

ON RECONCILIATION

A series of reflections on the correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, from 1925 to 1975, as a means to think about moral responsibility, ethical indebtedness, and the role of intellectuals in times of political urgency. These reflections were initiated by Dora García, who was joined by Simon Asencio, Rebecka Katz Thor, Nikola Mirković, Anna-Sophie Springer, Mark Thomas, Yuliya Tsutserova, Etienne Turpin, and Adriano Wilfert Jensen.

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ON RECONCILIATION/ÜBER VERSÖHNUNG
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In times like these, in these great times.¹

In times like these when it seems that a great paradigm shift is about to happen. A time when Fascism advances, unperturbed and wrapped in unbridled capitalism, protecting the few from the many. A paradoxical time, when, however hypocritically, the media is suddenly paying attention to the voices of women ignored thus far. In times like these when patriarchy, finally, seems to be feeling the heat. In such paradoxical times, in times like these, an acknowledged harasser of women and the embodiment of patriarchy holds the highest political office on the planet, while feminism seems triumphant in the midst of its fourth wave. It is in times like these, in these great times, when the private behavior of artists and intellectuals—while previously considered of minor importance—now greatly matters for the reception of their work, it is in these times, that we read again the correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger.

Their letters cover a period of fifty years, from 1925 to 1975, years spanning the rise of Fascism, the Second World War, the Denazification period in Germany, the creation of the state of Israel, the split of Germany, the Cold War; the development of

1 This phrase makes a reference to Karl Kraus's essay from 1914, "In These Great Times," in *Karl Kraus: In these Great Times*, ed. Harry Zohn, trans. Joseph Fabry (Montreal: Engendra Press, 1976); access text online: abitofpitch.com/170-In_these_great_times.

8 phenomenology, existentialism, and structuralism; the birth of Cultural Studies. As an artist myself, I am interested in this correspondence because the relationship between Arendt and Heidegger appears extremely relevant today. I wonder, does it provide a template, a pattern to help us better understand both the historical circumstances of when they were written and the complex issues we are confronted with today?

When they first met in 1925 and began writing to each other, she was nineteen and he was thirty-five. The relation, then, could have been identical to hundreds of student-teacher liaisons—trite and predictable. But she was Hannah Arendt, a young and brilliant Jewish student, while Heidegger was on his way to soaring academic fame with *Being and Time*, and their relationship was anything but ordinary. By 1950, when they met again, Germany had lost the war, and it was she who was a world-famous author and he, an unrepentant supporter of Nazism, had become a pariah. Yet, she still looked up to him and, in what could have been a very clichéd reckoning, even met his wife.

After this re-encounter, they seemed to share a long-lasting, quiet, and mutually supportive intellectual camaraderie. However, this is not entirely true. Heidegger never really acknowledged Arendt as an equal, always downplaying her as just his admirer and follower. Arendt never really made much of an effort to correct the absurdity of this anachronism, instead developing (first in her diary) the concept of *reconciliation* and using

9 it as the basis for her mission to reconcile with Heidegger. Arendt, all at once, made up her mind, and in Letter 48, dated 9 February 1950, she wrote of their meeting:

When the waiter spoke your name (I had not actually expected you, had not received the letter, after all), it was as if time suddenly stood still. Then all at once I became aware of something I would not have confessed before, neither to myself nor to you nor to anyone—how, after Friedrich had given me the address, the power of the impulse had mercifully saved me from committing the only really inexcusable act of infidelity and forfeiting my life.²

→p. 105

With the project *On Reconciliation*, I initiated a collaborative reading, re-reading, again and once more, of this great correspondence. If history is fractal, through these letters, I seek to understand what in their relation then could speak to us now. Their reconciliation happened quite suddenly—though not without problems. And in these great times, times unlike but perhaps not dissimilar to theirs, we too must reconcile.

Today, we might be able to brush off artists and intellectuals who have fallen short of our moral standards, because to ignore them would not harm us, we may not miss their work and, in many cases, we may even thrive without them. But we cannot

² Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, "Letter 48, from 9 February 1950," in *Letters 1925–1975*, ed. Ursula Ludz, trans. Andrew Shields (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 59.

10 ignore Heidegger, even if we wanted to. His thinking is everywhere, in every thread of thought we pull on. And if we cannot forgive him, and if we cannot eliminate him in revenge, reconcile we must.

In these great times, in times like these, when we imagine ourselves as righteous, I hope we might look to the past to speak to the present and find reconciliation the ethical answer to the wrongdoer; because this concept enables us to retain agency and political judgment in a common world of contradicting, and quite possibly *violent*, positions.

“Where one can no longer love,
there one should pass by.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

The work is reflected in the letters—or is it rather the reverse?

—Martin Heidegger to Hannah Arendt, Letter 98, from 29 September 1967

Dora García has been interested in changing perceptions regarding the legitimacy, marginality, and radicality of ideas for a long time, typically regarding thought on the political left and its cultural articulation. She has examined the moral condemnation of the American comedian Lenny Bruce in the 1960s, explored the controversial reception of the anti-psychiatry movement in Italy and France, and made work related to the gay filmmaker and performance artist Jack Smith and the avant-garde author Antonin Artaud, among other intellectual figures—usually male artists and writers—such as Julio Cortázar, James Joyce, and Franz Kafka. A consistent element of García's practice is the reading, re-reading, and re-circulation of their texts. Sometimes literary characters are reincarnated in this process, such as Charles Filch from *The Beggar's Opera* by Bertolt Brecht or Herman Melville's *Bartleby*. As characters are lifted out of the works, and thereby liberated from their respective cultural epochs and geographies, they are reanimated by García into the real, contemporary world either by hired actors or, in some cases, amateurs whose semi-scripted performances or public recitals of excerpted texts act back on the original work, the staging of the piece, our worldly encounters, and their unexpected relays. By initiating these situations that intertwine culture, history, participation, and responsibility, her work addresses the question of the separation of art and life; and, more often than not, the experience of engaging with her work puts the viability of this distinction strongly into question. How does the imagined segregation between art and life, when read and re-read through the intellectual, artistic, literary—namely, *cultural*—heritage of these adopted and augmented protagonists, provoke a rethinking of this separation and its consequences? García's practice inhabits this question in various ways, inviting both viewers and participants to join her in reimagining the culturally inflected terms and conditions of the art-life divide.

In this context, her recent focus on the controversial legacy of Martin Heidegger and his racist convictions comes as a somewhat unusual choice. First initiated in 2016 as part of the group exhibition *Performing Grounds: Performance as Situation, Installation, and Sculptural Intervention* at the Freiburg contemporary art gallery E-WERK, the project *On Reconciliation* unfolded in the wake of controversy

following the first publication of Heidegger's so-called *Black Notebooks* in the spring of 2014.¹ Undeniably underscoring the philosopher's anti-Semitism and Nazism, these notebooks created a formidable crisis of identity for the renowned philosophy department of the University of Freiburg, where Heidegger taught from 1928 until 1946, when he was dismissed by the Denazification Committee (he also lectured there again after he was made an emeritus professor from 1951 until 1976); many among the community of European philosophers and theorists were similarly scandalized by the publication.² Now that a number shocking passages exposed the extent and duration of his views, what would remain of his legacy as a philosopher? Was his philosophy, in its essence, fascist, or was it at least in part a fascist intellectual project? How should these racist statements be read with respect to his philosophical oeuvre? And, is it not precisely the separation between Heidegger's biography and his philosophy that must be assumed to even consider preserving, or endorsing, his philosophical legacy after discovering the racism scattered throughout the *Black Notebooks*?

In this book, García's search for clues about how to respond to Heidegger's legacy is based on a different but nevertheless decisive blurring of life and work: the centerpiece of *On Reconciliation|Über Versöhnung* is a selection of private letters exchanged by Heidegger and Hannah Arendt between 1925 to 1975. As is now well known, the first of these letters was written when Arendt, twenty years his junior, was Heidegger's student and their love affair had just commenced; their resulting friendship and intellectual camaraderie, which lasted until Arendt's death, has been written about extensively as "the love of a century," and even as a paradigmatic "love story in Germany."³ All of the existing letters in the archive of German literature have been published in an edited volume, and translations in many other languages exist. The selection in this book results from García's readings and discussions with her collaborators during the *Performing Grounds* exhibition at E-WERK. They are momentary glimpses into the shifting emotional and intellectual terrain of Arendt and Heidegger's relationship, expressing both personal incidents as well as their respective philosophical concerns, conceits, and reflections.

1 Edited by Peter Tawny and published in Frankfurt by Klostermann, the separate volumes of the so-called *Black Notebooks* include *Überlegungen II–VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 94 (2014); *Überlegungen VII–XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/39)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 95 (2014); *Überlegungen XII–XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 96 (2014); *Anmerkungen I–V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 97 (2015); and, *Anmerkungen VI–IX, Gesamtausgabe* 98 (not yet published).

2 See Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas, eds., *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks, 1931–1941* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

3 See Ludger Lütkehaus, *Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger: Eine Liebe in Deutschland* (Marburg: Basiliaken-Press, 1999); Tatjana Noemi Trömmel, *Wille und Passion: Der Liebesbegriff bei Heidegger und Arendt* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013); and, Daniel Maier-Katkin, *Stranger from Abroad: Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, Friendship and Forgiveness* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

Thus, it is less Heidegger's official philosophy than these private epistles—predominantly letters written by Heidegger have survived, contrary to the ratio of reproductions selected for this book, which emphasize Arendt's voice—that provide a point of departure for the subsequent discussions of a series of difficult subjects: the role of ethics in intellectual production, the relationship between private and political judgment, and the inheritance of toxic masculinity as the legacy of a major twentieth-century philosopher—as well as the recent discovery that Heidegger's racist convictions continued long after the end of the Second World War. The conceptual background for García's project is Arendt's notion of *reconciliation* as an act of political judgment, which, unlike concepts of revenge or forgiveness, allows for a response and relationship to perpetrators that nonetheless still fosters a political project of building and preserving a common world. In García's view, Arendt not only formulated the concept of reconciliation to make the world bearable following the atrocities of the Second World War, but also to rationalize her unconditional loyalty to Heidegger, founded in youthful love, and her lifelong devotion to his philosophical oeuvre.⁴ The concept of reconciliation is thus situated between the personal and political; Heidegger was a committed, active member of the Nazi party until the end of the war, yet he remained one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, while Arendt was a German Jew who fled Europe to escape the Holocaust, and later became an acclaimed social, historical, and political theorist.⁵

Produced as a bilingual publication, *On Reconciliation|Über Versöhnung* includes contributions assembled around the facsimile reproductions of nine of the letters by Arendt and Heidegger, printed with permission from the heirs of the authors, as well as the German publishing house Vittorio Klostermann and the German Literature Archive in Marbach. These central pages are flanked on both sides by the transcriptions of the letters—in German and English translations, respectively—and are the core reference material that is read, cited, and discussed in the essays written by García's interlocutors. It has always been the artist's explicit wish to engage with the letters from

4 Cf. Hannah Arendt to Erwin Loewenson, 23 January 1928. German Literary Archive Marbach, A: Arendt 76.956/2: "Ob ich zur Freundschaft fähig bin, weiß ich nicht. [...] Aber fähig bin ich dessen, was Rahel Varnhagen einmal die 'suchende Treue' nannte." ["Whether I am capable of friendship I don't know. [...] [B]ut I am capable of something which Rahel Varnhagen once called a 'searching fidelity.'" (our translation).] Quoted in Tatjana Noemi Trömmel, *Wille und Passion*, 26, fn. 37.

5 On Heidegger's actions as a member of the Nazi party, see the editor's introduction in Martin Heidegger, *Nature State History, 1933–1934*, ed. and trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 4–6; the editors here make explicit reference to Heidegger's lecture course "On the Essence of Truth," which explicitly calls for the "total annihilation" of Germany's "internal enemies." On these remarks, as well as Heidegger's active commitment to both Nazism and Hitlerism, see also Peter E. Gordon, "Heidegger in Purgatory," in the same volume, especially 87–9. On the postwar reception and reputation of Heidegger, see also Lutz Hachmeister, *Heidegger's Testament: Der Philosoph, der Spiegel und die SS* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2014).

a “human” rather than a scholarly perspective, and this is reflected in the first contribution: an edited conversation between García and her two close collaborators, Simon Asencio and Adriano Wilfert Jensen, about their experience of reading their parts, both in private study and publicly in various performative situations. This piece is followed by four essays: first, Mark J. Thomas mindfully elaborates why a philosopher who has subscribed to a fascist ideology inherently contradicts the concept of a reliable, serious teacher and intellectual authority. Second, Yuliya A. Tsutserova offers a philosophical meditation on the notions of thinking, being, and event, as expressed in Heidegger and Arendt’s epistolary exchange, as her only recourse to achieving a better understanding of their astounding relation. Third, Rebecka Katz Thor ultimately refutes Arendt’s reconciliation with Heidegger and unpacks Arendt’s notion of reconciliation as politically related to her concept of the *amor mundi*, or, the love of the world, in the context of her witnessing of the Eichmann trial in the early 1960s. Fourth, Nikola Mirković, by focusing on Arendt’s disclosing to Heidegger the reason for her not dedicating *The Human Condition* to him, makes a strong argument for Arendt’s differentiated attitude towards him—an attitude of personal friendship nevertheless defined by irreconcilable ethical and political boundaries. These texts provide no easy answers, but they do demonstrate the significance of Arendt’s claim, stated in her televised interview with the German journalist Günter Gaus, that there can be no act of thought without attendant personal experience.⁶

*

As the publishers of this book, we would like to add a few remarks regarding what we believe to be the contemporaneity of the publication, as Heidegger’s views and Arendt’s response to them certainly resonate uncannily with a number of present-day issues. During the two years while we were working on this book, there were many occasions when current events underlined the impetus and broader urgency of this collaboration—events that even felt radical in their forceful assertion of the politics of private life, were frequently morally repugnant, and often politically disquieting, if not extremely disturbing. A selective list would include, among many other relevant issues, the election of America’s current president and the attendant marches and rallies of white supremacists celebrating in the U.S.; the electoral success of the far-right AfD party and their subsequent entry into German parliament; and, the brutality of the Spanish federal police against voters during the Catalan independence referendum. Does the unlikely friendship of Arendt and Heidegger harbor or suggest any meaningful strategies

6 Hannah Arendt “Zur Person,” TV interview with Günter Gaus (1964), [youtube.com/watch?v=J9SyTEUi6Kw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9SyTEUi6Kw).

for facing a world in which repressive, far-right, and explicitly fascist politics are increasingly becoming mainstream and gaining momentum? What to make of her lenient treatment of him now—in these times of a new fascist threat?

Given that these letters also document an extramarital affair between an eighteen-year-old student and a thirty-five-year-old university professor, and then a decades-long intimate friendship between a man and a woman, our reading of this correspondence also resonated with many political concerns about misogyny raised by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. As Claire Dederer asks in her recent article, “What Do We Do With the Art of Monstrous Men,”

They did or said something awful, and made something great. The awful thing disrupts the great work; we can’t watch or listen to or read the great work without remembering the awful thing. Flooded with knowledge of the maker’s monstrousness, we turn away, overcome by disgust. Or... we don’t. We continue watching, separating or trying to separate the artist from the art. Either way: disruption. They are monster geniuses, and I don’t know what to do about them. [...] Ought we try to separate the art from the artist, the maker from the made? [...] Or do we believe genius gets special dispensation, a behavioral hall pass? [...] And how does our answer change from situation to situation? [...] Or are we taking in the spectacle of our own lost innocence?⁷

While their personal relationship was, for Arendt, reconciled, there remains a rather disturbing sense of the power dynamics, opportunism, and careerism that many scholars have discussed in other important publications.⁸

These are also anxious times with respect to the exhibition of work that is, or could be understood, as offensive to survivors or communities who have experienced traumatic violence. For various different and often incomparable reasons, “difficult” art works are removed from view, or their removal or demolition is demanded, as with Dana Schutz’s painting “Open Casket” at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, or the 1938 painting “Thérèse Dreaming” by Balthus at the MET, both of which recently created political controversies in New

7 Claire Dederer, “What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men,” *The Paris Review*, 20 November 2017, [the-paris-review.org/blog/2017/11/20/art-monstrous-men](https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/20/art-monstrous-men).

8 See Ludger Lütkehaus, *Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger: Eine Liebe in Deutschland*; Bernd Neumann, *Hannah Arendt, Georg Blücher: Ein deutsch-jüdisches Gespräch* (Berlin: Rohwohlt, 1998); and Elisabeth Young-Brühl, *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982) and *Why Arendt Matters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006). Young-Brühl’s writing is especially noteworthy in refuting the interpretations of Arendt’s alleged subordination to Heidegger as narrated by Elzbieta Ettinger in her controversial duography *Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).

York. Similarly, the debates related to the exhibition of work by British sculptor and sexually abusive father Eric Gill (1882–1940), and the temporary removal of the erotic painting “Hylas and the Nymphs” (1896) by John William Waterhouse at the Manchester Art Gallery (as part of a performance by artist Sonya Boyce), demonstrate the precarity of the art-life divide in contexts where the work of art under consideration is understood as a product of violence.⁹ While it is crucial to recognize and acknowledge the changing bandwidth of both personal and cultural responsibility, struggles for social justice are often accompanied by the no less fraught challenge of preventing further harm without creating new conditions of political repression. Thus, when demands for justice make the already prevalent attitude of institutional caution regarding the exhibition of works especially acute and politically sensitive, it is too often the voices of marginalized artists and curators that are silenced by forms of censorship, particularly under far-right and authoritarian regimes. Because the adjudication of cultural and political claims in these institutions always occurs in the context of existing, unequal, and often extremely problematic matrices of power, the call for censorship can easily become a precedent for silencing urgently needed and frequently marginalized voices, especially as the political right cynically looks for ways to appropriate the discourse of so-called “political correctness” under a banner of righteous indignation. To appreciate the brazenness of this appropriation, one only needs to recall that Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State under U.S. President George W. Bush, legitimized the invasion of Afghanistan by claiming that the military campaign was motivated by an emancipatory, feminist objective.

Still, there is a sense in which the culture wars of the twentieth century have become a persistent global reality, along with reality television and cultural production more broadly. And, as in more deadly wars, we are all asked to take sides, which involves parsing our cultural and intellectual excitements with the lives of their producers, who are increasingly revealed as extremely problematic—even criminal—figures. Richard Brody, a film critic writing for *The New Yorker*, makes an important remark about cultural complicity in his recent article “Watching Myself Watch Woody Allen Films”:

Of course, the recognition of evil feelings and impulses isn't the sole dominion of criminals, and guilt isn't solely the torment of gross offenders; the virtuous are all the more likely to feel guilt on the basis of ordinary personal failings, the inherent tensions

9 Rachel Cooke, “Eric Gill: Can We Separate the Artist from the Abuser?” *The Guardian*, 9 April 2017, theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/apr/09/eric-gill-the-body-ditchling-exhibition-rachel-cooke; Sonya Boyce, “Our Removal of Waterhouse’s Naked Nymphs Painting Was Art in Action,” *The Guardian*, 6 February 2018, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/06/takedown-waterhouse-naked-nymphs-art-action-manchester-art-gallery-sonia-boyce.

and conflicts of even constructive family relationships, romances, and friendships, ordinary compromises at work, a sense of responsibility for mere day-to-day passivity, willed indifference, self-delusion. An artist who can illuminate those powerful, ubiquitous, destructive, morally complex feelings and dramatize them in a range of public and private contexts, from professional to artistic to domestic, is one whose work is worth experiencing. It's a horrible paradox that the modern filmmaker who explores those emotions most relentlessly, most painfully, and most compellingly is one who is accused of doing things that would give him good reason to feel them.¹⁰

Whether or not to throw cultural, aesthetic, or intellectual production-babies out with the morally inexcusable personal-bathwater seems, now more than ever, a matter of knowing the levels of toxicity in the bathtub—yet these aren't always well known or well understood in a culture that is both obsessed with spectacular scandals and that simultaneously longs for and readily buys into the false promise of purism.¹¹ Moreover, and more disturbingly, the appropriation of the discourse of “political correctness” becomes increasingly fraught as the ascendancy of the political right leads to new attacks on what it deems *degenerate* art, culture, and ideation.¹²

Within this contemporary political context, we still believe that Heidegger's officially published work, as well as his various correspondences, including the letters with Arendt, can no longer be read or understood in the same way following the publication of *Considerations*—those volumes of the *Black Notebooks* from the 1930s and 40s—in 2014. To situate the broader reception of these notebooks, several philosophical positions that respond directly to Heidegger's philosophy and his Nazism are worth considering here—namely, those of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Jean-Luc Nancy.

Notably, it was well before these anti-Semitic notebooks surfaced that Deleuze and Guattari made Heidegger *the* conceptual persona of *shame* in *What Is Philosophy?* Their observations are neither compromised by the *Black Notebooks'* publication nor are they less compelling as a result: “The Heidegger affair has complicated matters: a great philosopher actually had to be reterritorialized on Nazism for the

10 Richard Brody, “Watching Myself Watch Woody Allen Films,” *The New Yorker*, 1 December 2017, newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/watching-myself-watch-woody-allen-films.

11 Regarding the literal toxicity levels of soap, see Alexis Shotwell's introductory chapter, “Complexity and Complicity,” in her book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 3–6.

12 As just one example, Fox News claimed that Kendrick Lamar, and rap music in general, was responsible for more Black Death than racism against Black African Americans; Lamar later sampled these accusations, made by Fox host Geraldo Rivera, on his Pulitzer Prize-winning album *DAMN*. For a discussion of Black Death in America, see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016).

20 strangest commentaries to meet up, something calling his philosophy into question, sometimes absolving it through such complicated and convoluted arguments that we are still in the dark.”¹³ They continue: “It is not always easy to be Heideggerian. It would be easier to understand a great painter or musician falling into shame in this way (but, precisely, they did not). It had to be a philosopher, as if shame had to enter into philosophy itself.”¹⁴ For Deleuze and Guattari, shame enters philosophy with Heidegger, but the horrors of the Second World War also enter into and transform the experience of being human. Referencing Primo Levi, they note: “But, [Levi] says, what Nazism and the camps inspire in us is much more or much less: ‘the shame of being a man’ (because even the survivors had to collude, to compromise themselves). It is not only our States, but each of us, every democrat, who finds him or herself not responsible for Nazism but sullied by it.”¹⁵ Even more importantly, and with decisive relevance for contemporary European politics, they add:

Nor is it only in the extreme situations described by Primo Levi that we experience the shame of being human. We also experience it in insignificant conditions, before the meanness and vulgarity of existence that haunts democracies, before the propagation of these modes of existence and of thought-for-market, and before the values, ideals, and opinions of our time. The ignominy of the possibilities of life that we are offered appears from within. We do not feel ourselves outside of our time but continue to undergo shameful compromises with it. This feeling of shame is one of philosophy’s most powerful motifs.¹⁶

Even as a philosophical motif, how does this shame—both human shame and Heidegger’s shame—intensify, transform, and thereby reorient philosophical thought in the wake of the *Black Notebooks*?

Fundamentally, the publication of these notebooks devastated every philosophical discussion of Heidegger. Because of this transformation, but especially because Arendt herself *knew nothing of these notebooks*, it is perhaps worth remembering, while reading this publication, the extent of Heidegger’s anti-Semitism and how it could further complicate the concept of reconciliation, as well as the separation between thought and life, or between philosophy and politics—both in the context of personal relationships and public action. Would Arendt have condemned Heidegger along with Eichmann if she had read the notebooks? We have struggled with this question as we worked on the

13 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 108.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 107.

16 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 107–8.

21 book and read the contributions, letters, and attendant scholarship, but we turned to Jean-Luc Nancy—whose own work developed from a profound engagement with and transformation of Heidegger’s thought—as the Virgil guiding our descent into the notebooks and their consequences. As Jeff Fort explains in his Translator’s Introduction to Nancy’s *The Banality of Heidegger*,

Heidegger remains an important philosophical resource. And that, like it or not, he remains, indeed, one of the most important thinkers of our age. Like it or not, this problematic figure will forever hold a prominent place in the landscape of twentieth-century European philosophy—neither, certainly, as the only legitimate voice in that landscape (as Heidegger himself seemed at times to believe) nor as an unfortunate perversion of a merely clownish sideshow (although even appreciative readers might see aspects of this). The problem, of course, is that he also was, in fact, a former Nazi and, we now know, a thinker who put the clichés of anti-Semitism to work within his thought.¹⁷

In our reading, these remarks resonate with García’s project and its significance today. Fort goes on to emphasize that Heidegger “was *both* an erstwhile Nazi given to anti-Semitic ‘thinking’ and an incisive philosopher whose radical question was driven by the urgencies of his epoch. Heidegger is both indefensible and not simply dismissable. [...] To defend or to dismiss, then, would both quite gravely miss the point.”¹⁸ García’s work and the book that follows is keyed to inhabiting and thinking this interstice, yet we are compelled to follow through with a brief reading of Nancy’s own interpretation, and that is because he seems, at least to us, the living philosopher closest to Heidegger’s own project, and thus suggests—despite their radically different relationships to Heidegger *as a man*—how Arendt might have been affected by the *Black Notebooks* had she lived to witness their publication.

According to Nancy’s reading, for Heidegger, “the Jewish people belongs in an essential way to the process of the devastation of the world. It is the most identifiable agent of this devastation in that it presents a figure, a form or a type, a Gestalt—the figure of the aptitude for calculation, of traffic, and of shrewdness.”¹⁹ Nancy continues, quoting Heidegger:

The figure of the Jew configures the very type of a devastating necessity: the gigantic, calculation, and a rationality that is

17 Jeff Fort, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Banality of Heidegger*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), xiv.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Nancy, *The Banality of Heidegger*, 20.

busy de-differentiating the world and properly dislodging it: withdrawing from it every kind of ground and soil. *Bodenlosigkeit*—groundlessness, lack of soil—is a distinctive trait of “Jewry.” Groundlessness consists of—or leads to—“being bound to nothing, making everything servicable for itself (Jewry).” Thus no real “victory of history over the historyless” can come about until “groundlessness excludes itself” (*sich selbst ausschließt*)—one can note the euphemistic character of the term, which however can only designate a destruction, an elimination.²⁰

Is there a possibility for reconciliation with these convictions? Where do we situate it as a political concept in this landscape of hatred?

Writing further that Heidegger’s anti-Semitism is drawn “from the most banal, vulgar, trivial, and nasty discourse that had long been scattered throughout Europe and that had been propped up for some thirty years by the miserable publication *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,”²¹ Nancy explains that “Heidegger ties together the deconstruction (*Abbau*) of metaphysical ontology—a grand philosophical gesture that extends and pushes further the premises of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Husserl—and the destruction (*Zerstörung*) of that which and of those who seem to him precisely to be destroying the world and history.”²² As others have written as well, maybe the most striking realization here is to see Heidegger’s soliloquy in the *Black Notebooks* so intensely occupied with a systematic cultural transformation, a “new inception of history” based on the megalomaniac understanding of “what is at stake on *his* terms.”²³

Despite Heidegger’s shocking and often reckless statements—as well as those outside of the *Black Notebooks*—that went as far as publicly exhorting a “total annihilation,” he somehow managed to convince his followers after the war that his professional association with the Nazi regime was merely temporary and steeped in naïveté.²⁴ However, given the extraordinary calibre of his intellect, such ignorance and dilettantism seem especially difficult to believe. As Nancy remarks, “The thinker who was so adept at tracing provenances, whether those of the Greek language or those of modern (technical, democratic,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 23.

²² Ibid., 25.

²³ Gregory Fried, “The King Is Dead: Martin Heidegger After the *Black Notebooks*,” in *Reading Heidegger’s Black Notebooks 1931–1941*, eds. Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 51.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 53, where Fried gives the example of Heidegger lecturing to undergraduate students in 1933 about the threat of an “enemy [who] can have attached itself to the innermost roots of the *Dasein* of a people and can set itself against this people’s own essence and act against it,” and later imploring that “[i]t is often more difficult and wearisome to catch sight of the enemy as such, to bring the enemy into the open, to harbor no illusions about the enemy, to keep oneself ready for attack, to cultivate and intensify a constant readiness and to prepare the attack, looking far ahead with the goal of total annihilation.” (Emphasis our own.)

calculating) devastation, did not ask himself where anti-Semitism could have come from.”²⁵ Instead, Heidegger “recognizes a higher truth in anti-Semitism” whose scheme “merits the support of the most widespread, heinous, and narrow-minded vulgarity because this vulgarity says in its way the truth of Jewish-being, of *Judentum*, the perfectly identifiable entity and identity of the precipitation of the world into vulgarity, precisely and in every sense of the word.”²⁶ Thus, Heidegger repudiates, at the heart of the West, “a foreign body that threatens it precisely because it disperses, dissolves, or conceals its ‘self.’ Dispersion, dissolution, or concealment of self—it is ultimately to these that Jewish specificity is reduced.”²⁷ Or, as Nancy says later, “Heidegger was not only anti-Semitic: he attempted to think to its final extremity a deep historico-destinal necessity of anti-Semitism. That is why, in the end, the displacement of ‘biological’ racism into a metaphysics of the races perhaps does not displace much at all.”²⁸ Indeed, since the publication of the *Black Notebooks* there can no longer be much doubt about the clarity of Heidegger’s racist visions—a “new reality” as he called it, “pushing our thinking into the right path and impact”; he was inebriated by the fascist dream of a national-socialist awakening.²⁹ Yet, according to Nancy, in the end and in spite of all this—and, we should add, in relation to Arendt and her concept of reconciliation—

there is no intention here of refuting Heidegger. Quite the contrary: by designating clearly the way in which he let himself be carried away and stupefied in the worst of heinous banalities, to the point of the intolerable, one can shed more light on what he himself should have seen and what in any case he allows us to discern. Heidegger was able to know what kind of trap is contained within the rage for the initial or for the *archi*-. He ought to have known it. His thought implied it. But in the violence of the paradigm of the initial, the old hatred of self, the old rancor of the West against itself persisted in occluding this knowledge.³⁰

Above all, re-reading Heidegger and Arendt’s correspondence in our contemporary political climate provides crucial ethical reminders for the ongoing relevance of critical practices of responsibility and memory that allow for a better understanding of our own situatedness within the contingent histories that condition the possibility of our actions. “How was it possible,” asks Nancy, “that a thinking that felt so intensely

²⁵ Nancy, *The Banality of Heidegger*, 27.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁹ Alfred J. Noll, “Heidegger vor Gericht!” *Die Zeit*, 28 Dezember 2015, zeit.de/2015/52/martin-heidegger-nsdap-vergangenheit (our translation).

³⁰ Nancy, *The Banality of Heidegger*, 43.

24 the heaviness of a morbid state of civilization could, in the face of the anguish, find nothing but to add to this anguish the imprecations forged by an age-old false or bad conscience? This question is not only aimed at Heidegger: it addresses itself to us, to all of us, to every exercise of thought, today no less than before.”³¹ How, then, does it address itself to Hannah Arendt, and what is her reply?

Again, because Arendt did not know about the statements contained in the *Black Notebooks*, any consideration of her relationship with Heidegger, and her reconciliation with him after the war, requires cautious meditation. And maybe, for us, the question that actually matters most in this context is not how she reconciled with him, but instead: *how should we reconcile with her?* How are we to re-read Arendt’s own political theory when the notably segregated subjectivity that enables her separation between life and thought, and which allows her to construct a philosophical firewall between the personal and the political, also exempts her own mentor from the moral scrutiny she applied to Eichmann, thereby permitting the possibility of reconciliation?³² In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche had already summarized this problem as a revelation: “It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of—namely, the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious autobiography; and moreover that the moral (or immoral) purpose in every philosophy has constituted the true vital germ out of which the entire plant has always grown.”³³ It is precisely this acute, disquieting sense that even exceptional philosophical oeuvres might stem from the banality of all-too-human prejudices—and what to make of this realization *culturally*—that makes García’s artistic practice so crucial today.

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31 Ibid., 58.

32 See especially Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1978).

33 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 13.

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