

Imagination, Political Freedom, and Affects. The Principle of the Common in the Institution of the Political Community¹

Imaginação, Liberdade Política e Afetos. O princípio do comum na instituição da comunidade política

Abstract

This article argues that imagining the institution of new political communities depends on our integrating the role of affects into our conceptual universe of life in common. To articulate this idea, I seek to think—through Arendt’s notion of the principle of beginning—the foundation of a new political community from the political principle of the common, understood as a principle of beginning that inaugurates and sustains political community. If, as I maintain in this text, the political principle of the common is understood as joint action and decision grounded in deliberation—through which people strive to determine together how to live in common—then it becomes essential to reclaim the possibility of new beginnings, based on political freedom and imagination understood in connection with affects.

Keywords: Imagination, Arendt, principle of beginning, political freedom, affects, political principle of the common

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* Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). maytems@yahoo.com

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Resumo

Este artigo argumenta que imaginar a instituição de novas comunidades políticas depende de integrarmos o papel dos afetos em nosso universo conceitual de vida em comum. Para articular essa ideia, busco pensar – por meio da noção de Arendt do princípio do começo – a fundação de uma nova comunidade política a partir do princípio político do comum, entendido como um princípio de início que inaugura e sustenta a comunidade política. Se, como afirmo neste texto, o princípio político do comum é entendido como ação e decisão conjuntas baseadas na deliberação – por meio das quais as pessoas se esforçam para determinar juntas como viver em comum – então torna-se essencial recuperar a possibilidade de novos começos, baseados na liberdade política e na imaginação entendida em conexão com os afetos.

Palavras-chave: Imaginação, Arendt, princípio do começo, liberdade política, afetos, princípio político do comum

Introduction

*“What makes human life specifically human is that it builds a world”
(Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance”)*

I will start with the claim that politics is the construction of a common world. For me, this idea implies that politics consists in an articulation of ends not guided by utilitarian concerns, it is not a means to an end, does not obey instrumental logic, and belongs not to the realm of the calculable but to that of common action —constitutively contingent and unpredictable. In other words, I consider politics beyond the merely administrative or professionally managed activities of a subsystem of reality. Rather, from my perspective, politics consists in that set of actions that make possible the emergence and articulation of life in common. From this perspective, its most important task is the constitution and care of the common world. A world in which political freedom—expressed through action, debate and deliberation with

others—should prevail. Thus, politics constitutes itself as a set of actions that have an end in themselves, and require neither an external foundation nor a strategic end. With this characterization, I seek to underscore the joint action that makes it possible to articulate the common in the political community. The constitution and articulation of the political community should, this is my wager, be motivated by the political principle of the common.

As I will argue in what follows, the political principle of the common, in one of its valences, is a “principle of beginning.” Attending this valence allows me to account for the emergence of beginnings carried forward, to a large extent, by the action of “the many.” At the same time, in its other valence, the political principle of the common is that which sustains the articulation of the instituted community through joint action. Thus, by recovering Arendt’s concept of the principle of beginning, it becomes possible to think the foundation of a new political community out of the political principle of the common, understood as a principle of beginning that inaugurates and sustains the political community. To give account of this political principle, it is important to clarify that I understand the common as a web of relations instituted through the articulation of actions, meanings and concepts emotively constituted and shared. It should be noted that in this characterization there is an emphasis on the emotive-conceptual character of shared meanings; this character, without a doubt, conditions the actions and decisions through which we articulate the web of human relations, that is, the common. Well then, if the political principle of the common is understood as joint action and decision founded on deliberation through which people strive to determine together how to live in common, then—as I will argue in what follows—it is necessary to reclaim the possibility of new beginnings, out of political freedom and imagination understood in connection with affects.

This move—the defense of a political principle that makes the common the motor of action to the linking of that principle with political freedom and imagination woven through by affects—is neither immediate nor self-evident. To argue in favor of this articulation, it will be first necessary to establish the characteristics of a political principle that, as a principle of action, seeks to mobilize with the constitution of a common space for freedom as its horizon. Thus, in a second moment, I will seek to show the inner connection between freedom, understood as a capacity for action, and the affects that drive us to action. A clarification is necessary: in this text I defend a characterization of the affects that is not restricted to considering them merely as psychological states. Affects and emotions are cultural and social practices. They influence

us in both their collective and individual dimensions, yet they are bodily in one sense and social in another.² Freedom, then, can only be understood in connection with the relational and bodily condition of emotions. I hold that political freedom must be understood from its embodied character. In the third and final moment of the argument, I turn to imagination. Hannah Arendt will allow me to develop this reflection through her reappropriation of Kant's reflective judgement. For her, Kant's representative thinking is the form of political thought *par excellence*. It is the kind of thinking that requires adopting the point of view of others and is characterized, as we shall see, by communicability and intersubjectivity. This kind of discernment, which entails "to put oneself in the place of another" depends on the exercise of imagination. Once again, a clarification: I am less concerned with the exegetical issue than with pointing out some of the implications of the use of imagination in judging. Thus, I will address the sense in which the faculty of imagination allows us to open the public space to new possibilities. From reading Arendt's work, imagination can be understood as a faculty that makes it possible to step outside our own viewpoint and to comprehend those of others. However, beyond Arendt's notion of imagination, it is possible to find in it a productive capacity—one that generates new concepts and, alongside them, new possible worlds. What is it that moves imagination to pay a visit to other conceptions of the world, to other ways of understanding the political community, or to ways of living the common in community? I hold that emotions and affects, understood as social, political and cultural relations, can provide this motivation. Thereby, with all the scaffolding articulated throughout this text, I will be able to reclaim the possibility of new beginnings, grounded in political freedom and imagination understood in connection with the affects.

1. Starting from the beginning

According to Claudia Hilb's reading of "*The Principle of the Initium*",³ two kinds of references can be found to the "principle": one she calls "Montesquieuian", which refers to the principle of action and regime; and another she calls

2 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2a edition, 2014 [1a.ed. 2004]

3 Claudia Hilb, *El principio del Initium*, in *Violencia y revolución en la filosofía de Hannah Arendt: Reflexiones críticas*, (eds. Marco Estrada and María Teresa Muñoz) Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2015.

“inaugural”, which refers to the institution of a new beginning, to the inaugurating action. For reasons that will become clear throughout the text, I’m especially interested in the latter reference, focused on the instituting dimension of political action. In particular, I will focus on this dimension of the *principle of beginning*, considered from the category of common action. In addition, Hilb, the Argentinian author, in the text just cited, draws an interesting distinction that she does not, however, develop. This allows me to advance this aim: “On the one hand, I point to the distinction between principle, end, goal and meaning, and on the other, to the particularities between *principle*, *passion* and *feeling*. The first, one could say, is destined to differentiate the principle in its relation to the action; and the second, what differentiates it in its relation to the actor.”⁴ I propose, in what follows, to take up this latter line of inquiry in order to link the principle of beginning with passions and feelings—that is, with the relations established amongst people who act with one another and with the world. I will seek to establish the link between the principle of beginning with the fact that action, driven by such principle, requires people who act in concert and sustain the action—people who cannot be understood in abstract, but rather as sentient bodies with the capacity for discernment and action, who judge and interact in the common world.

If we turn back to Arendt’s proposal, we find that “to act” (...) refers originally to *archein* (to begin, and to establish a rule or to govern) and *prattein* (to bring to completion, to realize).⁵ According to this conceptual tracing, “to act” originally presupposes a person—an agent who initiates, who with their beginning imprints a rule upon the action, and to whom other agents join to bring to completion, to “carry forward” the initiated action. Thus, in the constitution of a space for political freedom, what is at stake is joint action, action in common. To act, to begin, requires others joining the initiator and sustaining the action. That instance—when people join together and act in concert—is the moment in which the singular experience of the “combined power of the many”⁶ is manifested.

4 *Ibid.*, 71. (Emphasis mine.)

5 *Ibid.*, 89.

6 In 1994, Antonio Negri wrote: “The potential of the multitude is not only the power of ‘many’ (*mucho*), but the power of ‘the many’ (*muchos*), the power of singularities and differences”, (*El poder constituyente. Ensayo sobre las alternativas de la modernidad*, trans. Clara de Marco, Madrid: Libertarias/Prodhuvi, 1994, 375). A reflection on the convergences between Arendtian republicanism and the ‘postmodern’ stance of Negri’s neo-Marxism is a very interesting line of inquiry, though one we cannot pursue here.

In this joint action, sustained by the principle of beginning that makes possible the constant building of our common world which, Arendt tells us “(...) is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life.⁷ It is “the world itself, insofar as it is common to us all and distinguished from our privately owned place within it. (...) To live together in the world means, in essence, that a world of things is in-between those who hold it in common. (...) The world, like everything that is in-between, unites and separates men at the same time.”⁸ The common world comes into being each whenever us people are together through speech and action, for a space is created in-between the participants that enables us to find our proper place at every moment and at any location. In this way, rather than some characteristic common to all, the common world is an in-between space that unites all who participate.⁹ Well then, emotions and affects play a fundamental role in said interstitial space.

Indeed, emotions are the motives for action, but they are also constitutive parts of the judgments brought into play in joint deliberation, which encourage new beginnings —those that open us to the institution of new worlds. Moreover, they are a constitutive part of the principle of beginning, understood as the political principle of the common. There are affects and emotions that articulate action in concert for the constitution of a common world.¹⁰ And these feelings and emotions are not merely internal, private, or intimate affections that people enjoy or suffer through in isolation. They are bodily, social, and political relations which, in their articulation, can emerge from the principle of the common and subsequently sustain it. Let us examine this claim more closely.

7 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2da Ed. (Intro. Margaret Canovan) Chicago University Press, 1998, 52-53

8 *Ibidem*.

9 Fina Birulés, *Mundo común, feminismo y mitología*, in *Isegoria*, Revista de filosofía moral y política, no. 49, (July-December 2013): 412

10 It is true, as Antonio Campillo rightly points out, that “(...) the ‘beginning’ as initium is the basis of freedom, but it is also the condition of arbitrariness, irresponsibility, lack of solidarity, violence, tyranny, destruction—in a word, evil, whether the ‘banality of evil,’ which spreads like a fungus over the surface of society (as Arendt says regarding Eichmann and his inability to judge), or the ‘extreme or radical evil’ that can be the extermination of entire peoples or even of all humanity.” (Antonio Campillo, “Arendt, la libertad y el mal,” *Cuadernos Arendt*, vol. 04, no. 08 (2024): 17–39). For this reason (see citation 32), it becomes necessary to seek the articulation of emotions within a *sensus communis* fostered by the political principle of the common.

The common world, product of the political action articulating the common, is an interstitial or *in-between* space. This common world is the space in which we move with one another and act reciprocally. The world is not only the ensemble of created or fabricated things, but also, and most especially, institutions, narratives and shared meanings, senses and shared feelings. Following Arendt's intuition, we can say that the concern to form bonds in common is what defines the *world* [Welt].¹¹ Therefore, there is no world in solitude, no world in singular—only plural and common. Our social and political life unfolds in a common world sustained by a web of human relations. Using once again Arendt's thought, we can characterize this web by appealing to the idea of *inter-est*: "something that lies between people and can therefore relate and bind them together."¹² This *inter-est* can be understood in its objective sense, referring to the worldly reality, but also in its subjective sense, "formed by deeds and words, owing its origin exclusively to the fact that men act and speak for one another."¹³ We owe our capacity to insert ourselves into the world, to appear in the common world and thus to constitute our identity—an identity that, it should be said, is conditioned by these relations—to this subjective sense of *inter-est*. Well then, these deeds and words constitutive of the *inter-est* are intrinsically bound up with affects. Yet, not with emotions and affects understood as a matter of the private subject, but rather as relations articulated and engendered in the common world. Our emotions have to do with the way we receive what affects us. And therefore, what moves us (or does not) has to do with a cultural, social and political matter—that is, to the web of human relations. From my reading¹⁴, it is in the exercise of the faculty of judgment that we seek to make explicit this web which, as Arendt points out, has a "somehow intangible quality", yet no less real.¹⁵ The capacity to judge is grounded in the pre-discursive substrate—something that is, in a certain sense, intangible. Sometimes, this may consist—indeed, in many cases of reflective judgment it does—of emotions, affects, feelings, and passions. Moreover, the interactions—proper to our cohabitations in the common

11 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

12 *Ibid*, 182.

13 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

14 María Teresa Muñoz, "La teoría del juicio arendtiano y la política de las emociones." *Pescadora de Perlas. Revista de estudios arendtianos*. Vol. 3 núm. 3 (agosto 2024b).

15 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

world, propitiated by reflective judgement—must be linked not only to communication oriented towards comprehension and understanding, but also to the relations we establish affectively with others. In such interactions, it is not about reaching an agreement oriented towards establishing universally recognized truths, but rather to extend a way of inhabiting the world fixated in the exercise of speech and shared action—both made possible by the affects that circulate between bodies, and more radically, that are attributes of the bodies.¹⁶ Thus, political action cannot be understood apart from these interactions, whilst it consists in the public articulation of common affairs. In Zerilli's words¹⁷, political action consists in the practice of “world-building” and, in such building, we are by no means alien to affects. In fact, the principle that articulates the founding of a space for political freedom and the building of a common world is made possible, motivated, and articulated around affects, and should be—this is my wager—the political principle of the common which, in one of its valences, is a principle of beginning.

Let us now see what this principle of beginning, understood as a political principle of the common, consists of. As I noted at the beginning of this text, I understand the common as a web of relations instituted through the articulation of actions, meanings and concepts constituted and shared emotively. This web of relations is made possible by the institution of a space of meaning created from joint action and the public expression of judgments—in many cases in conflict. This field of existence and meaning is an indeterminate set, open to contingency. The principle of the common is, then, the principle of political action consisting in *a continuous and never ending labour* of unstable self-production and permanently redefinable of the common. As a result of

16 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 16. Ahmed argues that interactions are not oriented toward the establishment of universally accepted truths, but rather toward the extension of a way of inhabiting the world sustained by shared speech and action, both made possible by affects that circulate among bodies and that are, more radically, their attributes. This approach shifts the question of the common from the communicability of judgment to the affective economy that preconfigures the space of appearance. In Hannah Arendt, by contrast, *sensus communis* refers to the capacity to enlarge one's mentality and to judge from the standpoint of others, preserving a claim to communicable generality. My proposal does not consist in choosing between these two positions, but in joining them: to understand *sensus communis* neither as a transcendental faculty nor as a mere contingent effect of affective practices, but as an embodied capacity whose possibility depends on the affective circulation that constitutes bodies and, at the same time, is reflexively actualized in the exercise of judgment. The common neither precedes judgment nor is reducible to it; it is instituted in the tension between shared affectivity and plural reflexivity.

17 Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, 46

this principle, a space for cohabitation is generated in which the participants autonomously and jointly establish strategies and norms to administer and make use of the common good.¹⁸ These norms and strategies do not remain stable but rather are constantly modified as the community is nourished by new members. From this perspective, the common is neither a set of common goods nor a set of institutions; but above all, it exists outside identifications grounded in exception and framed as ‘for-all’ solutions. It is a space of meaning articulated through a web of relations. And, as I have noted before, this web of relations is imbued with affects.

For an Arendtian reader, the link I am establishing between emotions and what Arendt calls the “web of relationships” may appear striking, if not outright contradictory. Indeed, across several works, Arendt expressed her rejection of the emergence of emotions into the public space. However, we should also recall certain texts in which she mentions compassion, civic friendship (grounded in respect, in my reading), anger, or Solomon’s understanding heart.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt describes the sense of reality as the experience of objectivity that arises from the convergence of bodily senses, shared contexts, and intersubjectivity. This sense of reality is at once bodily and plural: it does not emerge from isolated consciousness, but rather in the interaction of our bodies and perceptions with the presence of others. Moreover, we should recall that Arendt’s idea of the sense of reality arises from a threefold experience of sensory communication and has as its fundamental function the anchoring of the subject in a common world. Arendt thus offers another key for thinking this link between world and common sense when she maintains that, just as each bodily sense has its proper object, the object of the *sensus communis* is the sensation of reality.¹⁹

Let us note the importance of emphasizing the emotive character of shared meanings;²⁰ this character, without a doubt, conditions the actions and decisions that allow us to articulate the web of human relations and the space of meaning—that is the common. We may say—taking some liberty with Arendt’s thinking—that “the reality of the public sphere lies in the

18 Christian Laval y Pierre Dardot, *Común. Ensayo sobre la revolución en el siglo XXI*, Barcelona: Gedisa, 2015.

19 Vid., María Teresa Muñoz, *Gramáticas afectivas de lo común. Una crítica feminista al juicio político*, México: FCE, forthcoming

20 Vid. María Teresa Muñoz, “Banalidad del mal. Reflexiones acerca de la fuerza de un concepto” en *Cadernos Arendt*, 4(8), (2024a): 55-70.

simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself, and for which no measure or common denominator can be invented.”²¹ Indeed, rather than some characteristic or denominator common to us all, the focus is placed on an idea of the common world as the in-between (“inter-est”) that at once separates and reunites. It is this space that articulates those who participate in political action motivated by the principle of beginning. This principle must be thought in terms of joint action (or, in the characterization established here, in terms of the political principle of the common) that allows the reiterated unfolding of *new beginnings*.

2. Embodied freedom

The freedom at stake in these new beginnings is the one understood as participation in common affairs, and capacity to fund and give life to a new space for the exercise of political life in community. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt offers some interesting clues for deepening the notions of “freedom” and “new beginnings”. For her:

*The new beginning inherent in birth makes itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity to initiate something new—that is, to act. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality—and not mortality—may be the central category of political thought, as distinct from metaphysical thought.*²²

These words of Arendt situate the issue I wish to address, namely, political freedom linked with natality. For her, natality is the ontological condition of freedom and, moreover—as can be read in the paragraph just mentioned—it is also the condition of political coexistence. This is why the root of political action lies in this category. Natality foregrounds the fact that us, human beings are capable of initiating something new in a world that precedes us but, at the same time depends on the arrival of novelty and on the contingency that such novelty entails. Again, in Arendt’s words: “The miracle that saves the world,

21 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 57.

22 *Ibid*, 9.

the sphere of human affairs, from its normal and 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted."²³

Thus, the common world, as a human world, depends on the biological fact of natality. And, the common world, as a universe of meaning, depends as well—and this is what I wish to emphasize—on the action of free beings; it depends on natality. With this idea of natality as the ontological condition of freedom, we are naming a capacity of action that cannot be conceived without having in mind the link between these two modes of natality: the biological and the political. The latter concerns the way in which we constitute our identity. Let it be noted that identity is not the result of conduct governed by the means-ends, but rather the result of appearance in the public space—an area of action and speech—and is conditioned, partly, by the recognition that others grant to our uniqueness. It is through action that people become equal as members of the political community, while at the same time revealing their uniqueness. Identity—personal, singular, and for that reason making us distinct from one another—*shows itself, is constructed, and appears* in the public space, in the space of cohabitation, in the common world. This way of conceiving identity implies a concept of freedom that goes beyond Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty.²⁴ It is clear that I am not wagering here on the so-called "positive liberty," if by it one means to postulate an essence of human nature that can only be developed through the exercise of freedom. And of course, nor is it a matter of the negative idea of freedom sustained by liberalism—or by the moderns—namely: "the absence of constraint, and the specific interpretation that [...] must be given to the concept of constraint is that it consists in an act of interference, by an external agency, in another agent's capacity to carry out 'possible choices and activities.'"²⁵ Arendt's link between natality and freedom gives us clear indications that what is at stake here is not freedom understood as "free will"—a conceptualization in which the person merely chooses among different options that function as motives or final causes of action—nor the "sovereignty" of the will (individual or collective), as an unlimited omnipotence that can

23 *Ibid.*, 236.

24 Isaiah Berlin, *Dos conceptos de libertad*, in A. Quinton, *Filosofía política*, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974: 216-233.

25 Skinner, Q. *La libertad de las repúblicas: ¿un tercer concepto de libertad?*, *Isegoría* 33 (2005): 19-49, at 26.

dispose at its liking everything that surrounds it.²⁶ It is not a metaphysical concept or issue of personal will or intimate feeling, but rather a phenomenon proper to the field of politics “[...] of which we can find traces and signs in almost all its activities, but which nevertheless *comes fully into its own only when action has created its own worldly space*, in which it can emerge from its hiding place, so to speak, and make its appearance.”²⁷ Freedom is then neither a divine nor natural gift, but a capacity that must be made effective in community; and for this, it requires the founding of a civil order that gives permanence to political power. It is about freedom understood as the capacity to found and give life to a new space for the exercise of political life in community. And it is not susceptible to be understood without reference to human *action*, defined as the capacity for something new to appear in the world, on the one hand, nor can it occur in solitude, on the other. For this reason, freedom is instituted at the same time as the public space is instituted which—again, in Arendtian terms—is a space of appearance and a common world.²⁸ Thus, the founding of a new order is closely linked to the possibility of beginning something new proper to agents as they appear in the public space—that is, with natality.²⁹ It is natality that allows agents to insert themselves into the world, and moreover, that makes possible the renewal of the world itself, which would otherwise perish along with the death of the members of the political community. Natality implies the possibility of novelty, for “without action to bring into the play of the world the new beginning of which every man is capable by the fact of being born, ‘there is nothing new under the sun.’”³⁰ Thus, freedom is the capacity to act and, with it, to appear and

26 Within the conceptual framework of traditional philosophy, it is quite difficult to grasp that freedom and non-sovereignty can coexist—or, to put it another way, that freedom might have been granted to human beings on the condition of the existence of non-sovereignty.” (Hannah Arendt, *What Is Freedom? in Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought*, NY: The Viking Press, 1961, 160).

27 Hannah Arendt, *What is Freedom?*, 164. Italics mine.

28 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 194.

29 This is a widely debated concept. In particular, it has gained attention among those who seek to link Arendt's political thought with biopolitics. (Miguel Vatter, *Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt*, *Revista de Ciencia Política* XXVI, no. 2 (2006): 137–159; and Laura Quintana, *Vida y política en el pensamiento de Hannah Arendt*, *Revista de Ciencia Política* XXIX, no. 1 (2009): 185–200). See also a critical perspective on biopolitical readings: Juan José Fuentes, *Vida, natalidad y libertad en Hannah Arendt: Objeciones a ciertas lecturas biopolíticas del pensamiento arendtiano*, *Isegoria* 44 (January–June 2011): 239–255.

30 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

to begin something new, unforeseen and spontaneous.³¹ Such beginning of something new is not guided by an ideal of personal flourishing: the agent in the space of appearance is not a “maker of itself.” There is no human essence to pursue or attain. It is in spontaneous action, in the speeches and actions of agents, that self-realization takes place—and it would not be possible were the space of appearance not shared with others. Thus, following Arendt’s thought, I situate the political action, and the self-realization of the members of the political community in the middle of a web of human relations, so that the realization of action is necessarily the realization of the human condition of plurality, and at the same time, the realization of identity is a process in which the gaze and recognition of others are indispensable.³²

In the essay “What is Freedom?” Arendt affirms that “freedom is in fact the reason why men live together among a political organization. Without it, political life would have no meaning. The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and the field in which it is applied is action.”³³ Thus, political freedom is also the mode of being in the public space; it is the exercised condition of appearing that, moreover, equips the person with a public, political identity. The exercise of freedom requires the company of others who are in the same situation, and a common public space in which common affairs can be addressed—in other words, a politically organized world in which each free being may insert themselves through word and deed.³⁴

In this retrieval of Arendt’s proposal, I find no reference to affects. It seems like the members and founders of the political community, called to the exercise of political freedom, were incorporeal beings, alien to feelings, emotions and affects. Although, it is interesting to note how, in the defense of this idea of freedom, bodies slip into Arendt’s account:

31 *Ibid.*, 201.

32 This notion of plurality is fundamental in order not to confuse Arendt’s approach (and, with it, my own) with the political pluralism of representative democracies. Plurality is constitutive of the human condition, of the singularity of each agent in their action; and because of this, the public space is understood by Arendt as a sphere permeated by diversity. This means that it is a space for the expression of diverse identities and for commonality, and not a space where distinct individuals merely coexist and tolerate each other. Rather, plurality is an ontological condition of agents in their appearance in the public space, and cannot be confused with the pluralism of conceptions of good.

33 Hannah Arendt, *What is Freedom?*, 143.

34 *Ibid.*, 160.

*Freedom is a worldly reality, expressible in words that can be heard, in deeds that can be seen, and in events that are spoken of, remembered, and turned into narratives before, finally, being incorporated into the great book of tales of human history.*³⁵

These references to words that can be heard and to deeds that can be seen attest to the need to broaden this conceptualization of political freedom from the ontological condition of human plurality, and this — according to my proposal — necessarily entails incorporating the phenomenic condition, that is, corporeality.

Indeed, as Arendt proposes, we are all subjects with the capacity of action, and moreover—and this she seemed to forget or take for granted—we are bodies that interact with other bodies, with the natural, social, and political world. The absence of reflection on the body and her modern conception of emotions are what prevented Arendt from seeing the political potential of affects.³⁶ To remedy this absence of reflection on bodily emotions, I will propose a political view of affects that, in addition, renounces any universalist position in favor of a situated perspective, attentive to the complexity and the affective materiality of the place of experience. Sara Ahmed's proposal, which I will return to shortly, is an opened pathway towards what may be called an embodied conception of affects and, as I seek to suggest, an embodied conception of freedom. Affects, emotions, feelings, and passions are embodied in the bodies. From this position, both feelings and affects, as well as emotions and passions, are relations that affect us both collectively and individually—that much is clear—yet they are of bodily order, in one sense, and social, in another. They should not be considered merely psychological states, but also cultural and social practices. Emotions arise from social relations and are themselves relations. On this point, Ahmed tells us: “Emotions are relations: they involve reactions or relations of ‘approach’ or ‘withdrawal’ with respect to objects.”³⁷ Therefore, they are not internal states immediately accessible to the subject and opaque or inaccessible to others. On the contrary, we may affirm that affects and emotions are neither our properties nor those of others. Emotions are not innate states or capacities, although, we come to feel them as our own. Emotions are not the individual expression of oneself. They are

35 *Ibid.*, 151. Emphasis mine.

36 Autor

37 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed., 2.

about objects and bodies, which they shape, while at the same time getting shaped by the contact between bodies. From this perspective, with which I concur, what is perceived and what is felt does not take place apart from emotions but is inscribed in a “structure of meaning,” in a “web of relations”—we might say, in Arendtian terms—that encompasses the emotional, the affective, and the perceptual. This structure of meaning, this web of relations, has an eminently social substrate. Emotions are cultural practices socially structured³⁸ through affective circuits: on the one hand, they are constituted in the relations between bodies; on the other, they become meaningful through a collective imaginary and through particular forms of social interaction.³⁹

When I link freedom with natality and with identity, I am not suggesting that the human being is free from birth, but rather that birth, natality, the appearance of a new being in the world, is the ontological condition of freedom, the possibility of inserting oneself into the world that every human being has by virtue of the relational, social, and political character of their personhood. As I have been emphasizing, freedom consists precisely in “putting into act” that capacity to act *in the world* and to introduce novelty. Thus, “political freedom is always limited, relative, and relational, regulated by common rules of social interaction that at once circumscribe it, secure it, guarantee it, and make it possible.”⁴⁰ Such acting requires the world in which we are inserted; it requires contact with others. I have shown that this being in contact is given in the relations between bodies, the very relations that constitute emotions and affects. Therefore, political freedom can only be conceived as embodied freedom: freedom of action with others in a common world constituted, articulated, and shared from our condition as corporeal and sentient beings.

Once again, from a canonical reading of the Arendtian tradition, this incorporation of the body—of bodies—into the conceptualization of freedom may be objected to. At this point, we may however turn to the notion of *being-in-the-world* drawn from the phenomenological tradition to which

38 What is more, affects are embedded in the consolidation of social hierarchy, insofar as “emotions become attributes of bodies.” (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 13). Thus, for example, women are said to be emotional, and with this we are ascribed a value—or rather, we are undervalued—in contrast to men, who are said to be emotionally contained and thereby “placed in a position” as rational. This way of attributing an emotion to bodies implies a clear dependence on power relations that endow “others” with meaning and value.

39 F. Mancini, *Reseña de La política cultural de las emociones*, in *Debate feminista*, 51, (2016): 88-91.

40 Antonio Campillo, art. cit., 23.

Arendt is indebted. For Arendt, *being-in-the-world* does not mean merely being located in the world, but appearing within it alongside others, cohabiting it under conditions of plurality and exposure.

Although she does not thematize the concept explicitly under the name of *being-in-the-world*, we can find its equivalent in the notion of the common world—an artificial space of relations, narratives, and actions that arises between human beings, as she indicates in *The Human Condition*. It is not a mere physical environment, but a structure of co-presence in which bodies are exposed, enter into relation, and acquire meaning in relation to one another. This conception, which transcends the individualistic logic of the Cartesian *cogito*, opens the possibility of thinking the world as a site of political appearance, where the common is woven through action and speech. Here, being-in-the-world is always being-with-others and, therefore, a mode of being open, exposed, and affectable.

Judith Butler deepens this intersubjective and vulnerable dimension of being in the world. In texts such as *Frames of War* and *Bodies in Alliance* and the *Politics of the Street*, she insists that human life is inherently precarious, and that this precariousness is not an accident but a structural condition of embodied existence. To be a body—in the political sense that interests Butler—is to be exposed to other bodies, to affects, to institutions, and to material conditions that exceed individual control. This exposure is constitutive of the political, for it is only on the basis of bodily and affective interdependence that a we can be thought. To cohabit implies being affected, being vulnerable, yet also, from within that vulnerability, articulating resistance, claim-making, and judgment.⁴¹

Read from this perspective, the experience of being-in-the-world does not refer to a sovereign and self-sufficient subject standing in relation to an environment, but to a dynamic network of affects, bodies, and significations that co-constitute the shared world. Within this cohabitation, imagination, affects, and political judgment appear as embodied practices that arise from the interweaving of our vulnerable relations, rather than as merely pure or abstract rational instances. As Butler suggests, the political dimension of bodies lies not in their individuality, but in their mutual exposure and in their capacity to articulate new forms of appearing, resisting, and instituting the world.⁴²

41 Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), chap. 4, “Bodily Vulnerability, Coalitional Politics,” pp. 123-153

42 Cf. Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. chap. 2 and chap. 4.

Therefore, to think being-in-the-world in a political and affective key implies abandoning the paradigm of the autonomous subject and replacing it with a relational, situated, and embodied understanding of agency. This reformulation makes it possible to approach political judgments as forms of ethico-political response to the shared world, grounded in a common vulnerability that, far from weakening action, makes it possible. In this way, vulnerable cohabitation becomes the ethical and political ground upon which judgment, responsibility, and the very possibility of the common are built.

The body is not merely the material support of experience. As Ahmed has shown, it is a relational and symbolic space traversed by histories, norms, exclusions, and inscriptions that constitute it in its vulnerability. It should be noted that I am not conceiving vulnerability here as passivity or essential fragility; rather, I understand it as a relational condition of exposure. Drawing on Judith Butler's reflections, one might say that we are exposed bodies—bodies that require others in order to be sustained, protected, and recognized. From this perspective, politics cannot be reduced to disembodied rational deliberation, since it is already a response to that constitutive exposure that casts us into the common world.

This perspective makes it possible to extend the Arendtian idea of freedom. If political action takes place among bodies that appear and affect one another, then freedom cannot be conceived apart from its material embodiment. Natality not only inaugurates the capacity to begin, but also the condition of being exposed, vulnerable, and interconnected bodies. In this sense, political freedom is neither an ethereal phenomenon nor a merely discursive one, but a situated practice embedded in the web of affective relations that sustain the common world. We may speak, then, of embodied freedom: a praxis of acting with others that combines speech, affect, and body, and that requires the public space in order to become effective. This freedom is sustained by plurality and nourished by the capacity to imagine, judge, and feel in common. It is not reducible to individual choices or to the sovereignty of the will; it emerges from the vulnerable cohabitation that constitutes political life.

3. Imagining through affects

Having shown the role of affects in the constitution of spaces for freedom (the first section) and, moreover, having defended the embodied condition of political freedom (the second section), it is now necessary to explore the role of imagination in the exercise of freedom. To this end, I retrieve Arendt's view

of reflective judgment as drawn from Kant's Critique of Judgment.⁴³ This will allow me to show that our capacity for judgment is also intertwined with our bodily, sentient, affective condition.

As it is well known, Kant establishes a distinction between determining judgments and reflective judgments. In the latter, one adopts an opinion which, although mediated by the place the judging person has in the shared world, derives its validity from the common sense shared with others as we share the world: the *sensus communis*. Despite differences of judgment, we recognize ourselves as members of a community.

It is now pertinent to emphasize, in the interest of my argument, that the fundamental feature of this model of judgment is that it operates without the mediation of a concept. The Kantian faculty of aesthetic judgment is a particular faculty of judging objects according to a rule, but not according to concepts. In Kant's words: "Taste may even be defined as the faculty of judging that which makes *our feeling*, with regard to a given representation, universally communicable and without the mediation of a concept."⁴⁴ The judgment of taste thus claims universal validity while being a judgment about the particular. The faculty of thinking the particular must reveal generality, "as if" the validity for one subject were to refer to universal validity. It is important to note, however, that such validity is not justified in the object judged. Put briefly, the aesthetic judgment does not refer to the objectivity of objects, but rather to the subjectivity of the subject: it is not a judgment of knowledge but of *subjective liking*.⁴⁵ It is therefore a kind of disinterested judgment, which pleases without concepts and is the object of a universal satisfaction: "In other words, a judgment of taste must presuppose a claim to subjective universality."⁴⁶ This notion of validity is fundamental to the recovery I now intend to make of the link between imagination, emotions, and concepts.

43 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Including the First Introduction translated, with an Introduction, by Werner S. Pluhar with a Foreword by Mary J. Gregor) Hackett Publishing Company Indianapolis/Cambridge. (For references I will use the notation KU followed by the paragraph)

44 KU, § 6. (Emphasis mine).

45 "In order to distinguish whether something is beautiful or not, we do not relate the representation to the object through the understanding for the sake of knowledge, but rather, through the imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the understanding), we relate the representation to the subject and to their feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Therefore, the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment, that is, it is not logical, but rather aesthetic." KU, §1. (Emphasis mine.)

46 "(...) a judgment of taste entails the awareness that all interest must remain excluded from it; it must also presuppose a claim to validity for everyone, though without being a universality grounded in concepts." KU, §14.

What seems to me to have been overlooked in the analysis and discussion of reflective judgments—and, specifically, political judgments—is that they have an undeniable link with emotions, passions, and affects. From my perspective, reflective judgments cannot be thought of as mental processes independent of bodies, which manifest affective dispositions. Reflective judgments are traversed by our condition as bodily beings inserted into a world of relations, of connections that draw us closer and set us apart. How are we to explain Kant's mention of our *feeling of pleasure* (or displeasure) if we do not attend to bodily relations? The answer to this question does not invalidate reflective judgments. That is, to appeal to affects, to bodily relations, does not imply individualizing or subjectivizing judgment. It might seem that those judgments in which passions or emotions emerge are not objective—that is, not valid. Yet we must recall that the validity of reflective judgments does not rest on the same criteria as the validity of determining judgments. It entails, as Kant tells us, a claim to “subjective universality.” To satisfy this claim to universality in such judgments, we rely on two resources: the *sensus communis* and exemplary validity. Kant says:

[...] *Common sense, whose judgment I here present my judgment of taste as an example of, and by which I grant exemplary validity is a mere ideal norm. With this presupposed norm, we could rightfully make into a rule for all a judgment that accords with it, as well as the satisfaction in an object that such a judgment expresses. For the principle, although it is only subjective and is assumed, nevertheless, as subjectively universal (a necessary idea for everyone), could, with respect to the unanimity of different judging subjects, demand universal assent, just as an objective principle could—provided one were certain of having made a correct subsumption.*⁴⁷

Thus, the example is a contingent particular which, in its own particularity, reveals a generality that could not be determined in any other way. Examples then function as models for judgment when we are confronted with particular objects or events. Reflective judgments rely on examples.⁴⁸ Exemplary

47 KU, § 22

48 With regard to exemplary validity, Arendt presents several cases to illustrate how examples function in responding to the validity of political reflective judgments. She maintains that, if we were Greeks, the rule for judging whether someone had acted bravely would be the example of Achilles, and Christians would take Jesus as the example of goodness. (Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* Edited by Ronald Beiner, University of Chicago Press, 1982, 84).

validity allows the chosen examples to reveal a generality that could not be determined in any other way.⁴⁹ When a rule cannot be applied to particular events, exemplary validity allows the particular itself to reveal the universal rule which, otherwise, would not be revealed.⁵⁰ For this exercise to be possible, productive imagination must come into play. In this way, imagination not only produces its own laws but also *activates concepts*, and this makes it possible to render judgments general. Arendt recovered the Kantian notion of imagination [*Einbildungskraft*], understanding it as that human capacity which enables us to go beyond the private conditions of our judgment in order to make other interlocutors present. Without this capacity, she remarks, human beings could not turn to *examples* to forge rules that help them distinguish right from wrong in moments where criteria are nonexistent.

I will now return to these two resources—the *sensus communis* and exemplarity—and show how the interpretation of reflective judgments is entirely transformed if we “traverse” them with emotions understood as social relations embodied in bodies. Emotions which, as we shall see, take shape from concepts.

As I have noted, in reflective judgment the point is not to qualify the perception of an object according to its properties as established in a prior concept, but rather through the evaluation the subject makes of the object. And such evaluation can attain general validity if it proves intelligible and communicable. The practice of reflective judging, the exchange of judgments, involves not only the relations between the “contents” of reflective judgments but also the relations between “persons”—what is more, between bodies that communicate. The content of judgments must be understood in terms of the social dimension of what is communicated. Indeed, reflective judgments are evaluative and move us to act (or not) in one direction or another. These judgments draw on examples which, like walkers, allow imagination to generate a rule without which communication would not be possible. We generate new concepts through reflective judgments.

49 Let us recall that at this point Arendt speaks of generality and not of universality. (*Lectures*, 67).

50 Arendt says: “What makes particulars communicable is: (a) that in perceiving a particular we have, in the back of our minds, (...) a ‘schema’ whose ‘form’ is proper to many similar particulars; and (b) this schematic form is found in the minds of quite a number of different people. Such schematic forms are products of the imagination, although a schema ‘cannot be brought into any image.’ B181 All singular agreements or disagreements presuppose that we are speaking of the same thing; that we, who are many, agree that something is one and the same for all.” (*Lectures*, 69).

Thus, the communal sense or *sensus communis* is sustained by the web of human relations I discussed in the first section of this essay. In the exercise of the faculty of discernment, the resulting judgment gathers the feelings and the affects articulated within the web of human relations and makes them explicit through concepts. Let us note that, as I have pointed out, following Ahmed, emotions and affects are generated by the relations we establish with the world, with objects, and with bodies. These relations are articulated in cultural and social practices, and are closely linked to inclinations or dispositions that become solid over time, predisposing us to subsequent emotions—that is, to being affected (or not) in a certain way. When we receive an impression, we “shape it” —that is, we conceptualize the affect or emotion and find ourselves moved (or not) to act. And this possibility of conceptualization is given by our own insertion into that world of concepts, categories, norms, and so on. Disposition and motivation (and with them, emotions and affects) cannot be separated from reason in the process of judgment. There is no fracture between affects and judgment insofar as the latter expresses, communicates—through the concept—that which lies in the pre-discursive substrate. And, as I have already noted, it is there that emotions, passions, and affects lie. For this reason, I claim that concepts are the form of affects.

On the other hand, concepts—at least in the context of social and political life—get their force from affects. When I affirm that affects are the force of concepts,⁵¹ I am referring to two fundamental elements: their relational condition and their mobilizing character. Emotions are relations we establish with each other, which, as Sara Ahmed has said, involve reactions or relations of “approach” or “withdrawal” with respect to objects.⁵² Strictly speaking, emotions are not merely psychological states but cultural and social practices that involve concepts. These practices move us.

The point now is to note that in the process of judgment imagination precedes judgment—not the determining kind that subsumes the particular under a previously established universal, but the reflective kind that does not presuppose a universal in order to posit a particular judgment. Let us recall that Kant establishes these distinctions in order to deal with aesthetic judgment, and Arendt retrieves them to think of political judgment. With her

51 Fernanda Cruz, “Formas y fuerzas: un acercamiento sobre el juicio reflexionante y el problema” *del afecto*, (Forms and forces: an approach about reflective judgment and the problem of affects) in *Pensamiento al margen*. Revista digital de ideas políticas, no. 16 (2022): 166–182.

52 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*,¹³

we can argue that, although political judgment is subjective, it nevertheless aspires to generality.⁵³ In this sense, political judgment refers not only to opinions but also to the discrimination of the validity of opinions through communicability. Thus, this kind of judgment does not aspire to universal truth, as logical reasoning does, but to general assent, to agreement. How is this possible? Through the work of imagination in reflective judgments. In such judgments, productive imagination activates concepts and succeeds in rendering judgments general by facilitating their universal communicability. Imagination not only produces its own laws, but also activates concepts and this makes it possible to render judgments general. One might ask: what is the mechanism that imagination sets in motion when we turn an example—let us say, Gandhi—into the “walker” that, in the manner of schemata, allows us to say of someone that they are peaceful? According to Arendt, we have the example “in the depths of the mind.”⁵⁴ Although Arendt explains communicability through the presence of schematic forms produced by the imagination and shared among a plurality of judging subjects⁵⁵, my approach radicalizes this move. These forms are not understood here as relatively stable conditions of possibility for judgment, but as contingent effects of historically situated social and political practices. What enables subjects to refer to “one and the same” is not a transcendental structure silently grounding agreement, but an ongoing process of articulation through which a common world is instituted. The *sensus communis*, therefore, is not presupposed by judgment; it emerges from practices that are affective, relational, and political. In my view, we have gathered a series of meanings that are articulated with affects and emotions, which have accumulated over time as a form of value.

From the theory of affects I am retrieving, emotions cannot be thought of as the product of mental processes expressed propositionally—processes that would be independent of bodies, which display non-conceptual affective dispositions. But, nor can emotions and affects be thought of as mental or bodily dispositions detached from concepts. It is concepts that shape and express affects. It is in this sense that I affirm that concepts are the form of affects. Affects, feelings, and emotions are not simply about objects or subjects; they involve

53 It is important to emphasize that Arendt dispenses with the notion of universality used by Kant and replaces it with the notion of generality. This is due to her concern to emphasize the non-necessity of political judgments.

54 Hannah Arendt, *Lectures*, 84.

55 Hannah Arendt, *Lectures*, 69.

cognitive evaluations of bodies, whether these be objects or subjects. In the process of discernment, the exchange of judgments involves not only the relations between the “contents” of reflective judgments—say, the mental representation of Gandhi—but also the relations between “persons,” or rather, between bodies that communicate, relate, and connect. Concepts—especially political—are, to a large extent, expressions of affects. Thus, it is possible to argue that the judgments in which political concepts come into play are constitutively affective. Moreover, this character pertains not only to our particular affects but also to those that sustain our political imaginary, our human relations, and the *sensus communis* that makes possible not only our affective openness to the shared world, but also the ongoing constitution of the common world.

In judging, we retrieve concepts that are, to a large extent, expressions of affects—not only of our particular affects but also of those that sustain our political imaginary, our *sensus communis*. Political emotions are relations we forge with our shared world, a world shaped by bonds and relations that are, themselves, affective. As I noted above, reflective judgments operate without pre-established concepts; they require the generation of a rule from an example. Through the exercise of imagination, we bring forth a concept. Yet the imagination at work here is not reproductive imagination, but rather productive and creative imagination. What moves this imagination? Affects activate and mobilize it. Political concepts are collective representations—think of “law,” “well-being”, “contract”, “democracy”, and so on—that may be regarded as tools, as “walkers.” Judgment about each particular political situation depends on the use of these walkers in accordance with the communal sense, or *sensus communis*, shared by the political community. This communal sense is sustained and mobilized by affective relations.

Once again, a reader well-versed in Arendt⁵⁶ might object that she did not take into consideration the role of feelings and emotions when she drew upon the Kantian conception of reflective aesthetic judgment in order to propose her account of political judgment. This objection is significant, since Arendt emphasizes disinterestedness and impartiality—features that seem to stand in tension with the claim that feelings play a decisive role in political judgment.

56 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this and the previous clarifications, which have enabled me to articulate my heterodox interpretation of Arendt's thought more clearly.

Indeed, for Arendt disinterestedness is impartiality, and impartiality requires distance:

Only what moves and affects in representation—when one can no longer remain affected by immediate presence, when one is not involved, as the spectator was not involved in the actual events of the French Revolution—can be judged as good or bad, important or irrelevant, beautiful or ugly, or something in between. At that point one speaks of judgment and no longer merely of taste, because although it still affects as a matter of taste, the proper distance has now been established through representation: the removal, the lack of involvement, or the disinterestedness required to approve or disapprove, to assess something at its proper worth. By distancing the object, the conditions for impartiality are established.⁵⁷

At this point, Arendt remains closely aligned with the Kantian understanding of impartiality as a form of distancing. What is often overlooked in this tradition, however, is that reflective judgment is not an isolated mental operation: it is traversed by affects. We cannot account for the Kantian “feeling of pleasure or displeasure” without attending to our embodied and relational condition. Emotions, as Ahmed reminds us, are modes of relation: orientations of approach or withdrawal in relation to objects and bodies. They are not private states, but social and cultural practices that link us to a shared world. Here lies a point of divergence between my perspective and the Arendtian one: in my reading, reflective judgments both express affects and, at the same time, configure them in concepts.

In this sense, it may be affirmed that concepts are the form of affects, and that affects constitute the moving force of political concepts.⁵⁸ From this perspective, Arendtian representative thinking can be reread, in light of these contributions, as a situated practice that not only enlarges perspectives but also reconfigures the affects and the frames that make the appearance of a common world possible. It is here that its critical and transformative force resides.

57 Arendt, *Lectures*, 68.

58 Vid. Muñoz, “Juicios políticos apasionados y democracia de los afectos. Reflexiones desde la teoría del juicios y el giro afectivo”, *Isegoria. Revista de Filosofía moral y política* N.º 70, enero-junio, 2024, 1418 ISSN-L: 1130-2097 | ISSN: 1988-8376 <https://doi.org/10.3989/isegoria.2024.70.1418>.

The capacity to judge (in the case of reflective judgments) helps us orient ourselves in the world, giving experiential meaning to what affects and moves us, without reducing it to a concept, a law, or a rule. In this process, imagination plays a central role: it is the faculty that allows us to represent what is no longer present, or what is absent and lies beyond our senses, and, furthermore, it *activates concepts* for reflection and judgment. The functions performed by imagination are fundamental to the institution of the common as a new space for political freedom. By making it possible to “go visiting” other perspectives on the world and by awakening the vital forces, imagination opens us to new possibilities for articulating the common.

Indeed, imagination provides judgment with examples and thereby makes possible not only communication but also what Ferrara calls the “arousal of the vital forces.” That is, exemplarity has the capacity to set political imagination in motion:

*Exemplarity provides guidance and exerts a persuasive power beyond its immediate context of origin—not as schemata do, that is, by supplying previous cases to which the present case may be assimilated, but rather as works of art do, namely, by offering exceptional examples of authentic congruence capable of educating our judgment by exposing us to selective instances of that special pleasure which Kant calls the feeling of “arousal of the vital forces.”*⁵⁹

For Ferrara, this arousal of the vital forces leads to a notion of self-realization⁶⁰ with a strong individualistic charge. From my position, the reading is different: it is a matter of the formation of political identity out of the web of relations that sustain the *sensus communis*. And, as I have already emphasized, this idea of freedom cannot be understood apart from what is properly biological; it cannot be understood without corporeality. It is embodied freedom, made possible by the web of relations that, as we have seen, is woven through judgments, concepts, and affects.⁶¹

59 Alessandro Ferrara, *The Force of the Example: Explorations in the Paradigm of Judgment*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). 30.

60 *Ibid.*, 39.

61 It is on this idea that my defense of a relational notion of the person lies. This is an aspect on which I can not linger here, but it entails a specific difference for thinking the political principle of

Affects, insofar as they are the force of our political concepts, orient public discussion and generate validity. We must not—and, strictly speaking, we cannot—purge them from the public arena. They are part of our *sensus communis*, and it is this that makes communication and understanding possible. Our political imaginary is constituted by political concepts that give form to emotions and affects which, in turn, give force to the concepts. And I wonder: what impels us to use our capacity for judgment beyond the categories or concepts previously established? From where does that impulse arise which sets off the productive use of imagination—that use which makes possible the generation of a new rule for judging a particular? The driving force, the impulse, the very trigger comes from the emotions, affects, and sensations we experience in sharing the world with others. Thus, it is essential to keep in mind the constitutive relation between judgment and imagination, in order to open the discussion on the instituting capacity of imagination through judgment.

Conclusion

After this brief characterization of embodied political freedom and of imagination in connection with the faculty of judgment, it is now necessary to relate this proposal to the political principle of the common, in order to sustain the idea that imagination enables us not only to open our communities to new subjects and new situations, but also to institute new political communities—new communities for freedom.

Imagination can be understood as a faculty that allows us to step outside our own conceptions and to comprehend those of others, and it enables the constitution of political communities understood as spaces that bring people together and accustom them to consider things from perspectives other than their own, as Zerilli suggests.⁶² Beyond this proposal, my concern on this essay has been to show that the faculty of imagination not only allows us to go visiting other conceptions of the world, but also enables us to institute new ways of living in common, to open up new spaces for political freedom. Indeed, the capacity to discern and to understand is always accompanied by

the common. My distance from liberal principles lies precisely in the rejection of the identification they presuppose between the notion of person and that of the individual.

62 Linda Zerilli, *Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason*, *Political Theory* 40, no. 1 (February 2012): 6–32.

the faculty of imagination and, for this reason, political decisions and actions must be rethought in light of the affective condition of judgment, so that they may be activated as transformative actions.

To defend this idea, I need to return to my arguments in the first section, which aimed to link the “principle of beginning,” understood as a political principle of the common, with people as sentient beings with the capacity for judgment. These are the persons who initiate action and sustain it through their acting in concert. I have insisted that being a member of a political community means building a world through common action. Thus, the common world is not given; it is a political achievement that takes root in natality and in the fact of human plurality—the ontological condition indispensable for the constitution of a common world. Let us recall that the absence of plurality supposes the homogeneity characteristic of mass societies—those in which life proceeds automatically, those that *have lost the world*. Moreover, from the position I uphold, natality is understood as the ontological condition of political freedom and political coexistence. As the capacity for something new to occur in the world, natality allows us to think the very possibility of the new. However, this novelty cannot be conceived as the act of a demiurge instituting totality out of nothing, but rather as a spontaneous act that allows us to appear and to begin something new, and furthermore, in its political sense, to insert ourselves through word and deed into a space of appearance where others are present, thereby acquiring our identity. These others are not abstract entities but sentient bodies endowed with the capacity for judgment.

Therefore, the common world is built not only through different perspectives but also through imaginative acts of feeling, thinking, and judging that take plurality into account. This idea of the common world reminds us that the political character of any human practice does not lie in the practice itself, but is created through common action. And to act, as we have seen, is to begin, to initiate something, and for that beginning to be “carried” by others so that it becomes a rule of action. Joint action should be driven and articulated by a political principle—“a principle of beginning”—that, through collective action and deliberation, enables people to determine what constitutes a just way of life in common. I maintain that this principle is the political principle of the common. As we have seen, in one of its valences, the political principle of the common is a founding principle, a principle of beginning. But why this and not other principle? There are those who ground other principles in

different ideas of the good or of justice.⁶³ I hold that the political principle of the common places persons (in plural) who act in concert and initiate and sustain action at its center—here lies the other valence of the political principle of the common. And the idea of person here is not understood as an abstract concept but as a relational notion that involves both the capacity to feel and the capacity to judge. In this way, I have linked this political principle centered on the common as the driving force of action with embodied political freedom and imagination woven through with affects. Indeed, my proposal is to place the focus on an idea of the common world as the space *in-between* (inter-est). In this interstice, in this *in-between* space, the actions and deliberations of those who take part in political action—motivated by the principle of beginning and conceived in terms of joint action—are articulated. Common action is articulated around political judgments constituted in an emotive-conceptual manner. These are the judgments in which the inner connection is revealed between the concepts we employ and the implicit relations necessary to endow them with force, to render them meaningful and communicable. These relations are found within the web of human relations and are, in many cases, emotions and affects. As I noted earlier, this web is made explicit in the exercise of the faculty of judgment. And this does not prevent us from transcending our subjective conditions; on the contrary, it means understanding those conditions as woven through with affects conceived as cultural, social, and political relations. Thus, it is precisely this imbrication of the person—understood as a sentient, acting being endowed with the capacity for judgment—within the web of human relations that makes possible both communication and understanding and, of course, discernment and action. There would be no understanding without recognizing that subjects, in their singularity, are constituted by the condition of plurality and are inserted into a web of human relations. This web constitutes a pre-discursive substrate that sustains a communal sense, or *sensus communis*,

63 For example, the influential proposal of John Rawls, who formulates justice as fairness in terms of two principles: “First Principle: Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all. Second Principle: Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: (a) they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and (b) they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.” (A Theory of Justice, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 53). While Rawls’s framework offers a powerful distributive model grounded in fairness and institutional design, my proposal of the common does not primarily concern the just distribution of liberties and resources. Rather, it addresses the affective, relational, and world-disclosing conditions under which a shared world becomes intelligible and inhabitable in the first place.

understood not *à la Kant* as a subjective faculty nor as an ideal norm, but as an effect of articulation—an effect of social and political practices, practices that—it is important to emphasize—are contingent.⁶⁴ For this reason, this common sense is neither universal, nor necessary, nor transcendental, but rather historical, contingent, and particular. The communal sense makes discernment possible and enables the articulation of action in the public sphere. This *sensus communis*—or, to put it better, this *communal sense*—is not an ideal norm, as Kant proposes.⁶⁵ Thus, the articulation of community must be thought of as an uncertain balance between the *sensus communis* and plurality. This communal sense opens us to the possibility of judging with others without losing what makes us unique, what distinguishes us from those with whom we share judgment. It is from this communal sense or sentiment that I propose the founding and articulating political principle of public life should be the political principle of the common.

The common is an artificial construction sustained by the web of relations developed through action and speech. To grasp its specificity, it is necessary to pay attention to the role played in the public sphere by the concepts that shape the common world and by our representations of it. Political actions and practices are constituted by the concepts and judgments employed by agents. And it is these actions and practices that allow us to articulate the common world. A world that, in this essay, I have characterized as an *in-between* space in which affects play a fundamental role—not only because they motivate action but, above all, because they are constitutive of the judgments brought into play in the joint deliberation that makes new beginnings possible.

The principle of beginning—understood as the political principle of the common, as a rule reiterated and sustained by many, and as action in concert—is articulated by affects and emotions. The principle of the common is,

64 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London/New York: Verso, 2000), p. 80. Kant conceives the *sensus communis* as a subjective yet universally communicable faculty that functions as a regulative principle of judgment, grounded in the transcendental conditions of shared cognition. By contrast, Mouffe understands the communal sense as the contingent result of hegemonic articulations. My position departs from both accounts: while I reject the transcendental and necessary status Kant attributes to the *sensus communis*, I also resist reducing it to a mere effect of hegemonic stabilization. The communal sense emerges within historically situated practices, yet it retains a normative dimension insofar as it orients subjects toward shared discernment within plurality. Its contingency does not eliminate its binding force; rather, it situates that force within embodied, affective, and relational practices of judgment.

65 On the complexity of the *sensus communis*, Alessandro Ferrara's argument in his book *The Force of the Example* is particularly interesting—especially the section entitled “The core of the paradigm: exemplary universalism and *sensus communis*”. 32-44.

then, a principle of political action that—when thought from the Arendtian concept of natality—can only be understood in connection with the bodily, social, and political relations that weave together our practices and our deliberations in common. Our condition as free beings can only be enacted within the framework of our insertion into the world. For this reason, I have argued that political freedom must be understood as embodied freedom, as a potentiality woven through with affects—that is, with a set of intricate social, political, and cultural relations that articulate the web of human relations and, at the same time, serve both as the trigger and the support of the political principle of the common. From it, with the aid of imagination, we can institute new political communities. We can dream of new ways of inhabiting the common.

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Autor

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