

# Places and Spaces: The Public Sphere and Privacy in Lina Wertmüller's *Love and Anarchy*

By Hedwig Wagner, Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen, Germany

## Abstract:

Making use of scenic and literary techniques, that is, means of strong intermedial, calculated cinematic construction, Lina Wertmüller's film *Love and Anarchy* succeeds in bringing the private-public binarism into play in a way which oscillates between the two poles. Wertmüller subverts the traditional demarcation of the private and public, which has long served as an instrument of power in patriarchal societies, and mounts a discursive challenge to the pre-defined division of the spheres of public and private.

1 Political and theoretical discussions regarding the spheres of the public and private are an almost classical topos in feminist academic debate. Challenging the binary opposition between privacy and public space, revisionist feminist thinkers have sought to expose the qualified dependency of the political-institutional public sphere on the private sphere, which it regulates but from which it is nonetheless excluded, and to decry the mechanisms of power and domination associated with the division between the two spheres.

2 In conjunction with other scenic and literary techniques, that is, means of strong intermedial, calculated cinematic construction, Lina Wertmüller's film *Love and Anarchy*<sup>1</sup> succeeds in bringing the private-public binarism into play in a way which oscillates between the two poles. Wertmüller subverts the traditional demarcation of the private and public, which has long served as an instrument of power in patriarchal societies, and mounts a discursive challenge to the pre-defined division of the spheres of public and private.

3 Lina Wertmüller's female protagonists, archaic and lusty, and characterized by a Southern temperament and *élan vital*, seem to evade every attempt to subject the film to a political reading. However, to claim that the film were characterized by an absence of the

---

<sup>1</sup> The film begins with its main character Tonino (Giancarlo Giannini) at a turning point in his life, the execution of an older relative for political subversion. After viewing the body on display in what would otherwise be an idyllic rural setting, Tonino is inspired to take over what he perceives as his relative's mission, the assassination of Benito Mussolini. Tonino goes to Rome and links up with his anarchist contact, a highly sought after call girl named Salomé (another Wertmüller regular Mariangela Melato), her brothel is popular with the Fascists and Mussolini's head of security, an arrogant blow-hard named Spatoletti (Eros Pagni), is especially fond of Salomé. Tonino and young call girl Tripolina (Lina Polito) soon fall in love which serves to greatly complicate his mission. Tonino does the madam a favor, and, in exchange, Tripolina gets two days off to spend with him. We soon learn that Tripolina returns his love, and the tragic stage is set. Knowing full well that the assassination attempt, successful or not, will surely mean his death, Tonino is suddenly gripped by fear. When all he had at stake was a quiet life on the farm, he was glad to give it up for a chance at changing the quality of life for his peasant countrymen. But now, having tasted the happiness love can afford, can Tonino really carry through with this suicidal act? Can he truly give up his life for a belief he once thought was worth dying? How will this love affair, Salomé's political will, and the assassination plans play out? (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070061/>; 29/12/06)

political and fails to openly discuss ideology is to ignore that it employs aesthetics as a means of expressing the political. Addressing the issue of space in totalitarianism, the film's pictures thus explore the superimposition of the public sphere by a private world of imagination, of which Hannah Arendt conceived as a history of demise of the public sphere, in relation to space and intimacy.

4 Influenced by Seyla Benhabib's criticism of Hannah Arendt I shall interpret Lina Wertmüller's film *Love and Anarchy* - unique in its new treatment of the borders between private and public - as a play on Hannah Arendt's concept of agonal and narrative action. What, according to Benhabib, should become compulsory exercise for feminists can be gainfully related to the film *Love and Anarchy*. I will pay particular attention to the correlation between the 'history of demise' and space and the public sphere.

5 In her reading of Hannah Arendt, Benhabib develops a conception of the public sphere which highlights the dependence of gender division on the separation of the public and private spheres. In this conception, space is understood as providing the opportunity for action which becomes politically significant, that is, as a location of empowerment and of common action through speaking and conviction.

### **The Binarism of the Public Sphere and Privacy**

6 Writing from the perspective of gender studies, Seyla Benhabib challenges the binarism of the public sphere and privacy. In the liberal state, the differentiation between public and private spheres serves to consign women to the private sphere, which is equated with norms, values and non-generalisable interests (questions of the good life and morality) declared as unalterable and excluded from a legal debate.

7 According to Benhabib, in the modern tradition of political thought privacy encompasses three large areas. Firstly, the sphere of the moral and religious conscience. Thus, questions of the meaning of life, the highest good, and principles of life, were transferred to the private sphere as matters of personal conscience and *weltanschauung*. Secondly, economic freedom was designated as a private matter in a process which Hannah Arendt terms "the rise of the social." With the rise of national markets and increasing capitalization, this attribution to the sphere of the private generated the doctrine of the non-intervention of the state into the free market economy. The third area of the private which Benhabib identifies is that of the intimate sphere, which encompasses for her the area of home keeping, the existential needs of life, sexuality, and reproduction. According to Hannah Arendt, modern times are marked by a restriction of the private sphere, which in antiquity comprised the household, trade, and the

family, to that of intimacy. The latter term denotes for Arendt negatively the confinement to a dictated unity of interest amongst unequal members (that of a family represented by its patriarchy), and positively - in that it stands for the absence of the political and the discursive negotiation of opinions - a comprehensive process of personality development.

8 Broadly formulated: What is at stake with the abolition of the absolutist state and the rise of the male-oriented bourgeoisie, is the autonomy of the religious and political spheres. With the women's movement in the 19th century and its continuation in the 20th century, women's suffrage and the massive entry of women into the labor market, the relationship between the public sphere and privacy changed. Benhabib maintains however, that this objective alteration remains suppressed by contemporary morality and political theory. She argues that the binarity of law and morality is maintained and runs parallel to the social distinction made between public and private. Thus, the state doctrine of the protection of the intimate sphere has prevented justice between the sexes because the gender-specific division in work and family life was never subjected to a public-legal debate. Under this cover, Benhabib claims, the gender-specific role division and the suppression and exclusion of women continues:

[C]ontemporary normative moral and political theory, Habermas's discourse ethics not excluded, has been 'gender-blind', that is, these theories have ignored the issue of 'difference', the difference in the experiences of male versus female subjects in all domains of life. Second, power relations in the 'intimate sphere' have been treated as though they did not even exist. The idealizing lens of concepts like 'intimacy' does not allow one to see that women's work in the private sphere, like care for the young and the running of the household, has been unremunerated. Consequently, the rules governing the sexual division of labor in the family have been placed beyond the scope of justice. ("Public Space" 87)

Arendt's "rise of the social" is associated with conceptions of a demise of the political. Although Arendt is according to Benhabib, who labels her a "phenomenological essentialist," not part of a modern tradition, her ideas are nonetheless worth considering, and hence Benhabib suggests a revised, anti-essentialist reading of Arendt.

9 In the following, I will first turn my attention to Hannah Arendt, and then to Seyla Benhabib's deconstructive translation of her theory. Arendt explicitly reflected on totalitarianism and investigated the change which the public sphere undergoes in a totalitarian regime. This is highly suggestive in relation to an analysis of *Love and Anarchy*, which owes the distinctiveness of its architectonic and imaginative spaces not only to the historical epoch in which it is set, but is also a part of the histories of mentality, ideology and medial imagination. The following analysis moves between an Arendtian conception and Benhabib's reading of Arendt in order to understand the various dimensions of meaning of the places and

spaces presented in the film.

10 In the following section, Benhabib's ideal of narrative action will be contrasted with an interpretation of the film which illustrates the extent to which both Benhabib's and Arendt's model of action are at work in it. In this way, the analysis points not only towards a concomitance in the reading of Arendt - the Arendtian and the Benhabibian - but will also see, in contrast to Benhabib, both as being of equal validity. Thus, as a consequence of my interpretation of the film, I oppose Benhabib's criticism of Arendt - without, however, formulating a meta-theoretical criticism of Benhabib.

### **The Demise of the Public Sphere**

11 Referring to Arendt as "a melancholic thinker of modernity",<sup>2</sup> Benhabib points out the extent to which Arendt's *Vita Activa* is determined by the main ideas of *Verfallsgeschichte*, *Begriffsgeschichte* and *Ursprungsphilosophie* (history of demise, concept history and philosophy of origins; German in the original), and emphasizes the discontinuation of the political history ideas in relation to modern societies. Benhabib suggests that Arendt's philosophical conception of the public sphere is modeled on the concept of the history of demise. The emergence of the social and the demise of the public area, which Arendt ascribes to the extension of economic self-interest, overlooks, thus Benhabib's critique, that the Arendtian ideal - the Greek *polis* - was founded upon the exclusion of fringe groups. It was however, to be regarded as a positive development and theoretically to be taken into account that these earlier fringe groups, for example women, had emancipated themselves from the ideal of political dominance, and had entered the public sphere.

12 In order to redeem Arendt, Benhabib places her not in the perspective of a 'history of demise' (*Verfallsgeschichte*), but suggests a different interpretation. Thus Benhabib, who characterizes Arendt as an anti-modernist, wants to use Arendt in order to argue against Arendt, and practice the deconstructive "art of making and subverting distinctions" (Benhabib, "Distinctions" 123). Benhabib constructs her intended anti-essentialist twist to Arendt by delimiting the Arendtian concept of agonal action against narrative action. Moreover, she uses the determinants in Arendt's works (*The Human Condition*; *The Origins of Totalitarianism*), in order to provide proof of narrative action. Benhabib succeeds in achieving this aim through the misaligned reading of the agonal concept of public space to the "associational view of public space." How does the history of demise of the public sphere and its most decadent location - the brothel - itself appear in Wertmüller's (sub)version?

---

<sup>2</sup> Thus the title of the German edition of Seyla Benhabib's book: *Hannah Arendt. Die melancholische Denkerin der Moderne*.

## The Brothel as a Political Location

13 The film identifies Fascism as the failure of modernity, the collapse of a democratic public sphere. It is presented as the absence of a stable political order, made visible through the morally illegitimate anti-public brothel, itself tolerated by the bourgeoisie, which stands outside of the public sphere. The brothel becomes the setting of a political dispute and shows a counter-public which is politically unestablished, institutionally unanchored and incapable of either action or discourse. This becomes especially clear during the film's final sequences: Tonino's running amok, his arrest by the Carabinieri and his murder by Spatoletti. As the prostitutes rush from the brothel into the daylight in their working clothes, only to be cowed and pushed back like sheep by the machine-gun wielding Carabinieri, they bring the brothel's relegation to the sphere of the underground and the underworld glaringly into view. The aesthetics of this scene of poetic, dramatic, absurd forcefulness emotionally overwhelms all comprehension by aesthetics. The location of the political action, its figures (the loving prostitutes) become incommensurable with political action.

14 Accordingly, Giesenfeld observes:

Entirely naïve and located entirely within the conventions of the melodramatic genre (the title can be taken quite literally), politics and love, heroism and the family idyll, even duty and proclivity in the classical sense all collide. *Yet neither the insecure, naïve peasant Tonino - verbalizing as if though reciting an empty, anachronistic creed on the one hand, driven more by the (personal) desire for revenge and the thirst for public fame - nor the brothel girls - forward, vulgar, sympathetically disillusioned, and always intent on their material advantage - are hardly suitable figures to personify agents in a personal-moral conflict.* Tonino succeeds in making a heroic exit, but in an almost farcical manner, going berserk and running amok. Only the myrmidons of the fascist regime provide the consecrated martyrdom. (my translation; emphasis added)

In that this film critique pictures the brothel as an apolitical sphere and attributes incomprehensible motivations to the prostitutes, it conceives of the prostitutes as incapable of political action as a result of their egoism.<sup>3</sup> Giesenfeld's reading of the prostitutes as clichéd figures makes explicit what is only implied in Wertmüller's poetical image of incommensurability: the disparateness of the brothel and the political, and of the prostitutes and political action. Thus in Wertmüller's film the brothel proves itself to be very much a location of the counter-public. The conclusion, Tonino's murder and the endangerment of the

---

<sup>3</sup> See Hübner, Irene: *Protest in Spitzenhöschen: Huren wehren sich; von der klassischen Hetäre zum postmodernen Bodygirl*. Frankfurt a. M.: Brandes und Appel, 1988. For the greatest part, the "Protest in bodices" was understood as a illusory rebellion which valued the individual feeling of power of the prostitutes, the situative dominance in the transaction of punters, lower than the structural inferiority of these sex professionals, who were earlier easy to make out legally and in analyses of society were always associated with patriarchy. These termini emerge in the concluding evaluation of the study, which decides the power question in favor of the punters, in opposition to the requests of the prostitutes wishes.

prostitutes, relativizes this particular discourse of the counter-public, in which anarchy, bourgeoisie and fascism are in negotiation with each other.

15 Every prostitute in the brothel represents a different type of woman: the Garçonne, the sporty woman (a *novum* in the 1920s), Salomè as a Mae West vamp, the trollop, a figure of Klimtish sensuality, and many other medially inspired, identifiable female types from previous decades. These anachronistic images can be read as a representation of the exterior in the interior, as a reflex of the "becoming public" of women. In the locked-away interior of the brothel, this appears as a framing of the new freedoms, which despite their ultra-modern appearance are relational images, superimposed with the male erotic projections which they serve. Yet they are also, albeit not exclusively, expression of a new understanding of women.

16 The group of prostitutes functions as a constant rebellion against decency and morality - it is a group without privacy or intimacy. The brothel is the location of the subversive privacy of the state. Expressed differently: a state-regulated public site of sexuality becomes the location of public intimacy. Despite the public dimension of the brothel, it and the sexuality lived in it is assigned firmly to the area of privacy and is not dealt with as a public matter in the liberal state. The brothel, in both the liberal as well as the fascist state, is state regulated, and in as much is a public matter, but is omitted from public discourse. Servants of the state and fascists are its best customers but this connection has to remain a secret.<sup>4</sup> The differentiation of public/private binarism forms a strange alliance with a dichotomy of a displaced connection between secret and absent. The bourgeois public is absent, as a watching group, irrelevant for the political events of the country; the brothel is partially public ('men only'), but secret. The brothel is the tolerated, necessary sub-public space; the anarchic, illegal non-public public sphere. The bourgeois public sphere, as far as it exists, maintains its friendly façade, yet remains silent in the face of injustice and contradictions. The sharp division of the sexes, their location, their scope for action and the options open to them, shows that a discursive bourgeois order cannot develop. The spheres do not come into contact, the sexes do not mix: there is no commonality between them.

17 Does the close of the film negate the brothel as a location of action? Does it discredit its power of discourse to reveal the citizens of Rome, passively watching the activities of the fascists? Does the story (the narration) yield to history (the historical events; the victory of the fascists in Italy)? Was the brothel as an open space of interaction only a fiction?

---

<sup>4</sup> There are multiple scenes in the film which make this clear. Thus, referring to the body of the person who died of a heart attack, which has to be removed secretly from the brothel, the brothel madam makes clear that she has excellent contacts to those in power, but that these must remain secret.

18 As my analysis of the brothel in *Love and Anarchy* has demonstrated, space is understood in Benhabib's reading of Arendt as an opportunity for nascent politically significant action. It is a location of empowerment, characterized by common action. Here, political action can be initiated by those standing outside society, even by prostitutes, who, according to the stereotype are ready to come to an arrangement with every form of power; are bereft of all political or idealistic conviction; are corrupt, seek a livable life and are still the corrupted and corruptible. Thus, the "associational model" comprises those Arendtian determinants isolated by Benhabib, which can be applied to modern democracy or which are penetrated by modern thoughts of communitizing.

19 Space in totalitarianism, which is one of the themes of Arendt's discussion, and for which an altered interpretative perspective emerges through the concept of narrative action, opens up different ways of reading the film *Love and Anarchy*. Totalitarian tyranny in contrast, resembles a desert: it knows no spatiality. Experience of tyranny is comparable to that of the desert traveler. "Under conditions of tyranny, one moves in an unknown, vast, open space, where the will of the tyrant occasionally befalls one like the sandstorm overtaking the desert traveler. Totalitarianism has no spatial topology: it is like an iron band, compressing people increasingly together until they are formed into one"<sup>5</sup> (Benhabib, "Public Space" 69). Although fascism has spatial preferences - the reference to antiquity, monumental architecture projecting power - these spaces are non-locations, invisible, empty of people, dysfunctional, unreal, as they fail to include the social classes in any panoply of common values. In her staging of outside locations, Wertmüller succeeds strikingly in grasping the space of totalitarianism aesthetically.

### **The Exterior: Rural Italy and Rome by Night**

20 The interior spaces [e.g. the brothel, H.W.] - as if they wanted to follow Wertmüller's typical filming style, the half and complete total with close-ups (especially the eyes) - alternate with excursions into the outside world: the trip to Sabaudia (Salomè, Spatoletti, Tonino und Tripolina), the Felliniesque jaunt of the party big-whig Spatoletti and Tonino's tramping through the deserted, nocturnal Rome. (Spagnoletti 123; my translation)

21 A motorbike-ride to the countryside brings the four day-trippers Spatoletti, Tonino, Salomè and Tripolina to a newly built church, around which the proud Spatoletti leads his guests. Images of non-locatable places float before the camera, which has taken the view of the four characters, to show the progress of the four through time and space, to a passage, a

---

<sup>5</sup> Here, Benhabib refers to Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

cross-over, a transformation of Italy. Later, Tonino returns to this place alone, whereupon we are presented with pictures stylized according to the purity of De Chirico paintings. The altered aesthetic dimension of the pictures when seen from Tonino's subjective<sup>6</sup> make Spatoletti's prime example of modern architecture and art appear not as modern art, but rather as a surreal production. Deserted, this location shows not greatness, but rather emptiness; we are conscious not of pathos but a feeling of being "off-stage." We are not aware of its functionality, but rather a sense of departedness is thrust upon us. Not life, but an unreal appearance dominates. The outside locations are a reflection of the nothingness which Tonino feels, and represent the negation of real space. This is however not the Arendtian continuation of the total re-personalization, which sees "emotion pictures" even in architecture, but rather a sharpening of the view which releases the societal sense. This sharpening of the view allows us to sense that the hierarchical order imposed on man's life by fascism falls short of it.

22 A scene no less pictorially composed and stylized is Tonino and Spatoletti's nocturnal drive over the Piazza del Campidoglio. Accompanied by Tonino, the leader of Mussolini's Secret Service circles the statue of Marcus Aurelius placed at the center of the Piazza on his motorbike. Spatoletti pays reverence to Marcus Aurelius, and anchors his claim to dominance in the history of antiquity, until the *Duce* himself has become a historical foundation myth. Tonino parries this legitimization of power with an almost Brechtian, inverse parable, the basic statement of which is that feeding does not always come before morality. The lousy tyke, kicked and oppressed, who one day does not yield to his appetite but, driven by desperation, bites his oppressor to death, is used by Tonino as an image for his own anarchic deed. This arouses no understanding in Spatoletti, his subsequent tormentor: he beats Tonino to death. The upright, courageously fighting opposition in the sense of a political resistance movement against fascism, thus the peasant, corresponds to the morality of the rich. The poor are left only with the act of surprise and desperation. The size and extent of the imperial roman construction is contrasted imaginarily to the cramped and restricted nature of a sub-proletarian scenario.

23 In *Love and Anarchy*, power structures are personalized to the highest degree. In fact, they carry human traits: amongst others, they appear cruel and double-minded. Thus, the political credo penetrates human relationships, determines them, even though it exists independently of them. In its political failure and personal despair, Tonino's running amok is such a manifestation of the momentary collapse of the division between public and private.

---

<sup>6</sup> The subjective refers to the camera view from the perspective of a film figure.



24 Even if one might argue that the film depicts prostitution as a falsification of intimacy, it cannot be denied that the prostitutes Salomè and Tripolina partake in the ideal intimacy which Arendt calls for. Although this true intimacy proves to prevent the political act (the assassination attempt), nevertheless, the knowledge of the reality of power structures functions as a guideline of political action. Salomè and Tonino were part of the resistance and would continue to be so if this were possible. In the preparation of the assassination and in its failure, the intention of the political act confirms itself *ex negativo*. Tonino's running amok shows that he is not satisfied with private happiness and love.

25 If Arendt's argument cites the decline of the public sphere on the one hand, and the weakening of feelings through the abandonment of social ties in relationships on the other, Salomè's and Tripolina's love for Tonino, evident in their feelings of responsibility and their caring nature, is a social love which could function as guarantee for a public sphere. In facism and capitalism, Wertmüller seems to suggest, the brothel challenges the division of private and public by positing love and anarchy against it.

### **Arendt's Vision of Agonal Action**

26 In the agonal concept, the public realm is bound to public spaces in which not only moral and political actions can be staged (a function also fulfilled by fascist squares), but which are peopled and first must be endowed with meaning. "According to the 'agonistic' view, the public realm represents the space of appearances in which moral and political greatness, heroism and pre-eminence are revealed, displayed and shared with others. This is a competitive space, in which one competes for recognition, precedence and acclaim; ultimately it is the space in which one seeks a guarantee against the futility and the transience of all things human" (Benhabib, "Public Space" 69).

27 If we relate these considerations to Wertmüller's film and its conception of place, the brothel must logically be regarded as the place of a perverted conception of such public space. Here there are people, there is life. Yet this place is scarcely a guarantee against the "transience of everything human," but becomes for Tonino the last, deadly refuge, in which the fleetingness and nothingness of individual life is ultimately revealed. The retrospective aesthetic of the female characters in their "whores dance" thus could be said to foreground only to a *Fin de Siècle* decadence, a stereotypical image of city prostitution, but could be said to carry the aesthetic of the morbid; relative duration, or even immortality, is perverted by extinction in death. This impression is very clearly emphasized by historical costumes, gestures and the antiquated music. Were one of the habitués not to say "*buongiorno*

*prostituti*," and were the brothel madam not to swear so drastically, one would believe the story line sometimes to be completely sunk in the realms of museology.

28 The contrast of the interior and the exterior, the symbolization of principles through the locations, the criss-crossing of their significance-laden dichotomies is highlighted clearly by Giesenfeld:

The brothel appears as a human alternative (already spatially, with its somewhat dusty nooks and crannies of cosiness) to the architecture of fascism (which is brought demonstratively into play with an excursion to the location which Mussolini is to visit). This contrast includes on the one hand rural village nature and on the other, the exemplary Piazza del Campidoglio as a reference to renaissance rationalism and architecture built to impress. Yet the brothel is also - as with the extension of Rome - seen as a metaphor for the co-existence of both tendencies: both an idyllic refuge and nest of resistance, as well as the place of authoritarian repression by the boss and the exploitation through the (fascist) customers. Similarly, the film differentiates between a "romantic" and "anarchic" narrative technique; the one an anti-mimetic and escapist and the other realistic and historical (Marcus). (my translation)

Inside the brothel, even if closed to the public, lives a women's community which constitutes an alternative public sphere to the bourgeois public sphere. If those engaged in the dispute over the political were to glance even cursorily at the bourgeois public sphere, they would not see the allegedly private ethical dispute about morality, about ideals. It is only in the most private and intimate area of relationships represented by the brothel that arguments about ideals and political strategies take place.

29 In contrast, Tonino's outside meetings with Spatoletti take place at non-places, which either have no exterior (the brothel) or are deserted. Empty architectures, leaden with history, function as exhibition pieces for self-chosen references to the past or the present. Spatoletti knows the owner of the rural inn, but its dancing customers are neither familiar with the extra-civic nature of the prostitutes nor do they have any notion of the political terror and violent rule of the fascist Spatelotti. The two unequal pairs Salomè-Spatoletti and Tripolina-Tonino play innocent: spectacle does not belong in their life. It is an exceptional setting: they make use of a stage rendering the inhabitants of the bourgeoisie public sphere of rural Italy into extras who do not know the game being played. It is at this place, which does not bear any continuity to the life of the protagonists, that Tripolina's love for Tonino begins.

### **The Space of Appearances and Public Space**

30 According to the agonal concept, the public area is a space of appearances bound to places in which morality, political stature etc. can manifest themselves, and through which the public space is being first produced. In opposition to this, Arendt's work introduces, according

to Benhabib, an additional space of action which is not bound to any place, namely, the space created by the good intent of a (male) group meeting to discuss the correctness or falsity of a matter, and which is a topos of classical democracy. Thus, the 'associational' view of public space suggests that such a space emerges whenever and wherever, in Arendt's words, 'men act together in concert.' In this model, public space is the space 'where freedom can appear'. It is not a space in any topographical or institutional sense. (Benhabib, "Public Space" 69)<sup>7</sup>

31 Benhabib's attempt to redeem the "anti-modernist"<sup>8</sup> Arendt consists initially of a differentiation of Arendt's undifferentiated concept of space. Thus Benhabib distinguishes between the space of appearances and public space in order to assign both types of space a type of action. Doing so enables Benhabib to accentuate narrative action, the model favored by her, through its classification under the less discredited and more widely-conceived space of appearances.

It has been rarely noticed that Arendt frequently runs together the phenomenological concept of "the space of appearances" with the institutional concept of the "public space." The two models of action discussed above correspond to this further dichotomy in that the agonal type of action presupposes a public space in which it can appear to others and be shared with others; narrative action, however, although it also needs a "space of appearances," does not need this to be a public space, accessible to all. Action, immersed in everyday web or narratives, can occur in the private-intimate realms as well. (Benhabib, "Distinctions" 126-127)

32 Benhabib supplements Arendt's terminology by introducing the model of narrative action. She elucidates that "*narrative action*, in Arendt's theory, is action embedded in a 'web of relationships and enacted stories.' This 'web of relationships and enacted stories' combines the constative as well as the expressive dimensions of speech acts [...]" ("Distinctions" 125). In *Love and Anarchy*, it is possible to recognize both an agonal as well as a narrative model of action provided we do not focus exclusively on the film's narrativity and allocate the narrative model of action on this basis. Thus, focusing on the film's characters allows us to identify their actions as either agonally intended or narratively-guided.

---

<sup>7</sup> Benhabib notes: "Hannah Arendt's persistent denial of the 'women's issue', and her inability to link together the exclusion of women from politics and this agonistic and male-dominated conception of public space, is astounding. The 'absence' of women as collective political actors in Arendt's theory - in which only individuals like Rosa Luxemburg are present - is a difficult question, but to begin thinking about this means first challenging the private/public split in her thought as this corresponds to the traditional separation of spheres between the sexes (men = public life; women = private sphere)." (Benhabib, "Public Sphere" 93)

<sup>8</sup> This represents one line of reception of Arendt (see Kallscheuer).

## Agonal and Narrative Action in *Love and Anarchy*

33

All action is narratively constituted, and some action may attain an agonal dimension. Action is agonal when it embodies or lets 'shine forth' a principle or a virtue like justice, generosity, wisdom, and kindness, or when it expresses a passion, an emotion in its quintessential form, like Achilles' wrath, King Lear's despair, Hamlet's indecision, Billy Budd's mute rage, or the anonymous evil of the Holocaust. (Benhabib, "Distinctions" 129-130)

Is Tonino's running amok an agonal action, comparable with Achilles' wrath or the despair of the old Lear? It is apparent that agonal action need not always correspond with great, good, and noble action. Yet does an action which is largely the result of an error, and which is not based on a conscious decision, possess a political - even if emotionally displaced - dimension at all.

34 Tonino's failure - his tragic death in tragi-comic circumstances - is a failure resulting from his inability to resolve the conflict between the agonal and narrative model of action. His original aim was the single-handed murder of Mussolini in order to avenge his friend, without ideological motivation or involvement in the resistance movement. Thus, his motivation corresponds to that of the wrathful Achilles, and contrasts with that of Salomè. Tonino is not only ideologically unbound; he is without any connection to the *resistenza*. Although an address leads him to Salomè in the brothel, he is without any support, and has no logistical back up or assistance in the planning of the strike. Tonino's planning of the assassination attempt is an expressive action or -in Benhabib's terminology - an agonal action (albeit a very naïve piece of agonal action). "Expressive action, on the other hand, allows for the self-actualization or the self-realisation of the person, and its norms are the recognition and confirmation of the uniqueness of the self and its capacities by others. (D'Entrèves qtd. in Benhabib, "Distinctions" 124). D'Entrèves further specifies this agonal or heroic model of politics: "When the emphasis falls on the expressive model of action, politics is viewed as the performance of noble deeds by outstanding individuals" (qtd. in Benhabib, "Distinctions" 124-125).

35 In essence, Tonino's action is expressive action, a disclosure of the identity of a person and the manifestation of the inner-self. This particularly evident after his identification with the louse-ridden, afflicted tyke in the parable by which he counters Spatoletti's historical myth. Yet Tonino is no classical hero performing a noble deed; much rather he is a mournful hero who - even before the assassination attempt - is denied the attention and affirmation of others, namely, Tripolina and Salomè. Even though they appreciate him as a person, as a lover, and recognize his unprejudiced humanity, which - because he does not share the

oppressive and exclusionary classification of prostitutes - motivates him to love a prostitute, they do not recognize his individual revolt, that is, its political dimension. They are unable to perceive his unarticulated sense of justice. The prostitute's expectations relate to a classical image of heroism, based on actions which are unambiguously agonal, which Tonino cannot live up to. Thus, Tonino's self does not express itself in his murderous calculations, as is expected, but in his largely emotional rebellion. This expressivity of the self is not acknowledged, and this one reason why his assassination attempt fails. This is a misconception of Tonino's inner nature in a manner almost suggestive of a lack of knowledge of human nature, a lack of humanism in the prostitutes. The self-realization of the person is thus not a furious lunge for freedom, but a running amok.

6 While Tripolina follows the narrative model of action, Salomè is unable to decide between the agonal and the narrative model of action. However, in a dialogue - a situation, in which claims to validity are raised and negotiated in speech acts (whose validity Tripolina disavows) - she opts for the model of narrative action and against the agonal. In contrast, Tonino continues to inhabit both Arendtian political models and ultimately founders on his indecision. Spatoletti adheres to the agonal model of action; for him there is no irritation resulting from communication. The dialogue during the torture scene reveals that for him Tonino also followed the agonal model in the classical sense, and that he sought to perform a heroic deed. He tortures him in order to learn a clearly definable political motivation as well as the names of possible accomplices. Tonino's death is sealed when it becomes apparent that it was the narrative model of action which lead to the assassination plan. Tripolina's and Salomè's decision to prevent Tonino's deed is due to a rational act of communicative action, during which Tripolina is characterized by her adherence to the narrative model of action while the figure of Salomè is characterized by communicative action in the sense of Habermas.

37 The nervous, stuttering, mostly silent peasant thus finds himself torn between an unarticulated agonal concept of action and an unacknowledged narrative one. However, eloquence and the degree of verbalization do not serve as a criterion for differentiation between the figures in the film. The difference which does emerge is that between the simple expression of a self-image and the successful accommodation amongst conversation partners based upon claims to validity raised in speech acts. An expression of Tonino's self-image appears when he explains why he agreed to discard the corpse on the forum, and becomes especially clear in the altercation between Tonino and Salomè as to the reasoning behind the assassination attempt.

38 Salomè discourses, providing justifications for the assassination attempt which appear justified by the personal experience of injustice, and legitimized by social and historical experience, and which are designed to make her action and attitude plausible. The firework display of speech and objection in the argument with Tonino facilitates her efforts to rationalize the decisions which she had made in her life. Tonino's non-verbalization stands in contrast to Salomè; running amok is Tonino's most dramatic expression of his speechlessness. The stuttering, effeminate man from the countryside canalizes his inarticulacy into a wild scream as he is pursued by the police officers.

39 Arendt, who placed great emphasis on the "linguistic structure of human action," makes clear that human action requires a linguistic agency, a narrative presentation, in order to "be identified, described, and recognized for what it is only through a narrative account. Both the doer of the deeds and the teller of stories must be able to say in speech what it is that they are doing" (Benhabib, "Rethinking" 199). However, the film figure Tonino lacks the imperative of communicative action. His incommunicativeness fails to create a common world, even a space of appearances.

### Works Cited

Arendt, Hannah. *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*. München: Piper 1995. English: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Vita Activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*. München: Piper, 1994. English: *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Benhabib, Seyla. "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas." *Feminism, the Public and the Private*. Ed. Joan B. Landes. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. 65-99.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Art of Making and Subverting Distinctions: With Arendt, Contra Arendt." *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. 123-171.

\_\_\_\_\_. "From the Problem of Judgment to the Public Sphere: Rethinking Hannah Arendt's Political Theory." *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. 172-220.

Giesenfeld, Günter. "Liebe und Anarchie." *Reclams elektronisches Filmlexikon*. CD-ROM. Stuttgart: Philip Reclam, 2001.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990.

Kallscheuer, Otto. Afterword. *Hannah Arendt. Die Melancholische Denkerin der Moderne*. By Seyla Benhabib. Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1998. 343-350.

Spagnoletti, Giovanni. "Kommentierte Filmographie." *Lina Wertmüller*. Ed. Wolfgang Jacobsen. München: Hanser, 1988. 67-195.

Wertmüller, Lina, dir. *Love and Anarchy [Film d'amore e d'anarchia]*. Peppercorn-Wormser, 1974.