

Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature
Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English
Band: 27 (2012)

Artikel: New mass movements : Hannah Arendt, literature and politics
Autor: Swift, Simon
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-323524>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 07.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

New Mass Movements: Hannah Arendt, Literature and Politics

Simon Swift

This essay considers the prominence of the word “movement,” and of ideas of fluidity, displacement and mobility in different forms across Hannah Arendt’s writings of the 1950s and 1960s. I argue that Arendt made significant use of literature in order to make sense of a range of political movements, including Nazism, the student protest movement of the 1960s, and Black Power. She did so because she found political theory – and especially Marxist ideas of the state and of class interest – to be singularly incapable of making sense of the phenomenon of a political movement. Nazism was characterized, for Arendt, by an abandonment of any settled political ideology, as well as by a need to be perpetually on the move, and to move and displace those who were subject to its power. I argue that in the 1960s, Arendt drew attention to a different form of political movement – the motion that is accorded to political subjects by their emotions. I claim that this later argument prefigures more recent work in the field of emotion studies, while providing a model for a different understanding of an inter-disciplinary English studies, which is itself on the move.

This essay is concerned with the connections between writing about literature and writing about politics in the mid-twentieth century. I will approach this relation from the point of view of political writing. In particular, I will describe the ways in which the political writer Hannah Arendt supplemented and elucidated her political understanding with a highly original use of literary examples, while highlighting the dependence of her argument on metaphor at several key points. I will briefly examine Arendt’s theory of the mass movement, which she developed in her post-war book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), while drawing attention to the surprising prominence of the word “movement,” and of

ideas of fluidity, displacement and mobility in different forms across her work. The prominence of these ideas in her writing accounts, in part, for Arendt's repeated recourse to literature. As she tried to make sense of what a political movement is, and of the ways in which modern political experience involves the mass movement and liquidation of human beings, Arendt needed to make this move in her mode of argument, because the concept of a political movement seemed to her to resist explanation in the terms of classical political theory as well as of modern critical theory.

Arendt often turned to literary examples in her work – repeatedly, for example, she invoked Herman Melville's story *Billy Budd* in order to think about the role of violence in contemporary politics. She thought that literature offers scope for a more attentive engagement with the problems of modern politics than political theory itself can offer. In Arendt's view, political theories, including Marxism, struggled to account for the emergence of radically new political phenomena, such as mass movements, in the course of the twentieth century. One of the most oft-quoted, and poetic moments in Marx and Engels's writings occurs in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) where, in describing the bourgeoisie's destruction of older, paternalistic and relatively stable forms of social allegiance, the authors lament, not without both awe and irony, that "[a]ll that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (Marx and Engels 659). For Arendt, a major political experience of the twentieth century – the experience of totalitarian rule – went beyond even the breathtaking ambition of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, and any Marxist vocabulary (such as that evolved by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1949]) was incapable of matching the new phenomenon of totalitarian rule with an adequate description of it. The central political experience of totalitarianism was, for Arendt, movement, and literature was best capable of capturing the meaning of this political experience.

Having described the novel political form of the mass movement in the early 1950s, Arendt returned, I want to argue, to her earlier definition in the late 1960s, especially in her late essay *On Violence* (1969). I want to focus in the second half of my essay on a different type of political mobility that Arendt discerned in the late 1960s, but that had already been present in embryonic form in her earlier analysis of totalitarianism, that is the mobility accorded to political subjects by their emotions. Arendt thought that the political activism of the 1960s, especially in Europe and North America, was characterized by a strong display of affect. The question of the political meaning of affective states such as

anger, rage and guilt is also, I would argue, one that impinges on literary studies. Arendt took rage, in the sphere of politics, to constitute a form of judgement, and especially as the place where a rational understanding of the world and a feeling of injustice meet. Arendt's work then anticipates later scholarship in the field of "emotion studies," and especially Martha Nussbaum's argument in her book *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2001) which also uses literary examples in order to explore the ways in which emotions offer cognitive judgements about the world. So too, the political meaning of affective states such as rage, anger and guilt can be tracked, Arendt argued, most effectively in the work of literary writers like Melville. To the extent that my argument is then interdisciplinary, my essay, like Arendt's own work, will itself be in motion, crossing and re-crossing the boundary between literature and politics.

1

In his book *Liquid Modernity* published in 2000, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that:

The era of unconditional superiority of sedentarism over nomadism and the dominance of the settled over the mobile is on the whole grinding to a halt. We are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principle of territoriality. In the fluid stage of modernity, the settled majority is ruled by the nomadic and extraterritorial elite. (Bauman 13)

The breathtaking spectacle of protest, civil unrest and revolution both in the Arab world and in Europe in 2011 might be taken to challenge Bauman's assertion, since these events undoubtedly signify a changing tide of public opinion in relation to nomadic, extra-territorial elites, and the fluid movement of capital between nation states that supports them. But there is also already something of a contradiction in the way that Bauman seeks to describe this shift back, as it were, to nomadism. Bauman describes the new era of nomadism in deceptively motionless terms: the dominance of the settled over the mobile is grinding to a halt, as if something stops moving just at the moment when nomadism becomes important once again; almost as if what Bauman calls sedentarism, itself, were a movement which is slowing down.

One of the most influential and perceptive accounts of the place of movement in modernity, an account that has been hugely influential on Bauman, not least, is that posed by Hannah Arendt across her work. Arendt's various accounts of movement show that we have trouble

making sense of what movement means for politics and for political representation, and how movements – as opposed to parties – have exploited our tendency to misrecognize them. Movement, under various guises, is everywhere in Arendt's work – most obviously in her account of the mass movements of the early twentieth century in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. There, Arendt also paid attention to the figure of the displaced person, the refugee, as a key example of the predicament of representative politics in the totalitarian era and beyond. So too, her most controversial book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), was a study of the man whose job it was to organize the mass transportation of millions of human beings to Nazi death and concentration camps during the Second World War. I want to begin with Arendt's analyses of mobility, and its relation to the Nazi genocide, in each of these texts.

Right at the beginning of the third volume of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt describes “the perpetual-motion mania of totalitarian movements which can remain in power only so long as they keep moving and set everything around them in motion” (*Origins* 3, 4). The key point about totalitarian movements (Arendt's main example is Nazi Germany, although she also thinks her analysis holds for the Soviet Union under Stalin) is that they are *movements*, that they are governed by no fixed political ideology but rather exist in so far as they have to keep moving, and also that they have to set everything else into motion, through war, the productive activity that goes with it, and the displacement of populations that it causes. In this movements differ, Arendt says, from political parties, which represent, she argues, particular class interests within a nation-state, but which disguise those interests with more expansive ideologies. It has been a matter of course, Arendt writes in Volume 2 of *Origins*, “to identify parties with particular interests” (133). Arendt also describes the development, in the course of the nineteenth century, of political ideologies in continental Europe that sought to camouflage the identification of parties and interests behind fictions of wider forms of belonging:

The trouble with the Continental parties [. . .] was not so much that they were trapped in the narrowness of particular interests as that they were ashamed of these interests and therefore developed those justifications which led each one into an ideology claiming that its particular interests coincided with the most general interests of humanity. (*Origins* 2, 134)

I cannot hope to do justice, for reasons of space, to the complexity of Arendt's argument about the party system here, which argues for the importance of European imperialism in aiding the transition “From party to movement,” as she titles the section of volume 2 of *Origins*

from which the above quotations are drawn, and which pays close attention to the different constitutional position of political parties in Britain and continental Europe, a difference that Arendt takes to explain the failure of totalitarian systems to take hold in the former. In short, Arendt argues that mass movements, in the inter-war years in Europe, expressed a widespread loss of faith, following the horrors of the First World War, in the claim of the institutions of the nation state, political parties among them, to be truly representative. The brutality of trench warfare, in her argument, disabused European populations of any faith in democracy's claims to be truly representative. In other words, the First World War had made clear to the masses that the party system only ever represents the interests of particular groups, and had exposed the claims of political parties to be interested in all of humanity as a hypocritical lie.

How to make sense, though, of this new political phenomenon of the mass movement, that is defined, according to Arendt, not by an ideology, but rather by the principle of movement, a being perpetually on the move? It would be wrong to suggest that their abandonment of class interest meant that the mass movements were free of any form of ideological mystification. Arendt suggests that many early supporters of the mass movements underestimated precisely the newness of those movements, the radicalism of their abandonment of any settled political doctrine or defence of a particular class interest. Rather, it is the nation state itself, rather than any particular group interest, that became the subject of mystification in the era of the mass movements. So, in volume 2 of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes of businessmen, early supporters of the Nazi party who "mistook the Nazis for the older groups they had themselves frequently instituted" and of pan-Germanists, those who in the 1920s wanted to create a greater Germany and who:

... clung to an outdated nontotalitarian state worship and could not understand that the masses' furious interest in the so-called "suprastate powers" [. . .] ie, the Jesuits, the Jews, and the Freemasons, – did not spring from nation or state worship but, on the contrary, from envy and from the desire also to become a "suprastate power." (*Origins* 2, 138)

What Arendt denominates "state worship" here has been replaced by a "furious interest" in suprastate powers on the part of the masses. So too, this interest was motivated by envy of those suprastate powers. Arendt always describes the mass movements in these passionate, dynamic terms, as motivated by envy and furious interest, sometimes too by hatred of and disgust for representative bourgeois politics, whereas liberal democracy had sought to disguise its "shame" at representing partial

interests behind a rhetoric of universal brotherhood. It is this dynamic passion which, for Arendt, defines the new phenomenon of movement in politics. The passions indicate a relation to what is outside of the movement – whether that relation be one of envy, furious interest or hatred. These emotions propel the movement towards that outside, whereas the concept of class interest, and the shameful hiding of it behind ideology, perhaps suggests a more static model of a political party's (mis)representation of its own interior, its own inside. Our political vocabulary is organized not, however, around the description of passions, but around the idea of the state. Consequently, metaphor becomes important to making sense of what a political movement might be. Like Bauman after her, in volume 3 of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt invokes metaphors of solidity in order to describe movement:

One should not forget that only a building can have a structure, but that a movement – if the word is to be taken as seriously as the Nazis meant it – can have only a direction, and that any form of legal or governmental structure can be only a handicap to a movement which is being propelled with increasing speed in a certain direction. Even in the prepower stage the totalitarian movements represented those masses that were no longer willing to live in any kind of structure, regardless of its nature; masses that had started to move in order to flood the legal and geographical borders securely determined by the government. (*Origins* 3, 96)

There is a powerful metaphorical description of movement at play here. Arendt needs to use the metaphor of a building, a structure, in order to help us think of what a movement is not (a political institution which has a fixed structure), as well as to understand what it is (a kind of flood that drowns the public world). But building and flood are not the only metaphors in this passage; so too, in a sense, is “representation.” Since the totalitarian movements cannot be said to “represent” anyone, having no meaningful structures, there is an important sense in which this completely new, unprecedented political entity, the movement, gets under the radar of our political categories, founded as they are in a discourse of representation. Even Arendt, undoubtedly a hugely perceptive analyst of totalitarianism, still inhabits those categories, but signals to her readers, through her use of metaphor, that they have become outmoded. Mass movements never did, in other words, represent the masses; the word “representation” might instead be understood, following Arendt's old teacher Martin Heidegger, as “under erasure” in this passage. There simply is no established political language to talk about a

mass movement on its own terms; Arendt is, arguably, on the way to inventing one.¹

But so too, this metaphor works in the other direction. Arendt's account suggests that, while the movement may have no fixed political purpose or representative structure, the Nazis meant it seriously, that there is an intention in their movement. Arendt also seems to suggest that we need to take the word "movement" as seriously as the Nazis meant it, rather than complacently to assume that we have understood what it means and to move on. The Nazis, Arendt argues, were clever enough to exploit the ways in which their movement tended to be misrecognized by fellow travellers, businessmen and pan-Germanists alike, who assumed that Nazism was a fixed political entity that respected the institution of the nation state. Nazism maintained, then, a kind of façade of the state, so that fellow-travellers, – the majority of the population of Germany – could remain within the bounds of the fiction that there was something like a Nazi party ruling a German nation in the interests of its people. As Giorgio Agamben points out in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Hitler never revoked the Weimar constitution. The state as a law-giving institution was maintained as a fiction in order to disguise the real intentions of the Nazi movement, which were in fact, Arendt argues, to destroy the nation state and its political institutions.

This use of fictionality meant, Arendt suggests, that the political functionary in Nazi Germany had to develop what she describes as a "sixth sense" in order to distinguish the authentic pronouncements of the movement from its statist propaganda. Thus, as she writes in volume 3 of *Origins*, those who "were to execute orders which the leadership, in the interests of the movement, regarded as genuinely necessary" received orders that were "intentionally vague, and given in the expectation that their recipient would recognize the intent of the given order, and act accordingly" (97). Such, most famously, were the orders around the Final Solution – itself a kind of fictional term, or euphemism – and the true "interest" of the movement, in Arendt's terms. I am suggesting that where the Nazis built up a world of illusion, an illusion that those

¹ For "sous rature" in Heidegger, see *The Question of Being*. "Sous rature" is Jacques Derrida's term for Heidegger's technique of crossing out but maintaining terms from the history of philosophy. The argument about representation that I am teasing out of Arendt here bears more than a passing resemblance to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's analysis of the subaltern. In the opening pages of her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Spivak reads Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851). She focuses especially on Marx's analysis of Louis Napoleon's claim to "represent" the peasant smallholders of rural France, a group that could not be represented since they did not, Marx argued, constitute a class with an interest of its own that was capable of political representation.

initiates into the movement had to know how to read through and to disregard while recognizing the true meaning of vague but important messages, Arendt writes back against such fictionalizing processes. She seeks to capture the real meaning of movement in an act of political storytelling that is dependent on metaphor in order to cope with the difficult task of describing the reality of a political movement which departs from, while disguising itself behind, the fundamental tenets of democratic politics.

The Final Solution brings me to a different dimension of movement in this period – the actual transportation of the victims of Nazi totalitarianism by rail across Europe. The man in charge of this process was Adolf Eichmann, the subject of another Arendt study, her report of his trial and execution in Israel in 1963, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. What is especially fascinating, for Arendt, about Eichmann's defence of himself in Jerusalem is that it actually reveals the disjunction between the reality of the movement, which, as Arendt was one of the first to note, was absolute flux and chaos, and its appearance of stability. Eichmann's job, as he remembers it in Jerusalem, was to rationalize the process of deportation:

. . . to bring some order out of what he described as "complete chaos," in which "everyone issued his own orders" and "did as he pleased." And indeed he succeeded, though never completely, in acquiring a key position in the whole process, because his office organized the means of transportation [. . .] his general description – "everything was always in a state of continuous flux, a steady stream" – sounded plausible to the student of totalitarianism, who knows that the monolithic quality of this form of government is a myth. (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 152)

In his account of the deportations, Eichmann presents us with a picture of the dark heart of totalitarianism – the movement within the movement, the mass transportation of human beings to their deaths which Arendt perpetually describes, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as the "centre" of the Nazi movement. The court in Jerusalem, or so Arendt claimed, refused to believe Eichmann's account of the chaos of the deportations, having bought into the myth of totalitarian government as a monolithic, efficient machine. It could not recognize the reality of the chaotic administrative circumstances that determined this mass movement of people, because it failed to understand the fluid nature of the movement itself – a steady stream, a continuous flux.

2

In the second section of this essay, I turn to Arendt's account of another, later set of political movements, that is the protest and civil disobedience movements of the 1960s that she, along with others, grouped together under the category of the "new left." In her discussion of these movements in her essay *On Violence*, first published in 1969, Arendt focuses on the student movement, and pays particular attention to its campus relations with another political movement, Black Power. Again, it is the notion of interest which drives Arendt's account of this relation. Arendt is struck by a particular *dis*interest in the rhetoric of the students, or what she describes as "the disinterested and usually highly moral claims of the white rebels" (*Crises of the Republic* 161) as opposed to their black counterparts who, in Arendt's view, as I'll discuss in what follows, think of themselves as representing a specific interest group, the black community.

Arendt noticed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that totalitarian movements occurred both on the left and the right, as Stalinism and Nazism. Indeed, the fact that movement cut across left-right ideological distinctions showed, in Arendt's earlier argument, that such distinctions could no longer aid in the effort to understand politics in the totalitarian era and beyond. Later in the 1960s, Arendt revisited such claims, this time by arguing that the growing commitment of the new left to violence challenged its leftist credentials. She claims in *On Violence* that Marx had sought to downplay the agency of political violence in history, in that he had described the violent events that accompany a revolution as the "labor pangs" of a new society (*Crises of the Republic* 113) rather than its cause. Ideological arguments for the importance of violence as a transformative political act had, Arendt argues, instead been more typically the prerogative of the right. Arendt argues, further, that the new left demonstrated a growing faith in the creative power of violence, a sense that violence is actually productive of new selves, new allegiances and new communities, such that the "strong fraternal sentiments collective violence engenders" will enable "a new community together with a 'new man' [to] arise out of it" (*Crises of the Republic* 166). She finds the source for this commitment to the creative power of violence in the students' reading of Frantz Fanon's call to violent anti-colonial struggle, *The Wretched of the Earth*, first published in 1961. This idea of the creativity of violence, Arendt suggests, is very far from Marx, who certainly understood man as a self-creating being, but who thought of him as a being who creates himself through labour rather than through violence.

While Arendt is then troubled by the movement-character of the politics of the new left, it becomes clear in her essay that she is drawn to and in some ways impressed by the disinterested, moral character of the student movement. She writes that “[t]o be sure, every revolutionary movement has been led by the disinterested, who were motivated by compassion or by a passion for justice, and this, of course, is also true for Marx and Lenin. But Marx, as we know, had quite effectively tabooed these ‘emotions’” (*Crises of the Republic* 126). Disinterest, Arendt implies, is founded in emotion, in a passion for justice that typifies the (usually quite privileged) leaders of modern revolutions, from Robespierre onwards. Marx had sought, again, to downplay the significance of this passion for justice among the leaders in favour of a claim that the class interest of the proletariat is the true engine of historical change. Arendt, on the other hand, seems disappointed that the student movement had failed to link up with any existing interest groups – “[t]he hostility of the workers in all countries is a matter of record, and in the United States the complete collapse of any co-operation with the Black Power movement, whose students are more firmly rooted in their own community [. . .] was the bitterest disappointment for the white rebels” (*Crises of the Republic* 126). For its part, Black Power seems to figure in Arendt’s imagination as something quite terrifying: a movement that is thoroughly wedded to violence, but that thinks of itself as representing a specific group interest, and that claims to speak for a community. Discussing campus sit-ins in the late sixties, Arendt writes that

Serious violence entered the scene only with the appearance of the Black Power movement on the campuses. Negro students, the majority of them admitted without academic qualification, regarded and organized themselves as an interest group, the representatives of the black community. Their interest was to lower academic standards. (*Crises of the Republic* 120)

This claim – and especially its play with the word “interest” – undoubtedly makes for disturbing reading, as does much of Arendt’s writing about civil rights and its radicalization in the late sixties. Arendt in fact seems to suggest that under cover of its claim to be representative of a specific community, and to defend its interests, the real interest of Black Power was to destroy established institutions (such as universities). There is a strong echo here with Arendt’s earlier claims about the way that totalitarian movements had disguised their fundamentally destructive impulses behind a claim to represent the masses. So too, Arendt thought that Black Power, like the earlier mass movements, was motivated by rage against the hypocrisy of a liberal society, and in the case of Black Power, by the hypocrisy of white liberal guilt. Yet unlike Marx,

Arendt valued and took seriously the efficacy of all revolutionary emotions, black rage as well as the white middle class “passion for justice.” Even in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she had at times sympathized with the revolutionary hatred of bourgeois society that she had described as characteristic of the mass movements, and had written of “how justified disgust can be in a society wholly permeated with the ideological outlook and moral standards of the bourgeoisie” (*Origins* 3, 26). As she had once endorsed disgust, so she endorses political rage and the passion for justice in the late 1960s as legitimate political sentiments; and indeed, she explores the links between them.

Later in *On Violence*, Arendt writes that “[o]nly where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not does rage arise. Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage” (*Crises of the Republic* 160). Rage is, in Arendt’s terms, an expression of a sense of injustice – it is, in fact, a judgement about the world which says: this is how I apprehend the world and my sense of justice tells me that things could and should be otherwise. Black Power’s rage and the “white rebels” sense of injustice, in fact, coincide. This is one of the moments in her writing in which Arendt invokes the example of Melville’s *Billy Budd* to talk about the political importance of rage and violence. In certain situations, she says, as Melville’s story shows, “violence – acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences – is the only way to set the scales of justice right again” (*Crises of the Republic* 161). Emotions, and especially powerful, violent emotions such as rage are importantly keyed in to our sense of justice, and need to be taken seriously as sources of political agency. Indeed, interweaving quotations from Noam Chomsky, Arendt reads claims to rational detachment and dispassionate objectivity in the established political class in the 1960s, particularly in light of the Vietnam War, as evidence of a loss of contact with reality:

Absence of emotions neither causes nor promotes rationality. “Detachment and equanimity” in view of “unbearable tragedy” can indeed be “terrifying,” namely, when they are not the result of control but an evident manifestation of incomprehension. In order to respond reasonably one must first of all be “moved,” and the opposite of emotional is not “rational,” whatever that may mean, but either the inability to be moved, usually a pathological phenomenon, or sentimentality, which is a perversion of feeling.

(*Crises of the Republic* 161)

Here, then, is a final sense of movement in politics that I want to explore in this essay: the political importance of being moved, of emotion, and the powerful connection to comprehension that Arendt stakes out

for it. Chomsky, in *American Power and the New Mandarins* from which Arendt borrows here, is discussing the relation between a “façade of toughmindedness and pseudoscience” and “intellectual vacuity” in debates about the Vietnam War. Arendt’s point is to take the critique of objectivity and detachment into an endorsement of rage as a political sentiment, and to link it to a rational apprehension of injustice. Being moved – feeling passion or rage – is not the opposite of reason, but the first step towards a rational engagement with the world, “whatever that may mean.” The real opposite of reason is emotionless detachment, which appears here as a rearguard attempt to give the appearance of being in control in situations of terror. Rage, instead, is a healthy symptom of the political self’s desire to push beyond any complacent sense that things are, fundamentally, as they should be. But the question remains: how is rage to be converted into a rational judgement of the world, or how is it to contribute to a transformation of the world in line with the sense of justice that it anticipates? Arendt claims to take the rage of Black Power seriously as a political sentiment, but this manifests itself in her argument as an excessive bluntness, a deliberate tactlessness even, that wants to undermine the claim of Black Power to speak for the black community by pointing out that what it is really interested in is destroying civil society. Yet we are asked to think that pointing this out will offer a contribution to the rationalization of black rage.

Hannah Arendt’s response to the Black Power movement in *On Violence* suggests that, at the close of the 1960s, she could scent identity politics on the wind; clearly, too, she did not like it. Yet Arendt’s endorsement of rage also suggests that she recognized the way that political subjectivity is founded in racial and class identities, and that this founding determines the kinds of political judgements that it becomes possible to make. Undoubtedly Arendt still hankered after an enlightenment political discourse of cosmopolitan, free, disinterested judgements, but she also knew that any possible political judgement in the modern world is arrived at through the prism of identity and the emotions that make it up. Sometimes, under duress (and especially when writing about racial segregation), she even invoked her own Jewishness and her (brief) first-hand experience of Nazi rule, to show her sympathy with black Americans. Identity, for Arendt, is not a-political but on the way to politics.

Arendt also thought that Marxist ideas of ideology and class interest, which were being revived at the same time as she worked on *On Violence* by Louis Althusser in his influential essay on ideological state apparatuses, could not account for the central political experience of the twentieth century, which was movement. Movement, in Hannah Arendt, roams beyond the bounds of the state since it abandons any particular,

worldly interest, and blurs the boundaries between different selves and identities, since it connects up political subjects with others by way of political emotion. It is literary writing, I have been arguing, and the power of storytelling, which can describe these movements to us. So too, it is the failure of the political tradition to account for the politics of emotions – a failure that Arendt overcomes through recourse to literary examples – that has served poorly our effort to understand the meaning of political movement, and the place of passion within it.

References

- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001. 85-126
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994.
- . *On Violence*. In *Crises of the Republic*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 3 volumes. San Diego, California and New York: Harcourt Brace, 1985.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.
- Chomsky, Noam. *American Power and the New Mandarins*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Question of Being*. Trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback. NCUP (Open Library), 1958.
- Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: International Publishers, 1963.
- and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd edition. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et. al. New York, London: Norton, 2010.
- Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd and Other Stories*. Ed. Robert Lee. London: Everyman, 1993.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988.