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"To Act or Not to Act": Arendt, Hegel, and Shakespeare on Action[1]

μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων
Homer, *Iliad*, Book IX, verse 417 (9.417)

Introduction

This contribution links three unusually connected suspects in order to tackle the age-old – and at the same time perennially contemporary – question of human action, which is eminently at stake not only in the realms of politics and history, but also in philosophy, and, as a peculiar link between the two, in the institution and works of theatre, namely: Hannah Arendt (*Human Condition*), G.W.F. Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), and William Shakespeare (*Hamlet*).

Arendt, despite her constantly critical stance towards Hegel, especially regarding the issue of history, shows a striking resemblance to the latter's own conceptual take on action as the subject's outward enactment in reality; Hegel, conversely, despite his speculative take on politics and history, always understood action as something that can find its meaning only in relation to others, especially as regards the capital political issues of revolution and reconciliation; both, moreover, constantly employed metaphors taken from the sphere of theatre in order to depict action in all its dramatic, fateful, powerful, and unpredictable character – and that is why, in the final analysis, Shakespeare can function as a mediating link between the two, not only to show how action is represented in theatre, but also to show the very theatricality of action itself.

Now, I am well aware that scholars – past and present – disagree whether Arendt was "Hegelian" or not, but the true question, at least for me, is: Was Hegel an

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"Arendtian"? And, if I may show my cards in advance: Were both "Shakespearian"? And, moreover: Were all of them "Homerian"?

The issue of action in Homer's *Iliad*

Let me now, therefore, introduce the fourth author, with whom I will properly begin this discussion, in order to merge all three of our protagonists and their related topics of politics, philosophy, and theatre: Homer.

The poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was – as is well known and leaving the "Homeric question" aside – not only not just "a" but rather *the* poet, but also, as Plato – this "poet among philosophers" – says in this regard in his *Politea*, the one who "provided the education (παιδεία) of Greece," and despite taking the side of Socrates in the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" against those who think that "in the management and education of human affairs it is worthwhile to take him up for study and for living by arranging one's whole life according to this poet," he nevertheless admits that Homer indeed "educated Greece," and, moreover, that he is "the most poetic and first of the tragic poets."[2]

Homer, as we can see, plays many roles at once: the poet of the first Greek epics; the "most poetic and first tragic poet"; the one who brought "education" to Greece; and therefore a practical man of wisdom (σοφός) and a philosopher (φῐλόσοφος) at the same time, since both terms were used synonymously, at least until the "quarrel between philosophers (φῐλόσοφος) and sophists (σοφιστής)," championed by Plato and Aristoteles against Gorgias and the Sicilian school of rhetorics,[3] which gained in popularity in classical Athens during the same time as Socrates' philosophy – both marking the decline of the ancient Greek πόλις – and thus philosophy chasing its own shadow.[4]

2 Plato, *Republic*, trans. B. Jowett, London, Penguin, 2012, 606e1–5.

3 Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. D. Lee, London, Penguin, 2004; Aristotle, *On Rhetoric,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

4 Cf. Barbara Cassin, *L'effet sophistique*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1995. Jure Simoniti provides an interesting reading of Greek philosophy as a peculiar "restoration" of aristocratic ideals in the atmosphere of proto-democratic developments in post-Homeric Greece. Philosophy could, in one of its dimensions, be interpreted as a specific return to Homer: "In the precise moment, when society began to produce the first inklings of democratic movements, the *impulse* of truth, proliferating at its heart, became elitist and antidem-

If there is a point and a verse in Homer's epics where all of this combines, condenses, and clearly shows the link between politics, philosophy, and theatre, then it is the famous lines describing what the purpose of education was in the case of Achilles: to make him μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων, a "speaker (ῥητῆρ', literarily "orator") of words (μύθων, "memorable words"), and at the same time a doer (πρηκτῆρά, "practicioner") of deeds (ἔργων, "works").[5]

However, in order for words and deeds to become worthy of remembrance, an assembly is needed – ἐκκλησία, a "gathering of those summoned" – a public space where these words and deeds can be heard and seen, and consequently, remembered.[6]

Achilles, a man of action

Scholars of Hannah Arendt know the relevance of the above-quoted passage for her thought, as in *Between Past and Future* she uses these verses about Achilles, translated as "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words" (reversing the line and putting the "deeds" before "words" and redoubling the adjective "great"), regularly in order to show how the public space of politics is something that is made of political actions and speeches.

Such as in the following argument from the *Concept of History*, where she reflects on the distinction between πρᾶξις and ποίησις and then concludes that:

> Implied in them, however, is one great and painful paradox which contributed [...] to the tragic aspect of Greek culture in its greatest manifestations. The paradox is that, on the one hand, everything was seen and measured against the background of the things that are forever, while, on the other, true human greatness was understood, at least by the pre-Platonic Greeks, to reside in deeds and words, and was represented by Achilles, the 'doer of great deeds and the speaker

ocratic." (Jure Simoniti, "Javnost in filozofska invencija resnice," *Filozofski vestnik*, 34 (3/2013), p. 84).

5 Homer, *Iliad*, trans. S. Butler, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2011; verse 9.416.

6 In this context, a perhaps not unimportant political footnote must be made, namely, that an assembly provides a public space for deeds and words to be heard and seen independently of any war being waged or not, or, to put it bluntly, a war cannot be waged without an assembly where strategy is discussed and decided, while an assembly can very well also be, and indeed is, called during times of peace.

> of great words', [rather] than by the maker and fabricator, even the poet and writer. This paradox, that greatness was understood in terms of permanence while human greatness was seen in precisely the most futile and least lasting activities of men, has haunted Greek poetry and historiography as it has perturbed the quiet of the philosophers.[7]

As far as *political* actions and speeches are concerned, Arendt always contrasts them with violence and *violent* actions as their exact opposite, which is discernible, for instance, in the following passage from *On Violence*, where she says that the "idea of man creating himself is strictly in the tradition of Hegelian and Marxian thinking" and that "it is the very basis of all leftist humanism"; but if according to "Hegel man 'produces' himself through thought," for "Marx, who turned Hegel's 'idealism' upside down, it was labor," and although "one may argue that all notions of man creating himself have in common a rebellion against the very factuality of the human condition," still, "nothing is more obvious than that man [...] does *not* owe his existence to himself," and that, therefore, "what Sartre, Marx, and Hegel have in common is more relevant than the particular activities through which this non-fact should presumably have come about"; nevertheless, she concludes, "it cannot be denied that a gulf separates the essentially peaceful activities of thinking and laboring from all deeds of violence," and thus also between violence and "power, which springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow."[8]

And as scholars of Hegel know, Achilles does not figure as prominently in his philosophy as he does in Arendt's political theory, but the Greeks, of course, do: in the *History of Philosophy* – as well as in the *Philosophy of History* – he repeatedly says that "among the Greeks we feel ourselves immediately at home," because the "Greeks were at home in the world": "If we were to have an aspiration, it would be for such a land and such conditions."[9] Moreover, and more specifically regarding the role of Greece in world history, in the *Philosophy of History* he says that

7 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, London, Penguin, 1963, pp. 45–46.

8 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, London, Harcourt Brace & Co. Press, 1970, pp. 12–13, 52.

9 G.W.F. Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, p. 75.

> Greece presents to us the cheerful aspect of youthful freshness, of Spiritual vitality. It is here first that advancing Spirit makes *itself* the content of its volition and its knowledge; but in such a way that State, Family, Law, Religion, are at the same time objects aimed at by individuality, while the latter *is* individuality only in virtue of those aims. The [full-grown] man, on the other hand, devotes his life to labor for an objective aim; which he pursues consistently, even at the cost of his individuality. [10]

And the two embodiments of such a stance are precisely Achilles and his great admirer, Alexander, since he says that "the highest form that floated before the Greek imagination was Achilles, the Son of the Poet, the Homeric Youth of the Trojan War"; for Hegel, Homer is "the element in which the Greek world lives, as man does in the air," and the Greek way of life is "a truly youthful achievement"; Achilles, "the ideal youth of *poetry,* commenced it"; Alexander, "the ideal youth of *reality*, concluded it: and these youths not only supply a picture of the fairest kind in their own persons, but at the same time afford a complete and perfect type of Hellenic existence."[11]

As we can see already from these briefly dealt-with passages, Hegel shares with Arendt a fascination with the Greek ideal, both being well-aware of the break in tradition that the Roman Republic and the Catholic Church brought into world history; however, while Hegel stresses the main achievements of the Greeks in the fields of arts and philosophy, Arendt, of course, focuses more on the *political* experience and philosophy.[12]

Philosophy and politics are, for Arendt, on the one hand, mutually exclusive if philosophy is understood narrowly as "metaphysics" and philosophers as "pro-

[10] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, Kitchener, Batoche Books, 2001, p. 243.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 244.

[12] I think one does not need to stress the importance of the Greek *polis* for Arendt's political thought, and neither that of Aristotle's philosophy, but for a further clarification regarding Hegel's understanding of the Greek world as a world of beauty, let me again quote his *History of Philosophy*: "The Greeks stand between both these extremes in the happy medium; this therefore is the medium of beauty, seeing that it is both natural and spiritual, but yet that the spiritual still remains the governing, determining subject. [...] Thus, it is a free subject which still possesses that original unity in content, essence and substratum, and fashions its object into beauty. The stage reached by Greek consciousness is the stage of beauty." (Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, p. 76).

fessional thinkers," but, on the other hand, mutually interdependent if philosophy is understood broadly as *thinking* and philosophers as "thinkers," as becomes evident especially in modern times, where "non-thinking" – or the "lack of thinking" – was the precondition for the rise of totalitarianism as a new form of government that enacted one of the most fundamental breaks in the Western tradition of philosophy and politics alike.[13]

Achilles, a man of inaction

Finally, as scholars of Shakespeare know, he reworked many a mythological history from Antiquity at large, for obvious reasons mostly preferring Roman history (*Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra*) since it did not reflect itself in the form of tragedy as the Greeks did with Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, who dealt with pure mythology (*Prometheus Bound*) as well as history (*Persians*), and only once portrayed Achilles, who makes an appearance in his tragedy – or more precisely: *tragicomedy*[14] – *Troilus and Cressida,* where the hero is mocked in the dialogue between Cressida and Pandarus (Act I, Prologue):

> CRESSIDA
> There is among the Greeks Achilles, a better man than Troilus.
> PANDARUS
> Achilles! a drayman, a porter, a very camel.
> CRESSIDA
> Well, well.
> PANDARUS
> 'Well, well!' why, have you any discretion? have
> you any eyes? Do you know what a man is? Is not
> birth, beauty, good shape, discourse, manhood,
> learning, gentleness, virtue, youth, liberality,
> and such like, the spice and salt that season a man?
> CRESSIDA

[13] *Cf.* Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* New York, Harcourt, 1973; on the connection between the "evil of non-thinking" and the Arendtian concept of "(post-)totalitarianism", see also: Vlasta Jalušič, *Zlo nemišljenja,* Ljubljana, Mirovni Inštitut, 2010, pp. 17–56.

[14] For a discussion of Shakespeare's mixing of genres in general and the overlap between tragedy and comedy in particular, see, *inter alia*: Gregor Moder, *Komična ljubezen: Shakespear, Hegel, Lacan,* Ljubljana, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2015.

> Ay, a minced man: and then to be baked with no date
> in the pie, for then the man's date's out.

Achilles himself does not refrain from mocking, but not as a man of action, but rather, as Homer in his *Iliad* and his followers from the *Epic Cycle* glorifying his "sacred anger" will it, as a man of *inaction*, which has, however, massive political consequences, since his refrain from fighting produces more violence than his return to battle does; Ulysses, king of Ithaca, who can be regarded as Achilles' "double" due to his use of wits and tricks instead of strength and violence – in answer to Agamemnon's question of "What is the remedy" to "[t]he nature of the sickness found"? – says the following (Act I, Scene III):

> The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns
> The sinew and the forehand of our host,
> Having his ear full of his airy fame,
> Grows dainty of his worth, and in his tent
> Lies mocking our designs.

The *Iliad* begins with Achilles' μῆνῐς, a word with Indo-European roots that links it with both the old Iranian *Avesta* (the collection of sacred Zoroastrian writings) and the old Hindu *Bhagavad Gita* (part of the *Mahabharata* epic poem) to the "sacred rage" of the god(s), which, however, in Homer presents an important political twist: as argued by Leonard Muellner in his *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic*, "sacred rage" can be invoked by humans too, especially if they are demigods, as Achilles is, but at the cost of life; moreover, it consists not only of a psychological "anger" (dealt with especially well in tragedy on the stage with actors performing its psychological manifestation), but it also has a metaphysical dimension in the sense that it pertains to the "sacred" (an enlarged anger, so to speak, since the gods are part of it too), while its political precondition is that it must be politically legitimate in order to be invoked (so, no arbitrary, individual, capricious character is permitted); and, most importantly for our discussion, Achilles' "anger" manifests its peculiarity in the form of his *in*action, of his withdrawal from the affairs of man and his transition into the realm of the gods (together with all the consequences that follow).[15]

[15] *Cf.* Leonard Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1996.

And both Arendt and Hegel took this issue to heart, considering inaction – the lack of action, if you will – as pertaining to action, as an essential part of action, both in terms of direct effects as well as responsibility for the consequences: think only of Arendt's conclusion in *The Human Condition*, with the Latin words attributed to Cato, *Numquam se plus agere quam nihil cum ageret, numquam minus solum esse quam cum sollus esset*;[16] or Hegel's dealing with the figure of the "beautiful soul" that does not want to "get dirty" with worldly affairs, in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.[17]

I am dealing at length with this "negative" of action – namely its *lack* – in order to show that Arendt and Hegel have a very defined understanding of action that includes even its lack as an essential part, while still, however, and this will now be my main point, lacking a theoretically coherent definition of action.

Arendt and Hegel's theory of action

Action is, as we have seen via Homer, central to our two authors of preference, but surprisingly what both *lack* is a coherent theory of action: Arendt speaks of "human", "political", "violent", "individual", and "collective" action almost indiscriminately even in chapters or books that are dedicated entirely to the issue – such as throughout the whole *Human Condition*, where (political) *action* is opposed to *labour* (*Arbeit*) and *work* (*Werke*);[18] while the speculative best that Hegel produces in terms of an inner conceptual distinction is the one between deed (*Tat*) and action (*Handlung*) from his *Philosophy of Right*.[19]

Arendt in the *Human Condition* defines *vita activa* as "active life", in contrast to the *vita ontemplative* as "contemplative life", which is already discernible from the Latin wordings that the distinction is more "Roman" than "Greek" in its character, opposing, to put it bluntly, "theory" to "action".[20] Nevertheless,

16 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 325.

17 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 380–1.

18 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

19 G.W.F. Hegel: *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 145–6.

20 *Cf*. Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

she, of course, at least starts by dealing with the old Aristotelian definition of the three ways of life from Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:[21] one is devoted to pleasure (*bios hedonikos*), the other to politics (*bios politikos*), and the third one to theory (*bios theoretikos*), the main opposition being between politics and philosophy, as discernible from the later recapitulation in Book X.[22] Now, Aristotle's analysis is actually a copy of how Plato dealt with the same or a rather similar subject in the *Philebus*, where he distinguishes only between a "life devoted to pleasure" and a "life devoted to thinking," while opting for a "mixture of both," since either of the first two are impossible in themselves.[23] From here on and keeping this in mind, it is obvious why Arendt was, of course, more interested in Aristotle than Plato, and how it is precisely with this insistence on action that she reads – or at least understands – Aristotle together with Hegel. Arendt's innovation with regard to both Aristotle and Hegel was to add a critique of Marx to the mixture, since for her a life devoted to political action differs from a life of labour (*Arbeit*) that produces products through which one overcomes the necessity of living, on the one hand, and the creation of works of art (*Werke*) that are formed as enduring monuments beyond the necessity of everyday life, on the other.[24] Thus, the main and most important conceptualisation that she provides in terms of defining the nature of action is the rather explicit "Greek" distinction between labour (*ponos*) and creation (*poeisis*), which differs from action (*praxis*) in the sense that the latter is the only one that is an end in itself, while the others two are both instrumental, a mere means to an end: overcoming the mortality of biological life, and achieving immortality through the creation of worldliness, to put it bluntly.

Hegel also, so it seems, follows Aristotle, this time not in differentiating action from theory (this distinction is, according to him, made by those who have an interest in affirming either action against theory or vice versa), but rather by making a distinction in the milieu of action itself. Aristotle says in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that "as when you have let a stone go it is too late to recover it; but yet it was in your power to throw it, since the moving principle was in you," the ἀρχή or "principle" of an action – ἀρχή meaning "cause", "rea-

[21] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. W. D. Ross, Kitchener, Batoche Books, 1999, 1095b17–19, p. 6.

[22] *Ibid*., 1172b–1181b, pp. 163–182.

[23] Plato, *Philebus*, trans. D. Frede, London, Penguin, 2012, 27c–28b.

[24] *Cf.* Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 7.

son", and "beginning" at the same time – also defines the character or *ethics* of a man, since his or her repetitive action started somewhere, sometime, and caused someone to become as he or her is now, "but now that they have become so it is not possible for them not to be so": "It is from the exercise of activities on particular objects that states of character are produced."[25] Hegel re-baptised this "Greek" example by first quoting the old German saying that "the stone belongs to the devil once it is thrown,"[26] while at the same time enlarging Aristotle's definition of freedom of action by excluding women and slaves from the list of those unable to act freely – leaving "children, imbeciles, and lunatics" on the list – understandably, since slaves were abolished in his time, or rather transformed into workers, and women were already regarded as possessing the ability to think freely.[27] Apart from these cultural and historical curiosities and differences, the result of Hegel's inquiry is very similar to Aristotle's: *Was das Subjekt ist, ist die Reihe seiner Handlungen*, "what the subject is, is the series of its own actions," or more prosaically speaking by redacting the translation, *the subject is the series of its own actions*.[28]

Hegel, however, also brought something new to the table that neither Aristotle *could* nor Arendt *did* think, namely, the distinction between *Tat* and *Handlung*, between "deed" and "action": an action has "multiple consequences in so far as it is translated into external existence [*Dasein*]"; these "consequences, as the outward *shape* whose *soul* is the *end* to which the action is directed, belong to the action as an integral part of it"; thus, action is exposed to "external forces which attach to it things quite different from what it is for itself, and impel it on into remote and alien consequences," thus transforming "necessity into contingency and vice versa," so that from this point of view, "to act therefore means *to submit oneself to this law*."[29] And this contingency is precisely the reason why there is always already a tragic moment attached to action, a moment that neither Hegel nor Arendt failed to address, as Allen Speight brilliantly demonstrates in his article *Arendt and Hegel on the Tragic Nature of Action*.[30]

25 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1114a, p. 42.
26 Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §119, p. 148.
27 *Cf. ibid*., §120, pp. 148–9.
28 *Ibid*., §124, p. 151.
29 *Ibid*., §118, pp. 145–6.
30 *Cf.* Allen Speight, "Arendt and Hegel on the tragic nature of action", *Philosophy Social Criticism*, 28 (5/2002), pp. 523–536.

As far as a subject acts, he must take upon him – or herself – the fact that his or her action can have a completely different outcome that the one intended, even a genuinely tragic one, and the prototype that Hegel mentions in the note to the above quoted §118 for such a case of a tragic hero in action is none other than Oedipus, who killed a stranger at a crossroad, solved the sphinx's riddle, became the king of Thebes, and married its queen, only to find out that it was his father whom he had killed and his mother whom he had married. This is the point where Hegel draws the line between purpose as *Absicht* and purpose as *Vorsatz*, in the sense of intention: intention pertains only to the particularity of a freely willed deed, while purpose also includes its unpredictable consequences,[31] so that Oedipus' *intention* may well have not been to fulfil Freud's wettest dreams of killing his own father and having sex with his own mother, but this was for sure his *purpose*; hence, Hegel's critique of the "*heroic* self-consciousness," which "has not yet progressed from its unalloyed simplicity to reflect on the distinction between *deed* [*Tat*] and *action* [*Handlung*]," between the "external event and the purpose and knowledge of the circumstances, or to analyze the consequences minutely, but accepts responsibility for the deed in its entirety."[32] And this is why Constantine Sandis could ingeniously entitle his article on Hegel's theory of action as *The Man Who Mistook his Handlung for a Tat: Hegel on Oedipus and Other Tragic Thebans*.[33]

As we have seen, despite Arendt's and Hegel's patient conceptual working of the concept of action – action as differing from labour and work and action as distinct from deed – neither of the two provided any further differentiation or definition, so that the author to whom one needs to turn in order to gain a well-defined – and well-refined (if you will allow me) – theory of action in its own terms, is Shakespeare.

To act, to do, to perform

Now, one last – alas final – effort remains in order to grasp the concept of action properly: in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, at the very beginning of the famous comic relief of the two clowns on the graveyard and just before the very last scene of

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31 Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, §119, p. 147.

32 *Ibid*., §118, p. 146.

33 *Cf*. Constantine Sandis, "The Man Who Mistook his Handlung for a Tat: Hegel on Oedipus and Other Tragic Thebans", *Hegel Bulletin*, 31 (2010), pp. 35–60.

the tragedy, we encounter this humorous dialogue regarding the most delicate issue of Ophelia's suicide and whether she deserves a Christian burial or not (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V, Scene 1):

> FIRST CLOWN
> Is she to be buried in Christian burial that
> wilfully seeks her own salvation?
> SECOND CLOWN
> I tell thee she is: and therefore make her grave
> straight: the crowner hath sat on her, and finds it
> Christian burial.
> FIRST CLOWN
> How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her
> own defence?
> SECOND CLOWN
> Why, 'tis found so.
> FIRST CLOWN
> It must be 'se offendendo;' it cannot be else. For
> here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly,
> it argues an act: and an act hath three branches: it
> is, to act, to do, to perform: argal, she drowned
> herself wittingly.

Shakespeare, thinking as a man of theatre that "the world is a stage and all the men and women merely players," first starts not with the noun "action", but rather with the verb "to act". And then proceeds to repeat or redouble it, as if the *genus* of action encounters first itself as its own *species* in the "to act" of an *actor*, in order to dialectically produce the other two, the "to do" of the *doer* and the "to perform" of the *performer*. A doer is less than an actor since the act of the actor includes the doing of the doer (such as: "doing a theatre piece"), but the act is less than a performance, since performing is broader in meaning and can thus encompass not only the act and the doing (one can, for instance, speak specifically of a "theatre performance" as well as of an "artistic performance" in general, theatrical or not), but can be stretched into the realm of politics and

philosophy as well (such as when one speaks of a "political performance" or of a "philosophical performance").[34]

All the world may very well be a stage, but we are *not* all "merely players," since, as Shakespeare rightfully says, "one man in his time plays many parts," not only diachronically from infancy to old age,[35] but also synchronically by acting, doing, and performing while engaging in the arts, philosophy, and politics.

Conclusion

The Shakespearian dialectics here employed understand *action*, as encompassed in the universal "to act" that "hath three branches," as composed of: "to act" in the specific theatrical sense of the word for "acting"; "to do" in the sense of "deed"; and "to perform", which would mean "performance" in the broadest sense possible. Thus, as I would like to argue, action is an eminently *political* category since it is the only "branch" that includes not only itself together with the other two – "to act", "to do", "to perform" – but others too: philosophy, at least in theory, does not need others in order to be done, or even demands isolation from others, and therefore falls into the category of mere "doing"; by contrast, a theatre piece, or an artistic performance in general, *does* necessarily need others, but others as a public that differs from the performers; while action is the only one of the three that essentially needs others as its own actors, doers, and performers at the same time, since there is no action without *inter*action. And here we have it: if there is a theory of action that can be drawn by linking Arendt, Hegel, and Shakespeare, then it is the following: the *inter*subjective dimension is a prerequisite of any *political* action, which is thus essentially an *inter*action, a situation where "a group of people get and act together," as Arendt puts it, and where there is no dif-

34 Bara Kolenc accentuates the constitutive moment of *enactment* within the notion of performance, thus distinguishing the performative gesture from mere representation: "Performance is, in the first place, an *enactment*. Unlike representation, it does not represent something else – for example certain other (hypothetically more real or original) reality – but directly produces a new reality by performing it." (Bara Kolenc, "Fantazma dotika in uprizoritev (ne)dotakljivega: Piram in Tizba", *Problemi*, 58 (5–6/2020), p. 120).

35 *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene VII): "His acts being seven ages. At first the infant [...] And then the whining school-boy [...] And then the lover [...] Then a soldier [...] And then the justice [...] The sixth age shifts into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon [...] Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history, is second childishness and mere oblivion; sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

ference between acting subjects – as pertaining to the theatre, where the actors are on stage and the public is seated, or as to philosophy, where a thinking "I" always already differs from the others – but rather, as Hegel articulates it while discussing the French Revolution, the political and concurrently theatrical event *par excellence*, the acting subject is "an I, who is We, and a We, who is I."

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