's "aestheticizing" political thought;<sup>165</sup> I would argue, instead, that the theatrical/performative paradigm of action is not devoid of a «substantive moral content».

In contrast, for both Arendt and Camus, the «moral factor» is inscribed *in* political action,<sup>166</sup> and it can be understood in the light of Nietzsche's equation of Freedom and Creation. In Camus' words, that there can be no freedom without *some kind* of law: not an external or transcendent law, but internal and *relative*, in the sense of the (Nietzschean) «aesthetic» morality, discussed in the previous Chapters.

From this perspective, I suggest that we read Arendt's *tragic* or "dramaturgical" model of political action – repeatedly pointed out by Arendtian scholars –<sup>167</sup> *in a moral sense*,<sup>168</sup> that is, as the adequate model to approach the "morality" of political action as *creative* action.

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<sup>165</sup> «Unlike a moralist like Rousseau, for example, who saw the kind of theatrical action they esteem as immoral and hypocritical, they maintain that the essence of politics is not the willing of what is morally 'right' and 'just'; rather, creative action must place itself beyond morality, and is not to be judged by its consequences or by the standards of conventional morality, but by the excellence contained in its performance. This is a highly aestheticist notion of action and freedom which is not without problems. The main problem is that, by conceiving politics as an aesthetic activity, in which actions are prized not for their moral ambitions and consequences, but simply in terms of their performative and glorious dimensions, action is deprived of substantive moral content » (K. Ansell-Pearson, op. cit., p. 44).

<sup>166</sup> See, also, L.J. Disch, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>167</sup> See for instance, Allen Speight, "Arendt and Hegel on the tragic nature of action", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 28, N. 5, pp. 523-536. And, also, Ramón Ramos Torre, "Homo tragicus", *Política y Sociedad*, 30 (1999), Madrid, pp. 213-240.

In GM, I, 10, Nietzsche defines respect as one of the traits of the free or “good” men, a sort of bridge to love: as opposed to the man of *ressentiment*, the free man *honours* his enemy as peer. In the *Twofold prehistory of good and evil in Human, All too Human* (I, 2, 45), Nietzsche would precise that the noble or free man does not regard the enemy as *evil*, for he can requite - « In Homer the Trojan and the Greek are both *good*. It is not he who does us harm but he who is contemptible who counts as bad»:

The concept of good and evil has a twofold prehistory: *firstly* in the soul of the ruling tribes and castes. He who has the power to requite, good with good, evil with evil, and also actually practices requital – is, that is to say, grateful and revengeful – is called good [...] As a good man one belongs to the “good”, a community which has a sense of belonging together because all the individuals in it are combined with one another through the capacity for requital. As a bad man one belongs to the “bad”, to a swarm of subject, powerless people who have no sense of belonging together [...] a mass like grains of sand. *Good and bad is for a long time the same thing as noble and base, master and slave.* [...] If, however, one of the good should do something unworthy of the good, one looks for excuses; one ascribes the guilt to a god, for example, by saying he struck the good man with madness and rendered him *blind*. – Then in the soul of the subjected, the powerless. Here every *other* man, whether he be noble or base, counts as inimical, ruthless, cruel, cunning, ready to take advantage. Evil is the characterizing expression for man, indeed for every living being one supposes to exist, *for a god*, for example. [...] *When this disposition exists in the individual a community can hardly arise*, at best the most rudimentary form of community: so that *wherever this conception of good and evil reigns the downfall of such individuals, of their tribes and races, is near*. – Our present morality has grown up in the soil of the *ruling tribes and castes*.<sup>169</sup>

What emerges in this aphorism is that, under the conditions of rule or master/slave relationship - which is, precisely, the soil out of which the present, i.e. Platonic-Christian, morality has grown – all men are evil *as all living being would appear to a God looking down* and taking pleasure at the vision of the earthly “spectacle” (Tertullian). The relation between morality of *ressentiment* and the god-like vision is all the more significant in the light of the identification of modern nihilism with the abstracting God-like (i.e. Cartesian) perspective.

Now, we could argue that, from the perspective of the free, that is, from the perspective of *political* action, which replaces rule by an-archy (equality or no-rule), thus breaking with the *nihilistic* god-like view, both antagonists - as the Trojans and the Greek in Homer’s poem - are *good*. More precisely, they are *good-and-evil*: political action is inscribed in the moral framework of *tragedy*.

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<sup>168</sup> As Martha Nussbaum points out, in tragedy we find not just the recognition of the *fact* of exposure, which characterises human condition and human action, but also of its *value* (in *The Fragility of Goodness*, op. cit., p. 20) – a value, resumed in the notion of excellence (Pindar), which touches upon the problem of the human ambition to rational self-sufficiency (Ivi, p. 18): «What both *mētis* and Platonic self-sufficiency omit [and I would argue, sheds light into the Arendtian hero’s excellence] is a picture of excellence that is shown to us in the traditional image of *aretē* as plant: a kind of human worth that is inseparable from vulnerability, and excellence that is in its nature *other-related and social*, a rationality whose value is not to attempt to seize, hold, trap and control, in whose values openness, receptivity, and wonder play an important part» (Ivi, p. 20).

<sup>169</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, volume I, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 37. My italics.

In 1952 a partial edition of Karl Jaspers' book *Von der Wahrheit* (1947) was published, through Arendt's mediation, in the United States, entitled *Tragedy Is Not Enough*. As the title suggests, the English translation principally concerned the section on the tragic (*Tragik*) from the voluminous work that the philosopher devoted to the question of truth.<sup>170</sup>

Jaspers' reflection on tragedy and the tragic – on the tragic conscience and the liberation from the tragic – sheds further light, in my view, on the (moral) meaning of Arendt's tragic model of action and on the relation between nihilism, history/ Historicism, and the political, which is the object of the present work.

Jaspers distinguishes tragedy and tragic conscience, the latter *making itself also manifest in novels*. What characterises the tragic (as opposed to the pre-tragic or mythic) conscience, in the author's view, is the breaking out of the cyclical time of the ever-recurring biological processes - life/death/rebirth in the endless metamorphosis of an immutable reality, the in-different and levelling *zoè* – into the time of history. What marks the tragic, in Jaspers' argument, is the “non-repeatability” disclosed in and by the unique moment of *decision*: it resides in the awareness of a kind of immortality *against* the eternal recurrence of natural becoming, one which is nevertheless immersed in a finite existence that disappears entirely with death. This terminology is strikingly resonant with Arendt's later reflection on historiography - especially Greek (Herodotus) -<sup>171</sup> in the 1956-58 essays and papers on the modern concept of History. I suggest that Arendt's notion of «immortalizing», as distinguished and opposed to the philosophic ideal of immortality, and defining her understanding of the political as the space of a peculiar “immanent” immortality, is mediated in her 1953-54 papers by a pre-philosophical tradition of story-telling and story-writing, which is deeply imbued with what Jaspers calls the *tragic*.<sup>172</sup>

It is significant that, in Jaspers' definition, the tragic neither resides in the natural eternal recurrence of sheer becoming, nor in men's suffering and mortality *per se*, but is brought about against the background of the latter in and by the action or *realisation* of an agent who is aware (*tragic conscience*),<sup>173</sup> which at the same time is seen as inserting man's

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<sup>170</sup> I will refer to the Italian translation of this section, K. Jaspers, *Del tragico*, traduzione di Itali Chiusano, 1959, Milano, Il Saggiatore. Some extracts have also been published in K. Jaspers, *Sulla verità*, a cura di Umberto Galimberti, Editrice La Scuola, Brescia, 1974.

<sup>171</sup> See her “The modern concept of history”, *The Review of Politics*, October 1958, vol. 20, n. 4, pp. 570-571.

<sup>172</sup> The relation between history and the tragic is clarified by Jaspers' tracing of the tragic in a non-unity (the conflict between truths) or incompleteness: thus defined, the tragic “rescues” the single phenomena from an annihilating *reductio ad unum*, «illuminating» the factual case (K. Jaspers, *Del tragico*, p. 70). In this sense, the tragic is not an absolute reality, but is inherently *superficial*, i.e. it remains on the surface, in the world of appearances («phenomena in time», Id.), or as Rustichelli says, it belongs to the sphere of the “aesthetic”.

<sup>173</sup> As for Camus (Mds, 196), what constitutes the tragic for Jaspers is the hero's awareness, which is inseparable from a fundamental sense of “exile”, i.e. the impossibility of feeling at home in the world.

«moral substance» in the tension between conflicting forces - <sup>174</sup> thus, displaying the hero's greatness - and freeing *from* the tragic. in the sense of man's capacity to move out and beyond the tragic conscience.<sup>175</sup>

For our purpose it is essential, in my view, to focus our attention on two points of Jaspers' analysis of the tragic. Firstly, *tragic action* inserts itself in the struggle or tension between two conflicting forces which *are both right* each from their own perspective, and which both entail a (part of) truth. The defeat of the tragic hero marks the failure of the tragic action (as *guilt*), which sprang luminously from freedom as *morally right* and necessary – the tragic actor acts in/out of *truth and justice*.<sup>176</sup> In the same way that a foundation of truth acts in each of the contending forces, truth itself is limited and, therefore, *relative*: the tragic conflict reveals a part of injustice in everything. The affinity with Camus' definition of *tragic* conflict in the 1955 Conference *Sur l'avenir de la tragédie* is striking:

[...] les forces qui s'affrontent dans la tragédie sont *également légitimes, également armées en raison*. Dans le mélodrame ou le drame, au contraire, l'une seulement est légitime. Autrement dit, la tragédie est ambiguë, le drame simpliste. Dans la première, *chaque force est en même temps bonne et mauvaise*. Dans le second, l'une est le bien, l'autre le mal (et c'est pourquoi de nos jours le théâtre de propagande n'est rien d'autre que la résurrection du mélodrame). Antigone a raison, ma Créon n'a pas tort. De même Prométhée est à la fois juste et injuste et Zeus qui l'opprime sans pitié est aussi dans son droit. [...] *la formule tragique par excellence* : « Tous sont justifiables, personne n'est juste ». C'est pourquoi le chœur des tragédies antiques donne principalement des conseils de prudence. Car il sait *que sur une certaine limite tout le monde a raison et que celui qui, par aveuglement ou passion, ignore cette limite, court à la catastrophe pour faire triompher un droit qu'il croit être le seul à avoir*. Le thème constant de la tragédie antique est ainsi la limite qu'il ne faut pas dépasser. De part et d'autre de cette limite se rencontrent des forces également légitimes dans un affrontement vibrant et ininterrompu.<sup>177</sup> (T, 1705)

It is, precisely, in this liminal situation that, according to Jaspers, the poet detects and celebrates the greatness and dignity of the tragic hero, who through action makes a *quid* visible that transcends individual existence, as a strength or a *principle*.<sup>178</sup> I suggest that it is here, in the active affirmation, which in the moment of catastrophe displays the «*personality*» of the hero - <sup>179</sup> or, in Arendtian terms, the “who” or the *daimon* of the actor - that the «moral factor» acquires its full meaning as the manifestation within and through action of an (energetic) *principle*, which transcends individual existence.<sup>180</sup> In the peculiar transcendence, brought about by tragic action, Jaspers traces the inevitable self-overcoming of (liberation

<sup>174</sup> K. Jaspers, *Del tragico*, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>175</sup> Ivi, pp. 54-55.

<sup>176</sup> Ivi, p. 31.

<sup>177</sup> My italics.

<sup>178</sup> Ivi, p. 32.

<sup>179</sup> Ivi, p. 50.

<sup>180</sup> See K. Jaspers, *Del tragico*, op. cit., p. 32. We find an analogous relation between (horizontal) transcendence, as the exceeding and obliteration of individual existence, and revolt as energetic principle of action in Camus' *Remarque sur la révolte*.

from) the tragic, implicit in the very definition of tragic conscience: it is significant that Jaspers would identify the overcoming of the tragic, and thus this transcendence, with true «humanity», in the sense of that solidarity and fraternity (communion of free men) formulated by Lessing in *Nathan the Wise*.<sup>181</sup>

The second point concerns the philosopher's distinction between tragic conscience (and its self-overcoming) and an absolute or pure tragic(ness), which in Jaspers' view is totally alien to the great tragedies, only emerging in certain works by Euripides and in 19<sup>th</sup> century drama. Jaspers uses the term «absolute or pure tragic(ness)» with a strong negative connotation as synonymous of despair, empty (moral) indifference and pure aesthetic contemplation.<sup>182</sup> He explicitly links *this absolute* form of tragic, which is only the perversion of the tragic vision,<sup>183</sup> to the pride of the «nihilistic man», rising out of tragic greatness into sheer «taste for absurdity», will to destruction, hatred of the world and of humanity coupled with a resentment against one's own despised existence.<sup>184</sup> *Absolute* or pure tragic(ness) is disclosed by the obliteration of tragic conflict, when the tragic is deprived of its complementary pole, thus remaining *isolated*: the echoes of Camus' definition of absolute nihilism, enacted by Caligula's negation of contradictors and contradictions, are apparent here. Now, according to Jaspers, the «realization» of the tragic conscience in action, which overcomes the tragic impasse bringing men together in mutual recognition, is *the opposite of despair*. In the light of these considerations we can fully grasp the meaning of his remarks on OR in his letter to Arendt on May, the 16<sup>th</sup> 1963, where Jaspers highly praises

the greatness to which you [Arendt] give expression [in OR] [which] is a source of encouragement. Ultimately, *the whole is your vision of a tragedy that does not leave you despairing: an element of the tragedy of humankind*. [...] The literature that you cite [...] comes to your aid, introduces elements that you incorporate into the simplicity and greatness of this vision. I want to continue reading and not skip a single page. *It is easy for me because I think I already have a firm footing in the central idea*. [...] And *this* book you have dedicated to the two of us! I'm very grateful.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> K. Jaspers, *Del tragico*, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>182</sup> Ivi, p. 12.

<sup>183</sup> Ivi, p. 68.

<sup>184</sup> Ivi, p. 68.

<sup>185</sup> Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence. 1926-1969*, op. cit., p. 505. In the same letter Jaspers remarks on to Arendt's wonderful «insight into the nature of political freedom and your courage in loving the dignity of man in this arena. [...] I sense the influence of Heinrich [Blücher]'s character and life experience, and in reading this book [OR] I think of both of you.» (Ivi, p. 504). We know from an exchange of letters between Jaspers, Arendt and Blücher (1950 -1953), that in December 1949-January 1950 Blücher had read and deeply appreciated *Wahrheit*, to which he devoted a letter (29<sup>th</sup> of January 1950), and included as obligatory reading for his students in 1953 (Letter to Jaspers', 21<sup>st</sup> December 1953, Arendt-Jaspers, *Correspondence*, op. cit., p. 235). It is significant that as an attentive reader of *Wahrheit*, Blücher should indicate Camus' HR as essential for the critique of nihilism in 1952. In his 1950 letter (see *Within Four Walls*, op. cit., pp. 120-122), Blücher also refers to Jaspers' «interpretation of *Nathan the Wise* [which] will give you [Arendt] much pleasure. That is the point at which one truly discovers the real meaning in Lessing.» (Ivi, p. 122). In 1959 Arendt devoted to Lessing, tragedy



It is to the structure of tragedy, as outlined above, that Arendt resorts when touching upon the problem of good and evil, as the crucial preoccupation of men asserting or re-asserting *human dignity without any resort to institutionalised religion* (OR, 76). According to Arendt, «the depth of this problem could hardly be sounded by those who mistook for *goodness* the natural, “innate repugnance of man to see his fellow creature suffer” (Rousseau), and who thought that selfishness and hypocrisy were the epitome of *wickedness*» (OR, 76).

Rousseau’s identification of *goodness* with compassion, as the «most natural human reaction to the suffering of others» (OR, 74), which, in Arendt’s words, came to play a crucial role in «the minds and hearts of those who *prepared* and of those who acted *in the course* of the French Revolution» (Id.),<sup>186</sup> is posed by the author at the core of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

By tracing the source of political power and the foundation of the body politic in man’s natural rights, that is, «upon his rights insofar as he is nothing but a *natural being* [...] his right to the necessities of life» (OR, 105), the French Declaration assumed the latter not as «some pre-political rights that no government and no political power has the right to touch and to violate, but as the very content as well as the ultimate end of government and power» (Id.). The absolute goodness of the “innocent” natural man is, thus, introduced in the political realm, with devastating effects.

Arendt draws on Melville and Dostoyevsky as the two writers who showed «openly and *concretely*, though of course *poetically and metaphorically*, upon what *tragic and self-defeating enterprise* the men of the French Revolution had embarked almost without knowing it» (OR, 77), by introducing absolute goodness, through the axiom of man’s natural goodness and the related passion of pity, into the course of human affairs.

As she points out, the actions of the men of the French Revolution, from Rousseau to Robespierre, brought to the fore the question, which the political actors would not even imagine (Id.), of the dangers inherent in goodness beyond virtue or *absolute* goodness.

Melville’s *Billy Budd* tells the meaning of the story which eventually resulted from their actions, by imagining a “natural man” endowed with a barbarian innocence and goodness, conceived on the model of a “return”: the return of Jesus among men, namely of the love of goodness as the inspiring principle of all (political) actions (OR, 76-78).

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and humanity her essay *On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing* when she was awarded the Hambourg Lessing Prize.

<sup>186</sup> Properly speaking, we could argue that those who *prepared* and those who acted *in the course* of the Revolution are not the same as those who *began* it, whom Arendt identifies with those who were primarily concerned with freedom and human dignity.

What brings about the *tragic* in *Billy Budd* is not, as Arendt points out with Jaspers and Camus, the confrontation between *absolute good* - Billy Budd's goodness beyond virtue - and *absolute evil* - Claggart's wickedness beyond vice, or «depravity according to nature» which «partakes nothing of the sordid and the sensual» (OR, 78), but the crime that turns the “angel of God” Billy Budd into a wrongdoer. The violent act with which Billy Budd eliminates nature's depravity (OR, 78), is, precisely, what ex-poses the hero as *good-and-evil*, justifiable and unjust. Tragedy begins, according to Arendt, when

“virtue” in the person of Captain Vere is introduced into the conflict between absolute good and absolute evil. [...] Virtue – which perhaps is less than goodness but still alone is capable “of embodiment in lasting institutions” – must prevail at the expense of the good man as well; absolute, natural innocence, because it can only act violently, is “at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind”, so that virtue finally interferes not to prevent the crime of evil but to punish the violence of absolute innocence. Claggart was “struck by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!” The tragedy is that the law is made for men, and neither for angels nor for devils. Laws and all “lasting institutions” break down not only under the onslaught of elemental evil but under the impact of absolute innocence as well. The law, moving between crime and virtue, cannot recognize what is beyond it, and while it has no punishment to mete out to elemental evil, it cannot but punish elemental goodness even if the virtuous man, Captain Vere, recognizes that only the violence of this goodness is adequate to the depraved power of evil. The absolute – and to Melville and absolute was incorporated in the Rights of Man – spells doom to everyone when it is introduced into the political realm. (OR, 78-79)

Not only Arendt identifies virtue with the (Socratic) «it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong», but she opposes the former to compassion as the anti-political annihilation of that *pathos* of a distance, which Nietzsche would see as distinctive of the free men's conduct *inter pares*, and which is made visible in the free men's acting *and speaking* together, using argumentative reason and persuasion in order *to fend off temptations* (OR, 82).

Precisely because Billy Budd's natural goodness, as an *absolute* goodness without virtue, is beyond temptation and beyond the worldly support of the *given word* (Id.), the hero «would not have been able to refute the accusations of the “elemental evil” that confronted him; he could only raise his hand and strike the accuser dead» (Id.):

Melville reversed the primordial legendary crime, Cain slew Abel, which has played such an enormous role in our tradition of political thought, but this reversal was not arbitrary; it followed from the reversal the men of the French Revolution had made of the proposition of original sin, which they had replaced by proposition of original goodness. [...] How was it possible that after “the rectification of the Old World's hereditary wrongs...straightway the Revolution itself became a wrongdoer, one more oppressive than the Kings?” [Melville] found the answer [...] in that goodness is strong, stronger perhaps even than wickedness, but that it shares with “elemental evil” the elementary violence inherent in all strength and detrimental to all forms of *political organization*. (OR, 82-83)<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> «It is as though [Melville] said: Let us suppose that from now on the foundation stone of our political life will be that Abel slew Cain. Don't you see that from this deed of violence the same chain of wrongdoing will follow, only that now mankind will not even have the consolation that the violence it must call crime is indeed characteristic of evil men only?» (OR, 83)

In 1952 Camus wrote an introduction to the work of Herman Melville in *Les écrivains célèbres*, where he addressed the writer as «l'Homère du Pacifique» (T, 1909). But his Ulysses «ne retrouve jamais Ithaque. La patrie où Melville aborde aux portes de la mort et qu'il immortalise dans *Billy Budd* est une *île déserte*. En laissant condamner à mort le jeune matelot, figure de beauté et d'innocence, qu'il aime tendrement, le commandant Vere soumet son cœur à la loi. Et dans le même temps, par ce récit sans faille qu'on peut placer au rang des tragédies antiques, le vieux Melville nous annonce qu'il accepte pour la première fois, que soient tuées l'innocence et la beauté afin qu'un ordre soit maintenu et que le navire des hommes continue d'avancer vers un horizon inconnu.» (Id.).

The «ordre terrible» evoked here calls upon Camus' definition of tragedy in the 1955 Conference: «il y a tragédie – he writes – lorsque l'homme par orgueil (ou même par bêtise comme Ajax) entre en contestation avec l'ordre divin, personnifié dans un dieu ou incarné dans la société. Et la tragédie sera d'autant plus grande que cette révolte sera plus légitime et cet ordre plus nécessaire» (T, 1706): «[...] tragédie idéale, et particulièrement la grecque, est d'abord tension puisqu'elle est l'opposition, dans une immobilité forcenée, de deux puissances, couvertes chacune des doubles masques du bien et du mal (Id.).<sup>188</sup>

I propose to re-contextualise the reference to tragedy, in the work of Camus and Arendt, as responding to the authors' need to rethink freedom, and thus, political action within (and beyond) the horizon of nihilism, and outside the reconciliatory narratives of the contemporary Philosophies of History.

As Camus points out in HR, the tragic hero in ancient Greek literature, from Achilles to Oedipus and to Antigone, revolts in the name of a tradition, an order, which remains uncontested (HR, 439). The question of modern tragedy, on the contrary, is inseparable from the problem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century crisis of civilization (T, 1703), or what Arendt would address as loss of authority, and is intimately related to the question of the «irrepresentable plurality»<sup>189</sup> of (political) freedom – as Camus would say in an interview in 1949: «La liberté est une angoisse collective et ne peut être exprimée que d'une manière ample, sans limitations. L'unique forme que je connaisse pour exprimer l'angoisse de l'homme en quête de liberté collective est la tragédie.»<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> My italics.

<sup>189</sup> See Esposito, R. (a cura di), *La pluralità irrepresentabile. Il pensiero politico di Hannah Arendt*, QuattroVenti, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, 1987.

<sup>190</sup> Interview to the “Serviço Nacional de Teatro” in Rio de Janeiro in July 1949. (F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., p. 91).

It is significant that in the *Carnets* in October 1945, Camus would resort to the literary form of tragedy to resume the political *enjeu* of the Resistance beyond the moral vacuum of Nietzscheanism among his generation, and the break internal to the French Left faced with the totalitarian outcomes of the *Socialisme réel* in the immediate aftermath of the War:

Si le monde est *tragique*, si nous vivons dans le déchirement ce n'est pas tant à cause des tyrans. Toi et moi savons qu'il y a une liberté, une justice, une joie profonde et partagée, une communauté enfin dans la lutte contre les tyrans. Lorsque le mal domine il n'y a pas de problème. Quand l'adversaire a tort, ceux qui combattent sont libres et pacifiés. Mais le déchirement vient parce que des hommes qui veulent également le bien de l'homme le veulent pour tout de suite ou le fixent à trois générations, et que cela suffit à les séparer pour jamais. Quand les adversaires ont également raison, alors nous entrons dans la tragédie. Et au bout de la tragédie, tu sais ce qu'il y a ?

C. – Oui, il y a la mort. [...] (CII, 148-149) [My italics]

United by a *taste* for justice and freedom, which provided the men of the Resistance with an “aesthetic”, that is, relative and unfounded, justification for action against Hitlerism/the Plague, beyond the nihilistic tabula rasa of higher (transcendent) values that the latter embodied, the 1945 *révoltés* had known the « *joie profonde et partagée* » of acting together for freedom, a community founded by the struggle against oppression.

But for Camus, as for Arendt, it is not the opposition against (absolute) evil, which makes a tragedy: we should not omit to underscore that *L'État de siege*, his play about freedom in an age divided between victims and executioners (T, 1732), was conceived in the structure of the Spanish *Autos sacramentales*, which he defines in 1955 as «un spectacle où la vérité unique est solennellement proclamée» (T, 1706), that is, properly speaking, not a tragedy but a *mystère* or a *moralité*.

The tragic knot lies in the «*Ils ont tous raison*» (CII, 147), which opposes the professional revolutionaries, who defer freedom to the end of History, in order to realize (absolute) justice, to the artists as «*témoins de la liberté*» (CII, 148), who defend friendship as the first (political) virtue, against a murderous policy which destroys men's capacity for «*estime*» (Id.), and the living *inter-esse*. It is not without reason that Camus would choose this opposition as the tragic core of the 1949 play *Les Justes*, which dramatizes the figure of the «*meurtriers délicats*» among the 1905 Russian revolutionaries.

The exceptional position of this play in the conjunction between Camus' reflection on the political developed in HR and his theory and practice of theatre - as emerges in the 1955

conference on *L'Avenir de la tragédie* – touches, precisely, upon the much debated question of the literary status of *Les Justes* as tragedy.<sup>191</sup>

In the preface to the American edition of his plays, Camus explicitly declared his attempt at obtaining «une tension dramatique par des moyens classiques, c'est-à-dire l'affrontement de personnages égaux en force et en raison» (T, 1733).<sup>192</sup> The tragic model can be traced in the con-frontation between the characters of Stepan and Kalyaev (T, 323), who both choose *out of a profound sense of justice* to fight against injustice, historically embodied by slavery and oppression of the Russian people under Tzarist despotism (T, 338). In this sense, they are both right, «[t]ous sont justifiables, personne n'est juste» (T, 1705) – the 1905 Russian revolutionaries chose terror to force their way into history and rea-lize justice and *bonheur*, in this sense their action partakes of injustice. It is not in the sense of the 1955 *Avenir de la tragédie* that, I would argue, the «meurtriers délicats» – as Camus defines Kalyaev and Dora, to distinguish them from the nihilist Stepan – are, therefore, *justes*, but rather *at the limit* in the sense of the 1949 presentation of Simone Weil's *L'Enracinement*, where the author refers to the capacity of «penser juste, [...] voir juste» (E, 1700) as the only possible “return” to the tradition, in the sense of the finite and relative perspective of *la chair* and of human dignity, as the act of *striking roots*.

The *delicate murders*, as Camus calls the 1905 Russian terrorists in HR, live to its extreme *dénouement* the contradiction between «penser juste» and «penser mal»,<sup>193</sup> under the conditions of loss of the world. I suggest that *Les Justes* may be read not so much in the light of Arendt's *Human Condition*,<sup>194</sup> but, rather, in that of the 1959 *On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing*: it is possible to trace a correspondence between Jaspers' remarks on tragedy and the tragic, Camus' pages on «Les meurtriers délicats» in HR and Arendt's essay on Lessing.

The central question of the play has been correctly underlined in the relation between love, revolutionary thought and the political: the notion of *fraternity* recurs from the opening lines of *Les Justes* (T, 309) as that «brotherly attachment to other human beings which springs from hatred of the world in which men are treated “inhumanly”» (MDT, 12-13). As Arendt writes, brotherhood among persecuted groups is the manifestation of *humanity* in dark times,

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<sup>191</sup> According to M. Weyembergh, «Camus se trompe en voulant faire des *Justes* une tragédie. La pièce constitue selon moi la commémoration du moment fondateur de la révolte [...]» (Maurice Weyembergh, «Théâtre et politique chez Albert Camus», in *Camus et le théâtre*, op. cit., p. 46).

<sup>192</sup> My italics.

<sup>193</sup> In the 1949 conference *Le temps des meurtriers* Camus explicitly pointed out that «on est un meurtrier parce qu'on pense mal» (F. Bartfled, op. cit., p. 53).

<sup>194</sup> See M. Weyembergh, «Théâtre et politique chez Albert Camus», op. cit., p. 46.

namely, among people who «under the pressure of persecution [...] have moved so closely together that the interspace which we have called the world (and which of course existed between them before the persecution, keeping them at a distance from one another) has simply disappeared» (MDT, 13).<sup>195</sup>

Now, according to Arendt, loss of the world entails the «atrophy of all the organs with which we respond to it - starting with the common sense [...] and going on to the sense of beauty, or taste, with which we love the world» (Id.): Kalyaev is a poet, who entered revolution in the name of his love of life, of beauty and of *le bonheur* (T, 322). His *personality* and greatness, in accordance with Jaspers, are made visible in the realization of an action, which he feels necessary («Ils ont fait de nous des assassins», T, 323) and inexcusable (HR, 575): by compensating the death of a man with his own life, he aims at «*recréer une communauté de justice et d'amour*» (HR, 572). It is sacrificing his own life that Kalyaev, and Dora after him, bring about a «bonne et [...] *juste* action [...] celle qui reconnaît ces limites» (T, 1733) and remember the value of human life and dignity exposed in the act of revolt. In this peculiar transcendence («Elle est le reflet, historique cette fois, du “nous sommes”», HR, 578) «l'esprit de révolte rencontre, pour la dernière fois dans notre histoire, l'esprit de *compassion*» (HR, 573): the resonance with Lessing's reflection on fraternity and compassion allows us to trace in his «It suffices to be a *man*» (MDT, 12) - against the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century nihilistic attempts of de-personalisation - the tragic knot, played out in the ineliminable tension between *la chair* and the idea (justice), in *Les Justes*.<sup>196</sup>

Thus, in Arendtian terms, the play re-enacts through the suffering of the hero the *origin* of the political, identified with the horizontal transcendence of the revolted “Nous sommes”, as the recognition of a communion among human beings *qua men*.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, the (tragic) failure of Kalyaev's terrorist act is by no means a political *commencement*: the emergence of a humanity in dark times – which justifies Camus' explicit admiration for his heroes, Kalyaev and Dora (T, 1733) – remains, properly speaking, a *pre-political* condition

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<sup>195</sup> T, 321. See, also, HR, 574.

<sup>196</sup> The reading of *Les Justes* alongside Jaspers' pages on tragedy confirms the role played by classical drama, and by Greek tragedy in particular, in Camus' text. Tragedy «[met] en jeu le destin humain tout entier dans ce qu'il a de simple et de grand» (T, 1733). The greatness and courage of the hero, made visible in the realization of his destiny through suffering and death, brings about the overcoming of the tragic conscience, as a constant questioning, in the affirmation of an *order*, a right, and the *love of men* (see Jaspers, *Del tragico*, op. cit., 69). «Même dans la destruction, il y a un ordre, il y a des limites» (T, 338). This is, precisely, the (anti-foundational and post-metaphysical) «sacred» disclosed by the death of these «delicate murders» (cf. M. Weyemberg, «Théâtre et politique chez Albert Camus», op. cit., pp. 54-55).

<sup>197</sup> See MDT, 20.

for the possibility of that «new beginning», which is the political acting and speaking in concert.

What is, nevertheless, essential to point out for our purpose is that, for both Camus and Arendt, if tragedy culminates in death and punishment, «*ce qui est puni, ce n'est pas le crime lui-même, mais l'aveuglement du héros qui a nié l'équilibre et la tension*» (T, 1707).<sup>198</sup>

The emphasis on the coincidence of the hero's blindness with his *speechlessness*, at the centre of Arendt's analysis of *Billy Budd* and of Camus' tragedy *Le Malentendu*,<sup>199</sup> brings into focus the relation between language and solidarity, which both authors situate at the centre of their political reflection.

#### 4.2. TRAGEDY AND LANGUAGE.

In *On Revolution* Arendt draws on Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor in order to elucidate her understanding of solidarity as the alternative to pity, that «perversion of compassion», which «taken as the spring of *virtue*, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself» (OR, 85).

She points out how «*sentiments, as distinguished from passion and principle, are boundless*» (Id.): by introducing the passion of compassion into the openness of the market place, Robespierre is no longer capable to direct his passion toward specific suffering and to focus on *particular persons*,<sup>200</sup> thus, his compassion turns into the boundless emotion of pity.<sup>201</sup>

Since the days of the French Revolution, it has been the boundlessness of their sentiments that made revolutionaries so curiously insensitive to reality in general and to the reality of persons in particular, whom

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<sup>198</sup>As de Aquila points out, quoting Martha Nussbaum, the tragic fault is “a wrong action committed without any direct physical compulsion and in full knowledge of its nature, by a person [or a community] whose ethical commitments would otherwise dispose him [or them] to reject the act. The constraint comes from the presence of circumstances that prevent the adequate fulfillment of two valid claims”. But this, in Socrates' belief (Euthyphro), is repugnant to reason: it is “absurd” (R. de Aquila, op. cit., p. 16-18).

<sup>199</sup>In the preface to the 1958 American edition of his four tragedies, Camus described *Le Malentendu* as an attempt to create a modern tragedy, by expressing the historic and geographical claustrophobia of France under the Nazi occupation (1941): «Un fils qui veut de faire reconnaître sans avoir à dire son nom et qui est tué par sa mère et sa sœur, à la suite d'un malentendu, tel est le sujet de cette pièce. Sans doute, c'est une vue très pessimiste de la condition humaine. Mais cela peut se concilier avec un optimisme relatif en ce qui concerne l'homme. Car enfin, cela revient à dire que tout aurait été autrement si le fils avait dit : « C'est moi, voici mon nom. » Cela revient à dire que *dans un monde injuste ou indifférent, l'homme peut se sauver lui-même, et sauver les autres, par l'usage de la sincérité la plus simple et le mot le plus juste.* »(T, 1731). (My italics)

<sup>200</sup>Arendt, like Camus, emphasizes the idealism of the Grand Inquisitor, whose pity had *depersonalized* the suffering men, dissolving their singularity into the abstract totality of a suffering mankind (OR, 80-81).

<sup>201</sup>In similar terms Camus speaks of the «*pitié froide*» of the Grand Inquisitor (E, 470) in KR

they felt no compunctions in sacrificing to their “principles”, or to the course of history, or to the cause of revolution as such. While this *emotion-laden insensitivity to reality* was quite conspicuous already in Rousseau’s own behaviour, his fantastic *irresponsibility and unreliability*, it became a political factor of importance only with Robespierre, who introduced it into the factional strife of the Revolution. (OR, 85-86) [My italics]

The principle of absolute purity on which, according to Camus, the French Revolution attempted to build history is visible in its concept of virtue: «Qu’est-ce que la vertu, en effet? Pour le philosophe bourgeois d’alors, c’est la conformité à la nature et, en politique, la conformité à la loi qui exprime la volonté générale» (HR, 531-532). But then, nature «telle qu’on la rencontre chez Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, [...] aussi est un *principe abstrait*» (HR, 532 note\*), and Saint-Just’s pure law is the unrealistic and de-realising refusal to take into account the frailty of human institutions, pointed out by Montesquieu, as arising from the boundlessness of human action, which Arendt traces in the human condition of natality.<sup>202</sup>

As opposed to the passion of compassion and to the sentiment of pity, solidarity operates, in Arendtian terms, as a *principle* of action (OR, 84), brought forth in the *pathos* of distance, which constitutes the *inter-esse* of the «aesthetic» community of peers:

[...] it is out of solidarity that [men] establish deliberately and, as it were, *dispassionately* a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited. The common interest would then be the “*grandeur* of man”, or “the *honor* of the human race”, or the *dignity of man*. [...] solidarity, though it may be aroused by suffering, is not guided by it, and it comprehends the strong and the rich, no less than the weak and the poor; compared with the sentiment of pity, it may appear cold and abstract, for it remains committed to “ideas” – to greatness, or honor, or dignity – rather than to any “love” of men. [...] But *pity, in contrast to solidarity, does not look upon both fortune and misfortune, the strong and the weak, with an equal eye*; without the presence of misfortune, pity could not exist, and it therefore has just as much vested interest in the existence of the unhappy as thirst for power has a vested interest in the existence of the weak. (OR, 84)

What emerges from these passages is that the «equal eye», which Arendt relates to solidarity, as the condition for the recognition of human greatness, honour and dignity, is not identified with a levelling or simplifying view, in the sense - metaphorically formulated by Camus in terms of «drame ou mélodrame» (T, 1705) - of a Manichean dichotomization and

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<sup>202</sup> «La vertu absolue est impossible, la république du pardon amène par une logique implacable la république des guillotines. Montesquieu avait déjà dénoncé cette logique comme l’une des causes de la décadence des sociétés, disant que l’abus de pouvoir est plus grand lorsque les lois ne le prévoient pas. La loi pure de Saint-Just n’avait pas tenu compte de *cette vérité, vieille comme l’histoire elle-même, que la loi, dans son essence, est vouée à être violée*» (HR, 533). This passage resonates with Arendt’s analysis of action in HC: «Action [...] no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries. Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself.» (HC, 190-191).



reduction of the complexity of human affairs to the moral(izing) opposition Good *versus* Evil.<sup>203</sup>

As Martha Nussbaum points out in *The Fragility of Goodness*, tragedy traces «the history of a complex pattern of deliberation» and «lays open to view the complexity, the indeterminacy, the sheer difficulty of actual human deliberation»:<sup>204</sup> the refusal of the simplifying and abstract «alibi of the (Evil) Enemy»,<sup>205</sup> thus, finds in the tragic paradigm of action an adequate model to rethink morality *within* the political, in the sense of a politics of *dignity*.

Now, according to Benhabib, in OR Arendt does not distinguish between the morally good and the morally right, and excluding the “purity of heart” from politics, she separates morality from politics.<sup>206</sup> I argue, on the contrary, that the tragic confrontation between Billy Budd, as the illustration of absolute moral good (the “purity of heart” of the French Revolutionaries), and Captain Vere, as the embodiment of virtue (thus, distinguished from the moral good, and rather identified with the morally right) illustrates, precisely, the complexity of human deliberation as inseparable from political action - free action among peers thus being intrinsically *moral*, in the sense brought forth by tragedy.

Moreover, I suggest that the tragic paradigm provides an alternative model to (re)think human action and freedom outside and against the fabrication paradigm, which is operative in the politics of the Western Tradition, as a politics of *achievement*.

The “unmasking” of the aesthetic paradigm of the political, consistently with the effort to think through the problem of modern and radical nihilism at the core of the Western tradition of political thought, lays open a fundamental *alternative*, formulated by Arendt in the opening pages of her chapter of Action in HC – namely, between the (aesthetic) political constellation of *achievement* and the (aesthetic) political constellation of *dignity* (HC, 181).<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> In the 1957 *Conference on L'Artiste et son temps*, Camus explicitly uses the term to address a categorizing and absolute thought, as opposed to the artist's finite thought of the finite, identified (Arendtianly) with the capacity to com-prehend: «S'il [l'artiste] jugeait absolument, il partagerait sans nuances la réalité entre le bien et le mal, il ferait du mélodrame. Le but de l'art, au contraire, n'est pas de légiférer ou de régner, il est d'abord de comprendre.» (E, 1091).

<sup>204</sup> «Tragic storytelling serves not to settle questions but to unsettle them, and to inspire spontaneous critical thinking in its audience.» (L. Disch, op. cit., pp. 111-112).

<sup>205</sup> Paolo Flores d'Arcais, “Hannah Arendt e il totalitarismo nelle democrazie”, *Micro-Mega*, Almanacco di Filosofia, 5/2003, p. 135.

<sup>206</sup> «The moral good, virtue, concerns indeed those dispositions, traits of character, emotions, and intentions that lead to virtuous conduct. The morally right concerns our public actions and interactions that affect, influence, and reflect upon the moral dignity and worth of the other as a public being», Seyla Benhabib, “Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt's Thought”, *Political Theory*, Vol. 16, N. 1, February 1988, p. 46.

<sup>207</sup> Two constellations, which are related to the twofold etymology of the word “action” as *archein* (“to begin”, “to lead”, finally “to rule”) and *pratein* (“to pass through”, “to achieve”, “to finish”) (HC, 189).

Human dignity is identified by Arendt with the “who” disclosed in deed *and words* -<sup>208</sup> «[...] all those whom the war had failed to *make known* and had robbed thereby, not of their achievement, but of their human dignity» (HC, 181), the «unique and distinct identity of the agent» (HC, 180) being lost wherever speech is reduced to “mere talk” or propaganda, and where the disclosure is limited to the deed, that is, to *achievement*.

Significantly, Arendt describes the *who*, which constitutes man’s dignity and uniqueness, as opposed to *what* (he made) , by recurring to the term «hero» in the Homeric acceptance of «*free man* who participated in the Trojan enterprise and about whom a story could be told» (HC, 186): the Nietzschean reminiscence immediately calls upon the condition of (*primus*) *inter pares* (HC,189), thus pointing to the original interdependence of the actor as *beginner* (as opposed to the actor as *ruler*) on others for action (plurality) (HC, 189-190),<sup>209</sup> and to his courage «without which action and speech and therefore, according to the Greeks, freedom, would not be possible at all» (risk) (HC, 186-7).

It is the emphasis on the revelatory quality of action *and speech* in disclosing «the *agent and speaker*» (the “who”) (HC, 187), that offers an adequate account of the primacy accorded by Arendt to theatre or drama (as play-acting), as the «political art par excellence» (HC, 188), over all the other various «forms of reification in art works which *glorify a deed or an accomplishment*» (HC, 187), bringing forth «the specific *content* as well as the general meaning of action and speech» (Id.).

Thus, imitation or *mimēsis*, as a kind of repetition (HC, 187), is an aesthetic or artistic “reification” or representation in the specific sense not of a fixation, or re-presentation as accomplishment, but of a constantly renewed pres-ence in the re-enacting of the living flux of *acting and speaking* of the actor(s) on stage.<sup>210</sup> But, as Arendt points out,

*the imitative element lies not only in the art of the actor, but, as Aristotle rightly claims, in the making and writing of the play, at least to the extent that the drama comes fully to life only when it is enacted in the theatre. Only the actors and speakers who re-enact the story’s plot can convey the full meaning, not so much of the story itself, but of the “heroes” who reveal themselves in it. (HC, 187)*

I suggest that we look for the meaning of this pres-ence in Arendt’s appropriation of Greek tragedy. In HC she draws on tragedy to confirm her distinction between *imitation*

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<sup>208</sup> «This disclosure of “who” in contradiction to “what” somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. [...] the “who”, which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person itself, like the *daimōn* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters» (HC, 179-180).

<sup>209</sup> See HR, 700.

<sup>210</sup> For this interpretation I draw on Adriana Cavarero’s distinction between *presenza* and *rappresentanza* in her analysis of theatrical metaphor (in *Micro-Mega*, 1996, op. cit., p. 147-148).

(*mimesis*) and story(-telling), in the sense, precisely, that «the story's direct as well as universal meaning», i.e. the *content* of action and speech, is revealed by the chorus, «which *does not imitate* and whose comments are *pure poetry*» (HC, 187), «whereas the intangible identities», i.e. the “*who*” that constitutes human *dignity*, «of the agents in the story, since they escape all generalization and therefore all reification, can be conveyed only through an imitation in their acting» (HC, 187-188).

This distinction is all the more interesting if we consider that Arendt conceives the dramatist's *playwriting* as part and parcel of imitation, not of poetry (or story-telling):<sup>211</sup> imitation is *playwriting and* the actor's art. This distinction, I suggest, allows us to rethink the tension, pointed out by critics, «between an associative, communal, democratic, deliberative Arendt who admires the episodic revivals of political freedom, and an Arendt “captured” by the Greek model of greatness, heroism, agonism, and aestheticized politics».<sup>212</sup>

What I propose is to approach the question of tragedy not from the viewpoint of the Pythagorean spectator, or of the Chorus, but of the “hero”, that is, from the perspective of *mimesis*. The focus on imitation, while reconsidering tragedy from the (Nietzschean) perspective of creation (as opposed to that of the spectator), situates Arendt's recourse to this literary genre within her attempt to think a post-metaphysical “aesthetic” paradigm of the political outside and beyond the fabrication model of the Western tradition of political thought, which both Arendt and Camus trace in the concept of “achievement”.

It is not without reason that in HC tragedy is invoked to support Arendt's analysis of the “hero” as (tragic) actor and sufferer, exposed, that is, in the «already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, *conflicting wills and intentions*» (HC, 184), as opposed to the “author” or maker of (his) story, which is at the core of the Platonic-Christian tradition of political thought and of the modern philosophies of History.<sup>213</sup>

The latter misconstrue the story resulting from action as a «fictional story, where indeed an author pulls the strings and *directs the play*. The fictional story reveals a *maker*

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<sup>211</sup> I do not agree with Françoise Collin, who groups storytelling and novel writing together with tragedy as *mimesis* of the hero's deed (see F. Collin, «N'être. Événement et représentation», *Politique et pensée. Colloque Hannah Arendt*; Petite Bibliothèque Payot, Paris, 1996, p. 149.

<sup>212</sup> J. Peter Euben, «Arendt's Hellenism», CCA, 161.

<sup>213</sup> «It is noteworthy that Plato, who had no inkling of the modern concept of history, should have been the first to invent the metaphor of an actor behind the scenes who, behind the backs of acting men, pulls the strings and is responsible for the story. The Platonic god is but the symbol for the fact that real stories, in distinction from those we invent, have no author; as such, he is the true forerunner of Providence, the “invisible hand”, Nature, the “world spirit”, class interest, and the like, with which Christian and modern philosophers of history tried to solve the perplexing problem that although history owes its existence to men, it is still obviously not “made” by them.[...] The invisible actor behind the scenes is an invention arising from a mental perplexity but corresponding to no real experience.» (HC, 185).

[...]. The real story in which we are engaged as long as we live has no visible or invisible maker because it is not made. The only “somebody” it reveals is its “hero”. [...] *Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero – his biography [...]» (HC, 186).

I suggest that tragedy and the metaphoric constellation of theatre are invoked as an *alternative* way of dealing with the past, and specifically, of taking into account beginning/foundation, outside and against the tradition,<sup>214</sup> whose break-down in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been systematically removed by (Neo)-Conservative and Liberal theorists through an accurate work of “restoration”.<sup>215</sup> «[L]iberalism and conservatism present themselves as the political philosophies which correspond to the much more general and comprehensive *philosophy of history* of the nineteenth century» (WA, 101), and, as such, are founded on the metaphysical fallacy (the *fiction*) of the author/maker that lies at the core of the (Platonic) fabrication paradigm of the political.<sup>216</sup>

It is significant that, in Arendt’s understanding, human action abolishes the sequence of temporality, «as though the actors were thrown out the *temporal order* and its continuity» (OR, 207), shattering all the attempts of causal thinking (the «reliable chain of cause and effect», Id.) to *immunize* reality against the (un-orderly) unpredictable and unexpected. The Arendtian “hero” is, thus - like Camus’ *lucid* man exposed to the dis-ordering disclosure of the absurd - *outside* the linear time of History, of what Walter Benjamin addresses as «the idea of messianic time».<sup>217</sup>

In his reconstruction of a «politics of tragedy» in Arendt’s work, Pirro fails, in my view, to read the author’s scattered references to tragedy in the specific context of her critique of the Historicist/nihilist paradigm of the political.<sup>218</sup> The inter- and intra-textual analysis

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<sup>214</sup> «[...] the undeniable loss of tradition in the modern world does not entail a loss of the past, for tradition and past are not the same, as the believers in tradition on the one side and the believers in progress on the other would have us believe [...]» (WA, 94).

<sup>215</sup> «Both liberalism and conservatism [...] are primarily concerned with restoration, with restoring either freedom or authority, or the relationship between both, to its traditional position. It is in this sense that they form two sides of the same coin, just as their progress-or-doom ideologies correspond to the two possible directions of the historical process as such; if one assumes, as both do, that there is such a thing as a historical process with a definable direction and a predictable end, it obviously can land us only in paradise or in hell.» (BPF, 101).

<sup>216</sup> Our reading is confirmed by Allen Speight, in his article on “Arendt and Hegel on the tragic nature of action”, according to whom «the dramaturgical character of [Arendt’s] view of action has an important tie to Hegel’s philosophy of agency, also, and in some of its features is perhaps even more strongly modelled on – or *in contention with* – Hegel than with Heidegger.» (in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 28 (5), 2002, p. 524. My italics.

<sup>217</sup> W. Benjamin, “*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy”, in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 1913-1926, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1996, p. 56.

<sup>218</sup> By relating tragedy to judgment, and pointing to «politics as a kind of tragic theatre», Pirro maintains that «Arendt’s tragic framework serves the aim of promoting political freedom by evoking the life affirming rewards

attempted in these pages, on the contrary, brings forth tragedy as the most adequate form to think the peculiar “time outside (historical) time” disclosed by human action.

It is significant that in his 1916 essay on «*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy», Benjamin situated in the actions of great individuals the crucial point in which «(historical time passes over into tragic time): «In art, historical *greatness* can assume the form only of tragedy».<sup>219</sup> It is in the notion of *greatness* that tragedy and the aesthetic/performative model of action acquire their full meaning outside and against the teleological and reifying logic of achievement (HC, 206) of the modern philosophy of History.

The opposition between a fabrication model (politics of *achievement*) and a performative model (politics of *dignity*) is reflected in the opposition between the organic metaphor and the theatrical metaphor in the interpretation of revolutions. As Arendt points out in OR:

It is quite characteristic that, of the two similes currently used for descriptions and interpretations of revolutions, the organic metaphor has become dear to the historians as well as to the theorists of revolution – Marx, indeed, was very fond of the “birth-pangs of revolutions” – while the men who enacted the Revolution preferred to draw their images from the *language of the theatre*. The profound meaningfulness inherent in the many political metaphors derived from the theatre is perhaps best illustrated by the history of the Latin word *persona*. In its original meaning, it signified the mask ancient actors used to wear in a play. [...] The mask as such obviously had two functions: it had to hide, or rather to replace, the actor’s own face and countenance, but in a way that would *make it possible for the voice to sound through*. (OR, 102)

The relation between *persona* and the idea that the political actor, as “beginner” of revolutions, is expected by the law to play a part on the public scene «with the provision [...] that *his own voice would be able to sound through*» (Id.),<sup>220</sup> brings to our attention a co-implication of the theatrical metaphor (*persona*), the tragic figure of the “hero” and speech.

This co-implication is confirmed, and acquires a specific meaning, in OR where the systematic negation of *persona*, and the reduction of the legal persona to a deceitful mask

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available to those who exercise freedom» (Robert Pirro, *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Tragedy*, Northern Illinois UP, 2001, p. 87). But such reading would simply contradict Arendt’s concept of judgment: as Simona Forti points out, «une teoria del giudizio politico che servisse ad orientare l’azione intenzionandola a partire da un’idea, riconnettendo così i due termini, ripercorrebbe quegli stessi binary che la Arendt aveva voluto abbandonare. Se, insomma, l’azione attraverso il giudizio attualizzasse un pensiero, seguirebbe una china, eseguirebbe un programma: la facoltà del giudizio farebbe di nuovo dell’agire la “conseguenza applicata”, la semplice esecuzione di un sapere [...] si ripresenterebbe, sotto sembianze diverse, quella stessa logica mezzi-fini in opposizione alla quale il pensiero arendtiano trova significato.» (in S. Forti, «Hannah Arendt e la facoltà di giudicare: considerazioni su un’eredità contesa», art. cit., p. 145).

<sup>219</sup> W. Benjamin, “*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy”, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>220</sup> «[...] it was in this twofold understanding of a mask through which a voice sounds that the word *persona* became a metaphor and was carried from the language of the theatre into legal terminology. The distinction between a private individual in Rome and a Roman citizen was that the latter had a *persona*, a legal personality [...]; it was as though the law had affixed to him the part he was expected to play on the public scene, with the provision, however, that his own voice would be able to sound through.» (OR, 102).

(hypocrisy),<sup>221</sup> brought about (in two opposite directions) by the French Revolution under the Reign of Terror and by totalitarian terror, is seen as coinciding with *speechlessness*, that is, with the impossibility of communication.<sup>222</sup> Now, «[s]peechless action would no longer be action because there *would no longer be an actor*, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words. The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the *word* [...]»<sup>223</sup> (HC, 178).

The emphasis on language or speech, implicit in Arendt's recourse to the theatrical metaphor and in her claim that imitation (*mimesis*) is playwriting *and* the actor's art, is further confirmed by Camus through his own experience as actor, director and dramatist. As he declared in an interview,<sup>224</sup> «le théâtre s'embrasse de peu de choses: de la toile pour le décor, et, pour la pièce, des caractères et un *langage*» (T, 1747-8).<sup>225</sup>

It is significant that Camus would devote a chapter to theatre and the (absurd) actor in *MdS*, as the illustration of his *tragic* finite thought of the finite (see Chapter 1).<sup>226</sup> The word

<sup>221</sup> «Linguistically, the Greek ὑποκριτής, in its original meaning as well as in its late metaphorical usage, signified the actor himself, not the mask, the πρόσωπον, he wore. In contrast, the *persona*, in its original theatrical sense, was the mask affixed to the actor's face by the exigencies of the play [...]. The point of this distinction and the appositeness of the metaphor lie in that the unmasking of the "person", the deprivation of legal personality, would leave behind the "natural" human being, while the unmasking of the hypocrite would leave nothing behind the mask, because the hypocrite is the actor himself insofar as he wears no mask.» (OR, 103).

<sup>222</sup> According to Arendt, the men of the French Revolution «had no conception of the *persona*, and no respect for the legal personality which is given and guaranteed by the body politic.» (OR, 104). By liberating the «natural man in all men», that is, liberating the man's natural goodness and absolute innocence, through the Rights of Man (Id.), the French Revolution, «by the unending hunt for hypocrites and through the passion for unmasking society», eventually tore away «the mask of the *persona* as well, so that the Reign of Terror [...] spelled the exact opposite of true liberation and *true equality*» (Id.). The product of the reduction of politics to nature operated by the French Revolution through the Declaration of the Rights of Man is illustrated by Melville's Billy Budd, the absolutely good and innocent man who, by lack of words, is forced to act violently by his very incapability to persuade. We could argue that the natural and absolutely innocent man, depicted by Melville, finds its historical incarnation in the figure of the refugee, significantly described by Arendt in terms of «absolute innocence» in *Collective Responsibility* (RJ, 150).

<sup>223</sup> My italics.

<sup>224</sup> Emission de Renée Saurel, « Douze auteurs en quête de personnages », non datée (probablement 1945-46).

<sup>225</sup> As he would point out in the Preface to the American edition of his plays, the question of language is pivotal in the dramatist creation: «Faire parler le langage de la tragédie à des personnages contemporains, c'était au contraire mon propos. Rien de plus difficile à vrai dire puisqu'il faut trouver un langage assez naturel pour être parlé par des contemporains, et assez insolite pour rejoindre le *ton tragique*» (T, 1731). It is (also) in this sense that Camus defined *Le Malentendu* «une tentative pour créer une *tragédie moderne*» (Id.).

<sup>226</sup> In *MdS* the actor embodies the contradictoriness of the absurd condition, expressing through his body the tragic conflict between the human demand for unity and permanence - «cette vaine tentative, cet entêtement sans portée» to attain everything, to live everything (*MdS*, 161) - and human finitude: «C'est là que l'acteur se contredit: le même et pourtant si divers, tant d'âmes résumées par un seul corps» (Id.). In this sense the actor embodies the formula  $A \neq A$ , by which Raymond Gay-Crosier defines the structure of irony as «affirmative negation». Now, «l'ironie est la conscience (au double sens d'une mise en garde et d'une mise en évidence) de [...] *la mise en paroles*», which takes place under the sign of openness and provisionality of discourse (R. Gay-Crosier, «L'ironie comme acte référentiel. La négation affirmative - étude fonctionnelle», in *Albert Camus: paradigmes de l'ironie - révolte et négation affirmative*, op. cit., p. 12). Moreover, «si la référence ironique nie le référent ( $A \neq A$ ) parce qu'elle refuse de le «re-présenter», elle «présente» néanmoins son refus comme affirmation d'un discours et d'un sens pluriel ( $A = A$ ) qu'elle livre à l'interprétation libre de l'interlocuteur ou du

«théâtral [...] recouvre toute une esthétique et toute une morale»<sup>227</sup> (MdS, 160), which is the finite *morale de la quantité*, founded on the absurd awareness of the ultimate unfoundedness of a «univers qui sacrifie tout à l'apparence, et n'est fait que pour l'œil » (MdS, 161).

For Camus, as well as for Arendt, the actor's performing art proves «[à] quel point le paraître fait l'être» (MdS, 159) - «le corps est roi» (MdS, 160):

La convention du théâtre, c'est que le cœur ne s'exprime et ne se fait comprendre que par les gestes et dans le corps – ou par la voix qui est autant de l'âme que du corps. La loi de cet art veut que tout soit grossi et se traduise en *chair*. (MdS, 160)<sup>228</sup>

Now, the perspective of *la chair*, which is the mark of Camus' finite thought of the finite, shatters the teleological perspective, that reduces gesture to a means for an end, bringing about the moral self-containedness of the actor's performance.

In an interview in 1958 Camus defined theatre as the highest of literary genres (T, 1726), «une *histoire de grandeur racontée par des corps*» (T, 1718): it is the actor, once more, who represents the living *principe*, the constantly-repeated-beginning, of the unity of re-enacting and playwriting through *speech*.<sup>229</sup>

I suggest that the “spectacularity” of Eichmann's trial is opposed to the theatrical disclosure of the tragic hero, which in Arendt's report is exemplified by the trial of Shalom Schwartzbard in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*<sup>230</sup> and can be imputed to the incapability of the Nazi functionary to *become* a “hero”, that is, to reveal his person (*whoness*) through words.

Eichmann is not a (tragic) villain, in the sense of a Iago or a Macbeth, or in the sense of the calculating wickedness of a Richard III.<sup>231</sup> What distinguishes him from the traditional villains of modern tragedies is his incapacity to remember – memory being, together with the

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lecteur. Ainsi l'ironie nie la possibilité d'une réification du référent pour d'autant mieux en affirmer sa textualisation » (Ivi, p. 17). Not only Camus situated his whole work under the sign of irony, but his predilection for this type of structure is confirmed by the notes in the *Carnets* (May 1936), where the author introduces the theme of *dédoublement* to describe the capacity of the intellectual to assume two (or more) different and opposite viewpoints at the same time, and to critically examine each position through the exercise of doubt, keeping himself in a constant and positive tension between the various perspectives. We read in his notebooks in November 1942: «Pascal: l'erreur vient de l'exclusion» (CII, 58). In this sense, the actor, who embodies the tragic thought of the MdS, is the illustration of the critical two-sided thought which is the condition for the «enlarged mentality».

<sup>227</sup> My italics.

<sup>228</sup> Camus situates the absurd actor in the post-metaphysical and nihilistic horizon under Nietzsche's word: «Ce qui importe, [...] ce n'est pas la vie éternelle, c'est l'éternelle vivacité» (MdS, 162).

<sup>229</sup> The personal combination of play-writing with a reflection on the role of the actor emerges in Camus' words in an interview in 1958: «[...] l'Acteur [...] est le principal, le principe, l'âme incarnée du spectacle. Voir un acteur entrer dans son rôle, l'habiter, l'entendre *parler de la voix même qu'on avait entendue dans le silence et la solitude*, c'est la plus grande joie qu'on puisse rencontrer dans ce métier » (T, 1718).

<sup>230</sup> BE, 265.

<sup>231</sup> In “*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy” Walter Benjamin significantly distinguishes classical tragedy from Shakespearian tragedy, pointing out that while the latter deals with the tragedy of fate, Shakespeare deals «with the *tragic hero, the tragic action*.» (in W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, op. cit., p. 56).

faculty of promise, the distinctive feature of the sovereign individual defined above –, which is inseparable from his fundamental incapability to think *from the standpoint of somebody else*. And thoughtlessness is related, since the beginning of the report, to the functionary's incapability to speak and communicate, that is, to formulate other than *clichés* or “empty words” – the *words and presence of others would not touch him*.<sup>232</sup>

As Arendt points out in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, the «trouble with the Nazi criminals was precisely that they renounced voluntarily all personal qualities, as if nobody were left to be either punished nor forgiven» (RJ, 111). According to the tragic model outlined above, punishment of the *tragic* crime always concerns the *who* of the agent, rather than the *what* (he has done): by refusing to think by themselves what they were doing, and by refusing to remember what they did, the Nazi criminals failed to constitute themselves into *somebodies*, to disclose their *whoness*: «By stubbornly remaining nobodies they prove themselves unfit for intercourse with others who, good, bad, or indifferent, are at the very least *persons*» (RJ, 112).

If we assume that theatricality and tragedy are related in Arendt's work to the author's critique of the Western tradition of political thought, and to her performative “aestheticism”, and that for Arendt, as well as for Camus, there can be no anachronistic *return to the tradition*,<sup>233</sup> I suggest that theatricality and tragedy operate toward, and must be understood in the light of, an anti-conservative and anti-Historicist effort, common to both these authors, to recover the *arché* of the political - the beginning/principle or, to use the Weilian expression, taken over by Arendt, the *root* of human action and common dignity.<sup>234</sup>

And this origin or root, I argue, is not *something* to be re-presented or glorified as a deed (a “*what*”) on stage, but is ex-posed in action and speech as the unfounded foundation of “law” as limit, which is brought about in the tragic «*penser juste*». <sup>235</sup>

In *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy* what distinguishes Eichmann from the villain, «as somebody who is in despair and whose despair sheds a certain nobility about him» (RJ,

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<sup>232</sup> BE, 49.

<sup>233</sup> «conservatives [...] cling to tradition and the past as to fetishes with which to ward off the future, without understanding that the very emergence of revolution on the political scene as event or as threat had demonstrated in actual fact that this tradition had lost its anchorage, its beginning and principle, and was cut adrift» (OR, 161).

<sup>234</sup> For Arendt, as well as for Camus, to «regain what former times called the *dignity or the honor of man*» - that is not of mankind, a notion especially dear to modern Philosophies of History, but of «being human» in its plural singularity (RJ, 48) – is to eliminate «the pernicious word “obedience” from our vocabulary of moral and political thought» (Id.).

<sup>235</sup> «[...] comme l'écrit Paul Ricœur commentant la lecture d'*Antigone* par Nussbaum : « Un appel à bien délibérer (*euboulia*) traverse obstinément la pièce : comme si « *penser juste* » était la réplique cherchée à « souffrir le terrible » (*pathein to deinon*) », Jacques Taminioux, *La fille de Thrace et le penseur professionnel. Arendt et Heidegger*, op. cit., p. 136.



94-95) - illustrated in Shakespeare's tragedies, or in the character of the Emperor in Camus' *Caligula* – is remembrance, as man's capacity to "return" to the past event, to think back to and through it. While the villain «has to face himself again and [his] curse is that he cannot forget» (RJ, 95),<sup>236</sup> the greatest evildoers «don't remember because they have never given thought to the matter, and, *without remembrance, nothing can hold them back*»<sup>237</sup> (Id.):

The danger, [...] not only for myself, whose speech, having forfeited the highest actualization of the human capacity for speech, will therefore become meaningless, but also for others who are forced to live with a possibly highly intelligent and still entirely thoughtless creature, is very great. If I refuse to remember, I am actually ready to do anything – just as my courage would be absolutely reckless if pain, for instance, were an experience immediately forgotten. (RJ, 94).

The stabilizing force of remembrance is inseparable from an imaginative thinking of past events, which according to Arendt moves «in the dimension of depth, *striking roots*» (RJ, 95) and takes place in the form of *(re)telling* the past in a story.<sup>238</sup>

Striking roots, thus, entails a capacity of dealing with the past through *words*: the greatest or *banal* evil is not radical, according to her, precisely because it has no roots, «and because it *has no roots it has no limitations*, it can go to unthinkable extremes and sweep over the whole world» (RJ, 95).

Arendt explicitly argues that it is the process of thought, actualizing «the specifically human *difference of speech*» (Id.), that constitutes the *person* – the "who" constantly revealed again and anew, as opposed to the "what" (someone's gifts, qualities, intelligence) - the true "subject" of punishment, as exposed in the tragic plot, and of the (Christian) notion of pardon.<sup>239</sup>

We could conclude, therefore, with Arendt, that the political concern of tragedy «is not whether the act of striking somebody unjustly or of being struck unjustly is more disgraceful» (RJ, 93) - the tragic wisdom of the blind Oedipus is resumed, precisely, in the «*Tout est bien*» (T, 1709) as a *savoir de non savoir* - «The concern – for both Camus and Arendt - is exclusively with having *a world* in which such acts do not occur» (RJ, 93).

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<sup>236</sup> The same is beautifully expressed in the words of *Caligula* (T, 59).

<sup>237</sup> My italics.

<sup>238</sup> Remembrance, like thinking, is a speech process, which takes place through the *reconsidering* of the past event in the form of «*telling* it to myself as a kind of *story*, preparing it in this way for its subsequent communication to others» (RJ, 93-94). Arendt emphasizes once more the plural dimension inherent in the Socratic-Platonic conception of the process of thinking as silent dialogue, as two-in-one (RJ, 96). In *Réflexions sur la guillotine* Camus would point out, in terms that echo Arendt's, the abstracting and murderous relation between meaninglessness and loss of imaginative thought: «*Quand l'imagination dort, les mots se vident de leur sens: un peuple sourd enregistre distraitemment la condamnation d'un homme.*» (E, 1023).

<sup>239</sup> «*In granting pardon, it is the person and not the crime that is forgiven*» (RJ, 95), as in tragedy it is the blindness of the hero and not the crime that is punished: «*in rootless evil there is no person left whom one could ever forgive*» (Id.)

Now, «[t]hinking and remembering [...] is the human way of striking roots, of *taking one's place in the world into which we all arrive as strangers*» (RJ, 100): by pointing to the «redundancy to speak of a *moral* personality» (Id.), Arendt clearly suggests that a morality stems from, and resides in the «*root-stinking* process of thinking» and remembering as that, which brings forth *limits* to individual conduct - not imposed on him from the outside, but *self-set* limits (RJ, 101). It is significant that she would identify, through Socrates, the loss of this capacity with a loss of *creativity* (Id.).

This notion of self-set limits and morality may be read in the light of her analysis of promise, which in OR she traces at the foundation of the Roman *societas*, as an exchange of words through which human beings endowed with memory, thus with a certain reliability and accountability for the future, throw «islands of certainty» and stability in an ocean of uncertainty without recourse to transcendent sanction or absolute (OR, 169, 175).

Montesquieu's concept of law as *rapport*, reviving the strictly Roman sense of the term,<sup>240</sup> thus provides an understanding of *limit* which is alternative to the traditional one - implicit in the concept of law as boundary imposed from outside and above - <sup>241</sup> law/*rapport* evokes a mutual con-tact *inter pares*, allowing to think action under conditions of equality: «no more than “rules” or *règles* which determine the government of the world and *without which a world would not exist at all*» (OR, 189).<sup>242</sup>

It is significant that in a note in January 1952 Arendt would identify injustice as a violating act, which destructs the *inter-esse* that constitutes the world, and she would invoke *Dike* – in terms that strikingly recall Camus' Nemesis in HR - in order to restore the shattered balance,<sup>243</sup> the tension brought forth exclusively in/as *rapport* (limit).

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<sup>240</sup> Both the Greek νόμος, with its stress on the “artificial” man-made nature of the boundaries that drew the *limits* of the political space,<sup>240</sup> and the Roman *lex*, originally meaning «“intimate connection” or relationship, namely something which connects two things or two partners whom external circumstances have brought together» (OR, 188), according to Arendt needed no transcendent source of authority, that is, were not conceived as being imposed from above (OR, 187).

<sup>241</sup> Law as “commandment”, of Jewish origin, which according to Arendt entails authority (OR, 189), and is inscribed in the ruler/ruled vertical relationship.

<sup>242</sup> This citation is all the more relevant if we consider that, in Arendt's view, this concept of law emanates from Montesquieu's concern with action rather than with “the nature of government” (HC, 190, n. 17), and this is, precisely, the perspective disclosed by imitation (*mimesis*). Moreover, the affinity of this concept of law with the finite perspective of the tragic thought, that emerges in Camus' political writings, from MdS to HR, is particularly striking in the following passage taken from OR: «Neither religious nor natural laws, therefore, constitute for Montesquieu a “higher law”, strictly speaking; they are no more than relations which exist and preserve different realms of being. And since, for Montesquieu as for the Romans, a law is merely what relates two things and therefore is relative by definition, he needed no absolute source of authority and could describe the “spirit of the laws” without ever posing the troublesome question of their absolute validity.» (OR, 189).

<sup>243</sup> From her *Denktagebuch 1950 bis 1973*, translated by Luca Savarino in *Micro-Mega. Almanacco di Filosofia*, 5/2003, p. 34.

It is the focus on the world, or on that «irreplaceable in-between» men (MDT, 4), not as *object* of possession and preservation in its orderly fixation, but as relational “space”, that, in my view, makes tragedy most suitable to think a fictitious (“aesthetic”) space of equality freed from the logic of retaliation, which Nietzsche, from his *incomplete*-nihilistic emphasis on the will to power, had conceived as the distinctive feature of the free men, but which remains anchored to the perspective of *what*-ness.

Tragic punishment, on the contrary, replaces the (political) perspective of the *what* by that of *who* as always already including plurality – a plurality that the crime (injustice) destroys together with the *person* (the “who”).

It is in this sense that, in *On Humanity in Dark Times*, Arendt draws the attention to Lessing’s reflection on tragic pleasure, the source of which he traces in all passions (as «even the most unpleasant, are as passions pleasant” because “they make us...more conscious of our existence , they make us feel more real”», MDT, 6) as affects «in which *we are affected by ourselves just as in the world we are ordinarily affected by other people*» (Id.).<sup>244</sup>

According to Arendt, Lessing was «concerned with the *effect upon the spectator*, who as it were represents the world, or rather, that *worldly space which has come into being between the artist or writer and his fellow men as a world common to them*»<sup>245</sup> (MDT, 7).

Arendt «deliberately mention[s] tragedy because it more than any other literary forms represents a *process of recognition*» (MDT, 20) through repetition, not in the sense of an obsessive and stabilizing reiteration/reification of the *what* (the deed), but rather, in the sense of a de-stabilizing re-suffering (*passion passive*) by memory or recollection of «the network of individual acts» (MDT, 20), which carries the relationality (plurality) or liminality of the *who* into the event or significant whole – in Camus’ terms, the artist or writer’s «unity» - in the form of an «ever-recurrent narration» (MDT, 21).

The link between the perspective of the “hero” (actor) and that of the tragic choir (as spectator) - or, to say in Arendtian terms, between acting and thinking - is, thus, brought about by the artist’s word, which *creates* the world (*inter-esse*) of men.

Artistic creation, in the nihilistic horizon of what Nancy describes as the « interrupted myth », <sup>246</sup> retains the *theoria* (vision) of ancient Greek tragedy, identified with a «pensée aux deux visages, [qui] laisse presque toujours courir en contre-chant, derrière ses mélodies les plus désespérées, la parole éternelle d’Œdipe qui, aveugle et misérable, reconnaîtra que tout

<sup>244</sup> «[...] for Lessing the essence of poetry was action [...]» (MDT, 6). My italics.

<sup>245</sup> My italics.

<sup>246</sup> In J.-L. Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée*, op. cit.

est bien. *Le oui s'équilibre au non*» (HR, 439). Tragedy, thus, exposes that philosophy of limit, brought about by revolt, which closes Camus' political reflection in HR.

It is, precisely, from the perspective of a politics of dignity - as a politics of the *who*, opposed to the politics of possession and achievement (of the *what*) - that I suggest we reconsider Arendt's emphasis on the political role of the storyteller and the poet, as well as Camus' affirmation of the political role of the artist, as stemming from a common concern for the world, conceived by both authors as existing in/as *relation*, against all ideological simplification of reality to a *total* and totalising sum of abstract entities (Man, the individual and its -ism, the objective Enemy).

In the concluding chapter of OR, Arendt would oppose to the post-war Liberal and Conservative political theories, in their incapability to understand the political and moral breakdown of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to rethink the political outside the categories of a tradition shattered by the totalitarian experience, thus, incapable to abandon the «beaten paths of ideologies» (OR, 225), to the two-sided view of the poets, as guardians of the «lost treasure» of revolutions (OR, 284).

The latter is «rooted» in the two-faced (ambiguous) character of the political *arché* as founding /beginning, coupling the complete arbitrariness of human action with men's need to throw some «islands» of stability, to «cut out» horizons of durability to save their words and deeds from their mortality or futility (OR, 222).

We could argue that, for both Arendt and Camus, the murderous drives of the (bio-political) contempt of sheer existence, which the two authors designate in terms of *absolute* or *radical* nihilism, and both recognize at the core of traditional politics, as a politics of *what*-ness or achievement, can be overcome only from a perspective (*theoria*) that does not reduce existence to abstract and fictitious object or material (*silhouettes*), in the hands of the political Architect,<sup>247</sup> but which takes into account «the *datum* of the human condition» as ex-istence, that is, from the «a radical phenomenology of the fundamental materiality of human beings who are incarnated singularities, existing *here and now*» -<sup>248</sup> which is the artist's *aesthetic* or tragic perspective of *la chair*, disclosed by Camus in the MdS.

Replacing sheer existence, as mere abstraction, by the *relational* or *liminal* being-in-the-world (the revolted «Nous sommes»), *tragic* thought discloses the ever-repeated possibility of a politics of dignity (of the *who*), against all «pseudo-scientific nonsense -

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<sup>247</sup>The fabrication/ architectural model of political (revolutionary) action, from Robespierre (OR, 210) to Hitler (cf. Miguel Abensour, «Architecture et régimes totalitaires»).

<sup>248</sup> A. Cavarero, «Politicizing Theory», *Political Theory*, August 2002, p. 528.

particularly in the social and psychological sciences» (OR, 222) – as Camus would write in 1955: «[...] au-delà du bien-être, vers l'honneur de vivre» (E, 1748).<sup>249</sup>

This, I would argue, is precisely the pivot of Camus' series of articles devoted to the Algerian crisis in *Express* between 1955 and 56. As he would write to Pierre Lebar in 1952, ever since his 1939 report on *La misère de la Kabylie* for the daily paper *Alger-Républicain*, «je n'ai jamais mené réellement d'autre lutte politique» than the one against colonialism.<sup>250</sup>

In an article, «La table ronde» (18<sup>th</sup> October 1955), Camus clearly opposes two concepts of the political: the first one, embodied by the politics of *déshonneur* and exploitation (CAC6, 59), perpetuates the impasse of terrorism and colonial repression through a series of «marchandages impuissants, destinés à maintenir au pouvoir des hommes qui ont apparemment choisi *le métier de politicien pour n'avoir pas de politique*»<sup>251</sup> (CAC6, 70); the other is, precisely, a politics of recognition of «personnes», founded on the radical phenomenology, which we have addressed as *aesthetic* thought,<sup>252</sup> a thought of *la chair* opposed to all simplifying ideology of the abstract «invisible enemy».<sup>253</sup>

The plea in favour of a round table, that would gather all the parties involved - «les représentants du gouvernement, ceux de la colonisation, et ceux des mouvements arabes (U.D.M.A., Ulémas, et les deux tendances du M.T.L.D.)» (CAC6, 45-6) - as a concrete solution to the «épreuve de force généralisée» (CAC6, 44),<sup>254</sup> must be understood, I suggest, in the light of the writer's effort to replace the totalitarian principle of collective responsibility (CAC6, 44) by that of *personal* responsibility, at the core of the political.

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<sup>249</sup> My italics.

<sup>250</sup> *Cahiers Albert Camus 6. Albert Camus éditorialiste à L'Express (mai 1955-février 1956, Paris, Gallimard, 1987 (from now on CAC6), p. 13.*

<sup>251</sup> My italics.

<sup>252</sup> In « Le vrai débat » (*Express*, 4 June 1955) Camus insists, in terms that are very close to Arendt's thoughts on Revolution, that «l'idée de révolution ne retrouvera sa grandeur et son efficacité qu'à partir du moment où elle renoncera au cynisme et à l'opportunisme dont elle a fait sa loi au XX siècle, [...] [et] mettra au centre de son élan la passion irréductible de la liberté» (CAC6, 34). Camus traces the «chances d'une rénovation créatrice» (Id.) in (direct) continuity with the thought that animated the political engagement in the Resistance, thus, pointing to the common effort of the French Left to resign conformism by gathering «ses forces, sa volonté de lucidité et son exigence de justice autour de l'idée de liberté, alors peut-être renaîtra la solidarité qui fut la nôtre et que, pour ma part, je n'ai jamais oubliée ni humiliée.» (CCA6, 35). Between 1954 and 55 Camus took a clear position in the favour of Pierre Mendès France. As P. Smets points out, the «Front républicain lui paraissait être une force susceptible de revitaliser la gauche libérale, d'imposer des réformes sociales et d'infléchir la mentalité des Français vers plus de fraternité en Algérie [...]» (CAC6, 21).

<sup>253</sup> «Le monde aujourd'hui est celui de *l'ennemi invisible*; le combat y est abstrait et c'est pourquoi rien ne l'éclaire et ne l'adoucit. Voir l'autre, et l'entendre, peut donner un sens au combat, et peut-être aussi le rendre vain» (CAC6, 70).

<sup>254</sup> «[...] l'action terroriste et la répression sont, en Algérie, deux forces purement négatives, vouées toutes deux à la destruction pure, sans autre avenir qu'un redoublement de fureur et de folie» (CAC6, 43).

The principles of equality and difference are, thus, at the root of Camus' concept of a Franco-Arab federation, conceived as an association of persons (CAC6, 48) – a person being defined by the twofold capacity to express herself and to make herself heard (CAC6, 49).

For Camus, as well as for Arendt, the table becomes the metaphor of the “political space”, as opposed to the State, where men mutually recognize each other as persons, by being *seen* and *heard*. Colonialism, he argues, brought about the de-personalisation of the Arab people by reducing the latter to utter despair, silence and wretchedness,<sup>255</sup> which equally deprived France of its interlocutor (CAC6, 49).

Camus repeatedly addresses the endless sequence of terrorist attacks and repressive measures as «tragedy». The tragic dimension of the spiral of violence is visible in the article «Les raisons de l'adversaire» (*Express*, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1955):

Quand l'opprimé prend les armes au nom de la justice, il *fait un pas sur la terre de l'injustice*. Mais il peut avancer plus ou moins et, si telle est la loi de l'histoire, c'est en tout cas la loi de l'esprit que, sans cesser de réclamer justice pour l'opprimé, il ne puisse l'approuver dans son injustice, au-delà de certaines limites. Les massacres des civils, outre qu'ils relancent les forces d'oppression, dépassent justement ces limites, et il est urgent que tous le reconnaissent clairement. (CAC6, 80) [My italics]

The emphasis on dialogue among persons,<sup>256</sup> which traces freedom in the recovery of equality in difference, is at the core of Camus' proposal of a federal solution of the Algerian crisis, disclosed and made possible only by «le courage de reconnaître les raisons de l'adversaire qui présentement le combat à mort» (CAC6, 81-82), that is, by the capacity to *understand* and take into account (*comprehension through imagination*) the perspective of the other –that is, through a *tragic theoria*.

The artist, «whose business is to *find and make the words we live by*» (OR, 284), precisely by virtue of being “creator” and guardian of men's world (*inter-esse*) through words, is the bearer of this *tragic theoria*:

What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but *this incessant talk about them*, which in its turn remains futile unless *certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it*. (OR, 222) [My italics]

The stress on the political relevance of *words* beyond nihilism, is what emerges in Arendt's essay on Benjamin - «*naming* through quoting became for him the only possible and appropriate way of dealing with the past *without the aid of tradition*»<sup>257</sup> (MDT, 204).

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<sup>255</sup> «Le peuple arable, déraciné de son passé, sans perspective d'avenir, immobilisé dans un perpétuel présent n'a plus d'autre choix que le silence et la violence» (CAC6, 48).

<sup>256</sup> In the articles of *Express* Camus uses the term “person” to address Algeria as a people (CAC6, 51).

<sup>257</sup> My italics.

Benjamin's critical method is seen as replacing the perspective of the *what* with a perspective of the *who*:<sup>258</sup> now, it is significant that this «man in dark times» would situate the *tragic* «in the laws governing the spoken word between human beings. [...] Tragedy is not just confined exclusively to the realm of dramatic speech; it is the only form proper to *human dialogue*. That is to say, no tragedy exists outside human dialogue, and the only form in which human dialogue can appear is that of tragedy. [...] In tragedy, speech and the tragic arise together, simultaneously, on the same spot. [...] It is the pure word itself that has an immediate tragic force».<sup>259</sup>

Arendt and Camus both highly praised the poet René Char: Arendt quotes his aphorisms in the concluding pages of OR to «testify to the involuntary self-disclosure, to *the joys of appearing in word and deed*» (OR, 285),<sup>260</sup> experienced by the author during the Resistance; while Camus traces in his work the renaissance of that «dure et rare tradition » of *tragic* wisdom, which runs from Empedocles to Nietzsche (E, 1163-64).

In Char's «condensation furieuse de l'image, un épaississement de la lumière qui l'éloigne de cette transparence abstraite que nous ne réclamons le plus souvent que parce qu'elle n'exige rien de nous» (E, 1164), according to Camus, «[l']homme et l'artiste, [...] marchent du même pas, [...] trempés hier dans la lutte contre le totalitarisme hitlérien, aujourd'hui dans la *dénonciation des nihilismes contraires et complices qui déchirent le monde*».<sup>261</sup> It is in his work that the co-implication of the tragic and beauty acquires its full (im)political meaning.<sup>262</sup> «En plein combat, voici un poète qui a osé nous crier : « Dans nos ténèbres, il n'y a pas une place pour la beauté. *Toute la place est pour la beauté* ». Dès cet instant, face au nihilisme de son temps et contre tous les reniements, chaque poème de Char a jalonné une route d'espérance. (E, 1165).<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> «Against tradition the collector pits the criterion of genuineness; to the authoritative he opposes the sign of origin. To express this way of thinking in theoretical terms: he replaces content [i.e. the *what*] with pure *originality* or authenticity [...]» (MDT, 199)

<sup>259</sup> W. Benjamin, «The Role of Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy», in *Selected Writings*, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>260</sup> My italics.

<sup>261</sup> My italics.

<sup>262</sup> CII, 240.

<sup>263</sup> My italics.

TRAGEDY AND AESTHETIC POLITICS  
- CONCLUSION -

Camus noted in his *Carnets* in 1947 :

Les reproches parce que *mes livres ne mettent pas en relief l'aspect politique. Traduction : ils veulent que je mette en scène des partis. Mais moi, je ne mets pas en scène que des individus, opposés à la machine d'État, parce que je sais ce que je dis.* (CII, 233-4). [My italics]

I suggest that the reference to tragedy and theatricality in the work of Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt challenges the traditional approaches to the question of (political) representation,<sup>264</sup> providing some important insights into what is currently acknowledged as the «measured anarchism» of the former, and the «new republicanism» of the latter,<sup>265</sup> reconsidering their federalist “solutions” in the light of their common effort to re-think the political *beyond nihilism*.

The *mise en scène* of the (modern) tragic conflict between individuals and the machine of the State – retold and re-enacted on stage in the con-frontation between freedom (revolt) and order (religious/metaphysical or political)- ex-poses, in my view, the problem, which Esposito addresses through the concept of «irrepresentable plurality»,<sup>266</sup> of the possibility of reframing political action outside and against the logic of incorporation, traced by both Camus and Arendt at the core of totalitarian domination.

In their reflections on the *absolute* or *radical* nihilism at work in the totalitarian «factories of corpses», as laboratories of the limitless «everything is possible», which *realize* the manipulation and artificialization of the human condition into *sheer* existence, Arendt and Camus exceed the traditional approaches to nihilism, which confined the phenomenon to a

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<sup>264</sup> R. de Aguilá suggests to interpret the tragic tension between necessity and liberty in the sense of a political conflict between two opposite models: the rules of necessity in the “reason of state”, aiming «to overcome the tensions and contradictions of political action», on the one hand, and the *virtù* (as knowledge and courage) of the political actor acting in plurality and competition, on the other. Identifying the “path of necessity” with the emancipatory tradition, from Jacobinism to Leninism, and the radical movements (nationalism, fascisms), de Aguilá remarks that «this way of thinking about politics has attained security and certainty at the expenses of liberty». This latter can be secured, he suggests, only in a political context of plurality and competition, which open the space for what he defines as “tragic choice”, in the sense of a capability to conceive alternative courses of action. (R. de Aguilá, op. cit., pp. 16-ff.)

<sup>265</sup> R. Gay-Crosier speaks of a «measured anarchism» in Camus’ work (in R. Gay-Crosier, *Albert Camus : Paradigmes de l'ironie –révolte et négation affirmative*, Éditions Paratexte, Trinity College, Toronto, Canada, 2000), while Margaret Canovan insists on Arendt’s “new republicanism” (in *Hannah Arendt. A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*, Cambridge UP, 1992, pp. 201-ff).

<sup>266</sup> R. Esposito, (a cura di), *La pluralità irrepresentabile. Il pensiero politico di Hannah Arendt*, Urbino, Quattroventi, 1987. See also, R. Esposito, “La modernità tra politico e “impolitico”, in *Logiche e crisi della modernità*, C. Galli Ed., op. cit., p. 159- 172.



moral *défaillance* in the European panorama of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *fin de siècle*, and trace nihilism at the core of the Western concept of the political *qua* «aesthetic».

I would not agree with Denise Souche-Dagues, according to whom Camus' HR confirms and may be inscribed in a «scepticisme envers l'engagement politique de type sartrien [qui] exprime dans les années Cinquante bien plus qu'un scepticisme à l'égard de l'Histoire: un véritable désespoir [...]».<sup>267</sup> As I have attempted to show, the distinction/opposition between totality and unity in HR - which can be read together with Arendt's distinction between incorporation and (political) organization in HC - brings into focus a tension between two alternative aesthetic paradigms of the political - namely, between a *poietic/architectural* paradigm, structured on the vertical model of dominion (ruler/ruled, master/slave, executioner/victim), and submitted to the logic of the body/matter (*le corps*); and a theatrical/performative/creative paradigm, associated to an horizontal model of political action *inter pares* under conditions of honour, courage and greatness, among *persons*.

It is, precisely, the notion of *person* that allows, in both Arendt and Camus' work, to escape the transcendentalist dialectic of representation, as (self)-representation of a subject, structured on a Manichean opposition between represented and representation,<sup>268</sup> between image/subject (mask) and body/object (nature).<sup>269</sup>

The co-incident of the fallacious logic of incorporation/incorporeality as rooted in the fictional notion of the body (*corps*), in the sense of an abstract (sheer) existence separated from its form or idea, runs through the pages of HR, and is explicitly denounced by Arendt in the twofold movement of French Terror, which incorporates the "natural man" by stripping off the mask of the disguised traitor; and of Totalitarian (Bolshevik) Terror, whose incorporeal "Objective Enemy" de-realizes the living human beings through the application to an arbitrarily selected people of an ideologically fabricated mask (OR, 95-ff).

The recourse to the tragic notion of "hero" to (re)introduce the moral perspective of the *person* into the political discourse can, thus, be read in the light of Nancy's threefold

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<sup>267</sup> D. Souche-Dagues, *Nihilismes*, PUF, 1996, p. 221.

<sup>268</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, op. cit., p. 91-ff.

<sup>269</sup> Tragedy can thus be conceived, with Nancy, not as a "space" of *re-presentation* (which would imply an ontology of subjectivity, which the absurd or tragic thought explodes), but rather as the unfounded *non-space* opened up as *aesthetic present* or *fictional space*, in which and through which the actor's body (*la chair*) says the impossibility of the re-presentation of the community as *totality* - the impossibility of the community-as-work-of-art, that re-presents itself as *work* to the public's vision (see J.-L. Nancy, SM, 61-67). In this sense, tragedy re-enacts on stage the *être-partagé*, the original liminality and relationality of the being-in-the-world: the insertion of an absolute claim within the liminal realm of human com-pearance destroys ex-istence by attempting to introduce the in-finite into the finite - the fury that finitizes the infinite. (cfr. Nancy, EL, 72-73).

distinction among the world of myth, as the world of the *given* pre-supposition, the world of *onto-theology*, as the world of the posed or *produced* pre-supposition - which is undermined by the bad infinity of its *poietic* (end/means, cause/effect) logic, and has its ultimate denouement in nihilism - and the (political) perspective of «creation» as *the reverse* of nihilism.<sup>270</sup>

It is, precisely, by situating Camus' and Arendt's appropriation of tragedy and theatricality on the backdrop of their rejection of the logic of incorporation/incorporeality, consistently with their analyses of absolute or radical nihilism, that, I suggest, their political thought, and especially the republican and anarchic elements, repeatedly pointed out by their critics,<sup>271</sup> acquire a specific meaning, as an attempt to do away with the «presence» of the object/truth (which, I would point out, should not be confused with the two author's emphasis on the need to "save" factual truth against the de-realizing effects of ideology), and to replace it with the «present» (*hic-et-nunc*) of a thought of *no-presupposition*.

The analysis of Camus' MdS in Chapter 1 has brought into focus a peculiar *aesthetic* or *tragic* perspective, which I have traced back to the author's effort to define a *good* use of nihilism, in the sense of a finite thought of the finite - as a thought, precisely, of *no-presupposition*.<sup>272</sup>

The tragic does away with the identity of Object/Truth/Body and provides, from Camus' 1942 writings to the late Fifties articles, the categories for re-thinking the political at the «point zero» of politics, reformulating the question of the possibility of political action from the (philosophically inconceivable) perspective of *la chair*,<sup>273</sup> which takes into account the inherent plurality and liminality of man's absurd *être au monde*.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> The question is resumed by J.-L. Nancy as follows: «Le monde du mythe, et du polythéisme, est le monde de la présupposition *donnée*. L'onto-théologie - la suspension du mythe - est au contraire l'ordre de la présupposition *posée*: activement posée comme affirmation du Dieu unique et/ou comme thèse de l'être. Dès lors qu'elle n'est pas donnée, mais posée, la présupposition contient aussi le principe de sa propre déposition, puisqu'elle ne peut rien présupposer comme une cause (ni, donc, comme une fin), ou comme une production, sans repousser d'autant les limites du monde. [...] En d'autres termes, si le nihilisme correspond à l'accomplissement de l'onto-théologie selon la logique d'un infini («mauvais») de la présupposition, en revanche une pensée de la «création» constitue l'exact revers du nihilisme, conformément à la logique d'une présupposition nulle (qui équivaut aussi à un «bon» infini, ou infinité actuelle). Le *ex nihilo* ne contient rien de plus, mais rien de moins, que l'ex- de l'ex-istance ni produite ni construite, mais seulement *étante* [...] Et cet *ex nihilo* fracture de l'intérieur le noyau dur du nihilisme. Ni donné ni posé, le monde est seulement présent [...].» (J.-L. Nancy, *La création du monde ou la mondialisation*, op. cit., p. 94-95).

<sup>271</sup> See note 245.

<sup>272</sup> On tragic thought as a thought of no-presupposition, see S. Givone, *Disincanto del mondo e pensiero tragico*, Milano, 1989.

<sup>273</sup> Esposito has recently drawn the attention to the radical alternative between the organic metaphors of the body politic and the disclosure of a perspective of *la chair*, in the sense of the inherently plural carnal existence freed from all totalizing hypostasis: «Proprio il collasso dei regimi totalitari [...] porta questa dialettica apparentemente inesauribile di scorporazione e reincorporazione ad un punto di non ritorno al di là del quale si apre un nuovo orizzonte di senso: ciò che finalmente si profila è la possibilità di portare in superficie quella

It is from the tragic perspective of *la chair* that Camus' political engagement, from *Combat* to the articles for *Express*, joins Arendt's political reflection, from *Approaches to the "German Problem"* to *OR* and *Civil Disobedience*. The two authors bring forth a horizontal conception of political (inter)action, centred on a notion of law as *rapport* or limit, which breaches the vertical structure of authority/dominion (whose nihilistic implications they both denounce), founded on the *immunitarian* identification of the *body politic* with an organism protected and de-limited by «boundaries».<sup>275</sup>

The emphasis on *grand style* and creation in Camus' HR, as well as on Arendt's political appropriation of Nietzsche's moral reflection in the *Genealogy*, provides, in this sense, essential insights into an *aesthetic* concept of the political, which re-thinks the problem of representation, namely of the relation between individual and State, from the "relative" perspective of a thought of *no-presupposition*.

Ankersmit's recent attempt to define an *Aesthetic politics*,<sup>276</sup> found - not "founded" or fabricated - in the aesthetic gap between represented and representation, answers to a similar concern to tackle the question of the relation individual/State from an alternative perspective, which would escape the totalitarian drifts of *incorporation* - exemplified, in the author's view, on the one hand, by mimetic representation, visible in the Nazi Politics as Total Art; and by direct democracy, identified with Rousseau's general will, on the other.

Ankersmit's criticism of the Liberal, Republican and Communitarian traditions of contemporary political philosophy,<sup>277</sup> points to two aspects, which he traces at the core of all three perspectives, namely that «the individual is always considered to be the basis or "foundation" of the social and political order; and no clear distinction is made between the social or pre-political, and the political order», with the result that individualism «goes together in all these three traditions of contemporary political philosophy with the absence of an effective barrier against the complete politicization of all interhuman relationships».<sup>278</sup>

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«carne primordiale» cui nessuna filosofia ha finora saputo dare un nome [...]» (R. Esposito, *Immunitas*, op. cit., p. 143).

<sup>274</sup> As I have shown, the emphasis on contingency, risk, finitude, unpredictability in Camus' Mds, and confirmed in the definition of the *pensée de Midi* as a philosophy of limits in HR, is echoed by Arendt's pages on action in HC.

<sup>275</sup> Esposito insists on the co-implication of Law and Force/power, as the transcendental presupposed and execution of the former, as the mark of the traditional relation between *ius* and the political, which rests on the immunitarian reduction of life to sheer matter, to be preserved and ordered within the legal confines of the *body politic* (State) (in R. Esposito, *Immunitas*, op. cit., 12-ff.).

<sup>276</sup> F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics. Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value*, Stanford UP, California, 1996.

<sup>277</sup> Ivi, p. 7.

<sup>278</sup> Ivi, p. 7.

In his concern to secure the body politic against what he describes as the seductions of totalitarianism, inherent in much pre-nineteenth century political thought,<sup>279</sup> Ankersmit opposes to sheer individualism the «recognition of the existence of a *sphere that cannot have its foundation in the individual* and that possesses its own autonomy with regard to the individual citizen», as the most effective protection against the totalitarian conflation of state and society - «Our real freedom is a freedom rather “found” than “founded” (or “made”)».<sup>280</sup>

It is in the attempt to save the “brokenness” of the political domain, and the relative autonomy between state and society, against the totalizing “unity” brought about by the totalitarian aestheticization of the political, that Ankersmit appeals to «the insurmountable aesthetic *barrier* between the represented and its representation», visible in the work of art, to define the nature of political power, and, thus, its legitimacy, as “found” (not founded) in the unbridgeable aesthetic gap between the State (the representation) and the electorate (the represented).<sup>281</sup>

His definition of an “Aesthetic Politics”, as opposed to Totalitarian forms of political representation (Total State) and direct democracy (Total Society), lies on the insight that visual arts offer «a substitute for reality [which] admittedly evokes an “illusion” of reality, but which nevertheless remains distinguishable from reality itself»,<sup>282</sup> thus aesthetic representation entails a difference, rather than an identity, between the represented and the representative.

Not only this *difference* or aesthetic gap (to use Ankersmit’s formula) emerges in Camus’ analysis of *creative unity* and *grand style*, in the Chapter on art and revolt in HR, as inseparable from the tragic awareness of the absurd touching-upon of *la chair*,<sup>283</sup> but it is also the pivot of Arendt’s “dramaturgical” model of political action in HC.

What Ankersmit, nevertheless, seems to overlook, but emerges from the comparative analysis of the two abovementioned authors, is that the so-called “aesthetic gap” between the representative (as *figura picta*) and the individuality represented, cannot *per se* constitute a bulwark against the immunitarian logic of incorporation: the focus on organization in Arendt’s analysis of totalitarian terror exposes the nihilistic dimension at the core of political action, as its permanent possibility (*hybris*).

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<sup>279</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>280</sup> Ivi, p 8.

<sup>281</sup> Ivi, p. 18.

<sup>282</sup> Ivi, pp. 45-46.

<sup>283</sup> Esposito insists on the concept of «différence charnelle» inherent in the sensory *toucher*: «Questa impossibilità di co-appartenenza, o di co-donazione simultanea – che rende il chiasma tra mano toccante e mano toccata sempre sospeso – ha l’effetto di disfare ogni possibile identificazione tra carne e corpo» (R. Esposito, *Immunitas*, op. cit., p. 142).

By rethinking the “aesthetic gap” not as a “hollow” space between the individual and his representative, but as the limit (*rapport*),<sup>284</sup> on which each man *is*, in the rich sense that both Camus and Arendt lend to the term *being as creative* (“aesthetic”) *unity* of a plural singularity (*person*), the question of representation, and more specifically of the relation between the individual and the political community is reformulated within the two-sided tragic *theoria* of a balance or tension, re-enacted by the tragic hero, between freedom and order, boundlessness and organization, as the two sides of political action *as* inherently aesthetic.

The opposition between a *poietic* model of the political community, traced by the «*unité césarienne, que fonde un chef*»,<sup>285</sup> as head/dominion in the vertical power structure of master/slave; and the horizontal model of a «*communauté sans chef liée par l’image obsédante d’une tragédie*», already recurred around 1937 in Bataille’s *Chroniques nietzschéennes*.<sup>286</sup> I suggest that (modern) tragedy - of which *Caligula* is one of Camus’ most beautiful attempts, highly praised by Bataille himself - exposes the *échec* of the immunitarian logic of *se-curitas*, bringing forth an *aesthetic* com-prehension of the limit (T, 1705),<sup>287</sup> not imposed from outside and above, according to the vertical structure of judge/law/nihilism, but as the horizontal relation of exposedness to *risk*, which constitutes the fact of *ex-istence*,<sup>288</sup> irreducible to the bio-political notion of sheer existence or “naked life”.

It is, precisely, the tension between these two paradigms - the *immunitarian* paradigm of *le corps*, as the de-vitalized *product* of an intellectual abstraction, associated to a logocentric and hierarchically ordered political structure of dominion (male principle); and the *communitarian* paradigm of *la chair* (female principle),<sup>289</sup> relegated outside the body politic as its pre-logical and non-mediated root of a horizontal *aesthetic* relatedness – which, I would argue, is played in the words of the women’s Choir in *L’état de siege*.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>284</sup> The closed space of the theatre (the stage) makes visible the finite circle of the human condition in Camus’ *Remarque sur la révolte* (E, 1696).

<sup>285</sup> Bataille, *Chronique nietzschéenne*, in Jacques Le Ridier, *Nietzsche en France*, PUF, Paris, 1999, p. 170.

<sup>286</sup> According to Le Ridier, «[ici], la tragédie au sens nietzschéen de *Naissance de la tragédie*, liturgie esthétique qui soude la communauté éthique et politique, se recoupe avec la tragédie au sens hégélien (dans la *Phénoménologie de l’esprit*) de l’opposition du Particulier et de l’Universel (l’État).» (in Jacques Le Ridier, *Nietzsche en France*, p. 170).

<sup>287</sup> «Les limites. Ainsi je dirais qu’il y a des mystères qu’il convient d’énumérer et de méditer. Rien de plus» (CII, 162).

<sup>288</sup> In *La mer au plus près* (1953) Camus wrote : «*Délicieuse angoisse d’être, proximité exquise d’un danger dont nous ne connaissons pas le nom, vivre, alors, est-ce courir à sa perte ? À nouveau, sans répit, courons à notre perte.*» (E, 886).

<sup>289</sup> For this reading I draw on Adriana Cavarero’s article «*Il corpo politico come organismo*», *Filosofia Politica*, Anno VII, numero 3 – dicembre 1993, pp. 391-414.

<sup>290</sup> In the 1958 preface to the American edition of his plays, Camus would describe *l’État de siege* as «*celui de mes écrits qui me ressemble le plus*» (T, 1732).

The tragic wisdom of these spectators/narrators coincides with the awareness of the limit or measure that lies in the tension between the abstract principle (man/Diego) and the *aesthetic* principle (female/Victoria):

#### LES FEMMES

Malheur sur *lui!* Malheur sur *tous ceux qui désertent nos corps!* Misère sur nous surtout qui sommes les désertées et qui portons à longueur d'années *ce monde que leur orgueil prétend transformer*. Ah ! puisque tout ne peut être sauvé, apprenons du moins à préserver la maison de l'amour ! Vienne la peste, vienne la guerre et, toutes portes closes, vous à côté de nous, nous défendrons jusqu'à la fin. Alors, au lieu de cette mort solitaire, peuplée d'idées, nourrie de mots, vous connaîtrez la mort ensemble, vous et nous confondus dans le terrible embrassement de l'amour ! Mais les hommes préfèrent l'idée. Ils fuient leur mère, ils se détachent de l'amante, et les voilà qui courent à l'aventure, blessés sans plaie, morts sans poignards, chasseurs d'ombres, chanteurs solitaires, appelant sous un ciel muet une impossible réunion et marchant de solitude en solitude, vers l'isolement dernier, la mort en plein désert ! (T, 298)

In the light of these considerations, the tragic formula «*Tout est justifiable, personne n'est juste*» (T, 1705) breaches the Manichean dichotomy, at the core of the traditional concept of the political, and revived in the early Fifties in certain Neo-Conservative political analyses, of a mortal struggle between Good and Evil, which justified the *meurtre utile*,<sup>291</sup> and entails an *aesthetic* understanding of the political community *inoperatively* founded («La tragédie – writes Camus in '45 – n'est pas une solution», CII, 153) on *souffrance*,<sup>292</sup> *complicité, amitié/fraternité (menacée)*,<sup>293</sup> *liberté*.

The tragic judgement «*Tout est bien*» (T, 1709) is the epilogue of Oedipus' *savoir de non savoir*, resuming the *aesthetic* awareness of what Camus calls «*le mystère de l'existence*» (T, 1708), which is the enigma/miracle of natality.<sup>294</sup> But it is also the word that dis-closes the political horizon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

L'homme d'aujourd'hui qui crie sa révolte en sachant que cette révolte a des limites, qui exige la liberté et subit la nécessité, cet homme contradictoire, déchiré, désormais conscient de l'ambiguïté de l'homme et de son histoire, cet homme est *l'homme tragique par excellence*. Il marche peut-être vers la formulation de sa propre tragédie qui sera obtenue le jour du *Tout est bien*. (T, 1709).

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<sup>291</sup> F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>292</sup> As Nussbaum points out, we can see « the passionate reaction, the suffering, as itself a piece of practical recognition or perception, as at least a partial constituent of the character's correct understanding of his situation as a human being. [...] There is a kind of knowing that works by suffering because suffering is the appropriate acknowledgement of the way human life, in these cases, is» (in Martha Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, cit., p. 45).

<sup>293</sup> *Fraternité* - term belonging to the sphere of *aisthesis*, was only recently taken up by Jean Luc Nancy in his attempt to re-think the political beyond the nihilistic *impasse*. J.L. Nancy, *Le sens du monde*, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>294</sup> In *L'Avenir de la tragédie* Camus writes : « La seule purification revient à ne rien nier ni exclure, à accepter donc le mystère de l'existence, la limite de l'homme, et cet ordre enfin où l'on sait sans savoir. "Tout est bien", dit alors Œdipe et ses yeux sont crevés. Il sait désormais, sans jamais plus voir, sa nuit est une lumière, et sur cette face aux yeux morts resplendit la plus haute leçon de l'univers *tragique*. »(T, 1708). See on this point A. Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, op. cit., pp. 18-ff.

The word *is* (in) the law: it *says* the fragile and finite *compearance* of men, recovering, against the resentful and nihilistic drives of «*la morale haineuse*»,<sup>295</sup> the limits of the absurd experience, articulated around the three terms (all belonging to the constellation of *aisthesis*) of tragic *bonheur, beauté, dignité/amour*,<sup>296</sup> as the finite condition(s) for a political *être-ensemble* founded on «*le courage, la parole claire et l'amitié*».<sup>297</sup>

There is no doubt that Ankersmit's understanding of mimetic representation, as having its origin in the fallacy that the perfect representation (*mimesis*) should be so accurate a copy of reality, that we ought not to be able to tell representative and represented apart – leading to the conclusion that «we could just as well do with represented reality alone and abandon representation as a dangerous and useless detour», which opens the way to the totalitarian *immanent* community -<sup>298</sup> is unmistakably antithetical to Arendt's acceptance of *mimesis* in her theatrical concept of the political, although it rests on a similar intuition that political reality is not a given pre-ceding, the object of a re-presentation, but that it «only comes into being after and due to representation».<sup>299</sup>

The question, raised by Ankersmit's book, is precisely the one, pointed out by Esposito,<sup>300</sup> concerning the possibility of rethinking the political in the anti-foundational horizon of the end of re-presentation. By relating both mimetic (totalitarian) representation

<sup>295</sup> G. Bataille, «*La morale du malheur: La Peste*», art.cit., p. 15. The legalization of violence and murder, at work in totalitarian terror, as well as in the notions of just war and death penalty, as the *immunitarian* outcome of a *nihilistic* and *aesthetic* effort to *eject* suffering and death, turns the *état de siege*, as a “state of exception or state of emergency”, into the very paradigm of the political. See on this point Giorgio Agamben, *État d'exception. Homo sacer*, Seuil, 2003.

<sup>296</sup> In 1943-44 Camus notes in the *Carnets*: «*Essai sur la Révolte. Après avoir fait partir de l'angoisse la philosophie: la faire sortir du bonheur. Id. Régénérer l'amour dans le monde absurde, c'est en fait régénérer le plus brûlant et le plus périssable des sentiments humains (Platon: «Si nous étions des dieux, nous ne connaîtrions pas l'amour»). [...] Mais cet amour est en dehors de l'éternel. C'est le plus humain des sentiments avec ce que le mot comprend à la fois de limitation et d'exaltation. C'est en cela que l'homme ne se réalise que dans l'amour parce qu'il y trouve sous une forme fulgurante l'image de sa condition sans avenir (et non comme disent les idéalistes parce qu'il approche une certaine forme d'éternel). Le type: Heathcliff. Tout ceci illustration du fait que l'absurdité a sa formule dans l'opposition entre ce qui dure et ce qui ne dure pas.*» (CII, 75). My italics.

<sup>297</sup> A. Camus, «*Nous autres meurtriers*», *Franchise*, n. 3, nov-déc. 1946, in F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>298</sup> «[...] the mimetic theory of (political) representation is, in fact, not a theory of representation at all, but a theory *against* representation.» (F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, op. cit., p. 44).

<sup>299</sup> On the backdrop of a post- or anti-metaphysical critique of the (Platonic) theory of truth as correspondence, Ankersmit seems to come close to Arendt in posing the co-extensiveness of reality and representation, for which he invokes Danto's view of artistic representation: «[Danto] urges us to accept the more interesting view that “something is real” when it satisfies a representation of itself, just as something only becomes a “bearer of a name” when it is named by a name. In other words, reality does not exist as such until there is a representation of that reality» (F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, op. cit., 47). This, as we have seen, is the conclusion, which Camus arrives to in the chapter on Revolt and Art in HR, that lies at the core of his concept of *grand style* and creative unity, the political relevance of which is repeatedly pointed out by Camus in his 1950's writings on the role of the artist and his struggle against ideologies.

<sup>300</sup> R. Esposito, «Hannah Arendt tra “volontà” e “rappresentazione”: per una critica del decisionismo», *La pluralità irrepresentabile*, op. cit., p. 47-48.

and direct democracy (identified with the exercise of Rousseau's general will) to a logic of *incorporation* (identity), and by linking the latter to referentiality and transcendentalism (political metaphor), as the frame of the Western concept of political power;<sup>301</sup> Ankersmit situates Aesthetic Politics outside the transcendentalist logic of power as *speaking about* (the Foucauldian *power of language*, rooted in the political metaphor as giving meaning to reality).<sup>302</sup> What he suggests is that Aesthetic Politics is disclosed by, must be thought within, the constantly re-opened "space" of a *language of power*:<sup>303</sup>

No less than language itself, the language of power is a subtle and refined structure that permits us to tell any number of stories without *presupposing* any one of them.<sup>304</sup>

The denunciation of the posed/*fabricated* sub-stance, as the traditional object (as meaning/truth) of re-presentation;<sup>305</sup> and the underscoring of the nihilistic drives inscribed in the Western concept of political organization, justify, in my view, a re-reading of Albert Camus' and Hannah Arendt' political appropriation of tragedy and theatricality as disclosing a peculiar version of aesthetic politics,<sup>306</sup> against and beyond the contemporary impasse of the (bio)political.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> «[...] Western political philosophies imply and emphasize referentiality; they are always theories about a supposedly theory-independent political reality, and from this metaphorical distance they tell us how best to deal with it. Here I would like to recall the tendency of Western political philosophy to see political power as representative of something outside itself (whether it be God, the nature of the body politic, or the people). In other words, the distance between political language and a heliotropically defined political reality is in the Western tradition not merely a fine epistemological point about the relation between words and things: this distance is the birthplace of the kind of political power we know in the West» (F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, op. cit., 291).

<sup>302</sup> F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, op. cit., p. 292.

<sup>303</sup> Ankersmit takes over Roland Barthes' study on the Japanese use of sign (the haiku) as situated in a semantic void, an openness that provokes a circulation of language and meaning, which stands in strong opposition to Western referentiality («Language in the West wants to erase itself by being transparent with regard to an underlying reality to which it refers and that is represented by it [...]).» (F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, op. cit., 292).

<sup>304</sup> F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, op. cit., p. 293.

<sup>305</sup> Nancy traces the conception of meaning (*sens*) and its loss/appropriation as object/truth at the core of all our politics of denouement in self-sufficiency (*autosuffisance*), be that in the form of (totalitarian) "fusion" or of atomisation (J.-L. Nancy, SM, 173).

<sup>306</sup> The idea, which Ankersmit poses at the core of the concept of Aesthetic Politics, « that reality does not exist in the proper sense of the word until we have placed it, so to speak, before us at a *distance*, and it is this which is effected in and by representation», leads, I would argue, in two distinct directions: the one, articulated in Ankersmit's book, which assumes the State as the primary political problem, and the main focus of an aesthetic political philosophy freed from the reference to ethics in the contemporary moral vacuum (moral nihilism); and the other, that emerges in the works of Arendt and Camus, which takes over certain aspects of the Republican and anarchic thought. It is significant that Ankersmit poses (or opposes) aesthetic political philosophy as a mutation, rather than as the adversary, of republicanism. Pointing to the «elective affinity» between republicanism and ideology, the latter being an instrument for achieving identification of the citizens with the collectivity, Ankersmit argues that «the death of ideology seems to have destroyed this biotope of republicanism. Citizens have now lost the possibility of linking their own station of life to the public interest in the meaningful way ideology always used to suggest. [...] As a consequence, with the death of ideology the relationship



In the closing pages of HR, it is the aesthetic law of *discipline* which “transfigures” the traditional dichotomy between individual (as atom or “stranger”) and the machine of the State (as «collectivité ennemie») into the tragic community of the «Nous sommes», disclosed in and by the action of revolt (E, 700). The politics of dignity is a “declination” of Aesthetic Politics, which defines a new individualism in/at the limit, which the aesthetic judgment of revolt brings into light, and which the action for freedom discloses as the “space” of a touching-upon, ex-posing the inexorably plural singularity of men.

Camus’ political thought develops out of the experience of the Resistance, as the historical event of the spontaneous upsurge and organization of political action for freedom. The republic provides, in this sense, both Camus and Arendt with a horizontal model of political action among peers (freedom) *versus* the vertical model of politics of force and oppression (dominion) (OR, 227).

The question of the Republic is at the core of the political thought of the Resistance, from the juridical perspective – with the declaration of the illegality of the Vichy Government in the manifest of Brazzaville (27<sup>th</sup> October 1940), which had its political foundation in the violation of «le droit de libre disposition du peuple» -<sup>308</sup> and from the philosophico-political viewpoint, combining to a patriotic appeal to the French republican tradition in the struggle against the Nazi occupant, a revolutionary *élan* toward a radical political and social change.<sup>309</sup>

The image of republican patriotism, which emerges in Camus’ articles for *Combat*, and is traced in the pivotal motive of the sacrifice of the resisters/*révoltés* in the struggle against the enemy, is refracted by the lenses of tragedy into a complex «crystallisation» of elements.

Camus worked throughout all his life on his tragedy *Caligula*, from his juvenile 1941 text to the 1957 version for the Festival of Angers. The experience of the war and of his “segregation” in France during the occupation contributed to the re-writing of the character of

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between the state and the citizen took on the form best described as « living apart together ». » (F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics*, op. cit., p. 351-2).

<sup>307</sup> See on this respect R. Esposito, «Il Nazismo e noi», *Micro-Mega. Almanacco di Filosofia*, 5/2003, op. cit., p. 165-174.

<sup>308</sup> According to B. Mirkine-Guetzévitch, the Brazzaville document «est non seulement républicain dans le sens formel, constitutionnel ; il l’est aussi par son inspiration, de par ses références à Gambetta, à Jules Ferry » (in *Les idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance (Documents clandestins – 1940-44)*, PUF, Paris, 1954, p. 45). According to the author the notion of Republic founded on the «droit des gens à disposer d’eux-mêmes» is the source of a series of constitutional paralogsms, from the Declaration of the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1943 and the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1944 institution of republican legality over the continental territory. (Mirkine-Guetzévitch speaks of an «absence d’épanouissement républicain» between ’43 and ’44 : «Le catalogue des libertés françaises est mince, la présentation en est faite avec une sécheresse qui aurait satisfait peut-être les démocrates polynésiens, mais qui est propre à décevoir la nation qui, dès 1789, avait défini les principaux concepts de liberté », lvi, p. 46).

<sup>309</sup> *Les idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance*, op. cit., 46-49.

Cherea, who in the *post* 1941 versions reminds of «une sorte de prototype de la résistance au totalitarisme» (T, 1738). But it is important to observe that the identification of Caligula as «pure» or Absolute Evil – which has its anti-tragic counterpart in the pure Goodness of Scipion -<sup>310</sup> is re-comprised, through the confrontation with Cherea, into the good-and-evil structure of two forces «*également légitimes, également armées en raison*» (T, 1705).

The limit on which Cherea and Caligula con-front and touch upon each other is the revolt against the *nihil* of foundation, which disclosed the tragic dilemma experienced by Camus in the years of the German occupation, and attested in LAA, in the conclusion, to which the Resistants were driven by totalitarian terror, that «il faut bien frapper quand on ne peut réfuter» (T, 35).<sup>311</sup>

I suggest that, in his murderous attempt to *rea*-lize the truth of the Absurd or the absurd *être-à* as Truth/Object,<sup>312</sup> the emperor Caligula embodies the fallacy of the *poietic* paradigm of political action implicit, made visible in the *bad* logic of *absolute* nihilism (T, 75), which culminates in the *logical* or *superior suicide* (MdS, 183), that is, in terror.

In this sense, Caligula resumes the Bataillan *tragédie illimité* of the sovereign thought (*pensée souveraine*), which annihilates the utilitarian categories of teleological thinking and destroys the re-assuring *immunitarian* world of *se-curitas*. But in his monstrous *mise en œuvre* of the impossible, Caligula falls back on the ideal (bio-political) quest for happiness: his madness *is* the immunitarian logic of political power pushed to its ultimate consequences.

Now, what both Camus and Arendt point out, and clearly emerges in *Caligula*, is that *hybris* (radical nihilism) is a possibility inherent in political action *qua* action, as the tragic or aesthetic *rappor*t-limit between its boundlessness and its quest for order (organization).

*Immunitas*, in this sense, must be grasped in the reverse of political action: Caligula's *jeu sans limites*, exterminating contradictors and contradictions (T, 23), re-presents in this sense the simplifying logic of 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century («immunitarian») politics, which

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<sup>310</sup> Caligula to Scipion: «Tu ne peux pas comprendre cela. Tu es d'un autre monde. Tu es pur dans le bien, comme je suis pur dans le mal » (T, 58).

<sup>311</sup> Questioned by the Emperor («Cherea, pourquoi ne m'aimes-tu pas?»), Cherea replies : «[...] parce que je te comprends trop bien et qu'on ne peut aimer celui de ses visages qu'on essaie de masquer en soi » (T, 77). The mask becomes here the vehicle of the practical impasse in which the critical capacity to «*think on both sides*» leaves man. Specular to Caligula's "logical attitude" is the "lyrical attitude" of the young poet Scipion, whose absurd capacity to understand everything (T, 83), to which the Emperor initiated him by killing his father, leads him to withdraw in isolation and inactivity. Scipion refuses to participate in the conspiracy against Caligula, finding refuge in *dénuement*, already described in *Noces* as the annihilation of the self in the sensory and sensual fusion with Nature.

<sup>312</sup> «[...] tout, autour de moi, est mensonge, et moi, je veux qu'on vive dans la vérité!» (T, 16).

eradicates the *aesthetic* toucher-à,<sup>313</sup> that constitutes ex-istence, as men's *partage* of an absurd condition –<sup>314</sup> expressed in the MdS by the conqueror's *communauté de la lutte*, rooted in the *aesthetic morale de la chair*, which runs through the political writings, from the 1944 articles of *Combat* onwards.

The limitless power of law - what Bataille fails to point out is,<sup>315</sup> precisely, that, as Emperor, Caligula *is* the law, repeating the vertical structure of dominion God (master)/ men (slaves) - coincides with the systematic exercise of *le malheur* on the part of Caligula/the Plague, aiming at the ultimate, God-like, eradication of death and suffering. The quest for the moon represents the *absolute* attempt to reverse, thus perverting, the absurd evidence of the finite human condition, «Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux» (T, 16).<sup>316</sup> In this sense, Caligula is the *anti-tragic* figure par excellence.<sup>317</sup> It is the confrontation between Caligula and Cherea that discloses the tragedy, playing the “inclusive” (*et...et...*) or *dramatic* logic, traced at the core of the *aesthetic* thought of the MdS,<sup>318</sup> on which the *tragic choice* is grounded.<sup>319</sup>

<sup>313</sup> Camus wrote in his notebooks in 1943: «L'absurde, c'est l'homme tragique devant un miroir (Caligula). Il n'est donc pas seul. Il y a le germe d'une satisfaction ou d'une complaisance. Maintenant il faut supprimer le miroir». (CII, 94) The same image recurs in the Introduction to l'HR: «D'une certaine manière, l'absurde qui prétend exprimer *l'homme dans sa solitude* le fait vivre devant un *miroir*. Le déchirement initial risque alors de devenir confortable. La plaie qu'on gratte avec tant de sollicitude finit par donner du plaisir. [...] Si donc il était légitime de tenir compte de la sensibilité absurde, de faire le diagnostic d'un mal tel qu'on le trouve en soi et chez les autres, il est impossible de voir dans cette sensibilité, et dans le nihilisme qu'elle suppose, rien d'autre qu'un point de départ, une critique vécue, l'équivalent, sur le plan de l'existence, du doute systématique. Après quoi, *il faut briser les jeux fixes du miroir et entrer dans le mouvement irrésistible par lequel l'absurde se dépasse lui-même*» (HR, 418-419) (my italics).

<sup>314</sup> Caligula's monologue at the looking-glass is the emblem of the historical and political situation of the 20th century, described by Camus as the age of polemic and insult: «Des milliers de voix, jour et nuit, poursuivant chacune de son côté un tumultueux monologue, déversent sur les peuples un torrent de paroles mystificatrices. Mais quel est le mécanisme de la polémique ? Elle consiste à considérer l'adversaire en ennemi, à le simplifier par conséquent et à refuser de le voir » (In F. Bartfeld, *Albert Camus voyageur et conférencier*, Archives Albert Camus, n. 7, Paris, Lettres Modernes, 1995, p. 60).

<sup>315</sup> G. Bataille, « La morale du malheur: *La Peste* », *Critique*, Juin-Juillet 1947, n. 13-14.

<sup>316</sup> As F. Bartfeld observes, « la faute tragique », as an act of violation of the existing order, is conceived by Aristotle as the result of an error, and not of a moral guilt : it coincides with «*l'ignorance ou la méconnaissance systématique de cette limite* qui semble inséparable de la nature humaine et que la révolte, justement, révèle. *Les pensées nihilistes*, parce qu'elles négligent cette frontière, finissent par se jeter dans un mouvement uniformément accéléré. Rien ne les arrête plus dans leurs conséquences et elles justifient alors la destruction totale ou la conquête indéfinie.» (HR, 697), see Fernande Bartfeld, *L'effet tragique*, op. cit.. In his notes for the play «Caligula ou le sens de la mort», the Emperor warns: «Non, Caligula n'est pas mort. Il est là, et là. Il est en chacun de vous. Si le pouvoir vous était donné, si vous aviez du cœur, si vous aimiez la vie, vous le verriez se déchaîner, ce monstre ou cet ange que vous portez en vous. Notre époque meurt d'avoir cru aux valeurs et que les choses pouvaient être belles et cesser d'être absurdes. Adieu, je rentre dans l'histoire où me tiennent enfermés depuis si longtemps ceux qui craignent de trop aimer.» (T, 1735). In the concluding pages of HR, Camus employs an analogous image to refer to the *absolute-nihilistic* temptation of contemporary thought (HR, 704).

<sup>317</sup> «seule, l'hybris n'est pas tragique ; [...]» see Paul Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté, II. Finitude et culpabilité. La symbolique du Mal*, Paris, Aubier Moutaigne, 1960, 209.

<sup>318</sup> The formula «*dialectic* or *dramatic* logic» is used by Robert Champigny to define the logic of the absurd (tragic) thought of the MdS, as thought of the absurd contradiction “in existence”. It refers to a type of logic that requires a spatial-temporal (existential) “support” in order to be thought, as opposed to the formal and a-temporal

The recourse to the category of the *tragic* to define an *alternative* model of political action, distinguished from the strategic and republican models of Western modern political thought,<sup>320</sup> confirms the irreducibility, brought forth in our analysis, of the horizontal paradigm of action not only to the political narratives of reconciliation (Liberal and Communist political theories, as rooted in the modern Philosophy of History), founded on the concepts of (scientific) certainty, rational mastery and progress, but also to the republican or anarchic thinking, often imputed to both Arendt and Camus.

The tragic exposes the aesthetic dimension of the political not through the trope of distance (*metaphor*), as aesthetic “gap” or “hollow” space between the individual and the State,<sup>321</sup> but through the aesthetic law as limit or measure (discipline), as that “space” of touching-upon (*distanced proximity*) which is (in) the *inter-esse* of *persons* acting together.

Not a Hobbesian mask, worn or stripped off at will, to display the pre-supposed individuality of the private (natural) man, but the public/moral person *as daimon*, men’s very (inter-)relatedness (*limit* or *rapport*) actively “drawn” in words and deeds.

As Cavarero points out, in the theatrical coincidence of being and appearing the totally «exhibitive» character of identity is brought forth not as the outward position of some internal *sub-stance*, but as non-residually *expressive*.<sup>322</sup> The *who* (the *persona*) is not the man-made (*fabricated*) pre-supposed of political action, but its *creation*,<sup>323</sup> which shatters the temporal sequence of *poiesis* (before/after, cause/effect, act/potentiality), which is the mark of Historical (teleocratic) thinking.

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character of conceptual logic, see R. Champigny, *Compositions philosophiques et concepts*, in *Albert Camus 1980 – Second International Conference*, Gainesville, University Presses of Florida 1980, 50-ff.

<sup>319</sup> Although he is aware of the intimate affinity with Caligula, Cherea chooses to «lutter contre une grande idée dont la victoire signifierait la fin du monde» (T, 34). In this sense he is the bearer of the tragic lesson – in ancient tragedy assigned to the Chorus – that there is a limit «qu’il ne faut pas franchir, et passé la quelle c’est la mort ou le désastre» (T, 1705). Rafael de Aguila defines as *tragic* a choice between two alternative courses of action, which affirms - without solving it - the conflict between two equally valid claims or perspectives, see R. de Aguila, *Machiavelli’s Theory of Political Action: Tragedy, Irony and Choice*, Working Papers, European University Institute Press 2001). While Caligula dissolves the tragic conflict («un affrontement vibrant et ininterrompu») between human revolt (freedom) and the necessity of a finite condition, becoming himself God and plague, Cherea restores it by revolting against the emperor’s frenzy in the name of a need for security (T, 77-78), which he feels common to all men.

<sup>320</sup> Summarizing the tragic model of political action by the capability of “choosing among the alternative courses of action (which are tragically in conflict with morals and with one another)” in the midst of contingency and risk, which aims at maintaining plurality and competition through a balance between “compassion” and irony, de Aguila raises the problem of the relation between the tragic and the republican model, grounded on the development and maintenance of “plurality and competition, under the conditions of risk and uncertainty” (R. de Aguila, *Machiavelli’s Theory of Political Action: Tragedy, Irony and Choice*, op. cit.). See also Michael Brint, *Tragedy and Denial. The Politics of Difference in Western Political Thought*, Westview Press, 1991.

<sup>321</sup> F.R. Ankersmit, *Aesthetic Politics. Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value*, op. cit., p. 358.

<sup>322</sup> A. Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>323</sup> To rephrase Bonnie Honig’s commentary of the Arendtian notion of action and identity, taken over by Cavarero (in A. Cavarero, *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, op. cit., p. 36.)

The coherence and continuity between the (im)political perspective of *creation* and the federalist solution, outlined by both Camus and Arendt, becomes, thus, apparent. In OR Arendt defines communal councils, which spontaneously emerged in the early stages of the French Revolution, as the first organs of «a republic which never came into being» (OR, 249): not only they were «organs of *order* as much as organs of *action*» (OR, 266),<sup>324</sup> thus exposing the political *aesthetic* drive for stability as the *reverse* of the futility of (political) action; but they brought into being a federal principle of political organization «practically unknown in Europe and, if known, nearly unanimously rejected»(OR, 249).

As Canovan points out, the problem with anarchic schemes for permanent revolution lies in their blindness to the two-sidedness of political action: «Arendt was not in the least attracted by formless anarchy or “dropping out”»,<sup>325</sup> and, like Camus from the *Combat* years onward, she conceived «a pyramidal structure of representatives sent on from lower to higher councils» as «a practical alternative to the party method of representation»,<sup>326</sup> and to the obsolete and anachronistic form of the Nation-State restored after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes.

The paradox of action, which is the paradox of “aesthetic” politics, is pointed out by Camus in the pages on Bakounin’s anarchism, to whom he pointed, in his letter to *Libertaire*, to provide some vital insights to revive contemporary libertarian thought. By rejecting all form of abstraction (principles and doctrines) in favour of the pure freedom of «l’homme entier, identifié entièrement à sa révolte [...] le brigand, chef de jacquerie, [...] ses modèles préférés sont Stenka Razine et Pougatchev» (HR, 565), Bakounin reduced revolt to «sa vérité biologique» (Id.), stripped of all law - «Mais un monde sans lois est-il un monde libre, telle est la question que pose toute révolte» (Id.).

Political action is, thus, *at the limit*, ex-posed in/ as «aesthetic» unity or *creation*: it does not expel nihilism, but contains it as its reverse, recognizing it as *no-thing* to be concealed, or empty space to be filled with *fabricated* meanings (subject to the vertical relation of dominion). Words are, in this sense, the com-munal *limit*, the *root* (*arkè*) brought

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<sup>324</sup> My italics. As she points out, «it was indeed their aspiration to lay down the new order that brought them into conflict with the groups of professional revolutionaries, who wished to degrade them to mere executive organs of revolutionary activity» (OR, 266).

<sup>325</sup> M. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, op. cit., p. 234. Although «[t]here are certain paragraphs in the writings of the Utopian Socialists, especially in Proudhon and Bakunin, into which it has been relatively easy to read an awareness of the council systems. Yet the truth is that these essentially anarchist political thinkers were singularly unequipped to deal with a phenomenon which demonstrated so clearly how a revolution did not end with the abolition of state and government but, on the contrary, aimed at the foundation of a new state and the establishment of a new form of government» (OR, 265).

<sup>326</sup> M. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, op. cit., p. 236.

forth by the artist and the storyteller, in which tragedy and the political touch upon each other, in the fragile balance «entre les pôles du nihilisme extrême et d'un espoir illimité» (T, 1707). In the letter «Révolte et conformisme», published in the review *Arts* in november 1951, Camus wrote:

*Il n'y a pas un bon et un mauvais nihilisme, il n'y a qu'une longue et féroce aventure dont nous sommes tous solidaires. Le courage consiste à le dire clairement et à réfléchir dans cette impasse pour lui trouver une issue. (E, 734) [My italics]*

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- HC Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1998.  
 BT \_\_\_\_\_, *The Burden of Our Time*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1951.  
 OT \_\_\_\_\_, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London, 1967.  
 BPF \_\_\_\_\_, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Books, New York, 1993 (reprint of the Viking Press edition, New York, 1968).  
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