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CHAPTER 4

Thinking in Metaphors

Wout Cornelissen

What connects thinking and poetry [Dichtung] is metaphor.

Thinking without Contemplation

The Denktagebuch is a strange “book.”¹ In fact, it cannot be read as a book just as any of or next to Arendt’s “other” books, such as The Human Condition or even The Life of the Mind, for it does not contain any single theory or a coherent set of propositions it argues for. Perhaps it is better to be considered as a collection of “thought fragments” (Denkbruchstücke), a term used by Arendt in her essay on Walter Benjamin. By this term, she refers to a peculiar use of quotations within a text, as having “the double task of interrupting the flow of the presentation with ‘transcendent force’ . . . and at the same time of concentrating within themselves that which is presented.”² A thought fragment is not so much to be considered as a piece of knowledge, the final outcome of a thought process, “a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece forever” (Virginia Woolf).³ Rather, interpreting and quoting is to have “witnesses, also friends” (D XXVII.7.756), as Arendt suggests toward the end of the Denktagebuch. We might say that each fragment serves as a witness attesting to some aspect of, or a particular perspective on, a specific
matter of interest. Arendt’s Denktagebuch consists of many such perspectives, the correspondences and contradictions between which may provoke us to think a matter through by and for ourselves, as if we were drawn into a conversation with friends.

In fact, the fragmentary form of the Denktagebuch makes us more attentive to the fragmentary aspects of her published work as well. Usually, The Human Condition is read as a plea in favor of the vita activa, as embodied in the Greek polis especially, over and against the vita contemplativa, as embodied in “the Socratic school” and especially by Plato. More specifically, Arendt is often taken to defend (the founding of) the polis as “the Greek solution” to “the frailty of human affairs” over and against the philosopher’s remedy of “the traditional substitution of making for acting,” the latter of which had resulted in the replacement of politics—as acting and speaking in concert—by rule.4

We may doubt, however, whether it is in fact the case that Arendt advocates one such theory or proposal over the other. Foremost, she tries to understand adequately the phenomenon of politics—or, rather, “to think what we are doing,” as she states in the prologue of The Human Condition.5 In order to do so, she needs to liberate our understanding of action from the allegedly superior perspective of contemplation. Hence, her aim is not so much to reverse the traditional hierarchy of the two ways of life—raising politics above philosophy—but rather to liberate us from the interpretative framework that is implied in this traditional hierarchy and which has blurred our understanding of the proper distinctions between the diverse range of human activities—including the activity of thinking itself.

Against this background, it is perfectly understandable why Arendt devotes the penultimate paragraph of The Human Condition—or of Vita Activa, as she initially intended to title her book—to thought, about which she says: “if no other test but the experience of being active, no other measure but the extent of sheer activity were to be applied to the various activities within the vita activa, it might well be that thinking as such would surpass them all.”6 In the introduction to The Life of the Mind Arendt explicitly admits that the term vita activa itself remains too much tied to its traditional polemical counterpart, the vita contemplativa. Thought had been conceived of as a mere means to lead up to the end of contemplation: “thinking aims at and ends in contemplation, and contemplation is not an activity but a passivity; it is the point where mental activity comes to rest.”7 As a result of this interpretation, the specific nature of thought’s being an activity had been forgotten. Analogously to The Human Condition’s aim “to think what we are doing,” in The Life of the Mind Arendt
asks: “What are we “doing” when we do nothing but think?” In order to answer this question, she needs to liberate our understanding of thought from the perspective of contemplation—the distinction between which had already been introduced by her in *The Human Condition*—that is, from conceiving of thinking as nothing but a process strictly obeying the rules of logic, a mere means in service of the higher end of contemplating the truth.

Accordingly, Arendt draws a distinction between thought on the one hand and knowledge or cognition on the other, the former of which has always been interpreted after the model of the latter, and the latter of which has always been interpreted after the model of seeing—contemplating—the truth. In fact however, Arendt claims, the “end” of thought is not truth, but meaning. Whereas cognition establishes what something is and whether it exists at all, thought asks what it means for something to exist. The function of thought is “to come to terms with” whatever we may experience: “The sheer naming of things, the creation of words, is the human way of appropriating and, as it were, disalienating the world into which, after all, each of us is born as a newcomer and a stranger.”

In other words, both acting and thinking have been understood after the model of the experience of making (*Herstellen*). To be more precise, whereas acting and speaking together have been instrumentalized and then substituted by fabrication, the activity of thinking has been instrumentalized and then substituted by contemplation. In her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt already expressed this in 1953:

> All making [*Herstellen*] rests upon contemplation and violence. Thus, in the western tradition, by taking its cue from the experience in making, everything has been split into contemplative thought, in which the “Ideas,” the ends, etc. are given, and into violent action, which realizes these contemplated ends by violent means. Our concepts of theory and praxis are equally oriented on making. (*D* XIII.20.305)

While fabrication implies the use of mute violence, contemplation is reached in a state of speechless wonder. What contemplative thought and violent action have in common, therefore, is that they are both *speechless*, that they both entail a loss of language. As a result, we may conclude, the element of “speech” has disappeared not only from our conception of action, including of politics, but also from our conception of thought, including of philosophy. According to Arendt, however, thought without speech is inconceivable: “Our mental activities . . . are conceived in speech even before being communicated.”
In this essay, I will address the question how Arendt conceives of the activity of thinking without the model of making (Herstellen). Thus, I believe, an answer can be found to the pressing question she raises in one of the earlier entries in the Denktagebuch, a question to which Thomas Wild also directs our attention elsewhere in this volume:

The question is: is there a thinking that is not tyrannical? This [is] really Jaspers' effort, without him completely knowing it. For communication, in contradistinction to discussion—“advocatory” thinking—, does not wish to ascertain itself of the truth by the superior weight of argumentation. (D II.20.45)

Three Motifs of Thinking

In order to offer some orientation, I will first introduce three different motifs of the activity of thinking which can be traced throughout Arendt’s oeuvre. All three center on a specific term or set of words, which at some point occur for the first time, and then keep recurring throughout her work, although sometimes in different but still related constellations. These motifs may be characterized as “thought fragments” too: condensed meanings, wandering through her writings.

The first and best-known motif used by her is that of “dialectical” thinking, of the solitary and soundless dialogue between me and myself, the inner “two-in-one.” It is introduced already in “Ideology and Terror” (1953), included in The Origins of Totalitarianism, and remains present throughout her entire oeuvre, including in The Human Condition and in The Life of the Mind. Arendt links it to the exemplary figure of Socrates especially, who engaged into friendly dialogues on the essence of concepts like justice, courage, etc. Although it is the single motif that stays around from the beginning to the end, and although she sometimes seems to identify dialectical thinking with thinking per se, there are two other distinct motifs that can be found within her work.

The second receives a name for the first time in her essay “The Crisis in Culture” (1960), where she speaks of “representative thinking.” It is linked especially to the notion of “enlarged mentality” (erweiterte Denkart) from Kant’s Critique of the Power of Judgment. Whereas dialectical thinking presupposes a duality, the “two-in-one,” representative thinking attempts to “represent” the plurality of perspectives that are present in and constitute the public realm, in order thus to prepare the formation of opinions and judgments about future projects and past events.
The third motif that can be found in her work receives a name only in her essay on Walter Benjamin (1968), where she speaks of “thinking poetically.”13 What it fundamentally refers to is the recognition that thought is conducted in language, and that language is essentially metaphorical. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt devotes two full chapters to metaphor. By thinking in metaphors, that is, by “transferring” (*metapherein*) words we use to grasp visible experiences within the external world of appearances to invisible concepts within the internal world of the mind, we may establish or reestablish some form of correspondence between ourselves and the world. Since it may seem that Arendt’s attention for the importance of metaphor is restricted to these two later texts only, it is worthwhile emphasizing that she already attests to its importance in the *Denktagebuch* as early as 1950, in an entry on “Metaphor(s) and Truth”:

How a phrase is changed back into a word, how out of metaphor truth again arises, because reality has disclosed itself. How without this being-turned-into-word one could not sustain the shock of reality. In this moment, where reality discloses itself and a word comes into being in order to capture it and make it bearable for man, truth comes into being. Perhaps this is indeed what underlies the “adaequatio rei et intellectus.” (D II.25.48)

As we have indicated above, in her later work Arendt will no longer speak of “truth” being the end of thought, but of “meaning.” But apart from this terminology, her reflections on metaphor remain remarkably consistent. As she explains in *The Life of the Mind*, traditionally the “*adaequatio rei et intellectus*” had been interpreted as the correspondence of knowledge with its object, and this “adequacy” had been understood as being analogous to the correspondence of vision with the object it sees.14 Metaphor, by contrast, opens up an entirely different understanding of the nature of this correspondence.

Directly following her explanation of the function of metaphor in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt asks whether we may find a metaphor for the activity of thinking itself, that is, whether, and, if so, how we may understand this invisible, mental activity by taking recourse to a visible, worldly experience. Traditionally, the activity of thinking had been interpreted after the model of cognition, that is, of seeing or beholding the truth. When proposing a different metaphor, Arendt claims that it should do justice to the fact that thinking, in contradistinction to cognition, is an endless activity. She therefore suggests that there is a correspondence of thinking to “the sensation of being alive,” as well as to cyclical motion, both metaphors of
which she derives from Aristotle. Yet, she readily admits that these metaphors are not entirely satisfying, as they “remain singularly empty.” 

Rather than search for an alternative metaphor, however, Arendt directs our attention away to a different kind of question: “What makes us think?”

I have always found this a rather abrupt shift. At least it could be asked in what sense the suggested metaphors are “empty.” For, as we have seen, what had vanished from our understanding of philosophy interpreted after the model of the speechless beholding of the truth is not only the endless character of the activity of thinking, but foremost its intrinsic connection to speech. It is precisely this element that is missing in the two Aristotelian metaphors mentioned. I would like to suggest that our understanding of the activity of thinking should somehow orient itself on or “correspond to” the phenomenon of speech.

**Correspondences Between Thinking and Political Speech**

On several occasions in the *Denktagebuch*, Arendt indicates that just as science (as a form of cognition) is related to doing (making), thinking is related to acting: “Philosophy, or free thinking, is related to acting as science [Wissenschaft] is related to doing [Tun]” (D XII.19.283). In addition, in several entries she claims that there is a “correspondence” (Entsprechung) between thinking and acting (D XIV.30.340). In her Benjamin essay, she uses the same word, “correspondence,” to signify the metaphorical relation between two concepts. In agreement with this, we will now turn to the activity of speaking (as a visible, audible experience) in order to understand the activity of thinking (as an invisible, soundless activity).

To this end, we will first need to acquire an understanding of Arendt’s notion of speech. In *The Human Condition*, it is most clear that acting and speaking somehow coincide. Yet, it is notoriously difficult what is exactly meant by that. Arendt refers to Aristotle, who characterized Greek *polis* life as “a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other.” Yet, what kind of speech is referred to here? At first sight, what characterizes the *polis* is the art of rhetoric, or of persuasion (*peitbein*): “To be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.”

Yet, Arendt says, political speech in this sense presupposes a separation between action and speech, which in the pre-polis experience still belonged together:
speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal, of the same rank and the same kind; and this originally meant not only that most political action, in so far as it remains outside the sphere of violence, is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally that finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action.20

In a similar vein, Arendt characterizes speech as “the specifically human way of answering, talking back and measuring up to whatever happened or was done.”21 What this means becomes clearer in the section of *The Human Condition* entitled “Action.” Here, she claims that the “revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are with others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness.”22 In addition, what they talk about or what they are concerned with in their speech is what lies between them, that is, “the matters of the world in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests.”23 In other words, people do not only speak about something, that is, about the “objective” world which lies between them (inter-est) and which “interests” them, but they also speak to one another, out of which results the “in-between” world of human relationships.

Interestingly, the *Denktagebuch* has something to offer in further clarifying this. Most helpful is a motif which runs through it and which may give us some guidance: *legein ti kata tinos*. This fixed set of Greek words is originally derived by Arendt from one of Heidegger’s lectures on the question “What is called thinking?” that she attended in 1952.24 Literally, it means “to say something about something.” Yet, Arendt gives it a twist: not merely (as in Heidegger’s explanation) to say something about something—a predicate and a subject which should somehow correspond to each other—but in her case it comes to signify: to talk with (or to) others about (über) something or with a view to (im Hinsicht auf) something. In her terminology, the “dative” case (speaking with or to others) is combined here with the “accusative” case (speaking about or with a view to something).

Just as in *The Human Condition*, in the *Denktagebuch* the first type of speech that appears as political speech (*politeuein*) is persuasion (*peithein*).25 *Politeuein* as such is characterized by Arendt as “to bear the fact that each thing has multiple sides (not just two; that is already a logical attitude)” (*D* XVI.20.390–391). *Peithein* is characterized by her as “to push one’s own aspect through” (*D* XVI.20.391). Yet, we now gain a clearer view than in
The Human Condition of the reasons for this type of speech being somehow derivative. For, insofar as persuasion consists in presenting one’s own aspect—”it appears to me” (dokei moi)—as the only aspect—the “absolute”—under which something is to be considered, it becomes “demagogical” (D XVI.20.391). For, in this case one person isolates himself from the legein (speaking with others) in which he had his own specific kata (about) and presents his own aspect against the multitude (die Menge) (D XVI.21.393).

We will now ask how, if at all, the first motif of thinking, that is, “dialectical” thinking, can be said to “correspond” to speech, to talking (Reden) in the aforementioned sense of the legein ti kata tinos. Arendt continues the entry I quoted at the beginning of this section in the following way: “Because [free thinking], as dialogical-being-with-itself, is from the outset involved with others, it has to be communicative—which science does not need.” (D XII.19.283). This passage resonates her answer to her initial question whether there is a thinking that is not tyrannical, and in which she said that thinking ought to be “communicative” rather than “advocatory.” In Plato’s Gorgias, dialectics is conceived of as the counterpart to rhetoric.26 We will pay special attention, therefore, to aspects of dialectical speech that remain somehow polemically tied to certain aspects of rhetorical speech, most notably to the latter’s advocacy opposition to the multitude.

Usually, dialectical thought is characterized by Arendt as “to speak a matter through with oneself” (D XIV.21.392) or “to express and speak something through for and with oneself” (D XIV.30.340). In both cases, it is contrasted with acting as “to speak about something with others (legein ti kata tinos)” (D XIV.30.340), or “to talk about something with a view to something . . . : legein ti kata tinos” (D XIV.21.392). The contrast is clearly twofold. In the first place, in the case of dialectical thought, talking about something is replaced by talking something through. In the second place, in dialectical thought, a plurality (talking with my fellow human beings) is replaced by a duality (talking with myself).

Regarding the first point, in the case of dialectics (dialegesthai), the object (the “about,” the accusative) is absolved from the in-between (the “with,” the dative), and hence ends up in direct accusative relation to the subject (D X.19.246).27 In this sense, Arendt says, thinking is related to “doing” (Tun) (in the sense of “making”) rather than to “acting.” For, here the subject holds on to the object it thinks through, and both the subject and the object become isolated from the “in-between” of the public realm within which people talk with each other about something. The subsequent step, that is, the opposition to the multitude (die Menge) is equally present in rhetoric (pe-
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thein), and from this point on, both rhetoric and dialectics may be characterized as “advocatory: “Who wants to show more than one’s own aspect, turns into a demagogue or (Platonically) into a tyrant.” (D XVI.20.391). Or, as Arendt explains most clearly in an earlier entry:

If one wishes to avoid the “about,” then one forces the other into one’s own thinking; here the coercion of someone else’s thinking arises. What is thus given up, is precisely that which I have in common with the other in the form of the “about.” One enforces a false identification. The coercion exists in treating the other as one’s own alter ego. Without the form of the “about,” there is no conversation. What is expressed in the “about” is that we have the world in common, that we live on the earth together. (D IX.19.214).

In the second place, insofar as the inner “two-in-one” is indeed a duality, it seems thus to be a form of plurality, of talking with another, yet limited to only one “other.” Accordingly, one might say that one experiences the self as “another friend.” By contrast, when Aristotle calls the friend “another self,” Arendt suggests, he inverts the order. For, in her view one is capable of talking with oneself precisely because one has had the experience of talking with others. Yet, even if this is true, she states that the presence of the inner dialogue between me and myself, of the “two-in-one,” is “not yet thinking,” but it is rather “the political side of all thinking; that plurality expresses itself even in thinking” (D XX.13.484). It may be doubted, however, whether the two-in-one may be called “political” in the full sense, for she usually claims that true plurality requires the presence of at least three.28

If all this is the case, it seems that the correspondence of “dialectical” thinking to speech in the sense of legein ti kata tinos is rather limited. The analogy between this type of thinking and speech is in fact a disanalogy. We will therefore turn to the second motif of thinking we traced, that of “representative” thinking. Clearly, this type of thinking represents the plurality of the world in a fuller way. For, when we are thinking in this way, we “represent” a conversation between more than two citizens (all citizens who happen to be present) about or with a view to a matter that interests us all. Hence, in this case, “talking” (Reden) does indeed “correspond” to this type of thinking. In the Denktagebuch, Arendt links it to Kant’s notion of “erweiterte Denkungsart” (introduced at D XXII.19.570, in 1957). Yet, she testified to this kind of thinking already in the following entry from 1953, although without yet giving it a name:
In politics, understanding never means: to understand others . . . but [to understand] the common world as it appears to others. If there is a virtue (wisdom) of the statesman, then it consists in the capability of viewing all sides of a certain thing, i.e., to view it as it appears to all participants. \(D \text{ XIX.}2.451\)

The logical law of noncontradiction (agreeing with one’s other self) is replaced by thinking in the place of others (agreeing with one’s fellow-citizens). Thus we seem to have found a way of thinking that truly “corresponds” to acting in the sense of talking with others about something. Representative thinking, rather than dialectical thinking, “corresponds” to acting and speaking together.

**Correspondences Between Thinking and Poetic Speech**

Yet, if this “political side” of thinking is “not yet thinking,” as Arendt suggested, how is thinking in the sense of “thinking something through” to be understood? We will now need to investigate the third motif of thinking we traced, “poetic” thinking. In this case we are confronted with a serious difficulty, however. In the first place, poetry seems to be intrinsically linked up with the activity of making (\textit{Herstellen}), as Arendt makes clear in \textit{The Human Condition} and as is clear in the etymological relation between “poetry” and \textit{poiësis}. By understanding thinking from the model of poetry, or of the poet who is “making” poetry in his or her room, isolated from his or her fellow human beings, we run the risk of bringing the elements of mute violence (which is inherent in the organization of means to a certain end) and of speechless contemplation (which is inherent in seeing the idea or blueprint) back in. Indeed, in \textit{The Human Condition}, in Chapter 23, entitled “The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art,” Arendt claims that writing poetry involves “the same workmanship which, through the primordial instrument of human hands, builds the other durable things of the human artifice.”\(^{29}\)

In the second place, the poet is usually presented by Arendt as a rival of the \textit{polis}, and hence also as a rival of (the aspirations of) the kind of speech belonging to the \textit{polis}, the \textit{legein ti kata tinos}.\(^{30}\) It is important to understand the nature of this rivalry correctly, however. In her essay “The Crisis in Culture,” Arendt draws a distinction between two aspects of making or work: “The chief reason of the distrust of fabrication in all forms is that it is utilitarian by its very nature. Fabrication . . . always involves means and ends.”\(^{31}\) It is precisely this \textit{instrumental} aspect of work—organizing material as means to fabricate an end product—which threatens the durability
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of the polis, the world. However, Arendt suggests, the conflict vanishes as soon as we take into account the product of art, which becomes part of the world, both in its material appearance and in the fact that it is being talked about by the public. By adding beauty to it, art in fact fortifies the polis, the world.12

We may ask however, whether the latter qualification is of much help. In my view, it is no coincidence that Arendt does not mention any of the performative arts, let alone poetry, as an example here. Moreover, she shifts her attention to the “representative” thinking that is meant to prepare the judgments of taste of the public about the works of art. Instead, therefore, I propose to turn to a fascinating passage in the Denktagebuch in which Arendt says of the “singing poem” that it can “absolutize” without having the same problems as the “absolutization” that is committed either by making (its use of violence) or by philosophy:

The accusative of violence, as of love, destroys the in-between, annihilates or burns it, leaves the other without refuge, robs itself of its refuge. Opposite is the dative of saying and speaking, which confirms the in-between, moves within the in-between. And then there is the accusative of the singing poem, which absolves and releases what is sung about from the in-between and its relations, without confirming anything. If poetry, and not philosophy, absolutizes, there is salvation. (D XVIII.11.428)

Clearly, poetry—that is to say, “the singing poem”—is distinguished not only from philosophy (of the contemplative sort), but also from talking with others about something (legein ti kata tinos). In my view, the crucial element of this fragment consists in Arendt’s suggestion that it is the poem insofar as it is sung which distinguishes it from philosophy and from talking. In fact, this element is also present in several other entries in the Denktagebuch addressing poetry, for instance when the poet—in his capacity as rival of the polis—is pictured as a singer (D XX.10.483) and when it is implied that in poetic speech “there is neither thinking dialegesthai nor speaking-about,” because people, insofar as they are poets, “do not talk [reden], and they do not speak [sprechen], but they resound [ertönen]” (D IX.19.214). We may say that in all these cases, Arendt conceives of poetry primarily as being a matter of oral linguistic expression, though of a different kind than of talking with others about something. It is this kind of speech that is capable of “absolving” the “about” from the “in-between,” yet “without confirming anything,” or, we might say, without being “advocatory,” that is, without “ascertaining itself of the truth by the superior weight of argumentation.”
In order to further determine the peculiar nature of poetic speech, we will turn to the passage from the *Denktagebuch* that I chose as epigraph to this essay. In it, Arendt explicitly speaks of a correspondence between thinking and poetry, and between their use of concepts and of metaphors respectively:

What connects thinking and poetry [*Dichtung*] is metaphor. In philosophy one calls concept what in poetry [*Dichtkunst*] is called metaphor. Thinking creates its “concepts” out of the visible, in order to designate the invisible. (*D* XXVI.30.728).

In order to illuminate the conceptual activity of thinking, Arendt makes use of the analogy with poetry’s use of metaphors. When we combine both aspects—the emphasis on the singing poem and the use of metaphorical language—suddenly other aspects from the section in *The Human Condition* just mentioned manifest themselves. For, Arendt calls music and poetry “the least “materialistic” of the arts because their “material” consists of sounds and words”—note her use of quotation marks here—and she adds that the workmanship they demand is “kept to a minimum.” Moreover, after having suggested that the durability of a poem is not so much caused by the fact that it is written down, but by “condensation,” she speaks of poetry as “language spoken in utmost density and concentration.” The German word for condensation is “*Verdichtung*” and for density “*Dichte*.” While being absent in the English expression of “making poetry,” both words clearly resonate in the German verb “*dichten*.”

Although Arendt does not draw any explicit connection between the activity of *Verdichtung* (condensation) and the use of metaphor, she may have had it in mind. For, one page earlier, she calls “the human capacity for thought” “the immediate source of the art work,” and she says that thought transforms the “mute and inarticulate despondency” of feeling so that it is “fit to enter the world and to be transformed into things, to become reified.” She calls this reification “more than a mere transformation,” a “transfiguration,” a “veritable metamorphosis in which it is as though the course of nature which wills that all fire burn to ashes is reverted and even dust can burst into flames.” Hence, a work of art is *more* than a matter of “making” in the ordinary sense. Arendt illustrates this by citing a poem of Rainer Maria Rilke, “Magic,” which is worthwhile quoting here in full. Consider especially the second stanza of this poem, which simultaneously articulates and performs the power of metaphor in using the visible in “calling” the invisible:
From indescribable transformation flash
such creations—: Feel! and trust!
We suffer it often: flames become ash;
yet, in art: flames come from dust.

Here is magic. In the realm of a spell
the common word seems lifted up above . . .
and yet is really like the call of the male
who calls for the invisible female dove. 37

We are reminded here again of the entry in which Arendt praises the
capability of metaphor to turn a phrase back into a word again, and thus
to (re)establish a “correspondence” between our inner mind and the outer
world.

To conclude this essay, we will return to the question of how Arendt
conceives of the activity of thinking without contemplation. In accordance
with her account of “poetic” thinking, we have searched for an adequate
metaphor. Thus we have found that, in contradistinction to “dialectical”
thinking, only “representative” thinking can truly be called “communicative,”
because of its analogy to speaking in the sense of legein ti kata tinos, of
talking with others about or with a view to something. Yet, “poetic” think-
ing seems to be the only one of the three motifs that enables us to truly
“appropriate,” “make sense of,” or “come to terms with” the conceptual
activity of thinking itself, of thinking something through by making distinc-
tions, that is, by distinguishing metaphors which offer a “correspondence”
between concept and experience from metaphors which do not. Moreover,
the analogy works both ways, in the sense that by illuminating thinking by
the model of poetic speech, we have also been able to draw attention to a
crucial aspect of poetry itself that has hitherto remained less visible in
Arendt’s work, but that subtly shapes her own thinking and writing.

NOTES
1. All translations of German fragments from the Denktagebuch are my
own unless otherwise indicated.
4. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chi-
5. Ibid., 5.
6. Ibid., 325.
8. Ibid., 1:8.
9. Ibid., 1:100.
15. Ibid., 1:124.
16. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 180.
23. Ibid., 182.
26. Ibid., 26 n. 9; Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, XVI.1.381: “Socrates draws a distinction between *technē rhetorikē* and *dialegesthai*: clearly that rhetoric is the art to talk about something to others (and as such belongs to politics), whereas *dialegesthai* speaks something through with oneself or others.”
34. Ibid., 168.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.