

Coldness and Compassion:
The abnegation of desire in the political realm

by

Tim Charlebois
B.Soc.Sc., University of Ottawa, 2015

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Abstract

The concept of compassion has recently held a controversial role in political thought. Critics have tied it with the condescension and latent self-interest of pity, while proponents have asserted it as *the* ethical posture from which to approach the suffering of others. This thesis looks at the role of compassion in the political sphere, arguing that political compassion involves a decentering of oneself as the primary subject of political action, looking instead to forego one's own desire and to replace it with the desire of another. It pays particular attention to the thought of Hannah Arendt, who excludes this self-sacrificing compassion from the political sphere, due to the importance of speech to political action, and in turn, the importance of muteness to compassion. To Arendt, political speech intends to performatively bring one's uniqueness into the world, whereas compassion performatively denies this subjectivity and is fundamentally unpolitical. She asserts that not only do public displays of compassion destroy their very value, but moreover, that a focus of compassion and suffering in the political sphere overshadows the need for cool, sober discourse between equals. I argue that, even in accepting Arendt's definition of the political, there is space for compassion as a political labour. While Arendt asserts the need for speech and action in the political sphere, she conflates the free will involved in the plurality and uniqueness of the content of speech with the uniform, natural will *to* speak. Her articulations of the political realm, which require one to make oneself heard among equals, invoke at that same moment an immediate need for the labour of others foregoing their own desire to speak and act, to instead passively listen. Instead of being a realm exclusively to manifest one's will, the political instead requires a reciprocity of desire, and its abnegation.

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Abbreviations

BPF	Hannah Arendt, <i>Between Past and Future</i>
EJ	Hannah Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i>
HC	Hannah Arendt, <i>The Human Condition</i>
JP	Hannah Arendt, <i>The Jew as Pariah</i>
LMT	Hannah Arendt, <i>The Life of the Mind: Volume One, Thinking</i>
LMW	Hannah Arendt, <i>The Life of the Mind: Volume Two, Willing</i>
MDT	Hannah Arendt, <i>Men in Dark Times</i>
OR	Hannah Arendt, <i>On Revolution</i>
OV	Hannah Arendt, <i>On Violence</i>
PHA	Hannah Arendt, <i>The Portable Hannah Arendt</i>
RLR	Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock"

Acknowledgments

Passion has little to do with euphoria and everything to do with patience. It is not about feeling good. It is about endurance. Like patience, passion comes from the same Latin root: *pati*. It does not mean to flow with exuberance. It means to suffer.

– Daphne Kaplan, *The Courage to Withstand*

There are a number for whose *patience* during the time of these writings I am grateful in ways that, as we will see, can be difficult to express. I cannot begin without mentioning two of my most important teachers, Sophie Bourgault and Dalie Giroux, without whom I certainly would not have continued with any serious reflections in political thought. While political theory was a field that held my attention, it quickly made me uncomfortable for reasons I could not articulate. It was not until Dalie's introduction to *Anti-Oedipus* (surprisingly) when something clicked and things began to make a bit more sense (in one memorable and affecting moment, looking at a photograph of Robert Frank's, she exclaimed at our class "You all need to stop being so Freudian!") It was also Dalie who, in making a joke at the end of our seminar, suggested that everything we had been working on could be described as "political theory for losers," an off-hand comment it seems I may have taken a bit too seriously. Sophie Bourgault's influence on (and continued support of) me has been huge, humouring me through a perhaps ill-advised honours paper on guilt and shame, subtly directing me towards the question of compassion, and sending me off from my Bachelor with the suggestion to start reading Simone Weil, which made for one of my strangest summers to date. It was also Sophie who, after kindly allowing me to read a draft paper she has written on Hannah Arendt and compassion, listened as I interrogated her on how she could possibly like Hannah Arendt. Her suggestion that I had too hastily assumed that just because she wrote on Arendt meant that she liked Arendt was a useful exercise in realizing that one could (and sometimes should) spend a great deal of time reading and taking seriously a thinker one does not necessarily *like* (although I still can't say that I *like* Hannah Arendt, I certainly do not *dislike* her as I did two years, one year, or even just months ago.)

In addition to Sophie and Dalie, I have greatly benefited from the support, teachings, questioning, and criticisms, of Chris Leite, Rob Walker, Jean-Pierre Couture, Peyman Vabazadeh, Colin Bennett, Elke Winter, Scott Watson, and Mark Salter. While not being my teachers formally, I am also so thankful for Mary Dietz, Deborah Nelson, Joan Tronto, and Beverly Woodward for always answering my questions with kindness and patience, and offering their insight to steer my research in much more interesting directions. I am particularly thankful to Dr. Nelson for sending me a draft copy of her manuscript on coldness in Arendt, Weil, Sontag, and others, after I emailed her with my anguish at seeing its release date occurring past the time I would be writing. I'd also like to thank Joanne Denton for her hard work as our graduate secretary and for always being the welcoming face in the department, as well as Simon Labrecque, Regan Burles, and particularly Susan Kim, for their early work welcoming me to UVic and easing my transition from uOttawa.

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Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of lust and sinne.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?
 My deare, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.

– George Herbert, “Love”

Introduction

To be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display which answers the fact of one's own appearingness. Living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them.

– Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*

When invoking the term *political*, a number of related concepts constituting the realm of politics may come to mind—reason over emotion, wisdom over opinion, debate over acquiescence, or glory over loss. A concept that has, until recently, seemed decidedly *unpolitical* is the concept of compassion. Lauren Berlant argues that not only has the concept of compassion entered into politics rather abruptly, but that moreover it has entered the political realm from both the right and the left. While generally more associated with the left—for example with former American president Bill Clinton's empathic catchphrase “I feel your pain”¹—former president George W. Bush began re-branding the Republican Party in the early 2000s with the label of “compassionate conservatism.”² Sophie Bourgault points out that this interest in political compassion has also been recently seen in the Canadian context, with Stephen Harper attempting a similar rebranding as a compassionate conservative after an increasing political culture of compassion gave rise to nationwide criticisms of his own “compassion deficit.”³

Most recently, benefitting from this growing political discourse on compassion, as well as an alleged international reputation of Canada as a compassionate country, Prime

¹ Marjorie Garber, “Compassion”, in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 18.

² Lauren Berlant, “Compassion (and Withholding)”, in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

³ Sophie Bourgault, “Compassion and the Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt on a Contested Political Passion,” in *Emotions, Community and Citizenship: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Rebecca Kingston, Kiran Banerjee, James McKee, Yi-Chun Chien and Constantine Christos Vassilou (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 233n.3.

Minister Justin Trudeau spoke at an October 20th rally in Ottawa following his election in 2015 saying that “To this country’s friends all around the world, many of you have worried that Canada has lost its *compassionate* and constructive voice in the world over the past ten years. Well, I have a simple message for you: on behalf of thirty-five million Canadians, we’re back.”⁴ Trudeau has since proclaimed that “compassion, acceptance, and trust; diversity and inclusion—these are the things that have made Canada strong and free,”⁵ making an apparent link between compassion as a *unified, Canadian* quality, and *diversity*, which is maintained by this unified compassion. In this vein, Trudeau has publicly praised Canadians for their compassion towards refugees,⁶ those suffering from poverty and inequality around the world,⁷ those who are affected by and have been lost to HIV/AIDS,⁸ those living with mental health issues,⁹ veterans,¹⁰ and the environment.¹¹ He has also declared compassion as a shared value among diverse Canadians and Shia

⁴ Justin Trudeau, public speech delivered October 20, 2015 in Ottawa, ON. Accessed from Jim Bronskill, “‘We’re back,’ Justin Trudeau says in message to Canada’s allies abroad,” *National Post* (October 20, 2015), <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/canadian-politics/were-back-justin-trudeau-says-in-message-to-canadas-allies-abroad>, accessed April 17, 2017. I emphasize.

⁵ Justin Trudeau, “Diversity is Canada’s Strength,” public speech delivered November 26, 2015 in London, UK, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/11/26/diversity-canadas-strength>, accessed April 17, 2017.

⁶ Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on World Refugee Day,” public statement delivered June 20, 2016 in Ottawa, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/06/20/statement-prime-minister-canada-world-refugee-day>, accessed April 17, 2017.

⁷ Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on International Development Week 2016,” public statement delivered February 6, 2016 in Ottawa, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/02/08/statement-prime-minister-canada-international-development-week-2016>, accessed April 17, 2017.

⁸ Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on World AIDS Day,” public statement delivered December 1, 2016 in Ottawa, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/12/01/statement-prime-minister-canada-world-aids-day>, accessed April 17, 2017.

⁹ Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Mental Health Week,” public statement delivered May 2, 2016 in Toronto, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/05/02/statement-prime-minister-canada-mental-health-week>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁰ Justin Trudeau, “Prime Minister re-opens Veteran Affairs Canada office in Sydney, Nova Scotia,” public speech delivered November 10, 2016 in Ottawa, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/11/10/prime-minister-re-opens-veterans-affairs-canada-office-sydney-nova-scotia>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹¹ Justin Trudeau, “Opening Ceremony for the Signing Ceremony of the Paris Agreement,” public speech delivered April 22, 2016 in NYC, NY, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/04/22/opening-ceremony-signing-ceremony-paris-agreement>, accessed April 17, 2017.

Ismaili Muslims,¹² Buddhists,¹³ Sikhs,¹⁴ and Black Canadians of African and Caribbean descent.¹⁵ At the time of writing, compassion has also been included in political discourse by New Democratic Party leader candidates such as Charlie Angus¹⁶ and Niki Ashton,¹⁷ and it has also been used to criticize Conservative Party leader candidates such as Kellie Leitch¹⁸ and Kevin O’Leary.¹⁹ This heavy focus on the rhetoric of compassion in politics

¹² Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Imamat Day,” public statement delivered July 11, 2016 in Ottawa, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/07/11/statement-prime-minister-canada-imamat-day>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹³ Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Vesak,” public statement delivered May 20, 2016 in Ottawa, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2016/05/20/statement-prime-minister-canada-vesak>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁴ Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji,” public statement delivered November 25, 2015 in London, UK, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/11/25/statement-prime-minister-canada-birthday-guru-nanak-dev-ji>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁵ Justin Trudeau, “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on Black History Month,” public statement delivered February 1, 2017 in Ottawa, ON, <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/02/01/statement-prime-minister-canada-black-history-month>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁶ Charlie Angus, “Re: Immediate Action for MMIWG2S,” email message to the Honourable Carolyn Bennet, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, November, 15 2016, http://charlieangus.ndp.ca/sites/default/files/multisite/76282/field_content_files/2016-11-15_letter_mmiwg_nihb_travel_and_shelters.pdf, accessed April 17, 2017; Charlie Angus, “New Democrats join Canadians in celebrating Black History Month,” public statement delivered February 1, 2017, <http://charlieangus.ndp.ca/new-democrats-join-canadians-in-celebrating-black-history-month>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁷ Niki Ashton, “Young, precarious workers better insured with Tom Mulcair,” public statement delivered September 22, 2015, <http://nikiashton.ndp.ca/young-precarious-workers-better-insured-with-tom-mulcair>, accessed April 17, 2017; Niki Ashton, “International Women’s Day,” public statement delivered March 10, 2014, <http://nikiashton.ndp.ca/international-women-s-day>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁸ Leitch’s policies for screening immigrants for Canadian values have been accused of “fuelling hate.” See Judith Timson, “We Need To Talk About Kellie Leitch,” *The Star*, February 1, 201, <https://www.thestar.com/life/2017/02/01/we-need-to-talk-about-kellie-leitch-timson.html>, accessed April 17, 2017. While she has also received criticisms for her cold and awkward disposition, particularly with respect to a promotional video she released, apparently showing a lack of compassion, warmth, and likeability, I will exclude these criticisms due to concerns of ableism that I will expand upon later. In response to these controversies, in an interview Leitch has described herself as “a very compassionate and sensitive person.” See in Malcolm Johnston, “Q&A: Kellie Leitch, the potential future prime minister who wants to bring President-elect Trump’s message to Canada,” *Toronto Life*, November 9, 2016, <http://torontolife.com/city/toronto-politics/qa-kellie-leitch-potential-future-prime-minister-wants-bring-president-elect-trumps-message-canada/>, accessed April 17, 2017. While she does not include compassion explicitly as one of her infamous shared Canadian values, she includes similar notions like “helping others,” “generosity,” and “tolerance.” See “Screening for Canadian Values,” <https://kellieworks.ca/screening-for-canadian-values/>, accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁹ O’Leary was publicly criticized by his *Dragon’s Den* co-star Arlene Dickinson for a “total lack of empathy,” arguing that “self-interest isn’t what politics should be about,” and that “Canadians deserve a compassionate and caring person to lead their country.” See Arlene Dickinson, “Arlene Dickinson on Kevin O’Leary’s entry into Conservative leadership race,” *CBC*, January 18, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/kevin-o-leary-conservative-run-arlene-dickinson-opinion-1.3942349>, accessed April 17, 2017.

has made it clear that there is a strong contemporary interest in the role of compassion in the political sphere. Moreover, as evidenced in almost all of these circumstances, the stakes of political compassion have been articulated as diversity, inclusion, tolerance, and anti-oppression.

Concerns with the political problem of compassion in the face of diverse, conflicting, or even competing desires seems unsurprising in the Canadian context, given its history of being characterized by plurality rather than unity. Such pluralism forces individuals to immediately situate themselves with respect to outside influences which may conflict with and even destroy their sense of self. Ian Angus remarks that a characterizing feature of Canadian political thought has been the “basic question [of] whether Canada, or even English-speaking Canada considered separately, can attain enough unity to become a nation—in the sense of a people with a unified culture—at all.”²⁰ It is for this reason he notes there has been a noticeable reliance on the thought of Hegel in Canadian political thought due to the general goal of reconciling a plurality into one nation, “which is remarkable,” Angus notes, “since Hegel himself explicitly rejected the notion that Canada might offer anything of interest to either history or philosophy.”²¹ Margaret Atwood makes a similar claim in her pioneering 1972 book on Canadian literature, *Survival*, where she argues that

The central symbol for Canada [...] is undoubtedly *Survival*, *la Survivance*. [...] For early explorers and settlers, it meant bare survival in the face of ‘hostile’ elements and/or natives: carving out a place and a way of keeping

²⁰ Ian Angus, *The Undiscovered Country: Essays in Canadian Intellectual Culture* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6. Angus is referring to Hegel’s comments in *The Philosophy of History*, where he writes “What has taken place in the New World up to the present time is only an echo of the Old World—the expression of a foreign Life; and as a Land of the Future, it has no interest for us here, for, as regards *History*, our concern must be with that which has been and that which is. In regard to *Philosophy*, on the other hand, we have to do with that which (strictly speaking) is neither past nor future, but with that which *is*, which has an eternal existence—with Reason; and this is quite sufficient to occupy us” (Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 87).

alive. [...] For French Canada after the English took over it became cultural survival, hanging on as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government. And in English Canada now while the Americans are taking over it is acquiring a similar meaning. There is another use of the word as well: a survival can be a vestige of a vanished order which has managed to persist after its time is past, like a primitive reptile. This version crops up in Canadian thinking too, usually among those who believe that Canada is obsolete.”²²

Where Angus notes the precarity of diverse cultures creates the obsession with unity, Atwood notes that this insecurity from this precarity creates the obsession with survival. It was considering the colloquially understood identity of Canada-as-compassionate alongside with Angus’s political identity of Canada-as-uniting-diversity and Atwood’s literary identity of Canada-as-surviving-the-outdoors that lead me to consider that *not* surviving may be a more interesting resolution.

In addition to an interest in compassion in quotidian (and Canadian) political thought, there has seemed to be an interest in forming political theories that articulate a grammar of compassion and/or the abnegation of desire in broader trends in academic political thought, for example the politics of recognition, the ethics of care, or queer theory. Axel Honneth, for example, describes the politics of recognition as “a welcoming gesture [that] expresses the fact that one can subsequently reckon upon *benevolent*

²² Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2012), 27. It is clear from this definition that Atwood is only talking about historically British or French settlers in her definition—she writes of her analysis that “All the books in this chapter are by white people. What the Indians themselves think is another story, and one that is just beginning to be written” (114, though the latter claim is clearly false). She later notes of the role of Indigenous nations in settler Canadian literature that “the Indians and Eskimos [sic] have rarely been considered in and for themselves; they are usually made into projections of something in the white Canadian psyche, a fear or a wish” (95). Indigenous nations, to Atwood, and to the Canadian writers she references, seem to be a part of the “outside” of the historic construction of the Canadian state, which also includes the harsh outdoors, Americans, and perhaps in the contemporary context, refugees and immigrants. She refers to this as “a closed and ingrown garrison mentality” (193) wherein (referring to E.J. Pratt’s *Brébeuf and his Brethren*) “inside the wilderness but disapproving of it and of Indian society, he eventually constructs his garrison, a four-square structure enclosed by walls, with a separate enclosure of tame Indians. He has built a shell for himself: outside the walls are the hostile forces, Nature and the Indians; inside them are the Christianity and the French civilization” (99).

actions,”²³ describing it further as involving a “decentering” that “*concedes* to another subject.”²⁴ Joan Tronto describes an ethics of *care* wherein “one needs, in a sense, to *suspend one’s own goals*, ambitions, plans of life, and concerns, in order to recognize and *to be attentive to others*,”²⁵ arguing that politically it is “necessary for democratic citizens to live together well in a pluralistic society.”²⁶ Lee Edelman argues for a nonreproductive queer theory that does not “enter the properly political sphere [...] by shifting the figural burden of queerness to someone else,”²⁷ but rather calls for sinthomosexual subjects who “*endanger the fantasy of survival* by endangering the survival of [heteronormative] love’s fantasy.”²⁸ These theories all involve an element of abandoning habits of self-oriented action for habits of sacrifice and loss in the face of the competing desire of another, a habit of loss that Danielle Allen points out has generally been excluded from the realm of

²³ Axel Honneth and Avishai Margalit, “Recognition,” *Proceedings from the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 75 (2001): 120, I emphasize.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 122, I emphasize.

²⁵ Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 128, I emphasize.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161–162.

²⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 74, I emphasize. That is to say, Edelman argues that structures of heteronormativity are formed around the “impulse to immortality, to perpetuating its self-perpetuation through the mechanics of genetic exchange” (63) and so that heteronormative love, “with its orientation towards the wholeness of a person, only reproduces (and in more ways than one) the subject’s narcissistic fantasy in the face of the originary wound inflicted by the fact of ‘sexed reproduction,’ a fact that produces the living being at the cost of sufficiency unto itself. [...] Love, therefore, like fantasy, seeks to regain that lost immortality, and to do so, fantasmatically, by translating sexed reproduction, through which immortality was lost, into the very mode and guarantee of its future restoration” (73–74). Action for Edelman becomes dictated by a desire to reproduce one’s own being and desire, or that “desire is desire for no object but only, instead, for its own prolongation” (86). In queer theory, to Edelman, the sinthomosexual undoes this narcissistic quest for reproduction through a willingness to *not* reproduce oneself, to forego prolonging one’s desire, and to die. While arguing for a similar politics of abnegating one’s desire over others (to reproduce oneself), he is skeptical of *compassion* specifically, due to his association of compassion with Lacan’s understanding of altruism, wherein (he quotes) “my egoism is quite content with a certain altruism, [...] altruism that is situated on the level of the useful. [...] What I want is the good of others provided that it remain in the image of my own.” Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, 187, quoted in Edelman, *No Future*, 83. Still, he still seems to describe a willingness to forego one’s own desire in the nonreproduction in one’s self, leaving questions of time out of one’s control. I thank David Miller for his recommendation of and commentary on *No Future*.

possibility when one thinks about their own political action in spite of the fact that loss when living with others is a democratic fact.²⁹ In short, while it is clear that compassion is a politically interesting concept, it is unclear exactly what the role of compassion is meant to be in politics, if it involves both diversity of others and accepting loss, as well as survival of the self. It is also unclear how exactly one is to articulate a political theory of compassion without replicating the nuances of self-centrism it seeks to address and provide an alternative to.

In this essay, I will be looking at the role of compassion in the political sphere, asking “What role does compassion play in politics?” I will argue that the role of compassion in the political realm is a decentring of oneself as the primary subject of political action during instances of competing desires, replacing one’s own desire with the desire of another, in such a way that instead of being driven by one’s own desire for security, survival, and further perpetuation of one’s own desire, one becomes vulnerable to annihilation by another’s competing desire and action. The first chapter will look at establishing an understanding of the concept of compassion broadly, looking at its proponents and its critics to argue that the rhetoric of compassion invokes a decentring of oneself and one’s desire as the basis of action, looking instead to act for the benefit of another. The second chapter will continue this thread, looking at the relationship between compassion and politics specifically. I will focus on the thought of Hannah Arendt to argue that despite her assertion that the political sphere is the place for the performance of one’s unique self, this performance immediately requires the abstention of this act by others to instead passively witness and receive this act. In conclusion, I will argue that

²⁹ Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 29.

rather than being an arena exclusively for the pursuit of one's own desire, there remains room for *political* compassion as an *abnegation of one's own desire* when faced with the competing desire of another.

Theoretical Framework

Theories of desire

As with many works on the realm of politics, this essay deals heavily with the mediation of a plurality of desires. Understanding the renunciation of one's own desire in this mediation, and the central role that this plays in the question of political compassion, must come with an understanding of what desire is. For a number of reasons, the understanding used will be the understanding of desire as the production of reality put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their seminal work *Anti-Oedipus*:

If desire produces, it produces what is real. If desire is productive, it can be so only in reality, and only of reality. Desire is this assembly of *passive syntheses* that make partial objects, flux and bodies, and that work as units of production. Reality flows, it is the result of passive syntheses of desire, like the autoproduction of the unconscious. Desire does not lack anything, it does not lack its object. It is more so the subject who is missing in desire, or rather, desire that misses a fixed subject; there is no subject fixed except by repression. Desire and its object are but one, the machine, in the sense of a machine-machine. Desire is a machine, and moreover the object of desire is a connected machine, to the extent that the product is taken out of its production, and that something detaches from the production to the product, leaving a remainder to the nomadic and vagrant subject. The targeted being of desire is the Real itself.³⁰

Deleuze and Guattari seem to build upon Spinoza's framework put forth in *The Ethics* wherein subjects, rather than being discrete bodies, are themselves caused and shaped by their environment. Spinoza notes that "in the mind there is no absolute, or free, will. The

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie : L'Anti-Œdipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 34, I translate, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize.

mind is determined to this or that volition by a cause, which is likewise determined by another cause, and this again by another, and so ad infinitum.”³¹ The mind and bodies of subjects are caused by others because they are a part of a common substance with them, and so subjects are not distinctly, discretely, or uniquely themselves, and what becomes of a subject is not spontaneously new and arising out of nothing, but rather the effect of causes in a substance which has once taken shape in other forms. This is not to say one does not have a will, or that one is caused by this apparent determinism to do things *against* one’s will, but rather that the experience of decision making (an experience one understands as their free will) is caused by factors outside of oneself, rather than crafted anew.³² In this sense, the will, or desire, is not something taking place within a unique and immutable subject which is then intentionally deployed in order to cause change, but is always the process of what is happening, or the manifested effect of different causes. It is for this reason that Spinoza notes that will and intellect are the same thing.³³ What distinguishes discrete subjects, since they are part of a chain of effect rather than a distinct beginning, is a *conatus*, which acts like a current in a larger body of flows, or simply a tendency toward self-preservation.³⁴ He explains that

When this conatus is related to the mind alone, it is called *Will*; when it is related to mind and body together, it is called *Appetite*, which is therefore nothing else but man’s essence, from the nature of which there necessarily follow those things that tend to his preservation, and which man is thus determined to perform. Further, there is no difference between appetite and *Desire* except that desire is usually related to men in so far as they are conscious of their appetite. Therefore it can be defined as follows: desire is ‘appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof.’

³¹ Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), II.48.

³² This discussion also could apply for discussions of intentionality: while this vision of desire complicates understandings of intentionality, it does not mean that individuals do not *intend* to do things, but rather that these intentions are caused, and not created by the subject themselves.

³³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, II.49.cor.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, III.7.

It is clear from the above considerations that we do not endeavour, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, *we judge a thing to be good because we endeavor, will, seek after and desire it.*³⁵

While Deleuze and Guattari set up desire as the constant unrolling of what happens, rather than the distance between a subject and what they want (which is lacking), this is not to deny that the latter exists, as to do so would paradoxically assert a lack between a signifier and its signified (or rather, to say that one is not experiencing desire properly, and that the real experience of desire is “over there,” when one’s experience of desire as lack is already a real production.) Spinoza noted above that desire is “appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof.” While Spinoza, as well as Deleuze and Guattari, conceive of a subject constituted by the current of their desire, this flow of desire is not unaffected by its own process of flowing. That is to say, if desire is appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof, and will and intellect are the same thing, then awareness of one’s desire and narratives used to understand it are forms of desire themselves. While one may describe desire-as-lack through desiring-production, the existence of desire-as-lack as a socially constructed narrative may continue to have real effects on how one acts. While one is driven and caused by a chain of desire, and desire always occurs at the moment of cause, rather than being deployed from a new, uncaused subject towards a lack, awareness of the narrative of desire-as-lack is a caused occurrence, and the real experience of feeling oneself in a fantasy away from the object of desire, which is lacking, may continue to have important effects on the consciousness of desire, and of desire in this discussion of compassion, which seeks to abnegate one’s real and always-productive desire.

³⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, III.9.sch., I emphasize.

The role that the sensation of fantasy as opposed to reality plays in the narrative of desire-as-lack is explored in Djuna Barnes's novel *Nightwood*. Barnes follows the relationship between the protagonist, Nora Flood, and her lover, Robin Vote, who seems to live her life in a fantasy away from the, "real" world, seeming off and inaccessible to those around her, and wandering the streets at night, as though she were passing through the world asleep. Matthew O'Connor, a character who serves as the book's meta-narrator, comments on how Vote seems to pass through the world as though she were elsewhere, noting that "he felt that her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood that had no known setting."³⁶ Given that her *attention* is always held *elsewhere* with *no known setting*, Barnes points out the discomfort experienced by Vote when her sleeping fantasy, which has real effects on her life, is confronted with the apparently real "waking" world; as well as the discomfort experienced by her lover Flood, when her waking fantasy of the relationship is confronted with Vote's very *real* sleeping world, from which Flood is absent:

The dead have committed some portion of the evil of the night; sleep and love, the other. For what is not the sleeper responsible? [...] So used is he to sleep that the dream that eats away its boundaries finds even what is dreamed an easier custom with the years [...] The sleeper is the proprietor of an unknown land. He goes about another business in the dark—and we, his partners, who go to the opera, who listen to gossip of café friends, who walk along the boulevards, or sew a quiet seam, cannot afford an inch of it; because, though we would purchase it with blood, it has no counter and no till. She who stands looking down upon her who lies sleeping knows the horizontal fear, the fear unbearable. For man goes only perpendicularly against his fate. He was neither formed to know that other nor compiled of its conspiracy.³⁷

³⁶ Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 44.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86–87.

Barnes takes the sleeping woman, Robin Vote (since “the dream” tends to be used metonymically for desire-as-lack,) and illustrates that her dream is not something lacking from her waking life, but rather the production of this dream is what constitutes her life and experience. She continues writing that

those who turn the day into night, the young, the drug addict, the profligate, the drunken and that most miserable, the lover who watches all night long in fear and anguish. These can never again live the life of the day. When one meets them at high noon they give off, as if it were a protective emanation, something dark and muted. The light does not become them any longer. They begin to have an unrecorded look. It is as if they were being tried by the continual blows of an unseen adversary.³⁸

The prescription that this sleeping “fantasy” is in fact a *lack* and not real creates a discomfiting collision of desires: “what do they find then, that this lover has committed the unpardonable error of *not being able to exist*—and they come down with a dummy in their arms.”³⁹ The experience of colliding desires is also found in Barnes’s character of Nora Flood, who is literally awake but has her waking fantasy of her love for Vote interrupted by her realisations that Vote is not there, but asleep: “For the lover, it is the night into which his beloved goes that destroys his heart; he wakes her suddenly, only to look the hyena in the fact that is her smile, as she leaves that company.”⁴⁰ For both Vote and Flood, desire-as-lack is experienced when the site of one’s subject formation is the collision between two currents of desire, effectively ending the flow of one, creating the sensation of lack in another. Deleuze and Guattari describe desire as, in turn, flows that continue forward, and flows that are cut off.⁴¹ The experience of one’s hunger for an apple and seeming lack involves the collision between a real fantasy wherein one is

³⁸ Barnes, *Nightwood*, 94.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 93, I emphasize.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *L’Anti-Œdipe*, 7.

feeding on an apple, and a real fantasy wherein one stands there with no food. The latter interrupts the former, and one is left apple-less, remembering only moments ago when the apple was there. One is left with a real sense of lack, which is not lacking in reality, since the fantasy is present, but as present as the sensation of lack. Flood's love for Vote involves a collision between a fantasy in which she has obtained her beloved and a fantasy in which her beloved is elsewhere, again the latter interrupting the former, leaving her with the sensation that "I have been loved by something strange, and it has forgotten me."⁴² One experiences, at the moment of this collision and interruption, the flow of desire that formed one's subject begin to disappear, as it is affected, changed, or annihilated by another's.

Compassion, in this essay, involves such a collision between competing desires, as well as understanding that the production of one's own desire may interrupt or block the flow of another. In this moment of collision, one may experience a vacillation between two fantasies (one seemingly *with* one's desire, and one seemingly *with a lack* due to the desire of another). A sense of violence may be felt as the lack when one's own desire is halted by another's. The project of compassion seeks to avoid personally enacting this violence onto others by foregoing one's own desire to instead allow for another's to continue forward. This may seem to contradict Spinoza's assumption that subjectivity is delimited by a flow of desire that tends toward self-preservation, and that as such, "no thing can be destroyed except by an external cause."⁴³ If what constitutes a subject in a broader flow of substance is a specific current towards self-preservation, this specific flow that makes a subject cannot contain the cause of the flow that destroys it.

⁴² Barnes, *Nightwood*, 155–156.

⁴³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, III.4.

This however involves two statements on the relationship between the boundaries of one's subjectivity and the project of self-preservation: one descriptive, and one prescriptive. In the former, one might say that Spinoza describes a current of flow tending towards preservation as the boundaries of a subject, and in the latter, one might say that Spinoza continues to argue that subjects should actively work to maintain those boundaries given that this is the way one acts. In the second, self-preservation becomes not only a description of the flow, but an additional element ordering direction of the flow. Not only is the subject formed by the flow of self-preservation, but it is directed by an additional cause, the normative claim that one ought to further preserve those flows of self-preservation. The former may form the boundaries of a subject, but the latter may work actively to maintain and secure those boundaries.

Theories of natural selfishness

While self-preservation, or self-interest, may be taken as a sort of natural law, one may imagine a subject with a desire-constituted subjectivity that does not have this additional element of prescribed self-preservation, and so while they do not *will* their own destruction, they exhibit a *willingness* towards their own destruction. While they do not contain the cause of their own annihilation, they do not actively combat the external causes of their own annihilation, but acquiesce to succumb to them. This may be difficult to imagine however given the frequency with which self-interest *is* taken as natural law⁴⁴

⁴⁴ One might wonder, for example, what could possibly motivate, or cause, one to act if not one's own interest. While this statement is not rooted in any specific literatures at the current time, it has been the most common objection received towards this project, and so I suspect most readers may already be formulating this counter-argument.

For this reason it may be useful to briefly explore what natural law is, or what natural law *does*. Leo Strauss notes how

Natural right in its classic form is connected with a teleological view of the universe. All natural beings have a natural end, a natural destiny, which determines what kind of operation is good for them. In the case of man, reason is required for discerning these operations: reason determines what is by nature right with ultimate regard to man's natural end.⁴⁵

Natural law does not seem to be “natural” because it is always already motivating or propelling individuals and their desire (Strauss notes here that it must be found with reason), but rather it seems to be “natural” in the sense that it is able to affect others (if they find it) but is in turn not able to be affected or caused in any way *by* them, given that it exists, uncaused, spontaneously starting things anew. The role that natural law seems to play in politics is one of allowing cohesion: while it may be difficult to organize a plurality of competing desires together into one flow, this is possible if there is one *true* current that has no competition and that all must follow.⁴⁶

Deleuze and Guattari note that, at least in the example of Kafka, the transcendent law is presented as something unknowable that only presents itself through punishment.⁴⁷ If the law is something to be followed, it may be unnoticeable when it is being followed correctly, and only become visible through punishment when it is transgressed, and so “if the law remains unknowable, it is not because it is retired in its own transcendence, but simply because it is devoid of any interior: it is always one room over, or behind the

⁴⁵ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 7.

⁴⁶ For example, the solution Thomas Hobbes seems to arrive at, is that with the *natural* law, in striving towards self-preservation of one's unique, plural desire, each individual must forego that desire to abide *one* sovereign who will *unite* that plurality. That is to say, he deals with taming and mediating the plurality of desires, saying that the plurality will all be united and achieve self-preservation in all foregoing their desires. A discussion on Thomas Hobbes will be further explored in §2, and how the social contract differs from the masochist contract of foregoing one's own desire for another's desire, rather than a unified desire, will be explored in §3.

⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka : Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), 79.

door, ad infinitum.”⁴⁸ The difference between positive law and natural law may *seem* that, since positive law is constructed, it circulates with the desire of individuals and may forcefully punish a transgression, whereas natural law in its transcendence remains a distant force that one must find and then choose to obey. Leo Strauss however notes how natural law is found and ascended to through its transgressions as they manifest in contradictions in the dialectic of conversation:

Philosophy consists, therefore, in the *ascent* from opinions to knowledge or to the truth, in an ascent that may be said to be guided by opinions. It is this ascent which Socrates had primarily in mind when he called philosophy “dialectics.” Dialectics is the art of conversation or of friendly dispute. The friendly dispute which *leads toward the truth* is made possible or necessary by the fact that opinions about what things are, or what some very important groups of things are, *contradict* one another. Recognizing the contradiction, *one is forced to go beyond opinions toward the consistent view of the nature of the thing concerned*. That consistent view makes visible the relative truth of the contradictory opinions; the consistent view proves to be the comprehensive or total view. The opinions are thus seen to be fragments of the truth, soiled fragments of pure truth. In other words, the opinions prove to be solicited by the self-subsisting truth, and *the ascent to the truth proves to be guided by the self-subsistent truth which all men always divine*.⁴⁹

While Strauss’s truth is self-subsisting, its role is to guide and change the desire of men, fuelled by a desire to obtain it. The natural law is not something distant that is willfully obeyed, but as with Deleuze and Guattari, Strauss’s natural law is something whose presence forces dissenters into acquiescence when it is transgressed. As in the beginning of *The Republic*, when Polemarchus challenges Socrates to persuade he and his interlocutors *if they don’t listen*,⁵⁰ a natural law is able to alter an individual’s desire when they transgress it, given that the appearance of natural in the form of logical

⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 82

⁴⁹ Strauss, *Natural Right*, 124, I emphasize. One would note that despite a claim that they won’t listen, they eventually forced into listening and acquiescing due to the apparent irrefutability of the truth contradicting their opinions.

⁵⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 327c.

contradiction forces them to change their ideas. In this sense it may not require active consent, active participation, or active listening. Both natural law and positive law become instruments to punish or altering another's desire. In this sense, it is not that there is a law, such as self-preservation, that exists, and must be willfully found and obeyed or ignored, but "that where we believed there was law, there was in fact desire, and only desire."⁵¹ The only difference between the narrative of natural and positive law being whether the body of law that affects may itself be affected.

Strauss is averse to this relativism in law, or the ability of a law to be caused, affected and changed. He opposes this to natural law in the sense that it does allow one to root one's own desire in any form of universal and immutable driving force but rather simply as a banality, arguing that "once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe in them anymore. We cannot wholeheartedly act upon them anymore."⁵² In short, Strauss seems to fear that, if one does not see their driving motivations as universal, absolute, and out of one's own control, they will not be deemed worthy enough to follow. A "natural law" in this argument seems to say that, in the absence of a cause that is itself unchangeable, one should not bother being affected by it at all. Albert Camus, conversely, is concerned with the way in which individuals act knowing the banality or relativism of their own desire, and the way that they are effected by an ever-changing precariousness. Looking at, for example, absurdism in art, he notes that

The absurd work of art requires an artist aware of these limits and a form of art where its concrete being signifies nothing other than that which it is. It cannot be the end, the meaning and the solace of one's life. To create or to not create;

⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 90, I translate.

⁵² Strauss, *Natural Right*, 6.

it changes nothing. The absurd creator does not cling to their work. They could renounce it; at times, they do renounce it.⁵³

This essay takes seriously the possibility of an absence of natural law, in the sense that no guiding cause is itself universal and unchangeable, but rather the product of causes and at times competing with a plurality of other causes. As such, in the context of compassion, one may absurdly renounce one's own desire to instead act from the cause of another's, given the absence of a necessary law dictating that one *ought* to strive towards self-preservation. In short, while one may be distinguished by a flow of self-preservation, it is possible to forego that self-preservation and have a willingness to be annihilated if there is an absurdist indistinction between the importance of one's own desire and the importance of another's desire.

Methodology

The framework and content of this essay may also have effects on methods of reading as well as methods of writing. The absence of self-centrism it takes seriously in content it also takes seriously in form (if these can be differentiated at all.) What follows in this section is a brief outline of how an essay on the abnegation of one's own desire may affect how texts are read and written in the study of political ideas.

Methods of the study of political ideas

In their edited volume *Ceci n'est pas une idée politique*, Dalie Giroux and Dimitri Karmis highlight four main approaches to the study of what they term "political ideas": political philosophy, the history of ideas, political theory, and political thought. While they note that these four terms are variably distinguished between or used

⁵³ Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 134, I translate.

interchangeably, they are all generally used to refer to a subdiscipline concerned with knowledge related to the foundations of, rather than applications of, political systems. They are related to comprehension more than explanation, and seek to problematize political questions rather than to offer explicit solutions. All four subfields also have the text as its principal object of analysis, looking at the social and political function of language, or other active symbolic systems in political life.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, given its place at the end of the list, Giroux and Karmis prefer the idea of political *thought*, and are interested in both how it relates to but differs from the first three, given that it seems to be the most ubiquitous and yet unspecified.

They claim that political philosophy, the history of ideas, and political theory all form bounded and delimited disciplines that relate to political thinking, though with differences between them.⁵⁵ In common, and in opposition to political thought, they all share a predilection for suspending the researcher apart from the object of research, differentiating between the knowledgeable researcher and reality. The relationship then between the text is that of a third order, separate from both the researcher and the world there is to know, intended to symbolize the latter.⁵⁶ Alternatively, while political thought may involve the content of political thinking found in the first three, it does not have as

⁵⁴ Dalie Giroux and Dimitrios Karmis, “L’étude des idées politiques : défis et approches,” in *Ceci n’est pas une idée politique : Réflexions sur les approches à l’étude des idées politiques* (Laval: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2013), 5.

⁵⁵ For this essay, the differences between political philosophy, the history of ideas, and political theory are unimportant, except for the way they all differ from political thought, which is the method of relevance. While it may be important to note that political philosophy is generally associated with Leo Strauss, and the history of ideas with Quentin Skinner, their identification of what political theory *is*, and the way it relies on formal logic in a way that differs from political philosophy, remains unclear. My only guess is that while *theory* maintains an implication of a formal discipline, and can therefore only be formed by academics apart from their objects of analysis, *thought* may take place anywhere, and allows the political researcher to be on the same plane as and implicated in the field of political thinking on which they are writing.

⁵⁶ Giroux and Karmis, “L’étude des idées politiques”, 7–8.

exclusive of boundaries of an academic discipline, and importantly subverts the staged scene of the knowledgeable political thinker. Instead they argue that, in political thought, discourse is always already in the world it is questioning, and therefore the political thinker is always interrogating their own position and experience as part of the discourse, which is both the object of their analysis as well as the environment in which it is done. Elsewhere they describe what they term “an idiot’s epistemology,” noting that such an approach to the study of political ideas challenged who is considered a “political thinker.” They point out that political thinking may occur outside of the academic discipline and that even within the discipline political thinking can take place with nuances of idiocy, noting that “thought is in the world, it is that which circulates, it is in relations, rather than in the individual consciousnesses that bring about meticulously choreographed somersaults by dead and all-powerful masters.”⁵⁷ The study of political thought, as such, is distinct for its acknowledgment that language and the text is not neutral, including those one studies and those one writes, that language and ideas are productive, placing particular significance on the question of “Who is speaking?”⁵⁸

In accepting the role of this essay not standing distinct from the political culture it is commenting on, but rather being a part of and implicated in it, these deliberations on how this essay is to situate itself within the political thinking it addresses becomes particularly important given the way notions of compassion, attention towards others, and absence of the self may influence how texts are both read and written. Hannah Arendt

⁵⁷ Jean-Pierre Couture and Dalie Giroux, “Onze thèses pour une épistémologie idiote,” in *Idiots : Figures et personnages liminaires dans la littérature et les arts*, ed. Véronique Cnockaert, Bertrand Gervais and Marie Scarpa (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2012), 248.

⁵⁸ Dalie Giroux, “Anarchie et méthode : Une approche généalogique des idées politiques chez Marx et Nietzsche,” in *Ceci n’est pas une idée politique : Réflexions sur les approches à l’étude des idées politiques* (Laval: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2013), 333.

asserts that *speech* is what “makes man a political being,” (HC 3) and that conversely, “passion and compassion are not speechless, but their language consists in gestures and expressions of countenance rather than in words” (OR 76). Given the fact that it is precisely the possibility of compassion and speechlessness that is the topic of this essay, is worth exploring the way in which compassion and speechlessness may be theorized in a discipline that relies so heavily on speech and the text. Specifically, how does the topic of compassion affect the way one might write a text, and in turn, how a text ought to be read? If compassion involves a decentring of one’s own self-interest, what might a text on compassion point to if not its apparent author? How does complicating the notion of speech as a disclosure of the agent change the way texts are read? How does the study of political ideas understand who or what a text communicates?

Methods of reading and writing silence

Leo Strauss first poses the question of a text that masks its meaning in his essay “Persecution and the Art of Writing.” Being a proponent of political philosophy, Strauss believes that the study of such is the “quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole [...] philosophy is necessarily preceded by opinions about the whole. It is, therefore, the attempt to replace opinions about the whole by knowledge of the whole.”⁵⁹ Strauss argues against any sort of relativism or historicism in the study of political ideas, noting how

Men cannot live, that is, they cannot live together, if opinions are not stabilized by social fiat. [...] The public dogma is originally an inadequate attempt to answer the question of the all-comprehensive truth or of the eternal order. Any inadequate view of the eternal order is, from the point of view of the eternal order, accidental or arbitrary; it owes its validity not to its intrinsic truth but to

⁵⁹ Leo Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?” in *What is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 11.

social fiat or convention. The fundamental premise of conventionalism is, then, nothing other than the idea of philosophy as the attempt to grasp the eternal.⁶⁰

To Strauss, the contradiction of relativism, historicism, or conventionalism is that it seeks to universalise the study of political ideas as well as to universalise historically situated ideas at their time to create political cohesion, all while asserting that “all human thought or beliefs are historical, and hence deservedly ought to perish.” As such, he notes how “to assert the historicist thesis means to doubt it and thus to transcend it.”⁶¹ This approach to the study of political ideas greatly affects the way in which Strauss reads texts. As Giroux and Karmis noted, political philosophy holds a strong distinction between the political researcher and its subject matter, and Strauss indeed notes how the traditional texts of political philosophy which aim to grasp the universal truth act “like a screen between the philosopher and political things, regardless of whether the individual philosopher cherish[es] or reject[s] that tradition.”⁶² Strauss’s approach to reading texts includes a strong concern for ascertaining their *meaning*, and in the case of Strauss, the meaning is a universal truth that the author was actively seeking and communicating. Interpretation involves “the attempt to ascertain what the speaker said and how he actually understood what he said, regardless of whether he expressed that understanding explicitly or not.”⁶³ The interpretation of political philosophy, in addition to finding the author’s intention, involves ascertaining the universal truth found in how the speaker understood what they said. To Strauss, the meaning of the text is synonymous with the intention of the writer

⁶⁰ Strauss, *Natural Right*, 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶² Strauss, “What is Political Philosophy?,” 27.

⁶³ Leo Strauss, “How to Study Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*,” in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 143.

which is synonymous with the universal truth, or at least with the pursuit of the universal truth.

Given its universality, the truth, the meaning of the text, and the intention of the author, all remain the same regardless of the form of the text. This becomes important to the way that Strauss understands the interpretation of texts where the meaning is deliberately obscured by its author. He notes that this may occur under conditions of persecution wherein an author rather must hide their true meaning and intention in a text that appears on the surface orthodox and uncontroversial to the powers of discipline at the time of writing. The political philosopher is able to write between the lines in such a way that its meaning may only appear to “benevolent and trustworthy acquaintances, or more precisely, to reasonable friends.”⁶⁴ While the form may change in order to obscure its meaning, the author’s intended meaning, which seeks to find the truth, remains the same and discoverable to careful readers, even in spite of meaningful silences. The text is always intended to speak, and to speak a deliberate message that performs its writer, insofar as the writer is part of a quest for a universal truth.

In short, to Strauss and the project of political philosophy, texts are to be read and written with a clear, intended, and universally truthful meaning, and texts referenced may be done with either the correct or incorrect interpretation, given that the meaning remains

⁶⁴ Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 23–24. Strauss cites Plato’s *Republic* 450 d3–e1 in discussing the safety involved in telling the truth to trustworthy and intelligent acquaintances or friends. Strauss notes later in his essay on Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise* that “We learn to write by reading,” and that “we may therefore acquire some previous knowledge of an author’s habits of writing by studying his habits of reading” (Strauss, “How to Study Spinoza”, 144.) It is therefore unclear, if Strauss reads for the carefully hidden truth intended only for trustworthy and intelligent readers, why he would write on the hidden meaning of texts so clearly, given the way “exoteric literature presupposes that there are basic truths which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man, because they would do harm to many people who, having been hurt, would be inclined to hurt in turn him who pronounces the unpleasant truths” (Strauss, “Persecution”, 36).

the same regardless of form of text or context. This is refuted by Quentin Skinner, a proponent of the history of ideas rather than political philosophy as the method of studying political ideas. While Strauss refuted any sort of historicist approach which takes context into consideration in affecting the meaning of the text,⁶⁵ it is precisely this sort of historicist and contextual approach which Skinner adopts. Skinner, like Strauss, is still concerned with the project of *interpretation*, which he understands as “the business of ‘getting at the message’ of a text, and of decoding and making explicit its meaning,” while he also claims to “be careful to avoid the vulgarity [...] of supposing that we can ever hope to arrive at ‘the correct reading’ of a text, such that any rival readings can then be ruled out.”⁶⁶ Skinner is concerned with Strauss’s appeal to eternal or at least traditional standards of reading, which he labels the “mythology of doctrines,” which states that authors of texts have clear, unified doctrine which is stated and can be read.⁶⁷ Skinner instead notes that “the terms in which we express such concepts as freedom, justice, equality and so forth make sense only within the cultural contexts in which they arise.”⁶⁸ In this sense he argues that “we should not ask about the alleged ‘meanings’ of words, but rather about their use,” that “the intentions and meanings, whether with respect to actions or utterances, are a public matter, and are to be understood not by trying to get into the heads of past actors but simply by observing the forms of life within which they act,” and that “[we] should therefore ask ourselves what their authors were

⁶⁵ While he may accept the need to look at context to deduce whether an author may be writing between the lines under the influence of persecution, this does not affect his meaning but only his form.

⁶⁶ Quentin Skinner, “Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts,” *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 393–394, Skinner emphasizes.

⁶⁷ Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 12–13.

⁶⁸ Quentin Skinner, “Quentin Skinner on Encountering the Past,” interview by Petri Koikkalainen and Sami Syrjämäki, *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* 6 (October 4 2001): 37.

doing in writing as they wrote.”⁶⁹ It would seem that Skinner is much more modest than Strauss in his project, not supposing that there is some universal meaning to which the text corresponds, but rather an historically contingent meaning produced by certain contexts. Skinner is still, despite his claims against such a project, ultimately concerned with *meaning* and *interpretation*, and while he claims to be concerned more with the *use* of words, or what they were *doing*,⁷⁰ this is done in a fashion synonymous with Strauss’s meaning. While there may be no universal truth, texts are still ultimately a reflection of what the author was intending them to do, and our treatment of these texts must be in line with these intentions. Texts are still intended to speak, and to speak a writer’s deliberate message, even if that message itself is historically specific.

Susan Sontag comments on this project of interpretation, a project shared by both Strauss and Skinner (though these two were not mentioned by Sontag), in her essay “Against Interpretation.” She notes how the project of interpretation requires “a shadow world of ‘meanings’,” in which there is an important and clear meaning behind the text created by the author, and of which it is the text’s job to convey. In the academic context, interpretation becomes important in clarifying a text which was apparently obscure to begin with, and so while interpretation “presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers,” the interpreter, she argues, is altering the text, or rather altering what the text *does* by acting upon the world in the name of its meaning, though claiming only to make it intelligible.⁷¹ The project of interpretation makes a claim that the text has a meaning, but proves it insufficiently, or

⁶⁹ Skinner, “On Encountering the Past”, 46–47, Skinner emphasizes.

⁷⁰ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding”, 37.

⁷¹ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Delta, 1961), 6–7.

contradicts it at points, or does not convey it properly, but that the meaning has been conveyed to an interpreter who must clarify it through a further text.

Since this project on compassion takes seriously the claim that desire is produced rather than deployed as a lack by a discrete subject, it must also take seriously the claim that the interpretation and writing of text is similarly not a deployment of newly born idea by a discrete subject. Rather, it is a complex production that will in turn produce a number of discourses in its wake. While Skinner may have been correct in noting the historical contingency of texts, he was still concerned with what the author was *doing* within those historical contexts rather than paying attention to what the author *did*, what the text *did*, and what the text continues to *do*. Sontag rather notes the congruency of content and form, in the sense that texts do not have a specific content that may be expressed in different forms, but rather the form of the text is part of what the text *does*, what it communicates, how it affects, and therefore is part of the content. She suggests that one may elude the project of interpretation “by making works of art whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be... just what is it.”⁷² That is to say, the text is not an artefact demanding clarification, but rather that it is what it does, and subsequent treatments are not comments or claims to the reality of the text, but rather move past the text, as they were caused by it. She ends her essay claiming that “in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art,”⁷³ a claim which could be extended to a demand for an erotics of political thought, in which the academic treatment of artifacts of thought such as the text is not a claim to meaning or intention, but itself a product of what that text has done. Moreover, it

⁷² Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14.

is an acknowledgment that the academic work being produced may not communicate a directed message authored in such a way to affect audiences in an intended way, or have a clearly necessary purpose of *use* or *meaning*, as much as one could choose to read it that way. In short, texts, like subjects, are not discrete and uncaused beings starting something anew, and they do not have intentions that are deployed from these discrete meanings. Rather, they have diverse and, at times, unforeseen effects.

This method of the study of political ideas is important to an essay on the pivotal role of the abnegation of one's own desire in compassion, given that the way in which self-sacrifice, silence, or the non-performance of the self becomes unimportant or negligible to the *interpretive* methods of Strauss and Skinner. If the central question in the study of political ideas is what authors *meant* in writing texts (whether that meaning is universally true or historically specific) one will lose sight of any actants which have moved from subjectivity into annihilation, given the self-selection bias of never having written a text, or never having been detected within a text. In the example of the personal diaries of Simone Weil, if the project of writing is *always* to have oneself heard, one might miss the way in which she was undone and forced into annihilation through her acquiescence to God, and that her writings that arose during this process are not attributable to her own desire, her own intended meaning, or any universal truth. The method of interpretation will always assume that a writer holds self-preservation through disclosing oneself via text to be a necessary precondition, and will never be able to understand how absences indicative of annihilation, but not disclosing the content of annihilation, reveal the ways in which individuals do not always strive for self-disclosure, but at times disappear, but in a disappearance that shapes reality. Avery Gordon, for

example, asks the question “how do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?”, suggesting that “visibility is a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated alternately by apparitions and hysterical blindness.”⁷⁴ In this sense, she notes that while an historical body may have been annihilated and rendered mostly forgotten, absent, or invisible, this invisibility continues to have an effect on the production of that by which it was destroyed. While Strauss might suggest that a silence in a text is meant to be found by a careful reader as an indication of a universal truth that is being masked, Sontag or Gordon might suggest that all texts are the product of a number of silences of those who have foregone their own desire and who have become annihilated in the face of another’s desire. If texts, as the primary object of analysis in the study of political ideas, are always intended to speak a deliberate message, one will lose sight of those who are not speaking. This is not to make a normative claim that silences ought to be heard, or that the goal of this essay is to incite others to look for silences. Rather, it is to claim that it may be difficult to understand how self-annihilation may affect the way in which one is to treat an artifact of political thought, when by necessity, those self-annihilations are never detected.

Understanding a methodology of reading silence is important to the essay at hand due to its goal of suggesting that there *can* be a willingness towards one’s own annihilation in the public and political realm, a suggestion that is frequently not explicitly written precisely due to its tendency *not* to be publicly and normatively stated. That is to say, the form of the suggestion matches the content, and so the idea that one may not publicly disclose oneself tends not to be publicly disclosed. Writers who hint at such an

⁷⁴ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 15.

outcome tend to publish few of the writings that they have written before dying at a young age (for example, Franz Kafka, Simone Weil, or Roger Gilbert-Lecomte), tend to publish little before going into reclusion and actively trying to impede the further dissemination of their already published writings (for example, J.D. Salinger, Djuna Barnes or Juan Rulfo) or tend to actively obscure the meanings behind the writings they do publish so that, while they may be literally written down, err on utter incomprehensibility (for example, Fernando Pessoa, Clarice Lispector, Mark Danielewski or Anne Carson.) While the ethical claim *not* to be normative, or *not* to disclose oneself, may, by seeming necessity, rarely be written explicitly, this essay seeks to suggest that it continues to be a possibility of action, and that compassion as this non-disclosure of self may complement political action, which does seek to publicly disclose oneself.

This methodology may affect both how this essay is written, and how texts in this essay have been read. The reading of texts may not simply consider what the author means, but rather to speculate on what the text, the choice of words, and the contexts seem to be doing or may have done, and its writing is not to impose that its readers must arrive at and agree with a clear and discrete argument. Its two chapters will play with these forms based on their respective content. The first chapter on compassion and self-sacrifice will be decentred in focus, may jump between texts, include long block quotes to give glimpses of the thought of others, and may not direct the reader's gaze through a specific argumentation for a specific use. The second chapter on speech, politics and Arendt will be narrower, will direct attention towards a single thinker and along a specific line of argumentation, and will require a greater labour of attention from the reader.

I. The Concept of Compassion

Not that I want to be a god or a hero.
 Just to change into a tree, grow for ages, not hurt anyone.
 – Czesław Miłosz, “Longing”

To organize an essay around the concept of *compassion* may seem challenging, due to the difficulty in determining the exact meaning behind its use. There may be a gap between its early etymology and its various contemporary uses, and the difference between these uses could result in inconsistencies in how the term is read and what it seems to do. Both those employing and criticizing the use of the concept of compassion in political thought could risk referring to different processes, and in turn reading what the other is saying in a way other than what was intended. To harness an understanding of compassion, this chapter will explore the linguistic root of the concept and the diverse ways the rhetoric of compassion has been used. It will highlight what it is that makes compassion a notable concept distinguishable from other forms of action, as well as what individuals are trying to do with it when they invoke it. It will note how, following from its linguistic root referring to a feeling or suffering with another, proponents of the concept of compassion such as Martha Nussbaum, Axel Honneth, and Emmanuel Housset, argue that this fellow-feeling allows for a form of action notable for the attention paid to the desire of another, in contrast to a form of action which primarily considers action as arising from oneself. This is in contrast to critics such as Sara Ahmed and Glen Coulthard who have claimed to reveal the ways in which, despite attempting to act for another, compassion still tends to propel one’s own desire, and may not differ from self-interested action at all. This criticism of compassion’s seeming paradox—that in trying to work towards another’s desire one really works towards one’s own—has led to the suspicion that rather than

criticizing the concept of compassion outright, these criticisms refer to specific, self-centred deployments of the term that are not generalizable to all of its uses. This suspicion is due to the seeming impossibility that any serious undertaking of pursuing another's desire will rather always just pursue one's own. While these criticisms of compassion may be true in the circumstances in which they are brought up, they may not be generalizable to criticize the possibility of compassion outright.

In this investigation of the role of political compassion, this chapter will suggest that the pivotal element of compassion is the abnegation of one's own desire in the face of the competing desire of another, saving a discussion of the political role of this abnegation of desire for the next chapter. Whether an act of compassion adequately arises from and represents another's desire rather than one's own seems to be the element that proponents of compassion use to justify it. In turn, compassion's critics seem to use the absence of this abnegation of desire to discredit compassion, arguing that compassion actually still arises from and represents only one's own desire. This understanding of compassion will draw attention to the way compassion is articulated in language, particularly using J.L. Austin's writings on speech acts. If the rhetoric of compassion is used and discussed with the understanding that it differs from a prevailing logic of self-interest, then it is worth noting that this same logic of self-interest may affect how one is able to articulate compassion with the language given, and that it also may affect *why* one may be wanting to use it within the theoretical framework of self-centrism. If there are different logics regarding the role of the self with respect to language that structure that language and its use—for example, one that allows for decentring of the self, and another that allows for a performance of the self—then there may be different visions of how

language is to be used, and in that vein, the same term may be used for different reasons. In this sense, it may make sense for self-interested individuals to deploy the language of compassion for their own interest, much the same way that both a liar and a truth-teller might say, "I am not a liar." Given the fact that both the liar and the truth-teller are employing language correctly in the way they set out, it does not make sense to assert that an obscure use of language is necessarily a misuse of language, though any theorist discussing the concepts of compassion or self-interest should be aware of these dynamics in the use of language. It may also be fair to say that if the theoretical structures of self-centrism referenced by proponents of compassion have been prevalent during the development of language, structures of self-centrism may also manifest themselves in everyday habits of how one articulates speech, rendering it difficult to speak of compassion even if one wants to. In this sense, while exploring how the concept of compassion has been theorized, particular attention will be paid, not necessarily to the terms individuals are using in their analyses, but rather what they are trying to do with these terms, understanding that individuals may be representing different motives in the same language, as well as that language may not be available to represent certain motives.

In addition to the dynamics of language in discussions of compassion, ethics of care theorist Nel Noddings also brings up the problematic dynamic of making normative claims for compassion. She importantly reminds her readers that when discussing questions of ethics, "we may become *dangerously self-righteous* when we perceive ourselves as holding a precious principle not held by the other."¹ This baggage of

¹ Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 5, I emphasize.

dangerous self-righteousness certainly comes along with the concept of compassion, given that it can be typically seen as ethically “good” and even “superior” in the face of selfishness, greed, and egoism. Noddings’s warning to avoid the self-righteous elevation of one’s own ethical values must be taken particularly seriously in discussions of compassion given the potential of this dangerous self-righteousness to undo the concept itself. If the concept of compassion is to involve a serious undertaking of another’s desire rather than one’s own, it would be a performative contradiction to discuss this while systematically prescribing one’s own ascription of value to the concept. In this respect, the goal of this essay is not to make a normative claim for compassion as *the* ethical stance from which to approach political or social life. It is rather to explore the possibilities and limits of compassion, as well as what exactly its role in political life is or might be. In this respect, while some have argued that “not the language of love and compassion, but only the language of freedom and equality, citizenship and justice, will *challenge* nondemocratic and oppressive political institutions,”² the discussion of the concept of compassion at hand is not to critique or replace certain logics (such as the self-centrism to action referenced earlier) but to explore the possibility of an alternative *and* complementary logic of action.

A last preliminary consideration into the exploration of compassion, in addition to questions of language and normativity, is the question of the “human” and its capacity as the “subject” of politics. As previously stated, this essay is not intended to assert compassion as a necessarily good, virtuous, or superior ethical stance or form of action. Furthermore, its goal is neither to assume that compassion is an intrinsically human

² Mary G. Dietz, “Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking,” *Political Theory* 13, no. 1 (1985): 34, I emphasize.

capacity or one that everyone may access with equal ease. A number of authors cited will attempt to draw a relationship between cognitive ability and the development or necessity of compassion. For example, Axel Honneth will illustrate the development of the capacity to hypothesize another's experience by comparing the development of Autistic children to non-Autistic children, explaining that "in the case of children *not* affected by autism this kind of emotional identification with others is absolutely necessary in order to enable the taking over of another person's perspective, which in turn leads to the development of the capacity for symbolic thought."³ More severely, Emmanuel Housset will write of compassion as the basis for community, saying that "a man devoid of pity would be equally devoid of his full humanity, simply because he would have lost his capacity of sensitivity."⁴ Most severely, Simone Weil will write of attention—which she sees as crucial to compassionate interactions with others—that "there is something in our soul that revolts against true attention far more violently than the flesh revolts against fatigue. This something is far closer to badness than to the flesh. That is why, each time we truly pay attention, we destroy all badness in ourselves."⁵ These understandings pose problems in their generalization of what individuals are capable of or innately do, and can be alienating to individuals with, for example, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Antisocial Personality Disorder, or Attention Deficit Disorder, respectively, who in these analyses

³ Axel Honneth, "Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Delivered at University of California, Berkeley, March 14–16 2005), 116, Honneth emphasizes.

⁴ Emmanuel Housset, "The paradoxes of pity," in *Care, Compassion and Recognition: An Ethical Discussion*, eds. Carlo Leget, Chris Gastmans and Marian Verkerk (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 71. Note that in this translation, the translator has opted to translate *pitié* into English as "pity", while others have translated Housset's concept as "compassion."

⁵ Simone Weil, "Réflexion sur le bon usage des études scolaires en vue de l'amour de Dieu," in *Attente de Dieu*, ed. J.-M. Perrin (Paris: La Colombe, 1950), 119, I translate.

are considered to be out of scope, inhuman, or evil.⁶ This analysis will neither restrict itself to a specific group of individuals and identify them as being cognitively normal, as with Honneth, nor delimit and define what it means to be human, as with Housset, nor make broad normative claims about good and evil, as with Weil. It is, rather, to understand what compassion might entail, while not supposing that it is applicable to or constitutive of what it means to be “human” (insofar as this category may be used at all), nor supposing that certain individuals are inherently incapable of compassion. It rather identifies compassion as a possibility that may (or may not) be accessed in various ways and with varying levels of ease.

The arguments in this chapter have grown from a suspicion that, in the absence of a reason not to, some individuals may strongly desire and work towards the flourishing of others. Pushing this further, the chapter will explore the idea that some individuals may work towards this flourishing even in the presence of a reason not to, and notably when this flourishing of another may not benefit and may even actively harm oneself. If compassion is to differ from regular action in that it relates to the desire of another rather than one’s own, one must adjust the focus of how desire is manifested into action appropriately. To focus an act of compassion on the well-being, capacity of reason, desire, benefit, or praise of the compassionate actor, rather than the one for whom or because of whom they are being compassionate, risks performatively contradicting itself. Language philosopher John Austin notes what he terms an *abuse* or *insincerity* of performative language, noting how, when language is intended to do something rather

⁶ This list is not intended to be comprehensive or definitive, it is rather to use contemporary diagnostic terms used to delimit cognitive functions of human subjects to illustrate how such restrictions by theorists may be used to restrict or prescribe individuals in their theories.

than to merely describe, it must be accompanied by certain thoughts and feelings that will dictate future conduct accordingly.⁷ Maintaining a focus on oneself in the context of compassion does not imply the language becomes void or that it was used falsely, but rather that it was not appropriately accompanied by the actions required to render it sincere. Such a sincere compassion as taking seriously another's desire would require an explicit element of decentring or decentering oneself in the process of action, in which a compassionate action is not based on one's own reason, one's own desire or maintaining one's own security. Rather, it must be done regardless of and frequently because it puts one into a position of vulnerability. In this sense, compassionate acts may frequently be something that one does not want to do, or representative of one's own desire, but are told to do and must do, in an acquiescence to another's desire.

The first section of this chapter will look at the uses, justifications, and critiques of the concept of compassion. It will look at both its etymological root as a form of suffering with another, as well as its colloquial understanding as a form of action wherein, rather than making decisions based on an individual's own desire, one is able to form a link with another individual or a community by acting as per another's desire. Moving from Marjorie Garber's concern with the condescension associated with compassion, to Martha Nussbaum's assertion that such a condescension does not exist, it will explore the differences between the concepts of compassion, empathy, sympathy, and pity. It will note that compassion is distinct for being a form of action, rather than mere suffering, as with empathy or sympathy. Moreover, it is distinct for transforming structures of domination rather than affirming and reinforcing them, as with pity. It will

⁷ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 15. This will be elaborated upon in §3.

identify the role of another's desire as primarily dictating action instead of one's own as the key element in both those who justify compassion, such as Emmanuel Housset, Nancy Fraser or Axel Honneth, as well as the key element apparently missing in those who criticize it, such as Sara Ahmed or Glen Coulthard.

Once the role that the desire of another plays in an act of compassion has been identified, the second section of this chapter will explore the way in which the representation of another's desire has been theorized in political thought, specifically the ways in which it has been impeded with the presence of the self. It will look at both Hanna Pitkin's discussions of political representation, specifically on the work of Thomas Hobbes, and Homi K. Bhabha's discussions of aesthetic representation, to look at the way in which the presence of one's self has been identified as the main threat to the possibility of representation of another. This is due to the way in which, when it is taken as a given that the performance or disclosure of oneself is an important project, the possibility of representing another desire risks being transformed or obscured by the presence of the self. It will move on to look at Susan Sontag's concern with representation specifically in the project of compassion, and the way in which the presence of the self in the project of compassion risks, again, using compassion as a Trojan horse to disclose oneself rather than to act caused by another. It will end by looking at the calls for transparency of the self in the works of Gayatri Spivak and Anne Carson, and applying them to a film by Jean-Luc Godard to illustrate the way in which one may undo oneself in one's own acts of communication, in the project of representing another's desire.

The last section of this chapter will look at the grammar required to formulate compassion as a foregoing of one's own desire. It will begin looking at J.L. Austin's

theory of speech acts and performative utterances as well as Jürgen Habermas’s writings on performative contradictions, looking at the way in which Austin’s theory of performative utterances restricts a grammar of compassion due to its reliance on the first person singular present indicative active tense. It will turn to the ethics of care literature to look at debates on the use of the language of self-sacrifice, noting the way in which resistance to the language of self-sacrifice in compassion or care does not centre on what it entails, but rather how it should be used. The last section will end on Chris Kraus’s deliberations on altruism and masochism, identifying the way in which the grammar of compassion removes any mention or allusion to oneself, and involves the consent to undoing or opening the boundaries of one’s own subjectivity. In concluding the chapter as a whole, compassion will be seen as an action that, while involving one’s self, is wholly caused and dictated by another, undoing the boundaries of the self in the process and rendering it vulnerable to annihilation.

§1 Compassion’s Use and its Critics

i. Suffering Together

Compassion is a relatively recent word, coming into use in the 14th century as a combination of the Latin *com* (“together”) with *pati* (“suffering”) to denote a suffering together with another (a “fellow feeling,”) or an emotion felt on behalf of another who suffers.⁸ It holds similar meaning to the older but less-used Greek *σμπάθεια*, also indicating a “fellow-feeling,”⁹ and the basis for the modern word *sympathy*. Marjorie

⁸ Garber, “Compassion”, 20, I emphasize.

⁹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1860), 610.

Garber compares compassion to sympathy as well as the distinctly modern concept of *empathy*, three concepts that are generally used interchangeably or with rotating understandings. She differentiates between the three, explaining that “a person who displays empathy is, it appears, to be congratulated for *having* fine *feelings*; a person who shows or expresses sympathy has good *cultural instincts and training*; a person who shows compassion seems *motivated*, at least in part, by values and precepts, often those learned from religion, philosophy, or politics.”¹⁰ Her understanding of empathy seems to concern one’s *own* feelings or emotion (leaving aside from her strange association of the term with the need for congratulation.) In the context of relating one’s own feelings to another’s suffering, empathy may denote an acknowledgement that what has once made oneself suffer is now making another suffer. While she associates empathy with “having [...] feelings”, sympathy and compassion both have elements of attention to the feelings that are uniquely another’s. Her notion of sympathy is still associated with an emotive “instinct”, though her use of the term “cultural instinct” continues to suggest that sympathy is not directed towards one’s own experiences, but those of another. While, in sympathy, one may not fully understand the details of this suffering, given that they do not suffer themselves, one may still recognize that another’s suffering is there, if only unintelligible to the sympathetic onlooker.¹¹ Lastly, Garber’s notion of compassion

¹⁰ Garber, “Compassion,” 24, I emphasize.

¹¹ While perhaps not theoretically rigorous, these differentiations between empathy and sympathy may make intuitive sense: for example, a citizen of a country may sympathize with an immigrant friend’s struggle to deal with the complicated bureaucratic processes needed to enter and remain in the country, whereas a fellow immigrant may empathize when having to go through or having gone through the same difficult process. Alternatively, sympathy’s difference from empathy may be illustrated through the cultural understanding of the sympathy card: sympathy cards are generally given to bereaving individuals by those who are not suffering from the same loss. While one may give a sympathy card to a friend who has lost a parent, one would not give a sympathy card to one’s own sibling at the loss of a mutual parent, given that one is suffering from the same loss.

appears, rather than a static emotional experience like sympathy and empathy, to be a dynamic move or action that is, as she phrases it, “motivated” by religious, philosophical or political values. While compassion may be based on the idea of a fellow-feeling, its evocation is concerned with what change is incited by that feeling. In this sense, compassion always seems to denote that an action is taking place to address that suffering; while this may be later complicated in this chapter through the suggestion that compassion action may not be authored by a “compassionate subject,” given that they are undone in their capacity as a subject in this process, it is still an action in the sense that it refers to a process that incites change.

According to Garber, the concept of compassion, as well as sympathy, began to acquire nuances of condescension, resulting in the need for the concept of empathy, which was void of this condescension. Compared to empathy, both sympathy and compassion seem to hold an element of “across,” in which the location where compassion or sympathy is felt is not the location of suffering. It is for this reason Garber argues that compassion quickly gained notions of condescension, noting that “compassion was felt not between equals but from a distance—in effect from high to low: ‘shown towards a person in distress by one who is free from it, who is, in this respect, his superior.’”¹² This understanding of compassion hovers alongside charity and condescension, as there is an implicit hierarchy that affords value to the ability to witness pain without experiencing it, and retracts value from being witnessed in pain. This hierarchy is further reinforced given the emotional benefits afforded to the nonsufferer, who is in turn able to gain pleasure from their administration of techniques to alleviate pain in compassion, or at least from

¹² Garber, “Compassion,” 20.

their personal sense of goodness in being able to witness and recognize the suffering in a state of sympathy while not having to undergo suffering themselves. In this sense, while claiming to be suffering *with* another (a *fellow* feeling), one is actually able to benefit from being the witness to another's suffering. This type of conspicuous compassion is similar to Thorstein Veblen's idea of conspicuous consumption, wherein rather than merely personal comfort or well-being, the commonplace uses of consumption, one is guided to a specific action by notions of glory: "the consumption of these [...] goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes *honorific*; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit."¹³ Similarly, as goods may be consumed for social wealth or influence, compassion may be used so that one can be seen as caring or compassionate.¹⁴ In short, while the etymology of compassion suggests that it is to suffer *alongside* another, Garber suggests that those who suffer and are witnessed by others incited to acts of compassion are actually suspicious of compassion because of the hierarchy associated with the term. When their suffering being taken seriously in the context of compassion, it becomes condescending since they are coded as hierarchically inferior due to the "badness" of their suffering as well as their inability to unilaterally alleviate it, in contrast to the "goodness" of witnessing suffering in compassion.

ii. In Praise of Compassion

Legal theorist Martha Nussbaum further explores this condescension during her praise of compassion, conversely arguing that it was not the term compassion that had acquired

¹³ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: MacMillan, 1899), 74. I thank Mark Hill for discussion on this point and this reference.

¹⁴ Patrick West, *Conspicuous Compassion* (London: Civitas, 2004), 5.

nuances of condescension and superiority, but rather *pity*. The term compassion, she argues, has only come into common use from the Victorian era onward to distinguish it from these nuances of condescension in pity. She explains that in reality, the term pity has historically been used to translated the uniquely used Greek *ἔλεος* and the French *pitié*, neither of which had these same connotations of condescension.¹⁵ She argues that while there may be a colloquial difference between the use of the two terms, they are essentially the same, and that any differentiations between them will be eliminated in any vigorous philosophical conversation. She admittedly uses them interchangeably.¹⁶

Though she refers to it as “the basic social emotion,” Nussbaum identifies pity, as with Garber’s compassion, not simply as a state of feeling but as an emotion with a *trajectory* or an emotion that incites an action. She variably describes it as “a painful emotion *directed* at the serious suffering of another creature or creatures”¹⁷ and as “an emotion that *responds* to the misfortune of others.”¹⁸ She argues that pity is “a central bridge between the individual and the community,” and that while it may related to

¹⁵ Martha Nussbaum, “Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13, no. 1 (1996): 29.

¹⁶ This interchanging use poses some problems for the part of this chapter that discusses Nussbaum, given that I assert there *is* a difference between pity and compassion and that I find Nussbaum’s inability to see the distinction, or to see the condescension in pity, problematic. Nussbaum, in her own texts, uses pity to refer to the discussion of the concept in early philosophical works (such as Aristotle, Rousseau, or Smith), but switches to compassion when discussing the term in the contemporary sense, acknowledging that pity now has a negative connotation, though she does not think this connotation is due. When discussing Nussbaum, I will consistently use the term “pity” to refer to the concept she is discussing, though it is worth noting that she thinks this concept is the same of compassion, and it is this improper evocation of compassion that I am discussing in this essay.

¹⁷ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 142, I emphasize.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 261, I emphasize. “Misfortune” seems to be a strange choice of words and would change the nuances of Nussbaum’s understanding of pity and compassion. While Nussbaum agrees with Aristotle that pity or compassion is only due when the sufferer is not themselves responsible or accountable for the suffering, she does not assume that this suffering must be haphazard or simply “bad luck,” as the term misfortune may suggest, but she seems to agree that compassion may be due when the suffering comes out of the direct and at times deliberately violent actions of others. I will ascribe this linguistic choice either to lazy rhetoric on her part, or to an allusion to Aristotle’s definition of pity which she uses as her basis in formulating her concept of compassion and pity but does not wholly accept. See Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 1385b13 ff.

emotions, one may still include it in traditions of philosophy without sacrificing the Enlightenment's commitment to reason and reflection, because it is itself a sort of reasoning.¹⁹ She eludes this apparent contradiction with the argument that, following Aristotle, while pity may be a (painful) emotion, it depends on three rational beliefs: that the sufferer's suffering is serious; that the sufferer is not culpable for their suffering; and that the sufferer's situation is similar to that of the onlooker. While for Nussbaum pity is based on another's experience of suffering, the qualification of suffering must be recognized using the reason of the onlooker, given that "pity takes up the onlooker's point of view, informed by the best judgment the onlooker can make about what is really happening to the person being observed—taking the person's own wishes into account, but not always taking as the last word the judgment that the person herself is able to form."²⁰

The theoretical move that keeps Nussbaum's discussion of pity and emotion in the Enlightenment tradition of reason and reflection, and her admitted contribution to the "long philosophical tradition" on the theorization of pity, is her inclusion of eudaimonism as a core element. In Nussbaum's account of eudaimonistic ethical theory, individuals should strive for a flourishing and complete life, and so one's goals and actions are guided by values ascribed on how they might contribute to one's own well-being. Pity becomes not simply an *irrationally* emotional act, because the onlooker is invested in the well-being of the sufferer, so the well-being of the sufferer is important to the well-being of the onlooker. In this sense, the alleviation of the sufferer's pain actually contributes to

¹⁹ Nussbaum, "Compassion", 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

the onlooker's own well-being.²¹ For this reason the deployment of pity becomes a rational and deliberative action on the part of the onlooker of pain. It also becomes an important element in arguing the social and political benefits of pity as forming a bridge between the individual and the community. Eudaimonism is to Nussbaum not simply egoism, and eudaimonistic pity is not merely a means to one's own satisfaction or happiness. Rather, she writes that "not only virtuous actions but also mutual relations of civic or personal love and friendship, in which the object is loved and benefited for his or her own sake, can qualify as constituent parts of a person's *eudaimonia*." Instead of valuing simply one's own happiness one may also ascribe value to an abstract normative conception of good, and so the eudaimonistic subject "both seeks the intrinsic good of justice *and* seeks to be a person who performs just actions for her own sake."²² This allows eudaimonism to contribute to Nussbaum's theory of pity as the central bridge between the individual and the community, because by ascribing value to the well-being of the community, one is able to include the alleviation of another's pain and suffering as important tasks to complete in striving towards one's own flourishing life. However, while the source of happiness may not take place in the onlooker, a eudaimonistic judgment must have taken place in the onlooker for the pity to occur.²³

Pity, for Nussbaum, still holds the onlooker of pain, or the "subject" of pity, to be the centre of focus rather than the sufferer of pain, who seems rather to be simply an object in the onlooker's process of self-fulfillment. This may explain her inability to understand the condescension associated with the term, and in turn, it may be easy to

²¹ Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 144–145.

²² Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32, I emphasize.

²³ *Ibid.*, 55.

recognize Garber's concerns with the condescension of compassion and pity in Nussbaum's justification for pity. It is precisely Nussbaum's second to last point, that the onlooker must personally identify with the sufferer's situation, that leads Garber to question whether or not "benevolent compassion" is a redundant term. Garber refers to a *New York Times* article dissecting this apparent redundancy in a statement by Justice Antonin Scalia, the article pointing out that "people sometimes identify with others' suffering, 'suffer with' them—[to] track the Latin root of compassion—not because they particularly love the others or 'wish them well'—to track the Latin root of benevolence—but because they shudder at the prospect of the same things happening to themselves."²⁴ Nussbaum's theorization of pity as being centrally located in the onlooker of suffering reveals precisely why a benevolent compassion is not a redundancy: while compassion may seek to respond to the pain of others, it remains condescending if it places the centre of focus of agency and power in the hands of the onlooker, rather than the hands of the sufferer of pain who is desiring to remedy their situation. In this sense Nussbaum's rational pity is emblematic of why compassion may be seen as condescending. Due to her commitment to Enlightenment reason and rationality, while she asserts that pity or compassion may bridge an individual to a community and provide "happiness" to another rather than oneself, this continues to be conditional on the fact that the onlooker of pain judges another as being "worth" happiness. While this may not be self-centred in the sense that one is only focused on one's own happiness, one continues to be focused only on one's own capacity for judgment. This type of compassion continues to appear condescending because it holds that one's own capacity for judgment is more important

²⁴ William Safire, "Compassion, In which Justice Scalia rises to a linguistic challenge," *On Language*, *New York Times*, July 15, 2001, SM22.

than another's, and moreover that one should remain in a position to maintain the security of their decision-making position over another. While Nussbaum's vision of pity and compassion claims to bridge individuals to a community and include another's desire in the decision-making process, it continues to delimit one's own capacity for thought and judgment as the sole location of worthwhile thought and decision-making. In short, it justifies compassion as linking an individual to another, all the while forgetting and erasing the importance of another entirely.

Nussbaum is not alone in justifying the use of compassion as bridging an individual to another through acting from another's suffering, though others have done so in such a way that actively decentres the compassionate actor as central and even secure. French phenomenologist Emmanuel Housset looks at compassion [*pitié*] as central to any coexistence of individuals in a community, nothing that without it, "man would have no other possibility except that of sensing himself, and therefore there would be neither world nor neighbor nor community to affect him and to trouble the illusory tranquility of self-presence."²⁵ Social theorist Axel Honneth theorizes on the element of compassion in the concept of recognition, defining it as a meta-action wherein "by making a gesture of recognition towards another person, we performatively make her aware that we see ourselves obligated to behave towards her in a certain kind of *benevolent way*."²⁶ He notes the importance of recognition and its element of compassion or benevolence as offering an alternative to the notion of a struggle for self-existence found in the thought of Machiavelli and Hobbes, instead offering the potential to counter this trend with the

²⁵ Housset, "Paradoxes of pity", 71, Steffen translates.

²⁶ Honneth and Margalit, "Recognition", 120.

development of an ethic between individuals.²⁷ In recognition, he describes that “a *decentering* takes place in the recognizing subject because she concedes to another subject a ‘worth’ that is the source of legitimate claims infringing upon her own self-love.”²⁸ Political theorist Nancy Fraser agrees on the need for this decentring in recognition, arguing that recognition may have two forms: one affirmative, in which inequitable social or political arrangements are remedied without disturbing the framework that generates them; and one transformative, in which these underlying generative frameworks are restructured.²⁹ These distinctions may be applied to pity and compassion, given that Nussbaum’s pity affirms the hierarchies of power in which the onlooker of pain is able to avoid it and judge the sufferer of pain worthy of alleviation, and given that there is a possible compassion actively transforms and restructures the frameworks that allow the compassionate actor to act in the first place, decentring them as primary actors, undoing their subjectivity and rendering them vulnerable to annihilation rather than self-existence.

iii. Against Compassion

Despite the possibility of a compassion that decentres rather than affirms, Nussbaum is not alone in theorizing a compassion or pity that continues to privilege oneself. Some critics have argued that compassion will always be used to a limit, notably the limit where compassion begins to seriously encroach on one’s own desire, and particularly when compassion is used in politics. For example, in the context of Canadian settler-

²⁷ Axel Honneth, *La lutte pour la reconnaissance* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 16.

²⁸ Honneth, “Recognition”, 122, I emphasize.

²⁹ Nancy Fraser, “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Postsocialist’ Age,” *New Left Review* 1/212 (1995): 82.

colonialism, Glen Coulthard notes that “colonial powers will *only* recognize the collective rights and identities of Indigenous peoples insofar as this recognition does not throw into question the background legal, political, and economic framework of the colonial relationship itself.”³⁰ Similarly, Sara Ahmed points out that in reconciliation practices where individuals of a nation attempt to take seriously their own errors in recognizing their injustices perpetrated upon another group, “by showing shame, in fact, such a subject can demonstrate that they are ideal subjects (‘well-meaning’), and have the ideals that made such shame shameful in the first place.”³¹ In this respect, compassion, rather than being done for the sake of another, is done because “one gets to see oneself as a good or tolerant subject.”³² While these may be true and an important criticisms in specific deployments of the concept, it seems paradoxical to assume that taking seriously the desire of another is *necessarily* conditional upon and therefore reifies one’s own desire. This includes compassion done in the political sphere, where it becomes more difficult to imagine a self-annihilating compassion. For example, Ahmed also discusses the possibility of a non-normative form of queer politics, explaining that

There remains a risk that ‘queer families’ could be posited as an ideal within the queer community. If queer families were idealised within the queer community, then fleeting queer encounters, or more casual forms of friendship and alliance, could become seen as failures, or less significant forms of attachment. Queer politics needs to stay open to different ways of doing queer in order to maintain the possibility that differences are not converted into failure.³³

³⁰ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 41, I emphasize.

³¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 109.

³² *Ibid.*, 133.

³³ *Ibid.*, 154.

Here Ahmed sets up queer politics as a project of compassion similar to the politics of recognition, in that it is similarly concerned with the desire of another, including when, and especially when, that desire is different from one's own. While having similar goals, to Ahmed this no longer becomes a project aimed to demonstrate oneself as a good or ideal subject, or to maintain the boundaries or goodness of the "queer community," as with her critique of national reconciliations (a continuing self-centred approach) but a project aimed to (as she was quoted earlier) "maintain the possibility that differences are not converted into failure." It seems here that Ahmed is not skeptical of the possibility of compassion outright as she had been earlier with the project of nation-building. Instead, she suggests that it is possible, if it has the goal of allowing another's difference to be maintained, and even to flourish. These criticisms may not show that compassion always fails outright, but they show that when it does fail, it is because it does not properly decentre the self when met with another's competing desire.

At this point one might be able to imagine a set of analytical distinctions between the different experiences described, onto which one might be able to assign the different terms used, distinguished both by the location of suffering-felt and the source of suffering. Both empathy and sympathy seem to differ from compassion in that the onlooker of suffering is not the source of the suffering, and therefore they do not denote an action. Although suffering is being sensed, one may recognize that they are not the one causing the suffering or at least that their desire is not involved with it, and are therefore unable to act to alleviate it in any way other than to acknowledge that suffering is being experienced. Empathy seems to differ from sympathy and compassion in that with empathy, while looking at the suffering of another, one recognizes that it is one's

suffering also, that one is suffering from the same source. As such, compassion would be a situation in which one senses suffering in another and recognizes that the suffering is resulting from one's own actions and one's own desire. Understanding compassion as a question of desire rather than merely suffering, it could be reformulated as an instance where one realizes that one's own desire is conflicting with and halting another's. The conditions of this conflict mean that one's desire, in that moment of conflict, is causing, or has the potential to cause, the suffering of another. Instead of continuing with one's own desire simply by virtue of it being one's own, one could withdraw one's own desire so that another's may continue.

While Garber fears that an unequal power dynamic is inherent in the concept of compassion, this may not necessarily be so. Rather than assuming self-interest as an inherent characteristic, one may imagine a circumstance in which, being presented with the competing desire of another, one willingly and even ambivalently³⁴ withdraws and sacrifices one's own desire, instead acting on the desire of another, as with the theories of Honneth and Fraser. One may rather save the term pity for referring to the concept as understood by Nussbaum, wherein one claims to be acting for the benefit of another while continuing to privilege one's own desire, or at least one's own role as judge or decision-maker. If one is to act from another's desire in a more rigorous understanding of compassion, this must be done unconditionally of one's own desire, reason, benefit, or security. In this sense, compassion is a form of representation wherein one renounces one's own role as a "subject" of action and instead becomes, in action, a vehicle for the desire of another. This chapter will continue on this thread, exploring the possibility

³⁴ The coldness and unsentimentality of compassion will be further elaborated upon in the chapter on Hannah Arendt.

surrounding the representation of another's desire in one's own action, and in turn, the possibility of foregoing one's own desire in one's action.

§2 Representing Another's Desire

If compassion involves, in instances of competing desires, action representing another's desire in the place of one's own, it is important to explore the nuances of this element of representation in compassion. This section will outline theorizations of representation, how it has been understood and restricted, and the effect these theorizations may play on understandings of compassion. It will look specifically at Hanna Pitkin's concerns of how desire circulates in the relationship of political representation, and who is able to author the content of representation. It will focus on her concern that representation, and particularly representation following Hobbes, risks ascribing one's own desire onto another, rather than having one's action authored by another. Following this, it will look to Homi K. Bhabha's concerns with the interpretation of representation, and how a representative utterance indicates the absence of the represented in such a way that attention is drawn away from it, rather than bringing their desire forth. These concerns will be combined with Susan Sontag's discussion on war photography, which looks at how war photographers claimed to be compassionate when representing suffering subjects in film. It will focus on her criticisms that war photography in fact obscures the desires of the suffering, as with Pitkin's concerns, by ascribing onto them certain representations. It furthermore actually directs attention away from them, as with Bhabha's concerns, by drawing attention to the photographers themselves. It will finish in looking at a film by Jean-Luc Godard and suggesting that, despite these concerns of representation always obscuring another with the opaque presence of the self, there is

hope for the possibility of representation in a representation that undoes the role and possibility of one's own authorship. This will be followed by the final section of the chapter, where questions of how exactly to articulate compassion will be further explored.

iv. Compassion's Author

In political theorist Hanna Pitkin's study on the concept of representation, she understands it as "the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact."³⁵ Cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha has a similar understanding with differing implications, describing re-presentation as a process of "a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once."³⁶ Both Pitkin and Bhabha, discussing, respectively, political and aesthetic representation, indicate the concept as involving a location of desire in a subject who, for whatever reason, may not act upon their desire in the way they intend.³⁷ For Pitkin, this involves a political subject having their desire for their individual political action blocked by the diverse desires of the multitude, needing instead to have their desire represented in the action of a political representative. For Bhabha, this involves an aesthetic subject having their desire to be understood as who they are blocked by the difficulty of having this wholly communicated, and needing to have their desire represented in the image of identity. Both theorize representation, in a way that could be extended to the concept of

³⁵ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 8, Pitkin emphasizes.

³⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 64.

³⁷ The reconciliation between the desire-as-lack narrative and the concept of desire as a production used in this essay is discussed in the theoretical framework section of the introduction.

compassion, as involving the location of desire in a specific subject, as well as a representative through which the trajectory of this desire must pass, given the absence of the original subject to manifest it themselves. The political subject is absent until the moment they are being re-presented politically, as is the aesthetic subject absent until the moment they are re-presented in image.

Actions that represent another, or are compassionate to another, involve shifting the focus of desire outside of oneself to another. This is done in such a way that one's actions are not caused by one's own desire, but another's. Both Pitkin and Bhabha however are concerned that certain narratives of representation may obscure another's desire with the opaque presence of one's self. It may seem that however well-intentioned and serious one may be about the pursuit of another's desire, there is a risk in altering another's desire with one's own. These conceptions of representation—and in turn compassion—risk reversing the relationship of desire. Rather than representing another's desire in one's action, one risks acting according to one's own desire and attributing it to another. This involves an act of compassion where another's desire is not represented, but rather where one's own desire is attributed to and forced on another.³⁸

Pitkin's interest in these debates is related to the role of political representation in government, looking first at Hobbes's development of representation in *Leviathan* and moving towards the ways in which people conceive of the rights and responsibilities related to representation in representative democracies. She seems specifically concerned with the question, in representation, of where the *authority* for the action lies (whose

³⁸ An easy way to identify such a version of compassion is that, when an act of compassion is rejected by its recipient, one may justify it to another by saying something like “you wanted this” or “I did this for you.” This obviously does not make sense, since, if the recipient's is the author of the action, they should be in complete agreement with it, and should not require convincing that it was what they wanted.

decision is reflection in the action) and of where the *responsibility* for the action lies (who is to be held accountable for its outcomes.) She begins analysing the thought of Thomas Hobbes, who considers speech and action as both unique to and constituting elements of personhood, and the way that individuals enter into a community. He begins *Leviathan* by explaining flow of desire through representation, introducing thoughts as the *representation* of objects (which imprint upon man's body by sense,)³⁹ then speech as the registration of thought,⁴⁰ and finally at the end of Part I, a person as either representing their own words and actions (a "naturall person") or as *representing the words or actions of another* (an "artificiall person.")⁴¹ The issue she takes with Hobbes's development of the subject is that, in his final move in this chain, where he tries to have the diverse desires of the multitude represented in the sovereign, Hobbes shifts the flow of desire. Instead of having a constituent have their actions represented in the sovereign, the sovereign is able to author an action and ascribe it to the constituent, leaving the sovereign entirely with the authorship for action while the people are left responsible.

Hobbes begins (in a fashion agreed upon and taken up by Pitkin) by noting the difference in the concept of representation between the author and the actor: wherein the author is the "owner" of the action, and holds both the choice to decide the terms of the

³⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Markham: Penguin, 1981): I.1–2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.1–4. I am uncertain of what to make of Hobbes's use of the term "registration" rather than "representation." To register seems to denote that it is merely enough to formulate a thought into audible speech (he seems to understand speech specifically as "the divers motions of the Tongue, Palate, Lips") though when outlining his uses and abuses of speech, he's concerned with its use not only in registering thought but correctly representing thought. He begins this discussion with a reference to the Tower of Babel, a story in which diversity of speech (in which thoughts may be audibly registered but not understood by others, and therefore do not re-present them) results in a dispersion of unity. Similarly, Hobbes's outline of the uses and abuses of speech all regard its ability to correctly represent thought rather than merely its audible registration. I would suggest that Hobbes understands the relationship between speech and thought similarly as one of representation, as with thought and sense, and actors and authors.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XVI.1–2.

action (to which they give authority) as well as the responsibility for the consequences of the action; while the actor is the one whose actions are owned by another. In relating this to the concept of compassion, one might understand the author as the recipient of compassion (or in earlier discussions, the “sufferer”) given that it is their desire that is in play, and the actor as the one who is foregoing their own desire to act according to the desire of the author. Hobbes notes that *the author always holds both the authority and responsibility of their actions*, and in the case where the actor, in representing the author, acts in a way to which the author has *not* given authority, *the actor becomes the author of that action*, and cannot ascribe that to another who has not authorized it.⁴² He would seem to agree initially that in representation, or in compassion, that one’s action ought to be authored exclusively by another’s desire.

This understanding of representation changes when he begins to discuss the project of representing a multitude of men, wherein he argues that the *multitude* becomes *one* person with *one* desire when they are *represented* as one, by one, “For it is the *Unity* of the Representer, not the *Unity* of the Represented, that maketh the Person *One*.”⁴³ This is in contrast with his work in both *The Elements of Law* and *De Cive* where he was far more skeptical about the possibility of a people having *one* desire. In *De Cive* Hobbes argues that “it’s a great hindrance to Civill Government, especially Monarchicall, that men distinguish not enough between a *People* and a *Multitude*,” given that the people are defined by one will (represented by the court in a democracy or aristocracy, and the King in a monarchy) and that the multitude is defined by a plurality (represented by each

⁴² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVI.8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XVI.13, Hobbes emphasizes.

citizen or subject, respectively.)⁴⁴ He had acknowledged the potential double meaning of “the people” in *The Elements of Law*, noting how it may refer to “a number of men, distinguished by the place of their habitation” as “the multitude of those particular persons,” as well as the politically significant definition of “a person civil [...] in the will whereof is included and involved the will of every one in particular.” While this may seem similar to the concept of representation, having the will of every one in particular *included* in the will of the representative, Hobbes finishes this passage by noting that “he or they that have the sovereign power, doth for them all demand and vindicate under the name of *his*, that which before they called in the plural, *theirs*.”⁴⁵ Pitkin notes that while the arguments of the three works seem to run parallel, it is only in *Leviathan* that the narrative of *representation* as the solution to plurality is introduced, and this seems correct here, as this discussion in *Elements of Law* seems to lack his later notion of authority of action (the action is no longer *theirs*, but now becomes *his*.) His solution to the problem of a plurality of desires in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive* does not yet try to invert the relationship of representation in ascribing the sovereign’s actions to the multitude when they have not individually authorized it, but rather seems more transparently a solution of acquiescence to the sovereign.

While it is in *Leviathan* that Hobbes stresses the importance of authority and responsibility in representation, he ends at the same place as his earlier works when he begins to discuss the multitude. He argues that when the representative represents a multitude, each individual represented now accepts the authority and responsibility of

⁴⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), XII.8, Hobbes emphasizes.

⁴⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), II.II.11.

what the representative decides to do as an actor on their behalf.⁴⁶ Hobbes arrives at the same solution of acquiescence present in *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*, only here calls it representation. This representation solves the problem of a multitude of desires with an inversion of his framework elaborated upon only paragraphs before: the actor, or representative, now becomes the de facto author, while the stated author, or represented, continues to accept both the responsibility and authority of the action. Pitkin is apt in questioning whether this is representation at all, proclaiming: “A sovereign given complete power in perpetuity, with no obligation to consult the wishes of his subjects and no duties toward them which they can claim—surely nothing could be farther from what we ordinarily think of as representation or representative government! We read the *Leviathan* and feel that somehow we have been tricked.”⁴⁷

While it may seem strange that Pitkin admittedly introduces Hobbes as a theorist of representation into a field in which he had been, according to Pitkin, previously absent, only to then immediately problematize this inclusion, she is apt in noting that when tracing the circulation of desire in this relationship, it does not seem to be representation proper but rather clever rhetoric. Moreover her inclusion and immediate problematization of Hobbes as a theorist of representation is important both in Pitkin’s discussion of political representation and in this discussion of compassion given that Hobbes’s discursive foundations of representation and unity do seem to play on how both representation and compassion seem to come into use today, particularly in political thought, in that it allows one to “author” another’s desire and justifying this by ascribing to them the authorship (in saying “this is what you want.”)

⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVI.14.

⁴⁷ Pitkin, *Concept of Representation*, 34.

While Hobbes inverts the relationship of representation in *Leviathan*, this is not to say that he eliminates representation entirely. As mentioned earlier, he sets out strict guidelines on what it means to be representative of something, so it may be unclear why he would include a relationship of representation and then misidentify who it is doing the representing. To briefly analyse why representation is necessary and who is doing the representing, Pitkin notes that in the case of Hobbes, representation is necessary due to the fact that in the project of bringing a multitude into a unified people, not everyone may present their particular desire at the same time. While the sovereign, or the representative, as has been shown, does not re-present the desire of their constituents, the constituents do concede their ability to act to the representative for the sake of political unity. While Hobbes introduces a “Dictate of right Reason” that is able to universally define the Law of Nature, which he defines as “those things which are either to be done, or omitted for the constant preservation of Life, and Members,”⁴⁸ shortly after he introduced a derivative of this Law of Nature (the pursuit of peace), wherein

the right of all men, to all things, ought not to be retain'd, but that some certain rights ought to be transferr'd, or relinquisht: for if every one should retain his right to all things, it must necessarily follow, that some by right might invade; and others, by the same right, might defend themselves against them, (for every man, by naturall necessity, endeavours to defend his Body, and the things which he judgeth necessary towards the projection of his Body) therefore War would follow. He therefore acts against the reason of Peace, (i.e.) against the Law of Nature, whosoever he be, that doth not part with his Right to all things.⁴⁹

It seems that the role representation plays here is not the sovereign representing the desire of his constituents, but rather each constituent is representing the desire of every other in their very concession of authority. By assenting to the legitimacy of one sovereign for

⁴⁸ Hobbes, *De Cive*, II.1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II.3, Hobbes emphasizes.

many, one acknowledges that the regular pursuit of one's own desire, (along with everyone else's pursuit of their own desire), will result in chaos, and that the abstention from the unrestrained pursuit of one's own desire (exemplified in Hobbes's state of nature) is desired by everyone else in one's political community. This reverses Hobbes's formulated framework of representation earlier in *Leviathan*: individuals are not the author of an action which is in turn acted out by the sovereign, but rather individuals are the author of an action (the renunciation of desire) which is then acted out by everyone else in acquiescence to the sovereign.⁵⁰

In *Elements of Law* and *De Cive*, this is presented as an acquiescence of all to the sovereign rather than representation of all in "the people." Uniquely in *Leviathan*, using the rhetoric of representation, Hobbes is able to make this notion more attractive by arguing that the multitude do not merely acquiesce to the sovereign, but their desires are represented in him. Therefore, the sovereign is able to gain further legitimacy because he is able to say "this is what you want!" The rhetoric of representation, as with the rhetoric of compassion, seems to be used to gain further legitimacy from another by claiming the action as their own. Representation claims to work towards the desire of another, when in reality being the product of one's own desire. Just as Hobbes claims that the people cannot dissent towards the sovereign because the sovereign represents their desires,⁵¹ it becomes difficult for one to dissent to receiving compassion when it was supposedly done for their sake. Danielle S. Allen importantly notes the distrust felt by citizens who

⁵⁰ While the moment that Hobbes seems to run into difficulty in his theorization of representation is the moment where the problem of representing a multitude comes into question, the version here (in which each citizen represents a multitude of desires in their acquiescence to the sovereign) does not pose a problem given the uniformity of desire: by participating in the institution as Hobbes sets up one knows that one's own abnegation of desire is desired by everyone else, and so there is not the question of balancing a multitude of desires on one's representation.

⁵¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVIII.3.

notice, under the ideals of democracy left behind by Hobbes, that in having renounced their desire to the sovereign under the impression that this was also to be done by others, certain members of that group are in fact having their desires regularly represented while they are having to do all the work of accepting loss for the sake of unity.⁵² The distrust created by this vision of representation may create a general distrust in the ability for individuals to “act for another.” In this version, representation becomes associated not with the re-presentation of an act that one has authored, but the falsely attributing an act to someone when, in reality, one has had no say in the content of that act. This concern has grave effects on the possibilities of compassion in the political imaginary, as any claim to representing another’s desire will have immediately sinister implications. Pitkin has a concern for the effect the Hobbesian model of representation—which she sees as effectively a masked inversion of representation—has on later conceptions of political representation as well as one’s possibility of imagining representation. She rather hopes that one can “think of representation not as an acting *for* other people, but as a standing for something absent.”⁵³ In this way, Pitkin alludes to the possibility of a representation, and a compassion, which decentres one’s self as the centre of focus in an action, and is able to present another’s desire, instead of acting one’s own *for* them.

v. Compassion’s Image

Pitkin shares this interest in how the concept of representation has been narratively constructed with Homi K. Bhabha, who explores it not through the question of political

⁵² Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 41.

⁵³ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, “The Concept of Representation,” in *Representation*, ed. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), 10.

representation, but rather the question of constructing the image of identity in the postcolonial context. While Pitkin's concern with representation was the reversal of the chain of desire in its practice, Bhabha furthers this discussion by questioning whether the representative may ever represent, or whether their subjectivity *as* representative will always eclipse that which they are trying to represent. More specifically, he suggests the image of identity re-presented and the actual identity or desire of that which is being represented may not align. Rather, there may be a gap between them through which, when the direction of gaze is pointed at one's representation in an image, one is able to circulate unseen:

...the phrase of identity cannot be spoken, except by putting the eye/I in the impossible position of enunciation. *To see* a missing person, or *to look at* Invisibleness, is to emphasize the subject's *transitive* demand for a *direct* object of self-reflection, a point of presence that would maintain its privileged enunciatory position *qua subject*. To see a *missing person* is to *transgress* that demand; the 'I' in the position of mastery is, at *that same time*, the place of its absence, its *re*-presentation. We witness the alienation of the eye through the sound of the signifier as the scopic desire⁵⁴ (to look/to be looked at) emerges and is erased in the *feint of writing*.⁵⁵

Bhabha notes that language is insufficient to represent identity because identity is not solely a linguistic construct and as such is incapable of fully articulating and presenting it. As such, while one may have the desire to be seen (or otherwise aesthetically sensed

⁵⁴ Bhabha defines the scopic drive as "the drive that represents the pleasure in 'seeing', which has the look as its object of desire," explaining that "like voyeurism, surveillance must depend for its effectivity on 'the *active consent* which is its real or mythical correlate (but always real as myth) and establishes in the scopic space the illusion of the object relation'" (Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 109). That is to say, if Bhabha thinks that any re-presentation of identity through language or communication is insufficient, the (scopic) desire to be seen becomes undone through redirecting the gaze elsewhere (to the linguistic utterances representing identity rather than identity itself), which is too opaque in their difference from its intended represented subject to reveal what's behind it. This is why the scopic desire both emerges and is erased in the feint of writing: it is both a product of the desire to be seen, and the very reason one isn't seen. In wanting to be seen, one emits an utterance that immediately directs attention away. The scopic drive will be elaborated upon and tied with Hobbes's discussion on sense and action as well as with Sontag's film theory later on in this section.

⁵⁵ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 67, Bhabha emphasizes.

by another), causing one to create an ‘image’ meant to re-present oneself (through, for example, written or spoken language), one serves only to direct the gaze away. By treating representation, or the linguistic utterances re-presenting identity, as synonymous with the identity itself, one misses what circulates behind it. Where Pitkin’s concern with Hobbes surrounded the authorship of the articulation of representation, Bhabha questions whether representation serves to re-present desire at all, or whether, in representing another with the image of their identity, and “making present what is otherwise absent,” one merely emphasizes one’s own presence in lieu of the other, rather than actually directing the gaze towards them and bringing forth their desire. Here, both Pitkin and Bhabha would be concerned with the content of compassion inadequately re-presenting another; Pitkin, with the concern of authorship, suspecting that under the Hobbesian model a compassionate actor might dictate another’s desire, and Bhabha with a concern that representation, however well-intentioned, will merely emphasize one’s self as representative of another’s blocked desire, actually directing gaze away from it, rather than ever bringing it to fruition.

These concerns are brought together in Susan Sontag’s book-length essay *Regarding the Pain of Others*, which questions compassion through representation, specifically through exploring the possibility of a photograph *depicting* pain (or rather, a photographer representing the pain of another.) Returning to the etymological discussion of compassion, her essay deals explicitly with the concept of pain and suffering in another, and holds similar views on sympathy and compassion as concluded in the first section of this chapter. She writes of sympathy that “so long as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering [...] our sympathy proclaims our

innocence as well as our impotence,” and writing of compassion that “compassion is an unstable emotion [...] it needs to be translated into action, or it withers. [...] if one feels that there is nothing ‘we’ can do—but who is that ‘we’?—and nothing ‘they’ can do either—and who are ‘they’?—then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic.”⁵⁶ That is to say, she is concerned not only with the viewing of suffering, or sympathy, for which one could do nothing, but rather with compassion, which she sees as having the possibility to act and enact change based on the desire of another.

Her essay focuses on her concern with the cult of admiration surrounding photographs of war as well as their photographers during and after the WWII period. During this period, she argues, there arose a view of photography that differed from the paradigm that it should be artistic and beautiful. Instead, photography was seen as having the potential to portray accurate representations of suffering and injustice abroad, and that through these representations, viewers would be able to acquire an ethical stance of compassion through which they would be able to work to alleviate or at least learn from this suffering. In this sense the interesting photos of suffering were not those that merely showed random suffering (in which the viewer, being not an accomplice and therefore impotent, is only able to suffer as a voyeur) but specifically those that showed suffering from wrath. Suffering deliberately caused by the wrath of others in war was preventable, it was a crime, and on these grounds, it was a type of suffering at which one ought to be outraged.⁵⁷

Sontag highlights an ethical stance taken towards war photography quite similar to the one laid out here: through witnessing the suffering of another, and presumed desire

⁵⁶ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 101–102.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

to leave this suffering, one realizes that one may play a role in this suffering, or at least be in a position to work towards alleviating it, and one may be moved to action in the expression of another's desire rather than one's own. Her skepticism however lies in the fact that in "representing" the pain of war, the subject of photography was actually the glamorous photographers who shot them, or alternatively the viewers who had the benevolence and greatness of viewing the images.

In an essay on German filmmaker Leni Reifenstahl, she highlights an approach to aesthetics concerned with the direction of gaze. She notes the structure of egomania and servitude, or domination and enslavement, in Reifenstahl's documentary about the National Socialist Party Congress *Triumph des Willens* (1935). This structure is indicated by the direction of looks from nameless and uniformed masses unto the glamorous leader of the Third Reich. She also notes how this direction of gaze within the film directs the gaze of the viewer of the film into a focus on that leader, and the emotion felt into a state of awe (see figures 1.1–1.4.) She notes that

The relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry: the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force. The [...] dramaturgy centers on the orgiastic transactions between mighty forces and their puppets, uniformly garbed and showed in ever swelling numbers. Its choreography alternates between ceaseless motion and a congealed, static, "virile" posing. [This] art glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness, it glamorizes death.⁵⁸

There seems to be, in Hobbes, Bhabha and Sontag, a shared understanding of the way in which one becomes vulnerable to the influence of others through sense, as well as the way in which one may influence another through being sensed. Hobbes begins his

⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980), 91.

discussion on the circulation of desire through one having thoughts through receiving sensation, and in turn influencing others through speaking and *being heard*. Bhabha also notes in his discussion of the scopoc drive the desire to *be seen*, and to have one's identity seen, as to have an influence on another. While being seen and being heard may be two common ways you may feel the desire to propagate yourself, you may also imagine the desire to strike another with your touch, or to occupy space with your scent, or to have another taste yourself. Sontag here notes the power dynamic of a scene in which an actor is the central object of sight, but does not look at anyone in return. Bhabha suggests that there is actually power in circulating unseen, given that, one has not been seen by another, then that other does not have sufficient information to protect themselves from one's unseen self. In spite of this, it continues to seem a significant sign of dominance to *not* look at someone, to not have them affect oneself with the image of their sight, to be impenetrable to them, and to not even afford them the dignity of appearing as a possible threat.

Sontag's concern with this form of aesthetics, through the direction of gaze, is that it deliberately manipulates the viewer's emotion, asserting the filmmaker or photographer as the one who is "seen." This direction and manipulation of receptions of the image obfuscates the representation: again, rather than re-presenting, the filmmaker authors the image and manipulates the viewer's gaze away from the apparent subject of the film to something else. While a "documentary," it is not actually serving to document the subjects apparently shown in their images, as their desire is not represented in the film, but rather that of the director, who is manipulating the images so that they convey the desire of the director instead. In this sense, it is not a compassionate documentation of

the subjects because it does not represent them, but is a vehicle for the director's own interest.

She is concerned with this similar direction of gaze in mid-to-late 20th century war photography. She notes the cult of admiration surrounding war photographers, specifically noting an edition *Picture Post* which heavily features a head shot of the handsome photographer, captioned "The Greatest War-Photographer in the World" (see figure 2.1.) She notes how "war photographers inherited what glamour going to war still had among the anti-belligose, especially when war was felt to be one of those rare conflicts in which someone of conscience would be impelled to take sides."⁵⁹ In this respect war photography is insufficient to represent its subject compassionately because the focus of the cult of admiration of war photography was not on those suffering but on the photographer who has the courage and the benevolence to go to war. She concludes in noting the way in which the dead would not desire these representations, and would be deeply uninterested in the lives of the living and those who are photographing and viewing their pain:

"We"—this "we" is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through—don't understand. We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like. We can't imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is; and how normal it becomes. Can't understand, can't imagine. That's what every soldier, and every journalist and aid worker and independent observer who has put in time under fire, and had the luck to elude the death that struck down others nearby, stubbornly feels. And they are right.⁶⁰

In constructing the image, both the photographer and the frame of photography get in the way of re-presenting another's desire. As a concrete example of both Pitkin and Bhabha's concerns with representation, and in turn the possibility of compassion, Sontag highlights

⁵⁹ Sontag, *Regarding Pain*, 33.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 125–126.

how both, in attempting to empathize with those suffering at war, war photographers are not adequately compassionate to their subjects. Rather, since they author their representations through the manipulation of image and its reception, they ultimately redirect the gaze away from the suffering of its subjects to the photographer and the viewer. As such, while claiming to be a medium to incite the compassion of its viewers, the post-war culture of war photography did not represent a vehicle of its apparent subjects' desires, but as a vehicle of the photographer, or of their viewers.

vi. Compassion's Transparency

While the representation of another's desire may risk being obscured by the presence of one's self (for example through the physical barrier of film and filmmaker) how might one serve to re-present another without getting in the way? Is such a task possible? Gayatri Spivak wrote of her concern for the role of claims to transparency in the concept of representation, looking at attempts to represent those who "cannot" speak, or perhaps who do not speak in ways understood by those trying to hear them, in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". The focus of her essay is "how the third-world subject is represented with Western discourse,"⁶¹ looking particularly at what is generally to be considered the poststructuralist theories of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida. Her primary critique seems to fit into the brief summary that "representing them, *the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent.*"⁶² The Western intellectuals, such as Deleuze and Foucault, claim to be transparent and to be simply reporting on while not analysing, judging or universalising the *previously unrepresented* subject, all while

⁶¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 275, I emphasize.

ignoring, to Spivak, the way in which “it is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe.”⁶³ Foucault and Deleuze are unable to represent subaltern thought and desire because, what they do not seem to understand, is that their interjection and representation may not have been desired in the first place, and their representation and claim to transparency continues to be a project of their own desire. With this Spivak reveals the continued power structures of claims to transparency: one claims to be invisible while still really being there, as manifest in the act of representation itself being a product of one’s own desire. As such, in her essay Spivak is generally skeptical of the possibility of “benevolence,” using the term repeatedly with nuances of contempt and irony to refer to Western intellectuals’ appropriation of the discourse of the subaltern.⁶⁴ If the representation in compassion may risk obscuring another’s desire through the presence of the self, either through the physical barrier of one’s own body, the frame of film, or even claims to transparency, it seems clear that representation as an action must entirely arise from the desire of another, and entail one’s self wholly going away. The representation, rather than iterating oneself as a subject who is representing, must rather undo oneself as a subject at the moment it represents another. A possibility of this sort of representation will be illustrated using Jean-Luc Godard’s 1963 film *Contempt*, showing how Godard actively attempts to erase himself from the direction of the film, showing the viewer what has been shown to him without attempting to ascribe to it any characteristics of his own desire.

⁶³ Spivak, “Subaltern”, 280.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 289, 292.

To briefly contextualize: *Contempt* centres on a film director named Paul and his crumbling relationship with his wife Camille. While rewriting a film script for *The Odyssey*, Paul begins to realize that his wife is no longer in love with him. He obsesses and continuously interrogates her about this, a fact she persistently denies until the end of the film. It is clear to the viewer that at the beginning of the film that she does love her husband, and that at the end she does not, and the viewer is invited to join Paul in his speculation of at which point she ceases to love him (of which there are many possible answers.) While the character of Camille seems to be a representation authored by Godard through his role as writer and director of the film—which may lead one to suspect that her character is entirely constructed by Godard himself—there are a number of reasons for which we are to suspect that he is not entirely in control her representation. Rather, while the film may show the character of Camille’s falling out of love, Godard, even in his role as director and writer, may not even know the details of part of the film, for example exactly when or even why it happens. As such, despite occupying the role of filmmaker, the character of Camille may be the representation of a desire that is not Godard’s.

Classicist Anne Carson comments on the role of the film in representing or documenting by looking at the goal of the “documentary,” from Longinus to New Wave cinema, with particular attention paid to their ability to get out of the way in their own work. She begins her commentary on this using Longinus’s essay documenting “the sublime”:

The Sublime is a documentary technique. “Documentary: of, related to or relying on documentation; objective, factual” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Take Longinus’ treatise *On the Sublime*. This work is an aggregation of quotes. It has muddled arguments, little organization, no paraphrasable conclusion. Its

attempts to definition are incoherent or tautological. Its key topic (passion) is deferred to another treatise (which does not exist). You will come away from reading its (unfinished) forty chapters with no clear idea what the Sublime actually is. But you will have been thrilled by its documentation.⁶⁵

The form of Longinus's documentary may not deliver a clear argument, however its form, of disaggregated quotes and muddled arguments, serve to adequately decentre Longinus as the author. He undoes himself as author by relinquishing complete control of the work and its reception, including windows to the desire of others through the form of quotes. She notes the process of documentation in Longinus and the New Wave often involved crossing the line into entering their own work.⁶⁶ This seems to be done to render the work "non-objective," or to reach a place where a viewer is able to see not only the director's direct influence, but to begin searching for the influence of others. Carson notes that Michelangelo Antonioni would often draw attention outside of the frames of his films by placing a mirror in the scene to glimpse the outside world (see Figure 3.1), or to leave the camera running after the actors thought the scene had finished to catch their candid errors. Godard employs a number of techniques to send the reader outside of his film, notably beginning *Contempt* with a scene of his cinematographer Raoul Coutard shooting the film's actress Giorgia Moll, taking the viewer immediately outside of the illusion of film and revealing to them the filming process, eventually turning the camera onto the audience (see Figure 3.2). During this scene a quote is read, misattributed to film theorist André Bazin: "Cinema substitutes our gaze with a world that conforms to our

⁶⁵ Anne Carson, "Foam (Essay with Rhapsody): On the Sublime in Longinus and Antonioni," in *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (Toronto: Vintage, 2005), 45.

⁶⁶ This was briefly mentioned in the methodology section, in Giroux and Karmis's discussion of political thought, as not holding distinct the separation between researcher and their subject, or between political philosopher/historian of ideas/political theorist and the political ideas upon which they are commenting. Rather, they noted how the political thinker is immediately immersed and affected by the political structures that are also the focus of their essay.

desires,”⁶⁷ explaining that “*Contempt* is the story of this world.”⁶⁸ While certainly drawing attention to the viewer, by introducing the film itself as possibly manifesting the desire of the individual viewer, it more importantly introduces the film as a “story of this world”, and so rather than *being* this world, is it a *story* of the substitution of gaze by cinema.

This draws attention to the way in which the characters in the film, rather than just living their lives, so frequently discuss their interpretations of *The Odyssey*, which also indirectly comment on their own lives, as though their own lives were a story being viewed, which the viewer knows is true. They draw connections between *The Odyssey* and their own lives, offering meta-narratives on the film they themselves are a part of, and drawing attention to the viewer of the fact that they are viewing a film. The main tie between *The Odyssey* and *Contempt*, through which the characters are able to offer such meta-narratives, is the influence of the poem’s “recognition scene” on the film. The scene of Camille’s contempt for her husband being a modified recreation of this archetypal recognition scene found in *The Odyssey*. Recognition scenes, broadly, occur when a character is provided with imperfect information about another (commonly their identity, or “who they really are”), though the information withheld is often presented to the audiences. These scenes are exciting to viewers because they are able to watch a previously duped character recognize another in a trick to which they had been privy all along. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus returns from war to his wife Penelope, though immediately upon returning he masks his identity from her, pretending rather to be a

⁶⁷ The real quote is “Cinema is a gaze that substitutes itself for our own, to give us a world conforming to our desires,” Michel Mourlet, “Sur un art ignoré,” in *Sur un art ignoré: La mis en scène comme langage* (Paris: Ramsay, 2008), 34, I translate.

⁶⁸ Godard, *Le Mépris*, 1963.

stranger. This ruse occupies the last books of the poem, and similarly to *Contempt* it is clear that, at the beginning, Penelope does not know who Odysseus is, and that at the end she recognizes him. While the reader is pleased to witness Penelope's recognition, having been privy to the information about his identity withheld to her, Homer subverts slightly this archetypal scene, since the reader of *The Odyssey*—as with the viewer of *Contempt*—is not provided with information about *when* Penelope actually recognizes Odysseus. This information is important given Penelope's insinuation to the still-disguised Odysseys that the marriage bed she shares with her husband may be moved into the hall so that she may accommodate a guest spending the night with her.⁶⁹ If she had recognized her husband before this point, this invitation becomes a way to trick him into revealing his identity through his subsequent rage. If not, this invitation becomes an invitation to adultery with who she believes is a stranger. *Contempt* reverses this already subverted scene: it becomes not a question of when Camille recognizes her husband but when she forgets him. The characters in the film frequently offer a metanarrative on their own film in speculating on this fact: the film director Jerry is first to suggest that Penelope has been unfaithful, and later Paul, Odysseus's counterpart, agrees, stating that "*The Odyssey* is the story of a man who loves his wife, and she does not love him."⁷⁰ Basing a scene on *The Odyssey*, a story of which Godard does not have sufficient information, sets him up to not construct it, but to transparently bring forward that which was being represented by Homer (or, whoever Homer was writing about.)

While basing the film on *The Odyssey*, there are number of other influences out of Godard's control that more directly dictate the nuances of representation in the image of

⁶⁹ Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by A.T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 23.200.

⁷⁰ Jean-Luc Godard, *Le Mépris*, I translate.

Camille. For example, *Contempt* is more directly based on the novel *Il disprezzo*⁷¹ by Alberto Moravia, the character of Camille being based on Moravia's character Emilia, who may or may not be based on Moravia's wife of the time, writer Elsa Morante. In writing on Emilia's contempt for her husband, Moravia similarly may not have understood the intentions of the woman he was writing but rather represented scenes which he had witnessed, as well as basing the character on what he understands from Homer (Moravia's character similarly speculates on whether Penelope loved Odysseus, noting that "Ulysses in the poem *is* loved in return by Penelope... in fact, in a sense, the whole of the *Odyssey* hinges on this love of Penelope's for Ulysses," immediately comparing this to his own situation, wondering if the possibility of betrayal necessarily indicates the absence of love, and attempting to recognize his wife.)⁷² In another example, Godard's film may have also been heavily influenced by his own relationship at the time with actress Anna Karina, as indicated by the scene in which Camille puts on a short, black wig (when her hair has previously been long and blonde), a hairstyle identical to Karina's character in Godard's film from a year previous, *My Life to Live* (see figures 3.3–3.4). This becomes a further metacommentary of the character's role as an agent of representation, literally dressing up in Karina's famous hairstyle on screen, an act that viewers of the time were sure to recognize. Lastly, the characters of Paul and Camille worry about the prospect of his selling out to the big budget cinema machine,

⁷¹ The English title of Moravia's novel is *A Ghost at Noon*, though both *disprezzo* and *mépris* come into English as, literally, *contempt*, the difference being that both *mépris* and *disprezzo* can be turned into a verb and take the form of the present indicative (*je te mépris(e)* or *ti disprezzo* respectively). Camille says in the film "Je te méprise... voilà la sentiment que j'ai pour toi," "I have contempt for you," occasionally translated to stylistically match the French as "I despise you.") I thank Eugenio Pazzini for his help with the Italian.

⁷² Alberto Moravia, *A Ghost at Noon*, translated by Angus Davidson (London: Secker & Warburg, 1955), 84–85.

while *Contempt* itself stars Brigitte Bardot in the lead as Camille. At the time Bardot was arguably the most famous French actress of that era, cost a substantial amount of the film's budget, and attracted paparazzi as well as box office success to the film. Her presence in the film alongside with this commentary on "selling out" becomes so distracting to the reader that their attention is drawn outside of the film, and their in-film discussion become a metacommentary on the film itself.⁷³

Instead of claiming ownership to the film and asserting himself as the constructor of the film and its story, Godard regularly provides the viewer with the tools required to dismantle his position and interrogate those who have influenced the film and the story, and so while he actively poses the question of when Camille stopped loving her husband, he does not propose to have the answer or to have constructed film clues, but allows the viewer to direct their attention to Penelope, Emilia, Morante, Karina, or Bardot. This is not representation through dictation or even claims to transparency, but representation through getting out of the way. In this sense, *Contempt* holds the possibility of being an example of compassionate representation. Whereas Godard may regularly be considered the director who authors the film, he seems to regularly decentre himself, moving his own desire out of the way to make room for another's. The solution Godard seems to offer Pitkin and Bhabha's problems of representation is to exhibit a willingness to work towards the creation of a film which does not disclose himself as subject or even conform to his own desires. He offers an articulation representing another that immediately throws himself off-kilter at the moment of its articulation, shirking himself of all attention while

⁷³ Much like a drawn-out and labyrinthine discussion on a film director with a reputation for pretentiousness like Godard in an academic political science thesis might be glaringly distracting enough to the reader to draw them outside of the thesis.

it is instead directed towards another. The role of the author in the articulation of compassion is rather a vehicle which has been annihilated of its ability to speak independently, instead rather to transmit the desire of its represented.⁷⁴

§3 How to Not Do Things without Words

The first section of this chapter looked at debates on the use of compassion, identifying the quality of representing another's desire as the pivotal element in theories both for and against compassion. The second section narrowed in on this process of representation to identify the way in which one's own desire tends to overshadow and obscure another's in

⁷⁴ It has been suggested to me that this argument resembles Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author," a piece I had been unaware of until the moment of its suggestion. Moreover, it is an essay that I find, now, I am in complete agreement with. He writes that "as soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins" (Barthes, "Death of the Author", 142, Barthes's emphasis, Heath translates). What I find equally interesting is how Camille Paglia's comments on Barthes's essay seem to anticipate or echo Spivak's aforementioned criticisms of French intellectuals, when Paglia writes that "most pernicious of French imports is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything *more* affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe. Behind every book is a certain person with a certain history." (Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 34, Paglia's emphasis. Despite having similar arguments, I will note to the reader that Paglia is not explicitly commenting on or agreeing with Spivak, given that she wrote it before [1981] but published it after [1990] Spivak's address [1983], nor does she refer to Spivak anywhere in this 718-page book). Both Paglia and Spivak seem to think that an undoing of one's own role as uniquely responsible for the contents of the text is to suppose that one is speaking *for* others, or *for all*. Rather than the author dying, they actually try to become more omnipotent. Instead, it seems that the death of the author, rather than attempting to ascribe onto many one's own ideas (which actually would increase the authorship), seeks to acknowledge that the author is caused by parts of the world though not wholly representative of it, and is contingently rather than absolutely delimited. Conversely to Paglia's criticisms, Barthes writes that, rather than the author and the text standing on a single line of time, nourishing its contents from the "before" that then become the "after" of the text, instead "the modern sriptor is born simultaneously with the text", and "*writing* can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' [...] rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative" (Barthes, "Death of the Author", 145), elaborating that "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [...] to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (143). While he notes that "there can be no narrative without a narrator and a listener" (Barthes, "Structural Analysis of Narratives", 109) he explains that "*who speaks* (in the narrative) is not *who writes* (in real life) and *who writes* is not *who is*" (111–112, Barthes's emphasis). In short, a text may be a manifestation of the causes which have acted upon a body, but are not a part of the flow of self-perpetuation (Spinoza), performance of self (Austin), or disclosure of self (Arendt) that define one's subject formation, but rather undo it. It is unsurprising that, in *Fragments of an in-love discourse*, Barthes wrote that "be it by injury, be it by happiness, at times I am moved to want to be annihilated" (15, I translate) and "the deadly identity of the one in love is no other than: *I am the one who waits*" (50, Barthes's emphasis, I translate).

the process of representation. This final section will begin to articulate a grammar of compassion as a decentring of one's own desire in the face of another's. It will begin by looking at J.L. Austin's theory of performative utterances to identify the way in which his conception of speech acts as being formulated in the first person singular present indicative active restricts language to habits of self-centrism, creating a performative contradiction, applicable to language that tries to indicate an undoing of this self-centrism. It will continue by looking at the ethics of care literature to identify the way in which the language of love, care and compassion has resisted formulation in a self-sacrificing way. It will end on Chris Kraus's writings on masochism to identify how one might formulate a performative indication of compassion in a way that decentres to focus on the desire of another rather than oneself.

vii. Performing Oneself

While the previous section asserted its possibility, it may be difficult to imagine the language of compassion, given certain grammatical restrictions in play. How might one speak or write about compassion while avoiding the trap of centring discussions around oneself? For example, to return to Honneth's understanding of recognition, wherein "by making a gesture of recognition towards another person, we *performatively* make her aware that we see ourselves obligated to behave towards her in a certain kind of benevolent way," how might one performatively indicate this benevolence or compassion to another while not thrusting oneself and one's desire into the centre of the action? How can compassion be formulated in language while not obscuring what's behind it? J.L. Austin speaks about the role of language in constructing action with his discussion of performative utterances in *How to Do Things with Words*, introducing them as sentences

that do not describe (or do not *only* describe), but rather insert into the realm of human affairs an action which the very utterance of renders true. To say “I condemn you,” may describe or at least refer to the act of condemnation at hand, but that which it is describing is itself; the sentence would not hypothetically be true if it were passed over in silence. Other descriptive sentences, for example, “I eat my breakfast,” continue to be true without a linguistic description because the act of eating would still have taken place with or without it, whereas the very act of condemnation being described is the speech act describing it. To Austin, since these sentences are themselves an action emanating from the location of speech, his only condition defining these sentences is that they will always include verbs in the first person singular present indicative active.⁷⁵ While he later concedes that performatives may be formulated in differently structured sentences (for example, proclaiming “Out!” in a sporting event) these will always be able to be reformulated into a clearer sentence in the appropriate form (for example, “I proclaim you out at this sporting event!”⁷⁶)

This restriction seems to limit Austin’s broader theory of speech as a form of action, as it may actually contradict certain types of action, such as compassion, and form a performative contradiction. A performative contradiction is described by Jürgen Habermas as occurring when “a constative speech act $k(p)$ rests on noncontingent presuppositions whose propositional content contradicts the asserted proposition p .”⁷⁷ It is worth noting here the difference between Austin’s and Habermas’s use of the word performative: in Austin’s use, ‘performative’ refers to the utterance, whereas in

⁷⁵ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 102.

Habermas's use, 'performative' refers to the contradiction, while the utterance itself is constative as opposed to performative. The performative/constative distinction is important to Austin given the relationship between "truth" and each act. Constative speech acts serve to describe, and may be true or false, given that their point of reference is independent of the speech act itself. This compares to performative speech acts, which serve to perform an action rather than describe it, and in that sense cannot be "false." A performative contradiction in a constative speech act renders it false (Habermas's example, "I do not exist [here and now]," is constative in that it describes an act of existing that is not implemented using that speech act,⁷⁸ however it contradicts itself as being uttered in the first person singular present indicative active presupposes a statement of "I exist [here and now]."⁷⁹) Conversely, performative speech acts can be valued neither as true nor false given that the qualitative ascription to the utterance depends on the act itself. Rather than being true or false, performative speech acts may be "happy" or "unhappy", where unhappy refers to a performative speech act which has insufficiently performed its apparent goal (for example, if the speaker does not have the authority to implement the act, if they have not implemented it properly, or if they do not have the correct thoughts or feelings necessary to implement the act.)⁸⁰ The performative speech acts are "done," or at the very least attempted, however they do not continue to act in the proper sense following the initiation of the speech act. While Habermas speaks of constative speech acts that contradict themselves performatively into falsity, one may extend this concept to performative speech acts that performatively contradict themselves

⁷⁸ According to Habermas. This will be complicated shortly.

⁷⁹ Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 102.

⁸⁰ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 14–15.

into unhappiness. That is to say, while the utterance of the act is intended to bring it into action, its utterance is also the reason that it is not done. Its performance is both what “does” it, and what immediately contradicts it.

This is particularly relevant to discussions of compassion given Austin’s restricted language structure, which may influence more broadly how language and its relationship to the self may restrict how one is to think about compassion. As mentioned, to Austin performatives utterances take place in, or at least may be reformulated as being in the first person singular present indicative active tense. While to Austin performative utterances cannot be doubted because it is their being said the way they are said that renders them happy, they can be doubted if the very structure of its formulation (the first person singular present indicative active) undoes the supposed act itself. In the example of compassion, if it involves decentring the focus from one’s own desire to another’s, this seemingly becomes undone when formulated in a way that centres around oneself in the first person singular active. To return to Honneth’s example of recognition as a performative action, saying, for example, “I recognize your right to act according to your desire” is intended as an act of recognition and compassion decentring and destabilizing hierarchies of power and domination that benefit oneself over another, in letting another know that one sees oneself as due to behave towards another in a benevolent way, yet the very structure of the speech act tells otherwise. Rather than performatively asserting the power and agency of another over oneself, it performatively asserts one’s own power and voice, indicating that another’s right to act according to their desire is in fact contingent upon one’s own act and ability to recognize. One therefore asserts it as their action rather than another’s, despite the apparent recognition of another’s agency to act. However

well-intentioned, phrases such as “I recognize,” “I care for,” or “I love” seem to contradict themselves immediately at the moment of utterance (how can “I” recognize you if , by the very conditions of that recognition, “I” am not there?)

Austin’s theory of speech has been elaborated upon such that the division between constative and performative speech acts are not as discrete as the language used in this section may make it seem—Austin himself noted that “in general the locutionary act as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech act is both.”⁸¹ This discussion of compassion as a performative speech act is not to classify it solely as a performative speech act, but to note the performative element in speech and action, including speech surrounding compassion. The performative element of speech is intended to communicate a certain force through the momentum of a mark (or utterance), this force not being an existing or prior referent, but rather something brought into meaning with the mark of speech, and moreover, to Austin, brought into being with a specific and *intentional* meaning.⁸² Speech risks failure when this intended meaning is not conveyed or brought into being with the sign; in the case of compassion, it is the sign of the first person singular active tense which fails to bring into being the “force” of the meaning, which in actuality is the force of another rather than the “I.” In this sense, on top of performing the verb, Austin’s restrictions of performative utterances in the first person singular present indicative active requires that they similarly perform the pronoun “I”; rather than purely describing the location of speech within oneself, the location of speech and in turn desire in oneself is a fabrication manufactured and sustained through

⁸¹ Austin, *How to Do Things*, 147.

⁸² Jacques Derrida, “Signature événement contexte,” in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Minuit, 1972), 382–383.

corporeal signs and other discursive means,⁸³ in this case, through the utterance of “I.”

Judith Butler notes that:

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well. It is, however, clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that there is a ‘we’ or an ‘I’ that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior.⁸⁴

In this sense, if discussions of compassion are to take seriously another’s desire rather than one’s own, it may require for articulations of thought through language to abandon the inclination to formulate phrases in the first person singular present indicative active, as well as to abandon the inclination to imagine phrases reformulated into such a tense.

viii. Caring for Another

This section will continue to look at the obstruction of articulations of compassion by the self by looking at the debate of self-sacrifice in the ethics of care literature. Discussions in the ethics of care on the construction of an understanding of compassion or care have frequently turned to the literature of sociologist Arlie Hochschild on the *use* of love, care and emotions, as theorized in her book *The Managed Heart*. Hochschild uses an interactional rather than an organismic model of understanding emotions, arguing that rather than simply being biological impulses to which one is subjected, one can understand emotions as biological impulses that becomes coded by social processes and

⁸³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 185.

⁸⁴ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist and Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 272.

interactions. She is interested in both “what is there, impermeable, to be ‘done to,’ namely, a biologically given sense related to an orientation to action,” as well as “how social factors influence what we expect and thus what feelings ‘signal.’”⁸⁵ Understanding emotions not as something that one is subject to but equally something that one may *use*, she develops a notion of “emotional labour,” noting that “this labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that *produces the proper state of mind in others*—in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place.”⁸⁶ This becomes a useful step to some ethics of care theorists who make a normative claim for the use of compassion or care, it gives one a way to deploy it appropriately (that is to say, it allows one to *make sure* that another *feels* cared for.)

It has been suggested that compassion and care ethics make difficult contributions to areas heavily permeated with logic of economic gain. For this reason, Hochschild’s concept has been employed by a number of medical practitioners who have taken seriously the role of care ethics and empathy in a profession generally characterised by economization in late capitalism. The health care industry is a prime example in which, despite the seemingly obvious role care may play in these types of professions, the self-sacrificial role of compassion may not be taken seriously as it does not continue to provide one with the economic benefits and personal gain afforded by other approaches to health care. In short, compassion or care are tolerated “as long as they do not interfere with the real *business* of medicine.”⁸⁷ Hochschild’s notion of emotional labour becomes

⁸⁵ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 222.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7, I emphasize.

⁸⁷ Carlo Leget, “Compassion in the context of an academic medical center,” in *Care, Compassion and Recognition: An Ethical Discussion*, eds. Carlo Leget, Chris Gastmans and Marian Verkerk (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 107, I emphasize.

attractive because it allows medical professionals to deploy compassion to benefit their profession. Studies on empathy⁸⁸ in the medical profession justify its use given that it helps attend to otherwise unnoticed aspects of a patient's health, increases patient satisfaction with the medical service, increases compliance with medical recommendations, and increases the professional satisfaction of medical professionals.⁸⁹ This may be deployed by medical professionals through a form of acting, in which professionals may create an emotional experience of feeling empathized with and cared for in the patient to obtain certain benefits.⁹⁰ Hochschild identifies two different types of acting that may be employed in performing emotional labour: surface acting, wherein one may deceive others about how one feels though not themselves; and deep acting, wherein one learns to alter one's own emotions to obtain certain outcomes and experiences.⁹¹ The evocation of "acting" an emotion on the part of those taking care of another seems to imply that the carer is to act an emotion *authored by the caree*.⁹² However in Hochschild's notion as well as its subsequent use by care theorists, a carer does not act according to what the caree wants, but rather to what the carer wants, based on the

⁸⁸ It's worth noting the difference in understanding empathy and sympathy in this field. Conversely to the understanding set up earlier in this essay, the authors note that "sympathy is defined as experiencing another's emotions, as opposed to appreciating or imagining those emotions." This becomes important given that "physicians who sympathize with their patients share their suffering, which could lead to lack of objectivity and emotional fatigue, whereas empathy has a uniformly positive impact on physician-patient interactions" (Stepien and Baernstein, "Educating for Empathy", 525). In this sense, their conceptions of empathy and sympathy are reversed with my own. Regardless of word choice, it is important to note that the authors stress the importance of distinguishing the location of suffering or desire from the location of empathy or care, which is in line with my conception of compassion, which distinguishes the location of desire (the other as separate from myself) but keeps the centre of focus on that location. Though what they term here "empathy" I would earlier have called "sympathy."

⁸⁹ Kathy A. Stepien and Amy Baernstein, "Educating for Empathy," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 21, no. 5 (2006): 524.

⁹⁰ Eric B. Larson and Xin Yao, "Clinical Empathy as Emotional Labor in the Patient-Physician Relationship," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 293, no. 9 (2005): 1101–1102.

⁹¹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 33.

⁹² See the discussion of Hobbes in §2.

emotional response they are wanting to receive in return from the caree. This approach borders on continuing to be a self-focused compassion, in which emotions are used to create a desired experience in another, and then justifies this use as either what they want, or what is best for them. In this relationship, it is not the carer who renounces their ability to act, and whose desire becomes vulnerable to the influence of others, in order to attend to the caree, but rather it continues to be the caree whose desire and emotional experience is vulnerable to being dictated by another, based on what the carer wants from them.

These ethics of care theorists, who take seriously the role of care, or compassion, seem to recentre the self-performing actor who does not become vulnerable to those who they are caring for. Instead, care in these accounts becomes overshadowed by the opaque presence of the self. This tendency within ethics of care writings can be seen in the debates within the discipline on the role of self-sacrifice. For example, some approaches to the ethics of care have focused on the need for reciprocity of care, or a “mature care,” a term drawn from a passing remark Carol Gilligan made in her groundbreaking study *In a Different Voice* where an interviewee describes her choice to get an abortion as mature and responsible as opposed to selfish, noting how it was “more mature in ways of making decisions realistically and *taking care of myself*.”⁹³ Tove Pettersen, an ethics of care philosopher, and Marit Helene Hem, a researcher and psychiatric nurse, note that notions of care of the self are equally important in notions of care as opposed to pure altruism, which they see as opposing egoism through pure self-sacrifice. They note that

Limiting a caring activity does not imply that the other-regarding aspect vanishes. The concept of mature care contains an altruistic component: carers are of course acting for others and have their best interests in mind. However, the needs and viewpoints of a particular other do not consistently take first

⁹³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 116, I emphasize.

priority. Consequently, understanding care as mature care can prevent severe self-sacrifice, something that could follow when care is understood as motivated only by the needs of the other. Self-sacrifice may inflict harm on both carers and those who are cared for, which is one of the reasons why an explicit understanding of care is required.⁹⁴

Criticisms of explicit claims to self-sacrifice in the ethics of care, it would seem, focus more on overarching normative claims of what all care should do, rather than understanding what care might entail. They still seem to acknowledge the role that self-sacrifice plays in defining relationships of care, while acknowledging that this self-sacrifice cannot be taken up absolutely, noting that the reciprocity of care is necessary to balance interests between the carer and the caree.⁹⁵ This does not define a reciprocity of what is involved in care, but a reciprocity of how care should be used. Moreover, it continues to rely on a language that recentres the subject, writing (as quoted earlier) that “self-sacrifice [of the carer] may inflict harm on both carers and those who are cared for,” asserting in these articulations of care that the caree will never have the understanding or desire to make demands of the carer that won’t harm the carer, and again placing faith only in the ability of the deliberations or rationality of the carer, who is the “self” and subject of the action of care.

While attempting to oppose itself to logics of economization, this “emotional labour” view of care, in which the carer directs and dictates the emotional response of the caree, continues to structure around a logic of growth and accumulation, given that the carer is guided by a desire to grow and accumulate emotions in another for the carer’s own use. Even if Hochschild’s concept of “deep acting” as the primary way to perform

⁹⁴ Tove Pettersen and Marit Helene Hem, “Mature care and reciprocity: Two cases from acute psychiatry.” *Nursing Ethics* 18, no. 2 (2011): 220.

⁹⁵ Marit Helene Hem, Kristen Halvorsen and Per Nortvedt. “Altruism and mature care: Some rival moral considerations in care ethics.” *Nursing Ethics* 21, no. 7 (2014): 797–798.

emotional labour involves a form of acting in which one allows oneself to be “tricked” into feeling an emotion, this ruse is deployed by oneself to fulfil one’s own desire, only opening up oneself to be vulnerable to one’s own trickery, rather than being vulnerable to the influence of others. It reveals the malleability of one’s own emotions to be altered while retaining a central focus on one’s own desire as the location of action and decision-making, rather than genuinely opening oneself up to vulnerability. These maintain nuances of self in the grammar of care because they seek to make normative claims that the carer ought to be the author of the acts and outcomes of care, or also that the carer ought also to be receiving care in return.

Anne Carson comments on the way in which love, a language which like compassion or care focuses on the attention of one towards another, when expressed as a desire or act of will, is similar to this logic of growth and accumulation. She traces this version of love, whose deployment focuses heavily on *use* by and for the benefit of oneself, in *Eros the Bittersweet*, where she looks at love-centred poetry from Sappho to the modernists, all of whom understand love as something that is both sweet and at the same time bitter. What she notes is that the conditions of this bitterness is the nature of love as defined by a lack, in which “it is by definition impossible for [the lover] to have what he wants if, as soon as it is had, it is no longer wanting.”⁹⁶ The sweetness, rather, is characterized by a reaching motion in which the lover finds pleasure in the act of seeking, in understanding love as a lack in the self that must be found and filled: “if we follow the trajectory of eros we consistently find it tracing out this same route: it move out from the lover toward the beloved, then ricochets back to the lover himself and the hole in him,

⁹⁶ Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey, 1998), 10. I thank Daniel Pfeiffer for his comments on and encouragements to continue reading Anne Carson.

unnoticed before. Who is the real subject of most love poems? Not the beloved. It is that hole.”⁹⁷ This conception of love puts the lover in a paradoxical and seemingly contradictory position. On the one hand, Carson notes that “No one in love really believes love will end [...] They are astonished when they fall in love, they are equally astonished when they fall out of love,”⁹⁸ while also noting that “what the conventional lover wants is to remain in the ‘now’ of desire at any cost.”⁹⁹ This is a notion of love structured by a logic of growth and accumulation, and is deployed in similar ways to compassion and the aforementioned ethics of care and its use. While this lover is guided by another, the beloved, the conditions of this love is not for the benefit of beloved, but as a way to ‘obtain’ the beloved, in the sense of having the beloved at one’s disposal, as an extension of one’s own desire. Attention is not paid to the unique specificity of the beloved and the desire that makes them, but in maintaining the experience of the reach towards them. Pleasure in this love comes from the increasing proximity to obtaining the beloved, and grows and accumulates like an asymptote approaching its limit. Elsewhere Carson compares this love to a type of *jealousy*, a negative emotion that drives the lover to wholly obtain their beloved. She reveals how this type of love does not actually depend at all on the desire or well-being of the beloved, but becomes a part of regular self-driven action. She looks to the dynamic of love between Marcel Proust’s protagonist and the character of Albertine in *In Search of Lost Time*: “Albertine’s death in a riding accident on p. 642 of volume 5 does not emancipate Marcel from jealousy, it removes only one of the innumerable Albertines he would have to forget. The jealous lover cannot rest until he

⁹⁷ Carson, *Eros*, 30.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

is able to touch all the points in space and time ever occupied by the beloved,”¹⁰⁰ given that to Marcel, “we only love that which we do not wholly possess.”¹⁰¹

Both Carson’s theorization of love and Hochschild’s theorization of emotional labour as desiring *for* another continue to focus around the growth and accumulation of one’s own desire while justifying it as relating to another. To say “I love,” “I care,” or “I pity” in these visions is to invoke another in relation to and as an object of one’s own vision of desire, rather than to open oneself up to the vulnerability of influence by another’s desire. The visions of the ethics of care which centre around emotional labour and reciprocity continue to mask what another wants by introducing a focus on one’s own desire still. This logic does not counter economization but replicates it by introducing compassion, love or care as being deployed as having a use value for oneself. Elsewhere Carson looks at an alternative vision of love, focusing on the role sacrifice of desire plays in love, looking at three female mystics who, in their writings, stage various scenes of love and jealousy in which they are undone. The mystics stage three respective scenes of jealousy: one of erotic love, one of love with God, and one of love with an absent God.

Carson remarks that

The jealous lover must balance two contradictory realities within her heart: on the one hand, that of herself at the centre of the universe and *in command of her own will*, offering love to her beloved; on the other, that of herself off the centre of the universe and *in despite of her own will*, watching her beloved love someone else. Naked collision of these two realities brings the lover to a sort of breakdown [...] whose effect is to expose her very Being to its own scrutiny and to dislodge it from the centre of itself. It would be a very high test of dialectical endurance to be able to, not just recognize, but consent to this breakdown.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Anne Carson, *The Albertine Workout* (New York: New Directions, 2014), 46.

¹⁰¹ Marcel Proust, *À la recherche de temps perdu III*, ed. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré. (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 106, I translate.

¹⁰² Anne Carson, “Decreation: How Women Like Sappho, Marguerite Porete and Simone Weil Tell God,” in *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (Toronto: Vintage, 2005), 165, I emphasize.

In comparison to her earlier vision of love as remaining in the now of desire, and jealousy as driving one to wholly obtain one's beloved, Carson now suggests that one may dwell in the negative emotion of jealousy and become undone, given that love is what "dares the self to leave itself behind, to enter into poverty."¹⁰³

Love, or care, as entering into poverty, rather than wholly obtaining the beloved, is a view expanded upon by care ethicists Inge van Nistelrooij and Carlo Leget. In comparison to the earlier care ethicists who insisted on care as a notion of reciprocity, or performing emotional labour to receive the economic benefits one wants, they instead point out that the drive to care is experienced as a moral dilemma wherein "the wish to reclaim the self is in conflict with the wish not to hurt others," explaining that "the former is mainly put in terms of selfishness, the latter in terms of care."¹⁰⁴ Returning to Gilligan's examination of moral development during the process of getting an abortion, they explain how

"selfishness" is exchanged for *forgetting what one would choose for the self*. The pressure exerted by the wish not to hurt anyone and by the feminine identification of goodness with self-sacrifice lead women to argue for their abortion in ways that avoid responsibility for the choice that is made. The abortion for instance takes place for the sake of not hurting the father or his wife (!) and is defended as a sacrifice of the woman's own needs for those of others.¹⁰⁵

In this sense, they argue that care is not a reciprocal notion because it is not characterised by such a duality, but that the element of self-sacrifice in care is that which abolishes the duality by forgetting one of the elements. They note that "a picture of mature care that upholds a dichotomy of self and other is inadequate and even runs the risk of being

¹⁰³ Carson, "Decreation Essay", 162.

¹⁰⁴ Inge van Nistelrooij and Carlo Leget. "Against dichotomies: On mature care and self-sacrifice in care ethics." *Nursing Ethics* Forthcoming: 5. I thank Joan Tronto for her recommendations on ethics of care literature pertaining to debates on (and particularly in favour of) self-sacrifice.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, I emphasize.

irrelevant for professional caring practices.”¹⁰⁶ In this sense, for a vision of care that differs from growth and economization, one must not articulate it in grammars which maintain the boundary of the “self” with respect to the other who is the focal point of the act of care, and outcomes must not be calculated by the “self” who is being undone in care.

ix. A Panic of Altruism

Chris Kraus elaborates upon relationships of compassion where an onlooker might view two parties, a “carer” and a “caree,” when there is in fact only one (given that the carer ceases to exist at the moment of caring.) She contributes to this body of literature in a way that is notably antihagiographic, trying to understand the act of sacrifice of desire as neither a noble nor privileged act, but rather merely something that people do. She discusses the sacrifice of desire through the metonym of anorexia, pointing out the way in which our assumptions of the relationship between an individual and their desire dictate the interpretation of their states by others. She notes that

At best, the anorexic is blocked in an infantile struggle to attain a separation from her mother. At worst, she is passive-aggressively shunning the “female” state and role. At any rate, all these readings deny the possibility of a psychic, intellectual equation between a culture’s food and *the entire social order*. Anorexia is a malady experienced by girls, and it’s still impossible to imagine girls moving outside themselves and acting through culture. All these texts are based on the belief that a well-adjusted, boundaried sense of self is the only worthy female goal.¹⁰⁷

This assumption of narcissism and egoism behind articulations of anorexia make it difficult to understand the abnegation of desire as anything other than an attempt to gain something from a performative renunciation. Kraus notes that “if the female anorexic

¹⁰⁶ Nistelrooij and Leget, “Against dichotomies”, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Chris Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2000), 161.

isn't consciously manipulative, then she's tragic,"¹⁰⁸ instead agreeing with Gilles Deleuze's articulation that "anorexia is perhaps that which we have been most poorly able to speak of, notably under the influence of psychoanalysis: the void, belonging to the anorexic body without organs, has nothing to do with a lack, and has everything to do with the constitution of a field of desire travelled by particles and flux."¹⁰⁹

In an example illustrating the desire to renounce one's desire, Kraus turns to the French mystic Simone Weil who was characterised as having a conflicted sense of "self" in reconciling her sense of personal worthlessness and inferiority with larger communities in the outer world.¹¹⁰ She was marked by personal contradiction, often restricted for being a woman despite attempting to shed this identity, referred to as a "young Israelite" by her interlocutors with whom she discussed her conversion to Christianity, and importantly, understood at the time and by later readers as a privileged and selfish bourgeois, despite her deep solidarity with the working class. Kraus focuses on this last point in developing her notion of altruistic panic:

All her life since she was 10 she'd empathized with the poor and dispossessed. It was a panic of altruism. She felt the suffering of others in her body, and found a language and a system for it. Value, she decided, exists only in the joining of two previously separate things. Value ceases when that union is dissolved. Craving unity, she launched herself into an altruistic panic, a state in which there aren't any boundaries between who you are and what you see.¹¹¹

It is unclear initially how Kraus's altruistic panic avoids the condescension of pity; how not seeing boundaries between oneself and the world does not entail an assumption of the world being exactly like oneself; or how, in renouncing privilege, or renouncing food,

¹⁰⁸ Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, 137.

¹⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 109, I translate.

¹¹⁰ Mary G. Dietz, *Between the Human and the Divine: The Political Thought of Simone Weil* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), 14.

¹¹¹ Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, 48.

one does not simply perform oneself as an “I” who has these things, and moreover an “I” who has the security to give them up and remain unharmed.

Kraus’s understanding becomes clearer towards the end of the book, in a scene where her relationship with her virtual sexual partner Gavin, with whom she would engage in conversations of sadomasochistic sexual role play, is terminated. It has been suggested that, despite their similarities, sadism and masochism do not actually fit together like two halves of a whole, but rather they are two discrete and actually incompatible predilections that are whole on their own. While generally characterized, respectively, by the love to cause pain to others, and the love to be caused pain by another, the role of desire rather than pain in characterizing sadism and masochism has been illustrated well in Gilles Deleuze’s book *Coldness and Cruelty*. He tells a short joke of the encounter between a sadist and a masochist: the masochist says “Hurt me,” and the sadist says “No.”¹¹² This scene reveals that in fact what is more painful to the masochist is not the physical sensation of pain, but being denied it when it is what they want. As such, the sadist’s optimal partner is not one who wants pain, given that this desire for the sensation of pain would confirm that the submissive partner is in control of the boundaries defining their subjectivity, but the unconsenting victim over whom they have complete control. The masochist is a bit more complicated, as they require an initial act of consent to a subsequent absolute renunciation of one’s own desire.¹¹³ Rather, to avoid continuous acts of desiring not to desire, in which case each act would simply be a product of one’s own desire still, the masochist initially desires to a subsequent abnegation of their desires, through having the boundaries of their body being dictated

¹¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch : Le froid et le cruel* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 36.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 68.

and controlled by another. Consequently, masochism characteristically involves a contract, emblematic of this initial act of consent. For example, the protagonist of Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* creates a contract with his mistress Wanda:

Severin von Kusiemski ceases with the present day being the affianced of Mme Wanda von Dunajew and renounces all the rights appertaining thereunto: he on the contrary binds himself on his word of honour as a man and nobleman, that hereafter he will be her *slave* until such time that she herself sets him at liberty again.

As the slave of Mme von Dunajew he is to bear the name Gregor, and he is to unconditionally comply with every one of her wishes, and to obey every one of her commands; he is always to be submissive to his mistress, and is to consider her every sign of favour as an extraordinary mercy.

Mme von Dunajew is entitled not only to punish her slave as she deems best, even for the slightest inadvertence or fault, but also is herewith given the right to torture him as the mood may seize her or merely for the sake of whiling away the time. Should she so desire, she may kill him whenever she wishes; in short, he is her unrestricted property.

Should Mme von Dunajew ever set her slave at liberty, Severin von Kusiemski agrees to forget everything that he has experienced or suffered as her slave, and promises *never, under any circumstances and in no way, to think of vengeance or retaliation.*¹¹⁴

The masochist contract, rather than being a question of merely inflicting pain, gives the masochist an opportunity to consent to, or desire, an immediate and absolute renouncement of the subsequent ability to decide, or to desire. In *Venus in Furs*, Severin's contract with Mme von Dunajew he "renounces *all* [...] rights," "is to *unconditionally* comply," and may not sever this contract until she ever decides to free him.

This contract becomes different from the Hobbesian contract discussed earlier because, while both involve a degree of renunciation, the narrative following Hobbes's contract is that the subject will eventually be better able to get what they want through the

¹¹⁴ Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs* (Dublin: Roads, 2015), 99, Sacher-Masoch emphasizes.

social contract, as their desire is represented in the sovereign. Conversely, in the masochist contract the subject is renouncing this ability, and their desire is indefinitely blocked by the mistress. Rather than ultimately benefiting from the contract, they risk vulnerability, and even annihilation. This is seen in *Venus in Furs*, when Mme von Dunajew invites a “beautiful Greek” man whose “muscles swell” into a scene where Severin is bound. Despite the constructed power imbalance between them, wherein Severin is the submissive element, this marks the first scene where he actively and strongly opposes her actions. He recounts that

The sensation of being whipped by a successful rival before the eyes of an adored woman cannot be described. I almost went mad with shame and despair.

What was most humiliating was that at first I felt a certain wild suprasensual stimulation under Apollo’s whip and the cruel laughter of my Venus, no matter how horrible my position was. But Apollo whipped on and on, blow after blow, until I forgot all about poetry, and finally gritted my teeth in impotent rage, and cursed my wild dreams, woman, and love.

All of a sudden I saw with horrible clarity whither blind passion and lust have led man ever since Holofernes and Agamemnon—into a blind alley [...] into misery, slavery, and death.

It was as though I was awakening from a dream.¹¹⁵

Despite recognizing that he actively dissents to his torture, he continues to acquiesce.

While Mme von Dunajew releases him from his contract, he continues to abide by the clause prohibiting him from vengeance or retaliation, noting that “I thought of taking vengeance, of killing him; but I was bound by the abominable agreement. So nothing was left for me to do except to keep my pledged word and grit my teeth.”¹¹⁶

In *Aliens & Anorexia*, the relationship between Kraus and her S&M partner Gavin is not *sadomasochistic*, but properly masochistic as in *Venus in Furs*. It is specifically a

¹¹⁵ Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, 152–153.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

product of Kraus's masochism, as evidenced by the fact that she is the one who initiates the arrangement in which she is the masochistic, or submissive, partner. In an email to Gavin, she stages a scene in which he leaves her tied up and alone, and subsequently poses "the safety question," which she elaborates upon as being: "Should the Dom ever really leave the sub alone?"¹¹⁷ This question is framed as one of safety and security because, as with Severin's experience with "Apollo," it reveals the degree to which the masochist becomes genuinely vulnerable to harm under the control of their dominant partner. While submitting oneself to the desire of another, one could risk this submission not being merely symbolic, but that one could be genuinely harmed in the outcome. Given that masochism offers one to genuinely forgo one's own desire to another rather than desiring to do so in each instance, it may, and most likely will, involve instances in which one is genuinely not happy about the conditions in which one's own desire is being foregone. In the case of Kraus's scenario of "the safety question", when left alone and tied up, she is helpless to save herself if something goes wrong. Her safety is left in the hands of Gavin, but having left her alone, he would not be there to save her either. Even if she actively desires otherwise, her power to do so has been foregone. This plays out in later in real life when Gavin begins to ignore Kraus's emails and calls entirely. She writes that "All I asked was that you would not disconnect without telling me. That is the greatest violence,"¹¹⁸ however this is exactly what he does, as the dominant element of Kraus's masochistic fantasy. Having renounced her desire to Gavin, Kraus experiences genuine harm from his uninvited absence. Later disguising herself as a new woman on the sex hotline where they met, she receives a call from him, and it is confirmed to her

¹¹⁷ Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, 117.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

that he willfully ceased speaking with her while seeking new sexual partners. She describes her reaction to this discovery with the language she used to describe Weil's self-sacrifice, as a "rush of *altruistic panic*."¹¹⁹

Her use of altruism to describe this scene may seem confusing. The dissimilarity between her use here and her earlier uses is a question of control: whereas earlier Weil was described as having altruistic panic when she renounced her privileged position to sympathize with the workers, this was seen as having the condescension associated with the security, control and agency of pity or charity. Weil was a bourgeois girl who *chose* time and again to give up her privilege to sympathize with the less fortunate, whereas Kraus has been unwillingly abandoned and still expresses her altruism towards the man who harmed her. Returning to the debate of compassion, if it is always seen as instances of repeated choosing to forego one's desire in such a way that one continues to remain secure, compassion will always be seen as condescending.¹²⁰ One might question Kraus's evocation of altruism, or compassion, in this instance because she was not one of the powerful, so one could ask, "well, what were you going to do anyways?" If one is to assume that individuals act when they are in control, and only in a way that maintains their security, this instance of Kraus describing herself as "altruistic" may seem confusing given that she is neither in control of the situation, and moreover still somehow sees herself as having the benevolence of altruism towards this man who has explicitly harmed her.

Her earlier understanding of altruistic panic was described as "a state in which there aren't any boundaries between who you are and what you see." Her last use of

¹¹⁹ Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, 195, I emphasize.

¹²⁰ Earlier this type of action (or in this case reception) was linked with pity rather than compassion.

altruistic panic implies that this does not involve a lack of boundaries due to projecting oneself onto everything one sees (the assumption that others must be like oneself), but rather a loss or erasure of one's sense of self (an absence of one's self in the presence of others). Carson notes the seeming contradiction of a language of decentring and decreation that seems to arise from one's very *in tact* self. She notes that "to be a writer is to construct a big, loud, shiny centre of self from which the writing is given voice and any claim to be intent on annihilating this self while still continuing to write and give voice to writing must involve the writer in some important acts of subterfuge or contradiction."¹²¹ She goes so far to suggest that Simone Weil is a "fake" woman, elaborating that "we have said that telling is a function of the self. If we study the way these three writers [Sappho, Marguerite Porete, and Simone Weil] talk about their own telling, we can see how each of them feels moved to create a sort of dream of distance in which the self is displaced from the centre of the work and the teller disappears into the telling."¹²² Rather than a performance of subjectivity, the language of decreation is expressed as "a presence that proposes itself in the modality of absence, as a *yes* to the other expressed by the negation of self in an act fully coincident with its own renunciation."¹²³

In Kraus's last panic of altruism, she loses sight of what constitutes her "self," as she has renounced it entirely to Gavin, as indicated by his unwilling abandonment. In the conflict between her own desire to be at the centre of her beloved's affection, and his desire in which she is abandoned, she wholly replaces her own desire with his, and ends

¹²¹ Carson, "Decreation", 171.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 173.

¹²³ Roberto Esposito, *The Origin of the Political: Hannah Arendt or Simone Weil?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 39. I thank Mary Dietz for alerting me of this exciting and newly translated book.

up willing her own unwilled abandonment in a last panic of altruism. The same could be said of Weil, who was not choosing to join the worker struggle, but did not have control not to because she could not see the “I” required to have that control. It is an “I” she had already renounced entirely to God. She writes, for example, of her departure from France to the United States in the advent of Nazi occupation in a letter to her interlocutor Father Perrin in a letter dated April 16 1942. She writes:

I have no desire to leave. I will leave with dread. The calculations of probability that decide my fate are so uncertain that they hardly uphold my choice. The thought that guides me, and which has lived in me for years, in such a way that I dare not abandon it, despite the feeble chances of its realization, is close to the project of which you have had the great generosity to help me with these past few months, and which did not succeed.

The bottom line is, the main reason pushing me is that given the increasing speed and stakes of the current circumstances, it seems to me that the decision to stay would be an act of will on my part. *And my greatest desire is to lose not only all will, but my entire being.*

It seems to me that something is telling me to go. Because I am certain that it is not just my own sensitivities, I am abandoning myself to it.

[...]

P.S. You know well that, for me, above all else, this departure serves for everything but to escape danger and suffering. My dread comes precisely from the fear that in leaving, despite myself and without my knowing, I will be doing exactly that which I do not want to do—to escape. Up until now we have lived here very peacefully. If this peace disappears after my departure, it would be awful for me. If I knew for certain that it was going to be that way, I would stay. If you know something which would suggest that something is going to happen, I count on you to tell me.¹²⁴

This reveals the way in which action incited by compassion may be performative in the sense that it involves actions taking place, but may not be framed in the first person singular present indicative, and may not performatively reinforce the boundaries of the “I” articulating it, but rather undo them. The grammar of compassion remains sensitive to

¹²⁴ Weil, *Attente de Dieu*, 65–67, I translate, I emphasize.

those who are annihilated in action, they are not seen as the central subject of action, though still passively implicated in it. Much how one may ask of Kraus's altruism "Well, what were you going to do anyways?" one could ask the same, for example, of one who says "I recognize..." If, with their goal of taking seriously the desire of another, they have entered into a contract in which they renounce their ability to act outright, rather than seeing the charity of recognition, one could ask (hypothetically, though probably not literally) "What did you have the power to do anyways?"

Compassion, in conclusion, involves political action in such a way that may shift where the "control" or "authorship" for this action occurs in one's body to outside oneself. In theorizing a political theory of care, Joan Tronto notes the importance of the concept of attention, describing it as a "suspension of one's self-interest, and a capacity genuinely to look from the perspective of the one in need," noting how "we might also be attentive or inattentive to our own needs."¹²⁵ This reveals the way in which action over a certain body may arise from different locations, whether those be found in the traditionally understood notion of "self," or elsewhere. Contradicting the idea that action in a body ought always to emanate from that body itself, theorists building on this concept of attention have pointed out how this form of constant calculation of one's own actions based on one's own self-interest may ignore a responsibility one has living in a community of others, looking to a "decidedly noncalculative" attention instead as a "nonwillful waiting that allows things to appear separate from our own doing or planning."¹²⁶ This may reformulate the performative action of compassion as not

¹²⁵ Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 34.

¹²⁶ Shalini Satkunanandan, *Extraordinary Responsibility: Politics Beyond the Moral Calculus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 187.

condescendingly emanating from an “I” who chooses when and how to act, but rather describing and performatively constituting an action which abnegates the desire that bounds a body which might otherwise, but does not, block the desire of another, ultimately annihilating that body at its moment of utterance. One’s involvement in the action of compassion is precisely the silence and inaction involved in the action of another over which one has no control.

II. Compassion and Politics

Theatricality
implies an embarrassing excess of presence, i.e., of sentiment. We
like it better when the work is cool.

– Chris Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*

In the first chapter I introduced the suggestion that the basis of compassion is foregoing one's own desire, replacing it with the desire of another as the cause of one's action. I suggested that, in this process of compassion, one decentres one's self as a necessarily important player in action, arguing that one may act in a way that does not promote one's own security, but rather opens oneself up to vulnerability, and the possibility of annihilation. This chapter will continue with this theorization of compassion, moving past the broader problem of self-centredness to look at the problem of its role in politics specifically. While it may be clear what compassion entails, it may be less clear how it applies to politics, or whether it applies at all. The concerns covered in the first chapter of this essay, including the relationship between compassion and the performance of the self, along with its relationship to politics, were of great concern to the political thinker Hannah Arendt. Indisputably one of the most influential political thinkers of the 20th century, Arendt offered an extremely convincing account situating compassion with respect to, and ultimately excluding it from, the political sphere. In addition to an exclusion of compassion in the content of her writings, she herself had a reputation for being "unsympathetic, cold, even brutal," in the form of her writings as well.¹ In a personal letter sent to her, Arendt's interlocutor Gershom Scholem commented on her

¹ Deborah Nelson, "Suffering and Thinking: The Scandal of Tone in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*," in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 221.

essays reporting on the trial of Adolf Eichmann by describing her tone and method of writing as “heartless, frequently almost sneering and malicious” (JP 241). Rather than arguing against this, she herself noted the need for a humaneness that was “sober and cool rather than sentimental” (MDT 25). For this reason, this chapter will focus exclusively on Hannah Arendt as a key political thinker of compassion, in spite of and including her apparent coldness.

While the first chapter asserted compassion as a decentring of the self as the cause of action, instead replacing one’s own desire with the desire of another, it was precisely this quality of non-performance of the self that lead Arendt to exclude it from the political sphere. In her exclusion of compassion, she wrote that “because compassion abolishes the distance, the worldly space between men where political matters, the whole realm of human affairs, are located, it remains, politically speaking, *irrelevant* and without consequence” (OR 76, I emphasize). Such a stance with regards to the question of what to do with the “self” may seem to put her in contrast with some of the thinkers of the first chapter, such as Simone Weil, who advocated for such a decreation, however I suggest that her exclusion of compassion may not be as totalizing as it seems.² While Arendt describes compassion as politically irrelevant, she does not diminish its importance broadly, but rather argues that to remain intact, it cannot be seen (a quality emblematic of the political.) She notes that “the most elementary meaning of the two

² Such affinities have not gone unexplored. I suggest Sophie Bourgault, “Repenser la « voix », repenser le silence : l’apport du care,” in *Le care : éthique féministe actuelle*, eds. Sophie Bourgault and Julie Perreault (Montréal: Remue-ménage, 2015), 163–186; Mary Dietz, “The Slow Boring of Hard Boards: Weil, Arendt, and the Work of Politics,” in *Turning Operations: Feminism, Arendt, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 161–181; Roberto Esposito, *The Origin of the Political: Hannah Arendt or Simone Weil?*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Gareth Williams (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). I thank Beverly Woodward for her insights on this point.

realms [private and public] indicated that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all” (HC 73). In this chapter I will argue that in spite of this exclusion, even accepting Arendt’s understanding of the political, the *labour* of compassion continues to be a relevant *political* activity, because of how her activity of speech immediately depends upon the action of speech as well as the labour of listening.

The first section of this chapter will look at the distinctions in Arendt’s conceptual framework, quickly overviewing her understanding of each concept and their relationship to each other. I will argue that she does not create distinctions between concepts to enforce a hierarchy, nor does she indict certain concepts outright. Rather, each concept, with their unique properties, are crucial to her understanding of the active life, based on her understandings of the natural will, to which all are subjected to be affected, and the free will, which is unique to each individual, arising from their ability to think and to begin something new. In the second section I will locate compassion in her conceptual framework, in the activity of labour, due to her association of compassion with muteness and poverty. I will similarly argue that Arendt excludes compassion due to its necessary muteness in dealing with the poverty and survival of another, and that it alone is not sufficient to constitute a political realm. In the last section I will argue that in spite of her exclusion, Arendt’s political realm is incomplete without the inclusion of compassion given that her understanding of speech and action necessarily invokes the need for another to forego their own desire to see and hear this action. I will ultimately argue that her understanding of the political realm requires a reciprocal balance between

performatively enacting oneself and foregoing one's desire, between speech and listening, and between action and compassion.

§4 To Begin Something New

To understand Arendt's association of compassion with muteness, and her subsequent exclusion of it from the political sphere, one must understand Arendt's association of speech with the political, but more specifically, her complex conceptual schematic. In this section, I will contend that Arendt's conceptual distinctions are non-hierarchical, although they may appear so given her tendency to analyse the "less human" concepts only in their distinction from the "more human" concepts, which are of more interest to her (for example, discussing the social in contrast to the political, the private in contrast to the public, labour and work in contrast to action.) Rather, I will argue that, to Arendt, all of these spheres, realms, and activities are important, but that they must be distinguished from one another to allow each to maintain its importance.

x. A Complex Schematism

Arendt's biographer Elisabeth Young-Bruehl points out that Arendt would regularly use the "complex schematism" she mapped out in *The Human Condition* in her other works without making an explicit reference to it, an "impatience" that "paved the way for many misunderstandings."³ The schematism involves, Mary Dietz says, a number of parallel or corresponding concepts that do not always appear in regular divisions, sometimes in twos, frequently in threes. She writes:

The concepts that constitute Arendt's map appear in ones, twos, and threes; sometimes they multiply into fours and sixes. One term constitutes the text-

³ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 318.

map itself: the *vita activa*. Three others—conditions, activities, and spaces—constitute its outer boundaries. A complex of related concepts—some binaries, others not—emerges inside: earth, world, private, public, social, household, polis, society, worldliness, worldlessness, labor, work, action, natality, mortality, plurality, *animal laborans*, *homo faber*, process, life, necessity, means-end, instrumentality, fabrication, action, speech, freedom. Arendt's concepts assume spatial, geometric relations to each other; and they are variously parallel, transverse, orthogonal, and homologous, but always circumscribed, delimited, and specified.⁴

Arendt's goal with this framework is to understand the conditions behind which “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (HC 7), a task which involves a world that “relates and separates men at the same time,” like a dinner table (HC 52). She understands three activities constructing the active life: labour, “the activity which corresponds to the *biological processes* of the human body,” and whose success ensures survival; work, which “provides an ‘artificial’ world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings”, whose success ensures housing and durability over time; and action, the activity in which humans, with their unique qualities, are able to bring appearance to themselves among equals, due to the fact that “nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (HC 7–8).

Arendt distinguishes these three activities into two realms: the political and the social, or the public and the private. While humans share the activity of work and labour with non-human life, action is unique to them. As such, to be *deprived* of this faculty is what constitutes the private realm, whereas to be able to act and speak brings one into the public realm of human affairs (HC 22–25). Hanna Pitkin points out that Arendt's distinctions differ considerably from how the public and the private are colloquially understood. If one is to interpret Arendt's distinctions through this commonplace

⁴ Mary G. Dietz, “Feminist Receptions of Hannah Arendt,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 21.

knowledge, one risks missing her argument entirely.⁵ In particular, if one accepts the *positive* connotations of the political, the public, and action, as well as the *negative* connotations of the social, the private, and labour and work, one will incorrectly turn Arendt's descriptive claims into normative and hierarchical claims. Adrienne Rich, for example, argues that while Arendt's public:private⁶ dichotomy does not explicitly verbalize an exclusion of women from the political, it actually does so in content through her exclusion and apparent diminution of labour, which is traditionally associated with the type of activities expected of women. She notes that "women are not described as 'working' when we create the essential conditions for the work of men; we are supposed to be acting out of love, instinct, or devotion to some higher cause than self."⁷ Due to this conflation of women with the biological needs of human life, she suggests that Arendt's distinctions of the private and public are indicative of "the withholding of women from participation in the *vita activa*."⁸ Mary O'Brien similarly describes Arendt as "a woman who accepts the normality and even the necessity of male supremacy."⁹ She notes that Arendt's main distinction is a dualism between activities of subsistence and reproductive labour (the private), and productive work and political action (the public), concluding that "the public realm is evidently not only apart from but *superior to* the private realm."¹⁰

⁵ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (1981): 328.

⁶ The colon as an indication for a dichotomy or triplet of concepts is used in Dietz's essay on Feminist Receptions of Hannah Arendt and will be kept for consistency across this essay. Slashes will be used to distinguish between concepts on the same "side" of a dichotomy, rather than to contrast them to the other "side" like the colon.

⁷ Adrienne Rich, "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women" in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), 205. Arendt notes, for example, the role of Nausicaä in Homer's *The Odyssey*, who washes the clothes of her brothers. Arendt writes "All this belongs to the self-sufficiency of the Homeric hero, to his independence and the autonomic supremacy of his person. No work is sordid if it means greater independence" (HC 83n.7).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁹ Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge, 1981), 99–100.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

Pitkin argues that, rather, it is not the private as private that Arendt indicts, but the private blurring into the political, which Arendt terms “society” or “the social.”¹¹

The reason Rich and O’Brien have a different understanding of the private:public dichotomy than Arendt is because they are mapping it onto their contemporary and colloquial understandings of the private:public dichotomy, its association with their own female:male dichotomy, as well as their own understood power hierarchies in these dichotomies. Dietz points out that Arendt’s understanding isn’t so simple, because she understands it through a tripartite category distinction of labor:work:action. While difference feminists like Rich and O’Brien will reduce Arendt’s concepts to the doublet public/freedom/politics/male:private/necessity/labor/female, Dietz points out that they misattribute the way in which Arendt does not gender action as masculine, but rather work, complicating their simple dichotomies.¹² Instead, the third category of action seems to transcend the gender binary, given that it depends on both *animal laborans* (the human in the activity of labour) and *homo faber* (the human in the activity of work), and furthermore itself contains aspects that seem both masculine, such as being the speaker of words and doer of deeds, as well as feminine, such as natality.¹³ In short, Arendt’s distinctions generally do not depend on or correspond to some of the colloquial divisions with which we are familiar. Moreover, not only does Arendt have a more complex distinction between these concepts than her receptions have implied, but she generally does not have a hierarchy between them.

¹¹ Pitkin, “Private and Public”, 334.

¹² Dietz, “Feminist Receptions”, 29.

¹³ Ibid., 31.

xi. Labour, Work, Action

Arendt describes labour, work, and action as activities upon which it is natural to the human condition that contemplation remains dependent. She writes that “it depends upon labor to produce whatever is necessary to keep the human organism alive, it depends upon work to create whatever is needed to house the human body, and it needs action in order to organize the living together of many human beings in such a way that peace, the condition for the quiet of contemplation is assured” (PHA 167). As seen here, Arendt asserts that *all* activities are important and essential to the *vita activa*. She describes, for example, labour as being an activity based on the condition of necessity, to which all are subjected as a means of reproducing their body. To Arendt, “this effort, despite its futility, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends upon it” (HC 87). While she notes both the pain and the necessity associated with labour, she is skeptical of ever overcoming the need for its activities, writing that “painless and effortless consumption would not change but would only increase the devouring character of biological life” (HC 132). She points to Simone Weil for writing “the only book in the huge literature on the labor question which deals with the problem without prejudice and sentimentality,” given Weil’s observation that Marx’s dream of a liberation from necessity is the same “opium of the people” that Marx accused religion of being.¹⁴ Rather, Arendt suggests that due to the *necessity* of labour, and its inability to be overcome, a reduction in the pain associated with labour would simply increase consumption. It becomes evident here that Arendt is not repudiating or

¹⁴ Simone Weil, “Réflexions sur les causes de la liberté et de l’oppression sociale,” in *Œuvres*, ed. Florence de Lussy (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 314. Weil, or de Lussy, cites Karl Marx, *Œuvres tome III* (Paris : Gallimard, 1982), 383.

diminishing the activity of labour outright, due to its importance and necessity to the active life.

Arendt's categorizations of labour and work, as distinct from action, are not to diminish them as activities, but rather a product of her concern for when the distinctions between them are transgressed (when work becomes labour, when labour becomes public, etc.) While Arendt does not criticize labour as an activity in and of itself, she does once the activity of labour enters into the public realm. She writes that

the triumph the modern world has achieved over necessity is due to the emancipation of labor, that is, to the fact that the *animal laborans* was permitted to occupy the public realm; and yet, as long as the *animal laborans* remains in possession of it, there can be no true public realm, but only private activities displayed in the open. (HC 133–134)

Here, it can be seen that Arendt's object of criticism is not the concept of the social or private—or the activities of labour and work—outright, but rather their transgression into the public or political sphere. Similarly, Hanna Pitkin traces the language used by Arendt to describe “the social”, writing that

In *The Human Condition*, society is variously said to “absorb,” “embrace,” and “devour” people or other entities; to “emerge,” “rise,” “grow,” and “let loose” growth; to “enter,” “intrude” on, and “conquer” realms or spheres; to “constitute” and “control,” “transform” and “pervert”; to “impose” rules on people, “demand” certain conduct from them, “exclude” or “refuse to admit” other conduct or people; and to “try to cheat” people. The social, then is very lively indeed.¹⁵

In almost all of these instances, the critical language used by Arendt to describe the social involves it transgressing into its public counterpart—the political. Rather than some being purely negative, each of the activities—insofar as they are what they are meant to be—are complementary and crucial to the world. She writes that

¹⁵ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3–4.

If the *animal laborans* needs the help of *homo faber* to ease his labor and remove his pain, and if mortals need his help to erect a home on earth, acting and speaking men need the help of *homo faber* in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all. In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced. (HC 173–174)

To Arendt, labour, work and action are all distinct and important aspects of the human, active life, and her exclusion of one from the other is not to diminish one in importance, but to keep them all intact by being distinct.

While Arendt may seem to have a hierarchy between them, this hierarchy is indicative not of worth, but rather a difference between each activity in terms of how necessary they are to constituting the realm of human affairs. While labour seems to be the most hierarchically inferior activity, this is because it is necessary for both work and action, whereas action seems to be the most hierarchically superior because it may only occur after the success of the activities of labour and work. This is to say that while all of labour, work and action are necessary to create the realm of human affairs, only the appearance of action as an activity is sufficient on its own, because if action may occur, then it is implied that labour and work have been successful. In this sense, only labour may be isolated on its own, being the first required activity. If Arendt seems to have a scorn for labour, it is because labour is the only activity which may be considered on its own, and on its own it is insufficient for humanness. Even work, considered only with its necessary completion of labour, is insufficient. If Arendt seems to have a higher degree of praise for action, it is because only in action are the other two activities guaranteed to be present, and only once action can occur does the realm of human affairs appear.

xii. The Natural and Free Will

The root of Arendt's distinctions between these three activities, upon which she justifies such boundaries, are the differences between how the human will is "caused" in each activity. Arendt understands the processes of labour and work through her understanding of action, which she argues gives appearance to the uniqueness of each individual, an aspect that labour and work cannot do. She writes that "this appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human" (HC 176). The condition on which action rests for Arendt is the condition of plurality. That is to say that while labour and work are necessary for human flourishing, they involve aspects that humans have in common, and moreover, aspects that are outside of one's control—the need to survive, and the need to have a world in which to live. Only action is able to reveal the uniqueness of each individual human, insofar as they differ outside of their needs for survival and worldliness, and its value lies in its ability to do exactly this. So while labour and work may involve causes outside of each individual, with action, individuals themselves are the cause.

Bonnie Honig suggests Arendt's conception of speech and action is an early articulation of a performative utterance,¹⁶ given her description of freedom as "the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known" (BPF 151). Arendt notes that not only is a human able to begin

¹⁶ Bonnie Honig, "Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic," *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 99. While similar to Austin's theory of speech acts, Arendt does not make explicit reference to it. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* was based on lectures he gave at Oxford from 1951–1954, following with Harvard in 1955, and then compiled and published in 1962, while Arendt's *The Human Condition* was published in 1958, though largely based on lectures she had given at the University of Chicago in 1956.

something new, to set something into action, but moreover, this something new is also unexpected because, having not existed prior to its fruition by a human, it could never have been known, and never been predicted (HC 177–178). Speech, therefore, is able to act upon the world, and bring rise to one’s own uniqueness, which is something new, and so in this vein, Arendt would agree with my earlier argument that Austin’s speech acts (as well as her own speech act) perform the subject as the location from which action is emanating in addition to performing the action itself. Arendt, as with Austin, would have performative action be articulated in the first person singular present indicative active, given her description of action as a “disclosure of the agent” in which “the action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it comes relevant only through the spoken work in which *he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do*” (HC 178–179, I emphasize). Arendt’s theory of performative action here compares with labour, which is driven by necessity, and work, which is driven by worldliness, which both involve desire that is outside of the control of the subject themselves, whereas desire for the unique content of speech is found within the actor, and is not shared with any others.

Arendt’s theory of action as beginning something anew may seem to be in direct contradiction to the theoretical framework set up in the introduction to this essay, wherein subjects are not distinct and self-caused, and desire is not created anew out of nothing. Arendt later elaborates on the details of this “beginning something anew” in an important and revealing way. She explains that:

Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, *nobody is the author or producer of his own life*

story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but *this agent is not an author or producer*. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author. (HC 184, I emphasize)

There would now seem to be a contradiction *within* Arendt's own thought here, given her expectation that an actor ought to bring something new into the world, while simultaneously not being the author of that which they bring into the world. She resolves this apparent contradiction in *Between Past and Future*, noting that:

Action *insofar as it is determined* is guided by a future aim *whose desirability the intellect has grasped before the will wills it*, whereby the intellect calls upon the will, since only the will can dictate action—to paraphrase a characteristic description of the process by Duns Scotus. The aim of action varies and depends upon the changing circumstances of the world; to recognize the aim is not a matter of freedom, but of right or wrong judgment. Will, seen as a distinct and separate human faculty, follows judgment, i.e., cognition of the right aim, and then commands its execution. The power to command, to dictate action, is not a matter of freedom but a question of strength or weakness. (BPF 151–152, I emphasize)

Here, Arendt's view is a bit more complicated. Action is not *without* cause, and the question in action is not whether it is supremely free to *choose from nothing*. Rather, the importance of the “newness” of action is to whom that action is attributable, and how strong the ability to disclose the “who” of that action is (HC 180–181).

Due to this interest in the tensions between a conception of the will that is ultimately caused, and one that is ultimately free, Arendt takes particular interest in John Duns Scotus in her later deliberations on the faculty of willing in *The Life of the Mind*, because “only Duns Scotus [...] was ready to pay the price of contingency for the gift of freedom—the mental endowment we have for beginning something new, of which *we know that it could just as well not be*” (LMW 195, I emphasize). Duns Scotus, she argues, takes an intermediary position between a will that is absolutely caused and a will that is absolutely free, a position that Arendt seems to adopt as well. To Duns Scotus, she

argues, there were two kinds of will, a *natural will*, and a *free will*. She describes his natural will as a gravity, in which bodies are affected by what is proper and expedient (i.e. necessity), and which alone, would make an individual an “enlightened brute.” Free will, rather, “freely designs ends that are pursued *for their own sake*” (LMW 132). She summarizes that “like the Intellect, the Will is *naturally* inclined to necessity, except that the Will, unlike the Intellect, can successfully resist the inclination” (LMW 140–141).

With Duns Scotus, Arendt is able to conceive of a versatile conception of the will involved in the activity of action that is able to *nill*¹⁷ its own natural will (i.e. necessity), is able to transcend itself to *choose* an action from anew, but still continues to be caused from its own perception of the future chain of causality. In my earlier theoretical framework, I had presented a subject’s *desire* as something that is necessarily caused, and that a subject does not begin things anew without cause. Rather, a subject may be distinguished as a notable current of desire that occurs within a broader flow. This did not challenge the idea of desire-as-lack, choice, or intentionality, but rather included perceptions of these by the intellect as themselves actants in the flow of desire. Arendt

¹⁷ Arendt begins to use the archaic verb “to nill” on page 69 of volume 2 of *The Life of the Mind* as though it were self-evident, writing that “the point is that every I-will arises out of a natural inclination toward freedom, that is, out of the natural revulsion of free men toward being at someone’s bidding. The will always addresses itself to itself; when the command says, Thou shalt, the will replies, Thou shalt *will* as the command says—and not mindlessly execute orders. That is the moment when the internal contest begins, for the aroused counter-will has a like power of command. Hence, the reason ‘all who rely on works of law are under a curse’ (Galatians 3:10) is not only the I-will-and-*cannot* but also the fact that the I-will inevitably is countered by an I-nill, so that even if the law is obeyed and fulfilled, there remains this inner resistance” (LMW 69, Arendt’s emphasis). She traces the acts of willing and nilling respectively to the Latin *velle* and *nolle*, explaining that “this *nolle* has nothing to do with the will-not-to-will, and it cannot be translated as I-will-not because this suggests the absence of will. *Nolle* is no less actively transitive than *velle*, no less a faculty of will: If I will what I do not desire, I nill my desires; and in the same way I can nill what reason tells me is right. In every act of the will, there is an I-will *and* I-nill involved” (LMW 89, Arendt’s emphasis). Like Deleuze’s desire, Arendt’s free will is not willfully deployed or willfully not deployed, given this non-deployment is an effect of the will, and so will is always *something*. Rather (as she was quoted above): “If I [freely] will what I do not desire [by necessity], I [freely] nill my [necessary] desires.” The faculty of *nilling* seems to Arendt a uniquely human faculty that is related to freedom and action because it is able to reflexively halt one’s own natural will or even its own free wills.

seems to take a similar view here, in which her conceptions of the free will—or freedom—and the natural will—or necessity—both involve a subject being caused, however the free will is a specific type of causation in which the subject is caused by their intellect looking forward and imagining many possible chains of events.¹⁸ In an earlier quote, she praised Duns Scotus for showing “the mental endowment we have for beginning something new, of which *we know that it could just as well not be.*” This process of looking at the possibilities of one’s action and having that as the cause of action is what makes action differ from the natural will, or in Arendt’s terms the necessity of labour, given that these are processes to which all subjects are subjected as part of the cycle of life. The intellect’s capacity to judge action, even if caused, is a desire *unique* to each subject, and is therefore exceptional enough to warrant a distinct category of action, in distinction to the uniformity of the natural wills involved in labour and work.

In this section I have looked at Arendt’s conceptual distinctions, particularly between the activities of labour, action, and work. I have argued that these are not hierarchical divisions, but rather divisions based on the cause of one’s will. Specifically, action is a distinguishable concept to Arendt because of its ability to begin something new. Action’s distinction from labour and work, in its ability to begin something *new*, is not that each subject is the *beginning* in the sense that they are the *author*, but in the sense

¹⁸ For example, holding an egg with my arm extended, I am able to imagine that in dropping it, the egg will break on the hard ground, but that in not dropping it, it will remain intact. Following this abstraction, in which I understand the causality of events, I bring my arm in and gently place the egg on the counter. While under the hypothesis of strict causality, one would argue that I never had a choice in the matter and that I was never going to drop the egg, and that my abstraction is unfair because the egg was never going to be dropped. The difference here between the *free will* and the *natural will* is that the cause of me not dropping that egg is precisely the abstraction of tracing the possible future chain of events, rather than an unintelligible desire that I feel driving me, such as hunger, or pain. It is not that I didn’t have a choice in the matter, but the details of that choice still involve a chain of causality, just a specific type of causality based on my intellect looking forward at the chain of effects as a cause of my action.

that it is new and different with them. It is not that they were *free* to do it without cause, but that they had the *strength* to bring appearance to this uniqueness of theirs. This becomes, for Arendt, an important enough distinction to warrant such strict divisions between labour, work and action, between the private and the public, and between the social and the political. This is to say that, in addition to a natural will, which is not unique to individual subjects, but is part of a larger circulation of desire (for example, Arendt's association of labour with the biological process of growth, metabolism, and decay), the currents of desire which constitute individual subjects each come with their own unique attributes which they are able to bring into appearance among others.¹⁹

§5 Arendt's Compassion

In the first section I argued that Arendt's distinctions of non-political activities, such as labour and work, are not excluded from the political as a way to repudiate them, but as a way to isolate what each activity is in a non-hierarchical way. I also showed that the element distinguishing between these activities was notion of will in each concept, given that the free will present in the concept of action is distinct from the natural will found in labour and work. In this section I will elaborate upon this, looking specifically at Arendt's exclusion of compassion from the political sphere, arguing that due to the role of compassion in decentring the self and abnegating one's own desire (or free will), Arendt restricts compassion to the activity of labour. In spite of this, I will argue that

¹⁹ Moving forward, it may be important to note that this chapter is showing the importance of compassion in Arendt's conception of the political, even if we are to accept it as a given. It is not to argue *for* Arendt's conception or distinctions. Arendt's understanding of necessity as opposed to freedom, or the natural will as opposed to the free will, or even the human as opposed to the non-human, may arise from a similar understanding as my introduction, but I would personally not consider Arendt's conceptions of freedom or free will to be important categories (which is why I had earlier only used the language of "desire.") The fact that I continue to use them represent an engagement with her thought, and not a product of my own.

compassion remains a valuable human activity to Arendt, as evidenced in her reports on Adolf Eichmann. I will end by arguing that Arendt's apprehensions about including compassion in the political sphere relate to its ability to overshadow speech entirely. In the final section of this chapter, I will look at the necessity of compassion as a *political labour* in Arendt's framework.

xiii. Instinct and Suffering

The way Arendt conceives of compassion seems to agree with the conception of compassion I arrived at in the first chapter. If Honig is correct in arguing that Arendt's formulation of action and speech is similar to that of John Austin's performative speech acts, then Arendt would argue that Austin's utterance in the first person singular present indicative active is the defining feature of political activity as opposed to private activity. She would in turn agree with my earlier conception of compassion as a non-performance of one's subjectivity, but she would continue to exclude it from the political because the performance and appearance of self is exactly what constitutes the political realm. She would agree that compassion involves another's suffering insofar as it is expressed in a state of want or desire (OR 50), that it involves "the capacity to lose oneself in the sufferings of others" (OR 71), that it involves abandoning one's own capacity for reasoning and judgment (OR 70), and that compassion may be perverted into pity when one uses it as an instrument for one's own desire (OR 78). Arendt even notes her shock for the outcome of compassion in the conclusion of Melville's *Billy Budd* (in a conclusion similar to that of Chris Kraus's *Aliens & Anorexia*) where "compassion is not the suffering of the one who is spared with the man who is stricken in the flesh; on the contrary, it is Billy Budd, the victim, who feels compassion for Captain Vere, for the man

who sends him to his doom!” (OR 75). Just as Kraus has replaced her own desire with the desire of her lover, in an act of compassion Billy Budd replaces his own desire to live with the desire of Captain Vere for Budd’s death.

Arendt brings up the problem of compassion in the context of discussing modes of addressing the suffering of another in the problem of *poverty*.²⁰ She explains that “poverty is more than deprivation,” which in *The Human Condition* she describes as the basis of the private realm, meaning “to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others” (HC 58), making one “not fully human” (HC 38). Rather, poverty is “a state of constant want and acute misery,” which is “abject because it puts men under *the absolute dictate of their bodies*” (OR 50, I emphasize). While deprivation is to be void of the wholeness of activities that makes one human (which manifests itself in speech), poverty is the failure to complete even the first activity, labour, which is driven by necessity. She writes that “the most powerful necessity of which we are aware in self-introspection is the life process which permeates our bodies and keeps them in a constant state of a change whose movements are automatic, independent of our own activities, and irresistible—i.e., of an overwhelming urgency” (OR 49).

To analyse how the suffering of poverty is addressed, Arendt sets up another triplet of concepts that deal with the natural will and suffering of another: compassion:pity:solidarity. She writes that “solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide *action*, compassion is one of the *passions*, and pity is a *sentiment*” (OR 79). With these definitions, one can see how the triplet compassion:pity:solidarity seems to map well onto her earlier distinction of labour:work:action, wherein compassion belongs to

²⁰ One might recall Carson’s definition in §3 of a decreasing love which “dares the self to leave the self behind and to *enter into poverty*.”

the activity of labour, pity to the activity of work, and solidarity to the activity of action. Compassion is an activity of labour because it involves the uncontrollable necessity of another, and moreover, a necessity of another that now becomes one's own necessity when one removes oneself from the public realm of free will to address it. Arendt writes that "compassion is unquestionably a natural, creature affect which involuntarily touches every normal²¹ person at the sight of suffering," that it is "inescapable" and can "overcome us like fear without our being able to fend it off" (MDT 14–15). Pity, conversely, is an activity of work because, in making public one's sentimentality at the suffering of another, it instrumentalizes their suffering for the sake of building a lasting world for oneself (as activities of work do.)

While Arendt never indicts compassion outright (only its inclusion in the public realm), she does so with pity, describing it as "the perversion of compassion" (OR 78). She differentiates between the two, describing compassion as "to be stricken with the suffering of someone else *as though it were contagious*" and pity as "to be sorry *without being touched in the flesh*" (OR 75, I emphasize). Compassion's benefit over pity is that it is able to substantively address the suffering of another, and "to be stricken with [it] as though it were contagious," whereas pity, maintaining its distance of security, uses the suffering of another for its own benefit without acting upon another's desire. She explicitly warns against the instrumentalization of humans in *The Human Condition* because of how it turns another into a means rather than an end (HC 155), a concern that continues to apply to her conception of pity. While she does not argue against the element of instrumentalization in work generally, she does object to instrumentalization in the

²¹ The latent ableism in the discourse on compassion was discussed in a footnote introducing the first chapter.

mode of pity specifically because of the way it makes another human, and moreover the *suffering* of another human, an instrument of utility. Whereas in compassion one's being is affected by another's desire, in pity, one seeks to be seen as having the benevolence of pity while maintaining the security of continuing to pursue the project of one's own appearance in the political realm. While both pity and compassion seek to address the suffering of another, pity eclipses the suffering of another with the opaque presence of the self through the warm, sentimental display of emotions. Compassion, conversely, does so through a coldness which draws attention away from oneself to another, instead allowing oneself to disappear.

In this respect, the benefit that pity *does* have over compassion is that, because it is able to "speak", it is able to "enter the market-place" (OR 79). Compassion, rather, relates to bodily pain, which is "the most private and least communicable of all" (HC 50–51). She writes that "pleasure and pain, like everything instinctual, tend to muteness, and while they may produce sounds, they do not produce speech and certainly not dialogue" (MDT 15–16). As a result, in the pain and suffering of labour, one is "no longer 'recognizable,' to the outer world of life," and one becomes "so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all" (HC 50–51). Furthermore, in decentring oneself in order to work towards another's desire in alleviating their pain and suffering, one cannot speak because this decentring "abolishes the distance, the in-between which always exists in human intercourse" (OR 76). As such, in the concept of compassion, in decentring oneself, one is not able to speak one's uniqueness to begin with, and second, that one is dealing with the passion and suffering of another, which cannot be spoken of in the first place. Rather, "their language consists

in gesture and expressions of countenance rather than in words” (OR 76). Pity, unlike compassion, is able to enter into public because one is able to speak about another’s pain when one instrumentalizes it for one’s own benefit, but she continues to argue against this perversion on the basis of this instrumentalization.²² Rather than compassion or pity, however, Arendt instead prefers the third option in her triplet of how to address the suffering of others, which she terms *solidarity* in *On Revolution* and *friendship* in *Men in Dark Times*.

Solidarity is the activity addressing the suffering of another that corresponds to her activity of action because it is able to speak and enter the realm of human affairs without instrumentalizing another. With solidarity, one is able to address the suffering of another while continuing to disclose one’s unique being among equals. She writes that

it is out of solidarity that [one] establish[es] 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 honour of the human race’, or the dignity of man. For solidarity, because it partakes of reason, and hence of generality, is able to comprehend a multitude conceptually, not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all making. But this 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 honour, or dignity—rather than to any ‘love’ of men. (OR 79)²³

²² A fuller analysis of Arendt’s concerns of compassion in the public sphere will be presented in subsection 3 of this section.

²³ There are similarities between Arendt’s conception of solidarity and my conception of empathy in the first chapter, wherein one sees another’s suffering as arising from the same cause. I had suggested that empathy involves witnessing another’s suffering that is similar to one’s own, sympathy involves witnessing another’s suffering that is different to one’s own, and that compassion involves sympathy with action to alleviate this suffering. My justification for not including an option for empathy + action, in the way that compassion was sympathy + action, was that, given it involves one’s *own* suffering, it seemed to me that empathy + action was just the same as regular action, only with the good fortune of being alongside others who are also suffering. It seems to me that this is exactly what Arendt would like about it, and would justify solidarity as the only *political* way to witness the suffering of others. So while Arendt seems to conclude that solidarity or friendship is the solution to the suffering of others, this seems unacceptable to me, as it will only address the suffering of others when one is already addressing one’s own suffering (or rather, one will only take another’s desire seriously if it perfectly matches with one’s own desire.)

In *Men in Dark Times* she similarly calls for a political friendship that is “sober and cool²⁴ rather than sentimental” and moreover one that “is not intimately personal but makes political demands and preserves reference to the world” (MDT 25). Arendt draws similarities between this possibility of considering the suffering of another and the equality she envisions in the political realm, noting that “for the Greeks the essence of friendship consisted in discourse” and that “it manifests itself in a readiness to share the world with other men” (MDT 24–25). In short, because compassion, unlike pity or solidarity, has to do with the natural will of instinctual suffering, she restricts it to the activity of labour. The next subsection will look at Arendt’s fondness for compassion in spite of this exclusion from the political, and the final subsection will look at more specific reasons of *why* Arendt excludes the instinctual suffering of compassion from the political.

xiv. Compassion and Humanness

Sophie Bourgault points out that Arendt’s conception of compassion as non-political is not to critique it. Rather she excludes it from the political so that it may continue to remain what it is, while, as I suggested earlier, continuing to not hold a hierarchical distinction. As Arendt notes, “the qualities of the heart need darkness and protection against the light of the public to grow and to remain what they are meant to be, innermost motives which are not for public display. However deeply heartfelt a motive may be,

²⁴ It would seem here that, in Arendt’s conceptions, solidarity and compassion seem to share a coldness in distinction to pity’s warm sentimentality, however the nuances of this coldness seem different. Compassion was cold because, in spite of being a passion, in which one is emotionally affected, it did not theatrically display the emotions which would draw attention to oneself, instrumentalizing the suffering of another. Rather, it would decentre oneself through the coldness, or as Deborah Nelson phrases it, *toughness* to seriously deal with the suffering of others head on. Solidarity, on the other hand, displays a coldness because it is rational, and arising from one’s free will, rather than emotional, arising from the natural will of one’s own or another’s suffering.

once it is brought out and exposed for public inspection it becomes an object of suspicion rather than insight” (OR 86). Bourgault argues against George Kateb’s appraisal that Arendt’s treatment of compassion is “one of the most disturbing segments in Arendt’s work,” as well as his summary of her position that “it is better to preserve freedom (for those few wanting to be free) by not trying to abolish misery than to lose freedom for all in trying and failing.”²⁵ Bourgault argues that this not to say that Arendt dislikes compassion, and in fact she seems to treasure it in a way, writing that “behind Arendt’s critique of political compassion lies an implicit apology for *private* compassion (one rarely noted by interpreters.) In the obscurity of our intimate relationships, compassion—the ‘noblest form of passion’—is redeemed.”²⁶ Like labour, the activity to which Arendt confines compassion, it seems to be an activity of which Arendt is fond, but one which she sees as insufficient to constitute being human, and therefore one she fears allowing in the political sphere.

Arendt’s praise of both public action and private compassion despite their distinctions is evident in her essays reporting on the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Arendt’s writings on Eichmann caused a series of both public and private denunciations of her treatment of the subject matter, specifically her cold and heartless tone.²⁷ Her refusal to actively display compassion with the Jews and to actively display scorn for Eichmann caused accusations that she was mocking the former and supporting the latter. Her friend Gershom Scholem privately wrote to her that “it is that heartless, frequently almost

²⁵ George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), 27–28. This is, in any case, not Arendt’s position.

²⁶ Sophie Bourgault, “Compassion and the Public Sphere”, 222.

²⁷ Recall my earlier notes on the coldness of compassion’s decreation and the warmness of pity’s theatrical sentimentality.

sneering and malicious tone with which these matters, touching the very quick of our life, are treated in your book to which I take exception” (JP 241), to which she replied that “generally speaking, the role of the ‘heart’ in politics seems to me altogether questionable” (JP 247). Supreme Court Judge Justice Michael Musmanno also publicly criticized her writings, accusing her of “believ[ing] that Eichmann was misjudged,” “sympathizing with Eichmann” and “defend[ing] Eichmann against his own words”²⁸ Deborah Nelson rather suggests that Arendt’s coldness in tone is not merely accidental, or her character, but a deliberate product of her own political philosophy.²⁹ This can be confirmed by her earlier response to Scholem that “the role of the ‘heart’ in politics [is] altogether questionable,” indicating that she saw her Eichmann writings, including the tone in which she wrote them, as a public and political speech act.

The content of Arendt’s writings is an articulation of her stance of the question of Eichmann’s guilt. She famously concludes that he was not evil but mundane and

²⁸ Michael A. Musmanno, “Man With an Unspotted Conscience” *New York Times*, May 19, 1963, BR1. It is worth noting that while Gershom Scholem and Justice Musmanno both criticize Arendt for not empathizing with they Jews, they are doing so from the perspective of Jews who did not have to flee the Nazis as Arendt herself did. While Musmanno was born and raised in the United States, and Gershom Scholem left Germany for Palestine 1923, Arendt was both arrested by the Gestapo in 1933 for her involvement doing illegal work for the German Zionist Organization (Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 105–106) as well as put into the internment camp in Gurs in 1940, a camp which she was able to leave months later, but whose population would be sent to the killing centre at Auschwitz in 1942 (Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 153–163). This is not to say that suffering serves to justify heartlessness towards others, but that at times, the nameless masses of Jews Scholem and Musmanno accuse Arendt of being heartless towards actually include, in a number of occasions, herself. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt mentions the Gurs camp in which she was detained twice, both in the third person, and both without a trace of emotion: “...the concentration camp of Gurs, in southern France, where Vichy France had interned, together with German Jewish refugees, some seventy-five hundred Jews from Baden and the Saarpfalz whom Eichmann had smuggled across the German-French border in the fall of 1940, and who, according to Propst Grüber’s information, were even worse off than the Jews deported to Poland” (EJ 130); “...the Vichy government put all seventy-five hundred Jews from Baden in the notorious concentration camp at Gurs, at the foot of the Pyrenees, which had originally been built for the Spanish Republican Army and had been used since May of 1940 for the so-called “*réfugiés provenant d’Allemagne*,” the large majority of whom were, of course, Jewish. (When the Final Solution was put into effect in France, the inmates of the Gurs camp were all shipped to Auschwitz.” (EJ 156).

²⁹ Deborah Nelson, *Tough Enough: Arbus, Arendt, Didion, McCarthy, Sontag, Weil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 207), 49. I thank Deborah Nelson for sending me a draft copy of this manuscript for my reference in the Fall of 2016.

thoughtless, coining the term “banality of evil” (EJ 252) and concluding with the judgment that “no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you [Eichmann]. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang” (EJ 279). Arendt’s readers may notice how her rhetoric of “sharing the earth” calls back to her writings on the *vita activa*, noting how

the man-made world of things, the human artifice erected by *homo faber*, becomes a home for mortal men [...] In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced. (HC 173–174)

Despite her coldness in tone (which are frequently attempts to not instrumentalize the suffering of others, not to display her own sufferings, and to deal with the content in a rational and politically relevant way) Arendt indicates her fondness of compassion as a necessary human activity in her indictment of Eichmann of not even being compassionate, in addition to his thoughtlessness. While Arendt creates the three activities of labour, work and action as the *wholeness* of the political realm, Arendt not only criticizes Eichmann for an inability for action, but an inability of *any* of the activities, including the labour of compassion.

To deprive Eichmann of political action, Arendt shows the way in which Eichmann was “an average, ‘normal’ person, neither feeble-minded or indoctrinated nor cynical” (EJ 26). Rather than sympathizing with Eichmann, as she was accused, she was actually depriving him of the ability to think, speak, and act required to be a political human. She notes how “despite all the efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man was not a ‘monster,’ but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown” (EJ 54). She deprives him not only of the glorified goodness of heroism, but even

of the glorified badness of villainy, arguing that “Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III ‘to prove a villain’” (EJ 287). She reduces Eichmann to thoughtlessness and even spinelessness through her comparisons between Eichmann’s claims before the trial, and Eichmann’s claims on the stand. Though she did not always do this directly, she would regularly narrate how Eichmann saw himself, while elsewhere highlighting how this was wrong. Or, alternatively, she would highlight the grandeur with which Eichmann presented himself, and the way in which he attempts to shed this during his trial to save himself. In a mild example, she notes that Eichmann would frequently tell his S.S. comrades as well as his Jewish victims that he was born in Palestine, and that he was fluent in Hebrew and Yiddish, Arendt pointing out that this was an outright lie (EJ 28). Honig suggests that Arendt’s failure to further comment on this is not the product of her being fooled by the performance he put on to save himself, nor her sympathizing with him, but rather the product of her investment in presenting a simple, two-dimensional version of Eichmann. Rather, Honig speculates that this is a detail about Eichmann that is ripe for some form of psychoanalysis that would add depth to the simplistic Eichmann seen by Arendt (she suggests it may be indicative of a number of things, including “exoticization of the other, a strange sort of pandering to or identification with one’s victims, a way to intimate valuable specialization, fitness for the job of dealing with Jewish ‘resettlement.’”)³⁰ This is not the only time Arendt mentions this detail about Eichmann, however. While it is not immediately adjacent, she later, when narrating the trial from the point of view of Eichmann (the ironic literary technique that, as Nelson

³⁰ Bonnie Honig, “Arendt on the Couch,” *differences* 26, no. 2 (2015): 100–101.

points out, proved to be so controversial), she mentions it again, describing his account during his police examination of his introduction to the classic Zionist literature that “promptly converted him forever.” She reports that “he then acquired a smattering of Hebrew, which enabled him to read haltingly a Yiddish newspaper.” While already having set the reader up to detect the lie in his narration, she still destroys his character, pointing out that this was “not a very difficult accomplishment, since Yiddish, basically an old German dialect written in Hebrew letters, can be understood by any German-speaking person who has mastered a few dozen Hebrew words” (EJ 41). In a more substantial example of Eichmann’s dehumanization at the hands of Arendt, Arendt reports that Eichmann, prior to the trial, had actively bragged about and even inflated his role in the Holocaust and the Final Solution, allegedly saying things like “I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews [...] on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction” (EJ 46) and that “‘of course’ he played a role in the extermination of the Jews; of course if he ‘had not transported them, they would not have been delivered to the butcher’” (EJ 52). While she illustrates Eichmann’s concern for status and prestige in the Third Reich, she later narrates his confessions on the stand that “I had never thought of such a thing, such a solution through violence,” and that “Eichmann was by no means among the first to be informed of Hitler’s intention” (EJ 83–84). She illustrates the way he confesses to not being tough enough to view the gruesome sights of the Final Solution, confessing that “if today I am shown a gaping wound, I can’t possibly look at it” (EJ 87).

Not only was Eichmann ultimately an unimportant cog, and not only did he lie to inflate his importance during the Holocaust, and not only did he lie to save himself during

his trial, but he utterly lacked both the ability to speak and act of his own accord, or even to display any compassion. Arendt writes:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such (EJ 49, Arendt emphasizes).

This marks a rare occasion in Arendt's corpus where she actively scorns someone for an *inability to be compassionate*, in this case, "to think from the standpoint of somebody else." Seyla Benhabib suggests that "such capacity for judgment is not empathy [...] for it does not mean assuming, accepting the point of view of the other. It means merely making present to oneself what the perspectives of others involves are or could be, and whether I could 'woo their consent' in acting the way I do."³¹ It is worth noting, however, how even the "*making present to oneself what the perspective of others involves or could be*" involves a passive labour of listening which is different than the free will of speech.³² Here it is seen how Arendt does not repudiate compassion or the task of labour, but she values it as necessary to creating a human world. Not only was Eichmann unable to participate in political life by bringing himself to appearance among his equals, but he wasn't even able to quietly sympathize with his victims. Even participating in the activity of labour, if not able to participate in the activity of action, would have been a piece of human goodness in which he contributed to the human world, and which could have redeemed him from a death sentence.

³¹ Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 190.

³² This will be elaborated upon in section 3.

It is well-known that Arendt was taken with Eichmann's mediocrity. In the introduction to *The Life of the Mind*, in discussing her motivation for pursuing a project related to thinking, willing, and judgment, she recalls:

I was struck by a manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the uncontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives. The deeds were monstrous, but the doer—at least the very effective one now on trial—was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic or monstrous. There was no sign in him of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives, and the only notable characteristic one could detect in his past behavior as well as in his behavior during the trial and throughout the pre-trial police examination was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness* (LMT 4, Arendt emphasizes).

In Arendt's heartless repudiation of Eichmann, she seems, as Bourgault aptly noted, to employ both a defense of public action as well as a defense of private compassion. To Arendt, Eichmann was incapable of both, and so while compassion is not sufficient to constitute political action, it is still necessary and praise-worthy for the human world, in her view.

xv. Rage and Terror

While associating compassion with the activity of labour, and demonstrating a fondness of compassion as a quality required (though insufficient) to be human, Arendt did critique compassion's inclusion in the public and political realm. In addition to the political realm destroying the act of compassion (by destroying its necessary muteness, giving it a voice, directing attention to oneself, instrumentalizing the other, and perverting it into pity), Hannah Arendt had apprehension about compassion destroying the political sphere due to its focus on the emotional fervour of *suffering* instead of cool, rational discourse. This criticism is most evident in her discussion of Maximilien Robespierre and the French Revolution in *On Revolution*. Whereas Eichmann was unable to demonstrate public

action or private compassion, rendering his evil “banal”, she saw Robespierre’s evil as “radical,” given his focus on public compassion resulting in the making of suffering public.

Arendt introduces Robespierre as founding his political thought on the task of addressing “the social question”—poverty. Through a profound sympathy with the poor and suffering, Robespierre proclaimed that “everything which is necessary to maintain life must be common good” and that government must be subjected to “the most sacred of all laws, the welfare of the people, the most irrefragable of all titles, necessity.”³³ Politics was not cool discourse among equal citizens, and “the people”, or *le peuple*, took on a connotation of “the low people”, or *les hommes faibles*, who were stuck misfortune and unhappiness. Robespierre’s thought created selflessness and the capacity to suffer with the poor as the highest political virtue (OR 65). Arendt writes that Robespierre’s political thinking ended in the thesis that “the value of a man may be judged by the extend to which he acts against his own interest and against his own will” (OR 69).

It was through the politicization of this suffering that Arendt notes that “it was necessity, the urgent needs of the people, that unleashed the terror and sent the Revolution to its doom,” given that “the revolution had changed its direction; it aimed no longer at freedom, the goal of the revolution had become the happiness of the people” (OR 50–51). To focus the public realm on *necessity* and suffering of the poor rather than *action* and discourse among equals creates, to Arendt, a focus on *violence* rather than *power*. In *On Violence*, Arendt distinguishes between a number of terms which are generally confused, including strength, power and violence. She notes the strength

³³ Maximilien Robespierre, *Œuvres tome III*, ed. Laponneraye (1840), 514, translated by Arendt. Quoted in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 50.

inherent in an object or person (OV 44), “strength” also being the term she uses to describe the ability to performatively articulate oneself in action, as opposed to the freedom to choose that articulation (BPF 151). Her understanding that each subject has a certain innate strength is crucial to her understanding of power, which she describes as “the human ability not just to act but to act *in concert*” (OV 44). Given that her formulation of the stakes of politics is for men to live together, power is Arendt’s understanding of the way in which individuals are able to act *together* in the context of free discourse among equals, based on their individual strength that is united. She contrasts these to violence, which she sees as a perversion of power, in the attempt to multiply one’s own natural strength rather than to obtain power through political deliberation. She notes that this violence may be justifiable, in that it may have a reason, but it cannot be legitimate, because it does not take place through the discussion of the political realm (OV 52).

Violence, she notes, is the source of the terror used by Robespierre during the French Revolution, given that terror is the maintained control through violence rather than its abdication into a political arena (OV 55). Compassion in the political sphere is conducive to rule through violence rather than power politics through discussion among equals because of its focus on the natural will, or suffering, rather than the free will, or speech. A primary focus on pain and suffering in the political realm is to open it up to dictation through *rage*. She writes that “suffering, whose strength and virtue lie in endurance, explodes into rage when it can no longer endure; this rage, to be sure, is powerless to achieve, but it carries with it the momentum of true suffering, whose devastating force is superior and, as it were, more enduring than the raging frenzy of

mere frustration” (OR 101). This is not to say that suffering is justified, but rather that to overshadow the question of freedom in the political sphere for the question of happiness or relief from suffering will open the political realm to be directed by the emotional fervour of suffering rather than the coldness of thought. While “this raging force may well nigh appear irresistible because it lives from and is nourished by the necessity of biological life itself,” Arendt warns that “every attempt to solve the social question [poverty] with political means leads into terror” (OR 102). She writes that “the danger of violence [...] will always be that the means overwhelm the end. [...] The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probably change is to a more violent world” (OV 80).

Arendt’s exclusion of compassion from the political realm comes from her close association of the concept with the activity of labour. This is due to their involvement with the pain and suffering from biological instinct, which is distinct from the freedom to bring one’s uniqueness into the world among equals, the pinnacle of the political. While Arendt argues that compassion is crucial to making one human, as evidenced in her death sentence for Eichmann, she argues that not only will the publicization of compassion ruin its very purpose, but also that the inclusion of compassion in the political realm will ruin its focus on freedom and power by creating a focus on suffering and violence. The final section of this chapter will challenge this exclusion, arguing that compassion is in fact not restricted to the private realm, but rather it is already implicitly invoked in Arendt’s formulation of speech in the political realm.

§6 The Politics of Compassion

In spite of Arendt's exclusion of compassion from the political realm, I argue that even if one is to take her understanding of the political as a given, there is still a place for a political labour of compassion. While the term "political labour" would be immediately oxymoronic for Arendt, I argue that her theorization of speech as emblematic of the political immediately couples a labour of speech with an action of speech—that is, the shared experience of audibly speaking and communicating, and the unique content of that speech. I will begin looking at Arendt's discussion of free will and speech, noting that the free will applies for the content of speech, but not for the will *to* speak, which seems to still fall under her category of natural will. I will then look at the way in which Arendt's theory of *only* speech as political creates a polarized political sphere of those who speak, and those who must take on the burden of listening. To conclude, I will note that while the political action of speech may freely disclose oneself and one's unique content of speech among equals, the coupled political labour of speech, the uniform act of uttering words, cannot be done among equals, and must entail individuals compassionately nilling their desire to speak and disclose themselves to instead perform the political labour of listening.

xvi. The Will to Speak

Arendt's deliberations on the will, as shown earlier, rely upon her understanding of John Duns Scotus's division of the natural will and the free will, a distinction she uses to justify her separation between the public and the private, or the social and the political. The natural will works like "gravity in bodies," Duns Scotus comparing it to a stone

naturally inclined to the centre of the earth.³⁴ To Arendt this natural will involves “our *being affected* by what is proper and expedient” (LMW 132), and she connects it with the realm of necessity and the activity of labour, which she in turn connects with a “hardly bearable ‘toil and trouble,’ with effort and pain and, consequently, with a deformation of the human body” (HC 48). The free will, conversely, which produces its own act (LMW 133), is a form of will Duns Scotus refers to as a “supernatural power” or a “will as informed by gifts of grace.”³⁵ Arendt points out that this production of one’s own act is not an uncaused authorship, but rather the element of freedom in the free will is the strength to make what *is* oneself heard (while not creating anew what one *is*.) The difference between the natural and free will, between necessity and freedom, and between labour and action, is that the former is caused by an impulse outside of one’s body, and the latter is caused by the deliberations of one’s own intellect. She notes the importance for the distinctness of the free will as opposed to the sameness of the natural will:

Human distinctness is not the same as otherness—the curious quality of *alteritas* possessed by everything that is and therefore, in medieval philosophy, one of the four basic, universal characteristics of Being, transcending every particular quality. Otherness, it is true, is an important aspect of plurality, the reason why all our definitions are distinctions, why we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else. Otherness in its most abstract form is found only in the sheer multiplication of inorganic objects, whereas all organic life already shows variations and distinctions, even between specimens of the same species. *But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself*, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings. (HC 176).

³⁴ John Duns Scotus, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, ed. William A. Frank (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), II.6., Wolter translates.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

The value of the political lies in the ability of individuals to reveal the uniqueness of their free will, based on their intellect, through the content of their speech. This is opposed to the homogeneity of their natural will, to which they are subjected without their control, and which cannot be communicated. In addition to this, the free will has the ability to null the natural will—that is to say, through deliberation, one is able to actively abstain from that which instinctively drives oneself.

I contend, however, that while the content of speech may be the product of free will, the actual will *to* speak more closely resembles Arendt's conception of natural will. She writes, for example, that it is an activity "from which no human being can refrain and still be human" (HC 176). This seems to contradict her justification for speech, which lies in the condition of plurality, explaining that "if men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood" (HC 175–176). While humans are plural in *what* they speak, they are uniform, to Arendt, in their desire *to* speak. She justifies the need for speech in that political actors are all essentially *different*, though apparently not in their desire to speak itself. In this respect, the desire-to-speak, in its distinction from the desire-of-what-to-speak, seems to fit far better in her discussion of labour than of action, though they are immediately coupled. She compares the two of them, explaining that

Men can very well live without laboring, they can force others to labor for them, and they can very well decide merely to use and enjoy the world of things without themselves adding a single useful object to it; the life of an exploiter or slave-holder and the life of a parasite may be unjust, but they certainly are human. A life without speech and without action, on the other hand—and this is the only way of life that in earnest had renounce all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word—is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men. (HC 176)

The activities she compares here are labour and speech, the stakes being biological survival and existential survival, respectively.³⁶ Speech and labour are both here presented as drives that all feel, that are required to avoid death, and moreover than one can choose to abstain from or not. These are all qualities of the natural will rather than the free will. In fact, it seems a paradox in Arendt's own thought that the desire to speak is a form of free will. The importance of speech, action, and the free will comes from the condition of plurality, and so for the desire to speak to be a free will, there would need to be a plurality of qualities amongst humans on whether or not they wanted to speak. There would therefore need to be a spectrum of individuals, ranging from those who strongly wanted to speak, to those who do not—the latter side of the spectrum being in the aporia of performatively bringing arise to their unique quality of not wanting to performatively bring arise to their unique qualities. As such, Arendt's political sphere, and her conception of speech as its key activity, seems to immediately couple the labour of speech (the homogenous desire to speak) with the action of speech (the distinct qualities revealed in the unique content of speech.) As such, the political immediately requires the natural will's desire to speak—a labour—along with the unique content of the speech—the condition of action. Similarly, while the one's unique qualities, the action of speech, is done among equals, fulfilling one's need to speak, the labour of speech, is done at the expense of others who must temporarily suspend their own pursuit of this labour to listen and receive speech attentively.

³⁶ As an aside, her comparison here seems unfair, given that she describes abstention from labour here as forcing another to labour for one's own biological survival, whereas earlier she argued that one cannot emancipate or abstain entirely from labour because one will always need to consume (HC 131–132). An appropriate comparison would be whether one could abstain from directly speaking while getting another to speak for oneself. The pain and effort of labour, is for the pleasure of consumption and survival, the latter which cannot be abstained from entirely. In the activity of speech the pain and effort of speech could be in theory abstained from if another was able to present oneself wholly and accurately.

xvii. The Burden of Silence

Due to her focus on the freedom of revealing one's unique content of speech, rather than speech as a political labour that all must perform to existentially survive as a "human", Arendt neglects the way in which one's act of speaking immediately invokes the need for another who will give up their own immediate need to speak instead to listen and attend one's speech. In her discussion of Robespierre, Arendt feared that making labour public and political would lead to the public realm being dominated by rage, caused by the suffering of not fulfilling one's labour, instead preferring it to be reserved for cool, non-competitive discourse among equals. While Arendt may argue that the action of speech, which performs oneself, may not be competitive, and therefore may be done among equals, this still already involves the labour of speech that is uniform and required to be human in her view. Therefore, even a political sphere reserved for cool, sober discourse may be dictated by rage if a significant portion of the population is regularly inhibited from the action of speech, due to its domination by speakers who are unwilling (perhaps even using Arendt's own philosophy) to fall silent and listen.

Danielle Allen points out that a political sphere with an exclusive focus on speech and decision-making tend to scapegoat a significant portion of the population with the burden of listening. While Arendt argues that the political realm is free and among equals, as opposed to the private realm which is characterized by scarcity and suffering, she ignores the way in which the desire to speak is a natural will, making the act of speaking a zero-sum game, because just as one's consumption immediately requires another to forego that consumption, one's speech immediately requires another to forego speaking to instead listen. Allen writes that these habits of seeing *only* speech as political

“dealt with the inevitable fact of loss in political life by assigning to one group all of the work of being sovereign, and to another group most of the work of accepting the significant losses that kept the polity stable.”³⁷ While Arendt argues that the political realm is one to be seen and heard, Allen argues that this exclusive focus means that “citizens have also developed methods of ignoring each other and their mutual implication in one another’s experience,” and that, rather “democracy requires vulnerability before one’s fellow citizens.”³⁸ Unsurprisingly, Allen points out that when certain parts of the population realize that they must always accept the burden of the labour of compassion, foregoing their own desire, and listening, while another always accepts the benefit of self-interest, articulating their desires, and speaking, they begin to develop a sense of distrust in this political realm.

This failure to pay attention to the will of others to speak and to be vulnerable before one’s equals is evidenced not only in the content Arendt’s writings but in Arendt’s engagement with her critics. While Arendt’s political realm involves a discourse among equals, it was rare that criticisms to Arendt’s thinking ever involved her own silence, acquiescence, or a rethinking on her part of her own point of view. Instead, she tended to respond by reiterating her points so that her arguments would continue to be heard, and her own self would continue to be disclosed over others. Honig notes this, and suggests that this is a product of Arendt’s reaction to her own experience of being rendered stateless. She writes that “she recreated something like the condition of precarity for herself, and each time she survived,” noting that “she seems to think all this trouble—by which I mean the criticism, the indignation, the death threats, the professional threats [...]

³⁷ Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

just comes with the terrain of ‘thinking’,” and suggesting rather that “maybe this is *why*, partly *why*, she ‘thinks’ as she does, that is to say, provocatively.”³⁹ It seems that Arendt’s acceptable outcomes for herself in the political realm was always survival, or speaking herself, and never vulnerability, or taking responsibility for her involvement in receiving the speech of others, unless on her own terms. For example, in a criticism of Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Eric Voegelin notes a passage wherein Arendt discusses “changing man,” a phrase at which, he says, “I could hardly believe my eyes,” writing that “to conceive the idea of ‘changing the nature’ of man (or of anything) is a symptom of the intellectual breakdown of Western civilization.”⁴⁰ In lieu of accepting vulnerability or conceding loss, Arendt publicly responds that she “may be permitted to clarify [her] statement,” explaining that “the problem of the relationship between essence and existence in Occidental thought seems to me to be a bit more complicated and controversial than Voegelin’s statement on ‘nature’,” though she does not go into detail of the content of these thoughts. She rather notes simply that she is not conceding, that she “hardly proposed more change of nature than Professor Voegelin himself in his book on *The New Science of Politics*,” and in short, that “this I can hardly discuss here” (PHA 163). In Arendt’s reply to Gershom Scholem, she comes close to conceding, writing in the second last paragraph of her letter that “let me come to the *only* matter where you have not misunderstood me, and where indeed I am glad that you have raised the point. You are quite right: I changed my mind and do no longer speak of ‘radical evil’” (JP 250, I emphasize). That is to say, the only concession Arendt makes to Scholem here is when he points out that she changed her mind (presumably of her own accord) in between her

³⁹ Honig, “Arendt on the Couch”, 96–97.

⁴⁰ Eric Voegelin, “The Origins of Totalitarianism,” *The Review of Politics* 15, no. 1 (1953): 74–75.

publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* on whether evil was radical or banal.

Arendt's only outright concession to a criticism came after a response of Ralph Ellison's to her essay "Reflections on Little Rock." The example of the civil rights movement is central in Allen's own analysis of how the activity of accepting loss is burdened upon one part of the population, noting the "two etiquettes of citizenship—the one of dominance, the other of acquiescence—that were meant to police the boundaries of the public sphere as a "whites-only" space."⁴¹ To Allen, the public sphere had become a whites-only space because political discourse had rendered white bodies as those able to speak in the political realm, while racialized bodies were expected to accept the burden of loss in silence. In response to the events in Little Rock, where a group of young African American students were protested upon their entering a newly desegregated school by their fellow white citizens, Arendt argues that the *social* problem of education should not be solved with the instrumentalization of children. Discussing a photo of Elizabeth Eckford, one of the students to fight the groups of white protestors, she writes that

It certainly did not require too much imagination to see that this was to burden children, black and white, with the working out of a problem which adults for generations have confessed themselves unable to solve. [...] The girl, obviously, was asked to be a hero—that is, something neither her absent father nor the equally absent representatives of the NAACP felt called upon to be. (RLR 203)

While the political realm, for Arendt, is the arena for individuals to freely speak and make themselves appear among equals, in a condition of scarcity of speech, she resorts to requiring the burden of loss to be required by certain individuals—in the case of Eckford,

⁴¹ Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 5.

due to her intersections of being a young woman of colour. In an interview with Robert Penn Warren, Ellison explained that

although action is necessary, forthright action, it must be guided—tempered by insight and compassion. [...] this too had been part of the American Negro experience, and I believe that one of the important clues to the meaning of that experience lies in the idea, the *ideal* of sacrifice. Hannah Arendt’s failure to grasp the importance of this ideal among Southern Negroes caused her to fly way off into left field in her ‘Reflections on Little Rock,’ in which she charged Negro parents with exploiting their children during the struggle to integrate the schools. But she has absolutely no conception of what goes on in the minds of Negro parents when they send their kids through those lines of hostile people.⁴²

This is one of the only circumstances in which Arendt conceded loss of control over the political realm, responding to Ellison (albeit in a *private* letter) acknowledging that “it is precisely this ideal of sacrifice which I didn’t understand.”⁴³ Here she acceded to a public display of speech and action in which she does not have control, in which she is not present, and which actually partially erases her being at its moment of utterance. An exclusive focus of the political realm on the action of speech, and excluding the labour of speech and listening due to fear of rage, seems to conversely create a political culture of an unwillingness to fall silent and listen. Instead of reciprocal, attentive listeners and speakers, Arendt’s vision of the political actually seems to deny many the action of speech due to a deficit of the labour of listening.

xviii. A Political Labour

Since, to Arendt, the chief activity of the political realm is speech, the chief activity of political compassion, in which one foregoes one’s desire to attend to the desire of

⁴² Ralph Ellison, quoted in Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965), 343–344.

⁴³ Hannah Arendt to Ralph Ellison, 29 July 1965, Library of Congress. Quoted in Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 316.

another, would be the silence of listening. That is not simply falling quiet when another is speaking, but attentively receiving and being affected by the speech of another.

Foregoing one's own will to speak in the act of listening to another follows Arendt's criteria of compassion, which she describes as being aroused by "the predicament of poverty" (OR 63), as "*los[ing] oneself* in the sufferings of others" (OR 71), and as being "mute" (OR 76). Despite her proclamation that "speech is what makes man a political being" (HC 3) and her exclusion of actions that forego one's own desire, like compassion, from the political realm due to their inability to speak, even Arendt's own idea of the political realm also requires the *labour* of another in passively listening to one's speech. Due to the fact that she puts the importance of speech on the plurality and uniqueness of its content, but continues to have a desire to speak that resembles a necessity, she neglects the way in which her exclusive focus on speech and not its reciprocal activity of attentiveness forces others into the task of exclusive listening, a role she would argue is deprived of its full humanity.

She notes that "no human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings," (HC 22) and that specifically, "action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others" (HC 23), this constant presence presumably intended to listen, witness, and understand the political actor. Theorists like Martha Fineman agree that vulnerability in front of others is a core element of the human condition, pointing out that dominant political and legal theories use a universal human subject who is autonomous, self-sufficient and self-interested, and who is able to is able to navigate the political realm using their capacity to manipulate and manage their

independently acquired resources.⁴⁴ Instead of assuming that all players are equally able to make their voice heard, Fineman's analysis of subjects as inherently vulnerable call on political actors to also take a responsibility to listen for the voices of those who are less able to speak in the public arena, as well as to call upon the ways the institutions of the public realm may actively work to advantage certain individuals more than others.⁴⁵

While Arendt would agree that the public realm needs to be constructed as a world which is "fit for action and speech" for all (HC 173), she takes the category of vulnerability and dependency on others to mean that actors need to have a sole concern for making themselves heard among others. She does not, conversely, note that this vulnerability to the presence of others means that one must also accept the responsibility of attention to others.

The fact that Arendt places exclusive focus on speaking rather than listening in the political realm is evidenced in her discussion of forgiveness. Glen Coulthard, for example, in his critique of the politics of recognition, brings up the issue of the irreversibility of action:

if many of today's most volatile political conflicts *do* include subjective or psychological dimensions to them in the way that [Nancy] Fraser admits (and [Charles] Taylor and [Frantz] Fanon describe), then I fear her approach, which attempts to eschew a direct engagement with this aspect of social oppression, risks leaving an important contributing dynamic to identity-related forms of domination unchecked. [...] The problem [...] is that any psychological problems that ensue, although socially constituted, can take on a life of their own, and thus need to be dealt with independently and in accordance with their own specific logic. As mentioned previously, Fanon was insistent that a change in the social structure would not guarantee a change in the subjectivities of the oppressed [...] dumping all our efforts into alleviating the institutional or structural impediments to participatory parity (whether redistributive or

⁴⁴ Martha Albertson Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20, no. 1 (2008): 10.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 17–18.

recognitive) may not do anything to undercut the debilitating forms of unfreedom related to misrecognition in the traditional sense.⁴⁶

In short, to Coulthard, recognition (or compassion) cannot simply be a question of stopping or changing structures of harm or oppression when, frequently, the damage is already done, and has taken on a life of its own. This problem of irreversibility is one with which Arendt is also concerned, noting that at times, one's actions can have harmful outcomes that are unforeseen,⁴⁷ and moreover that are irreversible. Rather than looking to amend the outcome, or to include the role of recognition or compassion, she writes that “the possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of not being able to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving” (HC 237). That is to say, because of the importance of speech instead of attention to the political, or the primacy of the *speaker* rather than the *listener*, or of one's own action rather than another's, in the circumstance where one's free will, speech or action has actively harmed another, the onus is on the individual(s) harmed to forgive, rather than on the one who has harmed to take on the responsibility to decreate oneself, to undo all the points in time and space ever affected by oneself, and attend to addressing the consequences of one's actions as though they had not happened. This is because to demand reparation on the part of the actor who has harmed is to remove them from the realm that had made them human, ignoring how their action and harm to another may have removed another from the ability to publicly disclose oneself and affect others. Because she sees political action as non-competitive and among equals, she neglects the political labour of speech which actively detracts from the political

⁴⁶ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 37, Coulthard emphasizes.

⁴⁷ Or, in Coulthard's case, outcomes that *were* (or should have been) foreseen but which have been retroactively indicted.

involvement of another through bestowing onto them the labour of listening and being affected.

In conclusion, Arendt's conceptual distinctions defining the political rely not on a hierarchy of inferior or superior activities, but rather a wholeness of activities required for a full political realm. While the importance of speech to the political lies in its ability for individuals to reveal the uniqueness of their free will as opposed to the natural will to which they are subjected, Arendt sets up a *free* will of what to speak as well as a *natural* will *to* speak. While Arendt's excludes compassion and foregoing one's own desire from the political realm due to it not partaking in the disclosure of the subject required to be *wholly* political, she neglects the way in which her conception of speech as constituting the political immediately invokes plural and unique contents of speech, which are revealed among equals; *as well as* an economy of individuals fulfilling their natural desire to speak, and others abnegating this desire to instead attentively listen. Because she notes of individuals who make themselves appear through speech that "their reality depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see and hear and therefore testify to their existence" (HC 95) she creates an immediate, though unstated, political requirement of those who reveal themselves in speech, and those who compassionately forego their desire to listen. While compassion may not be involved in the disclosure of one's own subject, it is involved in and necessary to the public and political disclosure of others.

Conclusion

Man's only sin is ultimately that of *pleonexia* (Col. 3:5): the cancellation of nothingness resulting from something that aspires to become everything without realizing precisely that the One, who is already all, made himself No-thing for our benefit: [...]

Original sin—the self-creating will—is not the imitation of God, which would lead, rather, to self-reduction. It is a bad caricature that leads us to want to impersonate God; it is the attribute of power instead of love, of being instead of non-being. It is as if we were in a sinister optical illusion in which the more we believe we are near to God the more distant we are. The more we try to inhabit him, the more our place remains vacant.

– Roberto Esposito, *The Origin of the Political: Hannah Arendt or Simone Weil?*

The problem of this essay has been ethical claims for the desire of another when it competes with one's own. If subjects are constituted by the flow of their desire, how are they to meet criticisms, in the absence of a transcendent law, that, when the desire that makes their very being is impeding on another's desire, they ought to be halted, or even annihilated? Briefly, and theatrically: what sort of political theory might allow the powerful to be convinced in favour of the claim that they ought to die?

This essay has looked at compassion as a rhetoric used to express the serious undertaking of another's desire in addition to one's own in political action, though it has also included discussion on similar concepts that have different nuances and intentions, such as sympathy, empathy, pity, recognition, benevolence, altruism, care, love, solidarity, and friendship. It has suggested that the important element of claims towards the desire of another, such as claims of compassion, are whether or not one adequately privileges another's desire over one's own when they are in competition. The stakes of this suggestion being that without a theoretical understanding of these nuances of compassion, these discourses risk replicating the very self-centred behaviour they seek to address. This is not to make a normative claim for compassion as *the* ethical stance from

which to approach the question of “another” in politics, but rather, to argue that if one wants to use a rigorous approach of compassion in politics, it must involve a decreation of the self, and the consent to replace one’s own desire with the desire of another. Moreover, this type of compassion as the abnegation of one’s own desire is still politically relevant given its involvement and even necessity to the political participation of others. The nuances of the question of exactly *how* to be politically compassionate, or *how* to throw one’s own desire off-kilter, despite being alluded to, are out of scope in a rigorous exploration in the current essay, and would be left to future research. The topic of this essay has been, more modestly, *what* it is to be politically compassionate.

This essay began with an exposition on the concept of compassion, looking at how proponents such as Martha Nussbaum, Axel Honneth, and Nancy Fraser have praised compassion, with varying success, as a way to reconcile motives of self-interest with ethical claims for the desire of others by allowing one take seriously the suffering and desire of another. It also looked at critics or skeptics of compassion, such as Sara Ahmed, Glen Coulthard, and Marjorie Garber, who have suggested moral praise for compassion has given it the shallow effect of appearing to work for another on the surface when in reality being the product of one’s own desire, frequently to the detriment of another. With both of these claims, I suggested that the key element of compassion was whether or not it accurately sacrificed one’s own desire to instead replace it with the desire of another, and representing another’s desire in one’s action. From this point I moved onto discussions of representation, and specifically representation in politics, looking to the writings of Hanna Pitkin, Homi Bhabha, and Susan Sontag, to suggest that with embedded assumptions of self-centrism in action, representation frequently risks

obscuring its represented subject with the opaque presence of the self. Rather than being wholly an extension of an absent other's desire, representation risks inverting this relationship, authoring representation to direct attention away from another towards oneself, and ascribing one's own desire onto another. It ended by looking instead at articulations of compassion that decentre and decreate the self in the process, looking at J.L. Austin's writings on performative speech acts to argue that articulations of compassion phrased in Austin's first person singular present indicative active tense such as "I recognize," "I care," or "I love," performatively contradict themselves at their moment of utterance, given that by the very conditions of that process of recognition, which seek to decentre the self as the all-powerful source of action over another, "I" can no longer be in a place to perform such an utterance. Instead I turned to the masochist writings of Chris Kraus, Anne Carson, and Simone Weil to suggest that acts of compassion can not be seen, either by third-person onlookers, recipients, or actors, as products of the actor's first person, but rather as extensions of the desire of the subject which they are seeking to address. Instead of being an action caused by one's own desire, compassion involves an initial act of desire to subsequently and wholly forego one's own desire in the face of a desire of another, in spite of and precisely because it may no longer be dictated in such a way that one may strive towards one's own self-preservation or security, but instead become vulnerable to annihilation.

In the second chapter I looked at the role of compassion in politics, focusing on the thinker Hannah Arendt due to her sharp delimitations of the political realm, her profound concern with the activity of compassion, and her insistence that the two were incommensurable. Accepting Arendt's understanding of the political realm as the space

where individuals are able to disclose themselves as agents in the human world through a performance of their uniqueness in speech and action among equals, I began by looking at Arendt's distinctions between the political and social, the public and the private, and the activities of labour, work, and action. I argued that the distinctions between these were not to create "better" or "worse" realms, spheres, or activities, but to distinguish activities based on the natural or free will, given the importance of free will as a unique type of cause specific to each agent. In this sense the political realm becomes notable because it is uniquely able to disclose the free will of the agent, but it is not supremely important over other activities for its ability to do so. I continued by looking at her understanding of compassion not as subordinate to the political, but as intensely incommensurable with it, precisely given that, as I argued in the first chapter, its role is to decentre and not disclose the agent, an activity that she thinks constitutes the political. I ended by arguing that, in spite of compassion not disclosing the agent at hand, compassion as foregoing one's own desire is still an essential labour to Arendt's political realm. Since, to Arendt, disclosing oneself through speech among equals is essential to the political realm, this activity immediately invokes the need for a labour on the part of those who are to receive this speech. Specifically, if the primary political activity is speech that is to be heard among others, equally essential to the political realm is the labour of those who compassionately forego their own desire for speech, the activity which to Arendt makes them human, to attentively listen to another so that they may be a political actor.

My concluding suggestion is that, in spite of the apparent essentialness of speech, action, and manifesting one's own desire in the political realm, there remains an implicit,

frequently unstated, and (necessarily) unnoticed labour on the part of those who must be passive instead of active in paying attention to the action of others. An immediate exclusion of compassion from the political realm due to it not being sufficiently political, like speech and action, risks creating an absolute unwillingness towards being attentive to the political action done by anyone other than oneself, since this type of action momentarily deprives oneself from political inclusion. Instead of a political theory that requires subjects to always be immutable, impenetrable beings who are always disclosing themselves publicly, I suggest that one could allow for subjects to flicker in and out of being when faced with others. To conclude, theories of the political that take seriously the ethical claim that the desire of another ought to be heard or accepted, require explicit and rigorous elements of a decentring, decreation, or non-disclosure of the self in one's action, instead accepting the passive role of being attentive to the desire of another, regardless of whether or not another's desire infringes on or even annihilates oneself.

Figures

Figure 1.1: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens* (1935): The leader, central focus of the masses' gaze, looks at no one in particular.



Figure 1.2: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens* (1935): The uniform, faceless masses directing the gaze towards the leader.



Figure 1.3: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens* (1935): The impassioned gaze of a specific onlooker, indicating to the viewer the appropriate emotion and direction of gaze.

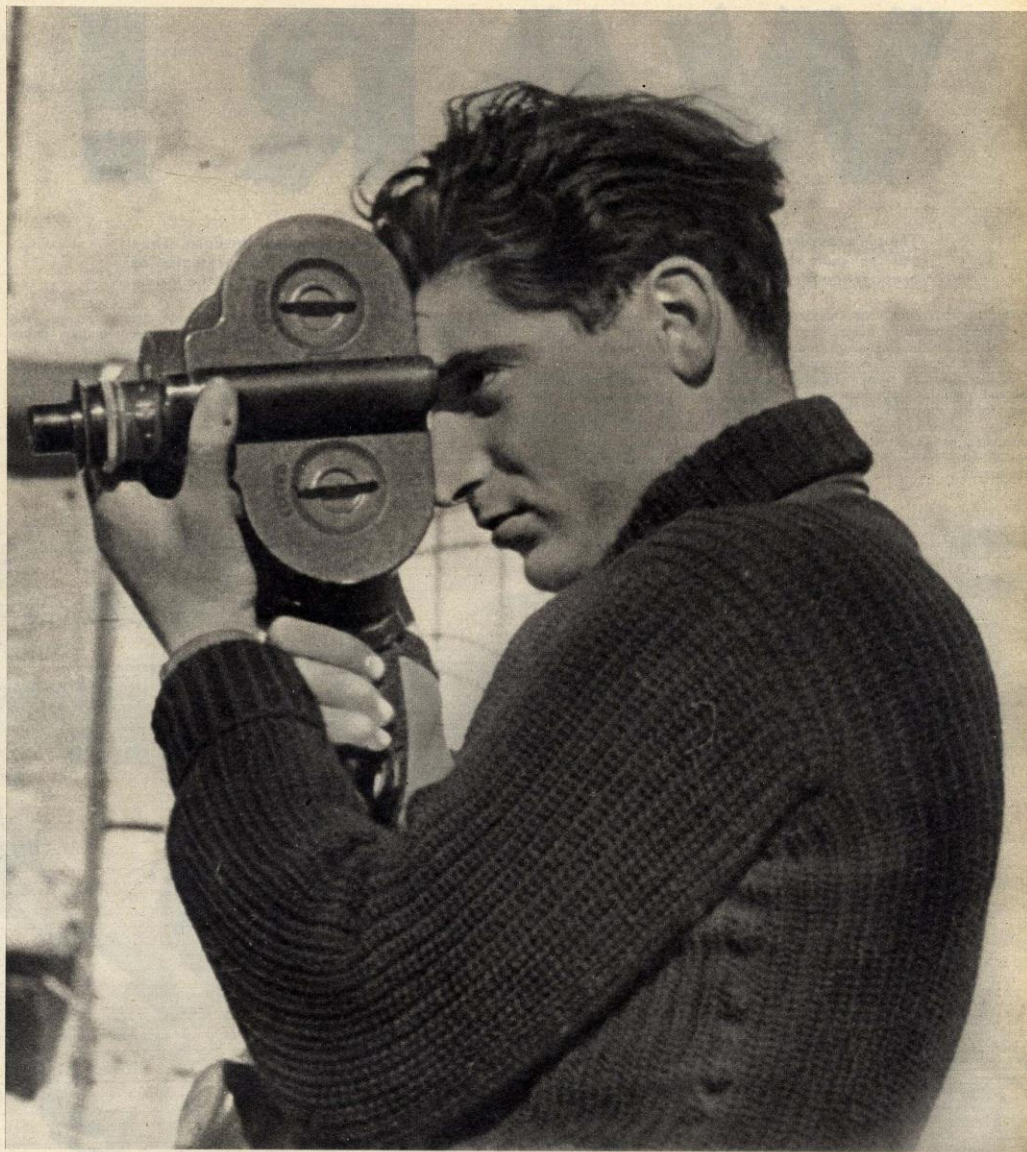


Figure 1.4: Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph des Willens* (1935): The all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure, grouped around by the masses of people/things, as the focal point of gaze, looking at neither the viewer nor the onlookers.

PICTURE POST

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December 3, 1938



The Greatest War-Photographer in the World: Robert Capa

In the following pages you see a series of pictures of the Spanish War. Regular readers of "Picture Post" know that we do not lightly praise the work we publish. We present these pictures as simply the finest pictures of front-line action ever taken. They are the work of Robert Capa. Capa is a Hungarian by birth; but, being small and dark, he is often taken for a Spaniard. He likes working in Spain better than anywhere in the world. He is a passionate democrat, and he lives to take photographs. Over a year ago, Capa's wife, on her way back to join her husband in Paris, was killed in Spain. She was standing on the running-board of a car when it collided with a tank. Capa went to China and took pictures of the Chinese war, some of which we have already published. To-day, Capa is back in Spain, taking pictures for "Picture Post."

PICTURE POST

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Figure 2.1: *Picture Post* 1, no. 10 (1938): A head shot of the handsome photographer Robert Capa, "The Greatest War-Photographer in the World."



Figure 3.1: Jean-Luc Godard, *Le Mépris* (1963): Cinema substitutes our gaze with a world that conforms to our desires. *Le Mépris* is a story of this world.



Figure 3.2: Michelangelo Antonioni, *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), *L'Eclisse* (1962): Drawing attention to offscreen space by placing a mirror in the middle of the scene so that you glimpse a stray piece of world there.



Figure 3.3: Jean-Luc Godard, *Le Mépris* (1963): Brigitte Bardot's character Camille in her Anna Karina wig.



Figure 3.4: Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa vie* (1962): Anna Karina in Godard's film a year prior to *Le Mépris*.

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