

The Phenomenon of “Solidarity”

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August ‘80, just like the whole “Solidarity” movement from the period between 1980 and 1981, escapes all clearcut interpretations.

This is because this historical phenomenon can be observed both from the perspective of social movements, one can highlight the worker and left-wing features of the movement, thus also its revolutionary character (back when it started Jadwiga Staniszkis talked about a “self-limiting revolution”), but one is also totally justified in interpreting “Solidarity” in light of the spirit of the Polish tradition of insurrections.¹ I will propose one more possible perspective for interpretation: I propose looking at the August strikes in the Gdańsk Shipyards through the lens of the republican tradition. Thus, August will be analyzed through the eyes of one of the key traditions of political philosophy – reaching all the way back to the ancient tradition of reflecting upon politics.²

This choice of a vantage point makes it into an interpretation that goes beyond the boundaries of sociological theory, or the typical historical narrative. Just as with any other interpretation, it is merely an attempt at getting at a phenomenon, which, because of its scale and historical meaning, exceeds all possible perspectives of interpretation.

At the same time, the phenomenon of August exceeds, as is the case with other theoretical perspectives, the hermeneutical possibilities contained within the republican tradition. To put it another way, the republican tradition does a great job as a tool for understanding certain especially important aspects of August, but at the same time, the events of the summer of 1980 expose the weaknesses and limitations of the republican tradition.

Even now the news from the coast hits us with an especially strong feeling of the gravity of the events, which are coupled with descriptions of the psycho-somatic sensations of the participants that are clear examples of limit situations. The strike is an existential border-experience for them. To illustrate these crucial facts let’s use several quotes taken from the

¹ Cf. *Lekcja Sierpnia* [The Lesson of August], ed. Dariusz Gawin, Warszawa 2002 and “*Solidarność*” w imieniu narodu i obywateli [“Solidarity” in the name of the nation and citizens], ed. Marek Latoś, Kraków 2005; an interesting overview of Polish texts concerned with “Solidarity” is Andrzej Waśkiewicz’s “Ku pokrzepieniu serc” [Toward the Raising up of Hearts] *Res Publica Nowa* no. 8, 2000.

² Years ago, Paweł Spiewak was the first to conduct this sort of interpretation in the text “Hannah Arendt i Alexis de Tocqueville o Solidarności” [Arendt and Tocqueville on Solidarity], in *Ideologie i obywatele* [Ideologies and Citizens], Warszawa, 1991.

participants, “I was constantly moved. I cried throughout, but felt strange about it, so I turned away from people, covered myself up, hid myself from others, but I could not get a grip on myself.” “I cried throughout the whole strike. Even now [in 1981] whenever I hear the word, ‘strike,’ tears well up in my eyes” “this was an incredible experience. Only once before, as a child during the Warsaw Uprising, did I experience anything like it. I remember how my mother was sewing armbands for the soldiers of the Uprising. It was also August, and also warm. They pulled down the fence between the yards, so there was a lot of space, and there young soldiers of the Uprising were walking around and singing: Poland has not yet perished. I remembered this experience and something similar happened right under this gate. It was an atmosphere of euphoria – of choking on freedom, one of our friends was literally in a state of shock. He had to return to Warsaw, because he was constantly throwing up.”³

If we agree with Hannah Arendt – whose writings on the republican spirit will be the interpretive key for our explorations – that a remarkable feeling of “public happiness” is born when free citizens constitute political freedom and at the same time establish a political community, then we can recognize in what took place in the Gdańsk Shipyard the pathos which has accompanied the republican spirit from the dawn of Western civilization.⁴ The spirit of civic action, the same spirit that once visited Athens, Rome, Philadelphia and Paris, demonstrated its power in Gdańsk in the summer of 1980. This really seems like a far-fetched perspective – someone could ask, what could the times of Pericles and the American Founding Fathers have to do with these shipyard masses dressed in gray work uniforms, their carts with accumulators, their halls that served to organize boring meetings, their factory fences and checkpoints? All these requisites appear to be in disharmony with the spirit that has encroached upon them. However, the power of politics encroaching upon the mundane reality of that time was capable of constituting the meaning of events totally irrespective of the context. This fact always seems to have the character of an epiphany. The power of politics sacralizes places that were totally submerged, without reserve, in the profane. Every scenery could serve as the backdrop for a historical drama whose theme is the struggle between freedom and tyranny.

The Shipyard as *Polis*

Let us start with the shipyard – the setting of the drama of August ‘80. Classical politics was tightly bound to cities understood as the physical emanation of the political community.

³ These are fragments collected by reporters who participated in the strike, from: *Kto tu wpuszcil dziennikarzy* [Who Let in the Reporters?], ed. M. Miller and J. Jankowska, Warszawa 2005, p. 69, 86, 245 ff.

⁴ This phrase was originally used by Hannah Arendt throughout the book *On Revolution*.

Polis, civitas – in these concepts the physical space gave way to the laws of symbolism. The Greek *polis* contains, in its Indo-European roots, a tie to fortifications, that is, a fenced-in place which can become a shelter during times of attack. Fortuitously, the Polish word for stronghold, “gród,” in its archaic meaning, or at least in its archaizing translations, for example in translations of classical drama, is taken as an equivalent of *polis*, because it contains similar layers of meaning. Etymologically, it is directly connected to “grodzić,” the establishing of boundaries or fences. At the same time the Polish word for city, “miasto,” is the same as the Old-Slavonic for place. “Stronghold” and “city” point to the specific character of the physical emanation of politics, which appears where people want to be together, connected by a common political authority. The city-place, *polis*, should have clear boundaries, thereby tearing away the space of citizen's action from the homogeneous space of nature, in which nothing can be called acting in Arendt's sense, because everything is subject to the power of necessity flowing from biological processes. The sphere of biological compulsion extends outside the boundaries of the city – the vegetative kingdom of life, the eternal rhythm of circling time.

In August of 1980 the place-city, Gdańsk's *polis* was the shipyard. More live accounts, “you could breathe there just like in free independent Poland. I felt so well over there. It was a wonderfully organized city, our little headland;” “Strumff told me that there came to be a country within the country in the shipyard... one that governs by its own laws, it has its own intelligence services, its own minister of propaganda, its supplies people, its own security forces. Thus, it fulfills all the functions of a normal country...”⁵ The fences of the shipyard were the physical barrier of the self-constituting political community. This was the wall of the *polis*. Spread out beyond it was the domain of necessity, the social controlled by the tyranny, that is, a totalitarian authority. To put it another way, one can say that beyond the wall of the shipyard there spread out an undifferentiated “society,” controlled by the authorities, which reduced politics to a totalitarian managing of social processes.

This particular tension is born of the interaction of two spheres, on the one hand, that which is social, submerged in pre-political tyrannical state control and on the other, the sphere of free political community – the meeting of these two created the specific atmosphere at the gates of the shipyard. This is how the participants described the unique function of the shipyard's gates: “This passage to another world was simply miraculous, especially after the stifling atmosphere of Warsaw. All of a sudden I find myself in a place where everything seems obvious, everything is clear, peaceful.” “We could feel that behind these gates a totally different

⁵ *Kto tu wpuścił dziennikarzy*, op. cit., p. 240.

world functioned, that totally different laws reigned there. This is indescribable. I just stood there and watched. I found myself on the border of a totally different world.”⁶

In the gates, literally and symbolically, a primordial politics concentrated within the shipyard came in contact with the social, with the whole of social life that remained outside the ring of freedom created by the strikers. The unique atmosphere of the plaza in front of the gate, filled with thousands of people waiting for communiques, fliers, manifesting their support, and, above all, concentrating and gathering in that point, was documented in countless photos and many documentary films. The gate, covered with flowers, guarded by shipyard workers wearing white and red bands, decorated with flags and pictures of the Pope John Paul II, became one of the most important icons of August.

If the shipyard was a *polis*, then the equivalent of the Pnyx (the Athenian place where the *ecclesia*, the assembly of the people, held its councils) was the Shipyard's BHP Hall⁷, where the national Strike committee held its councils. A reporter present at the shipyard recalls, “I had the impression that it was, well, I don't know, something like the conference hall of the United Nations.”⁸ This primordial form of politics had the power to morph places and events seemingly banal into a historical drama, and here it showed its power. Thanks to it, the BHP Hall in the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard became a historical icon not only on a local scale, or on the scale of Polish history, but also in universal history. The history of freedom picks the scene where its drama is going to put on its show. In this perspective accidental places, seemingly unfit for the occasion, become necessary elements of the historical narrative. This is why the symbolic career of the BHP Hall is reminiscent of the tennis courts in Versailles – as distant from the pathos of grand history in 1789 as the Gdańsk Hall before 1980.

On the margins of the comparison of the shipyard to the *polis* one notices one more factor that strengthens the metaphor – the Greek *poleis* were far from the modern understanding of democracy, because they forced women, slaves and foreigners who were permanent residents, out of political life. The shipyard was specifically a place of work and the majority of its employees were men. Indeed, many women took part in the strikes, some of them played very important roles, like Anna Walentynowicz, Alina Pienkowska or Henryka Krzywonos, but the absolute majority of the strikers were men. Their families remained behind the lines separating what is the political, from the social, that is, the reality which remained outside the fences of the shipyard. Even here, in a surprising way, accidentally, August's reality intertwined with the

⁶ Ibid., p. 84, 86, 93, 98.

⁷ BHP – Occupational Safety and Hygiene [trans.].

⁸ *Kto tu wpuścił dziennikarzy*, op. cit., p. 98.

classical tradition and the thought of Hannah Arendt. As one of the reporters recalled, describing the atmosphere by the gates:

On the one side were the husbands, on the other, the wives and children. The striking workers would come to the gates and greet their children, often they were little, in their strollers.⁹

“Solidarity,” that is, the *Res Publica*

Into this place-city that was the shipyard, fenced off from the outside world by a wall, something poured in like a torrent, it engulfed people and took them much further than they could have imagined at the beginning of their united action. It was elemental, primordial, politics, which transforms and changes people and reveals the proper meaning of events. This is how a participant of the strike in Gdynia recalled the strike's atmosphere:

A strange knot of unity tied the Polish nation together, we became closer, dearer, everyone respected their brothers more than they respected themselves... this was not an ordinary strike, this was an enormous school of educating noble human feeling from which we took away not only theory, but an enormous experience of the immense unity of the nation.¹⁰

The knot of unity was nothing other than the directly felt nature of that which is in common, or also, to use an idiom grounded in the Western tradition, the nature of “the thing in common,” the republic. Our knee-jerk understanding of *res publica* causes us to see it as the concept which describes the form of a country. Here *res* means a thing, an institution. In its primordial sense *res publica* is not a thing, instead it is an event, thus it does not describe something that exists beside citizens, instead it refers to relations that join citizens, thereby constituting the proper foundation for the state's institutions.

The pathos of the August strikes was the result of a leading affect which engulfed the people directly involved in fanning the flames of the common will and feelings. The community of will and affect allowed for the constitution of an event common to everyone, a *res publica*, that is, “Solidarity,” because precisely this content is hidden in this remarkable word that was chosen as the official name for the movement born in the shipyard. The specificity of this name comes from the fact that it, and this is rare in modern politics, does not point to any political institution or ideology, but instead to a certain specific and universal human relation.

⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁰ Edward Bernatowicz, “Czarne chmury” [Black clouds], in *Sierpień '80 we wspomnieniach* [Memories of August '80], ed. Marek Latoszka, Gdańsk 1991, p. 166.

Equality and Solidarity, that is, *Homonoia*

Primordial political action, as its swift current poured into the *polis* of the shipyard workers, caused a rapid transformation of the drama's actors. Just the day before, submerged in the social (for the great majority the impulse that pushed them to join the strikes was material, the increase of prices by the communist authorities), but now, from day to day, they became citizens – free people who desired to constitute and regain their freedom at last. The rapidity of this change shocked observers. Many, up to this day, are inclined to instinctively explain the meaning of the August events by resorting to the category of “miracle.” This is because a miracle is an act that just happens, seemingly out of nowhere, and is not the result of the past – it is something that cuts through time and makes possible the establishment of a new order.

Within these categories the proper meaning of the miracle which occurred in the shipyard was the sudden (yet peaceful) and unexpected birth of a political community of citizens. The crowd deprived of its own will, a population treated as an object of administrative procedures by thoroughly alienated rulers, changed itself into conscious and responsible citizens. The freedom that changed the anonymous crowd into citizens acts on two levels: it changed both individuals and the collectivity. In the first case, we are dealing with an ennobling of every individual, or rather, each person. On the other hand, in actualized socialism there was a dramatic divergence between the declared respect for the rights of the individual and reality, a reality over-saturated with contempt for anyone who found himself lower in the actual social hierarchy. Thus, the ethical postulate of guarding the dignity of the individual had deeply revolutionary political consequences. The power of this postulate was surprising and fascinating, because it ripped apart the cover of universally present lies and gave back social reality its proper proportions.

This precisely was the cause of the thing that made people cry and gave them lumps in our throats. Freedom is a miracle because with its mysterious force it changes the essence of a person right down to his core. This is such a substantial and rapid change that affect precedes reflection, feelings are faster than thoughts. When freedom is encrusted with institutions, laws, procedures, when it is hard to perceive it under the accumulations of politics understood as the craft of gaining power and ruling it becomes increasingly difficult to realize how special it actually is. In August freedom showed its power without any veils, in its whole, primordial, wondrous character.

The rapidity of that metamorphosis of individuals and the whole collective fascinated observers. In September of 1980, Ryszard Kapuściński's report about the strike in Gdańsk

appeared in the Warsaw-based “Kultura” weekly. Kapuściński was at the time one of the most renowned journalists in the world.

Its tone does not stray from the tone of other texts written by intellectuals from the capital reporting live about the strange strike-phenomenon, which they personally witnessed. What is most interesting about it is the direct way in which he grasped the ethical dimension of the workers' protests.

Kapuściński wrote that someone who:

tries to reduce the movement from the coast to matters of pay and living (...) has not grasped anything. This is because the leading motive of these occurrences was the *dignity of man*, it was a striving to create new relations between people, in every place and in all ranks, there was the principle of mutual respect binding everyone without exception, a principle according to which one's subordinate was at the same time one's partner.¹¹

Recognizing the dignity of every human person, recognizing his inborn right to be treated as a subject, not as an object, constituted the crucial condition this collectivity of individuals needed to raise itself up to a higher level – a collectivity composed of persons could no longer be just a crowd nor a mass of people. The collectivity had to transform itself into a community of citizens. The ethical sense of August turned into its political sense – just as individuals were becoming persons, so also the crowd was becoming the People.

For this transformation to be complete another step was needed. A step that depended upon thinking through the logical consequences of the previously accepted conclusion about the inborn dignity of each and every human person. The conclusion had to be the presupposition that the collectivity of such individuals can be recognized as a valid subject of action only when it acknowledges the principle of equality as the main principle regulating their mutual relations. And again, just like with the surprise voiced at the unexpected eruption of general agreement to treat each other and everyone with respect, also the experience of the sudden, spontaneous, community of equals caused wonder mixed with deep feeling. This mood resounds in the picture painted by the words of a reporter written several months after his time in the Gdańsk Shipyard, “We sat on the ground, right by me there was some professor from the Fishing Institute. There were no barriers resulting from titles, positions, age, profession. Everyone was open.” Someone else added, “It was a republic of equals. No rituals.”¹²

¹¹ Cited in: Grażyna Pomian, *Polska “Solidarność”* [The Poland of “Solidarity”], Paris, 1982, p. 76.

¹² On the margins, with a certain bitterness, one can notice that from our current perspective years later this disappearance of all social barriers and hierarchies and all their attendant social rituals, it all seems all the more miraculous and extraordinary than it did then. Our democracy today offers us equality reduced to a narrow circle

The regained freedom brought out, from under the decks of social roles and social hierarchies, an inborn humanity. A female reporter who spent time in the shipyard recalls, “Faces were interesting... I immediately realized that I couldn't tell the difference in professions from faces, and yet both workers, technicians, and engineers were there.” This similarity was not the same thing as standardization – a loss of individual identity. On the contrary, resemblance in dignity allowed for a recapturing of authentic subjectivity. It seems that the classic conception of *homonoia*, that is resemblance, but also equality, is useful for understanding this aspect of the strike. The citizens of the political community, of the Aristotelian *koinonia politike*, as equals should at the same time resemble each other. This is due to the emphasis put on friendship between citizens by the Stagirite. That's because it fulfilled a unifying role, transforming a collectivity merely living together into a community ready to act as a political subject in solidarity.

This lead is quite interesting, because to a certain degree *homonoia* understood in this way overlaps considerably with solidarity understood as the tie of friendship. Friendship joining those resembling each other as the uniter of political community, or to put it otherwise, solidarity joining the free who recognize in themselves an inborn dignity, also expands and fills out the understanding of the shipyard as a *polis*. Plato and Aristotle underscored that a real *polis* as a political community is only possible in limited, small from our modern perspective, social frames. Several thousand citizens was the optimal number by their reckonings. The emphasis on this scale was the result of the conviction that a real community of citizens could only function where citizens know each other mutually and interact directly. Friends share the same interests, spend time together, and talk frequently. Since friendship is born of direct contact, thus, according to Aristotle, there arises the question about the possible number of friends:

The population of a city cannot be composed of ten people, however, if there will be a hundred-thousand of them, then it will no longer be a city either.¹³

The reality of the August strike, in a curious fashion, can also be explained according to this aspect of classical political thought. The average place of work in the Polish People's Republic in its size was reminiscent of a Greek *polis* – at most it contained tens of thousands individuals. Therefore, one can say that the largest industrial behemoths of those times did not exceed the size of Athens from Socrates' and Plato's epoch. On this scale people could still know each other, and if they did not know each other directly, then they could recognize each

of formal procedures. We no longer have any chance to experience being in a universal community of equals.

¹³Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1171a.

other by sight, or could have heard about people with whom they did not run into during day to day situations. In such conditions it was easier to talk of friendship, or also, to use a more modern idiom, of trust and solidarity. The great “Solidarity,” a union of tens of millions, which developed from the August strike reminds one of a large confederation, or as the Greeks put it, a *symmachia*, composed of thousands of city-states, of workplaces. This large union was composed of a thousand communities that each had its debates, its political conflicts, and its moments of political action. Precisely this circumstance was at the root of the unusual, even by modern standards, intensity of civic life which took place within the union. In a normal parliamentary democracy conscious, intentional, acting is needed to directly take part in political life – one has to sign up with a party, go to meetings, take part in discussions and pre-election meetings. To put it another way, one must find people and places that are “political.” In the years 1980-1981 the vast majority of Poles participated in some workplace where they spent eight hours a day. Therefore, being political, as a way of collective acting and living, was really a universal and obvious dimension of their existence.

Language as the living element of Being Political

The element of the political is language, speech, democratic debate. To all the authors writing about August the talkativeness of those times stood out. The unbridled element of universal debate, of a general and uninterrupted talking, spilled out from the coast to the whole country. During countless meetings of work organizations of the union people could finally say what they thought and felt. The meaning of these monologues could not be reduced to its therapeutic function. Getting rid of anxieties or regaining psychological balance was not the thing at stake there. During them opinions about public affairs hitherto hidden under the masks of the gossip, political joke, judgments made within the safety of one's own four walls, transformed themselves into public discourse. In the sphere of the political speech stopped being mere blather, constantly buzzing, filling up everything, but unable to change anything.

Under the new conditions speech was becoming a tool of change, a weapon, even more, an inherently political form of acting. This helps us to understand why “Solidarity” sacrificed its efficiency on the altar of free speech. During the first convention of the union's delegates the super-democratic procedures allowed each delegate a chance to enter the discussion at any moment. Despite the fact that this usually resulted in a complete mess, this principle was carefully and seriously observed. Thanks to this “Solidarity's” republican democracy had a clearly substantial character. It treated procedures as a necessary evil.

The Presence of religion

The republican tradition also allows for an interpretation of religion's presence during the August strikes. The unusual, mysterious, character of the process of establishing the public sphere demanded a transcendent sanction. A reporter present in the shipyard said:

How to understand this explosion, these explosions of religious feeling, this basically religious demonstration? All historical events demand a frame, ceremony. Right then the movement realized that its moral societal protest could not find any official form which was not compromised. The church proved to be the only institution that did not betray the interests of the nation. There was nothing to lean on and in the shipyard there was a great need for lasting things, a need for hope, and as we all know, God is imagined as the One who does not represent any group interests, because He is impartial. Masses had a significant meaning for the mood and for building up the dignity of people. People in the shipyard, irregardless of whether they were believers or not, found in them a kind of soundness which they wanted to serve.¹⁴

Thus, naturally, the boundaries surrounding this specific piece of physical space, which gained a totally new status thanks to civic action, had to be marked with religious symbols. On the fences of the shipyard, near national symbols, evoking political order, there spontaneously appeared crosses and pictures of the Pope John Paul II and of Our Lady of Częstochowa. What's interesting, this presence of religion was deprived of ideological variables. No one associated the crosses and pictures of the Pope with the stereotypical threat from the catholic-nationalist rightwing. Just as the community had to first regain a primordial politics and an elementary public sphere, now the religiosity of its members first had to be rebuilt from a foundation of Christianity understood as the source of a sacred that sanctifies public space.

August and republican *Aporia*

August, as was underscored earlier in this paper, escapes all clearcut interpretations. Thus, the republican tradition cannot appear in a privileged position. Just like all the others, even though it is handy and useful when it comes to shedding light on significant aspects of those events, it is not capable of providing a hermeneutical key to all questions. With this the experience of August shows the limitations of the republican tradition. One of the crucial matters is the matter of violence.

For Arendt, in her reconstruction of the Greek model of political life, the exclusion of

¹⁴ *Kto tu wpuścił dziennikarzy*, op. cit., p. 156.

violence beyond the sphere of the political had substantial consequences. This thread returns throughout her work, but it plays an especially important role in *The Human Condition*. The point of departure of Arendt's reasoning is the way in which Aristotle bases politics upon the human ability to use language. Speaking gained a political character, because the Greeks identified speech with acting. If a political community's proper mode of existence is the gathering of citizens together, thereby constituting political space where the political appears, then speech is the living element of politics. Citizens appear in public space in order to make themselves present, to present their point of view and to let others judge them accordingly. Public speaking thus becomes the core of political acting through convincing others of your own point of view, or also, as the Greeks put it, through giving good council to the *polis*. The identification of political action with speaking is based upon the assumption that political virtue is the way of finding the proper arguments and words at the right time, thereby influencing the assembly. Physical power, violence or compulsion are mute, as Arendt puts it, "the quintessentially political action is the one that stays outside the sphere of violence, it essentially occurs in words... Ordinary violence is totally mute, because of that it cannot achieve greatness."¹⁵ "To be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that words and persuasion decided everything, and not power and violence."¹⁶ A leadership which cannot tolerate opposition, or does not allow discussion, which uses violence, always mute, is one that uses ways of governing that are characteristic of pre-political or extrapolitical forms of living together. Arendt contends that, on the one hand, the Greeks reserved this sort of conduct for family life, on the other, that it characterized tyranny, a political order based upon an unlimited power. The citizen of Athens, within the confines of his household, was a tyrant, he had unlimited power over the members of his family and slaves; his will was an order, and discussion with him was impossible. However, by crossing the threshold of his family home and by entering the *agora*, or any other place where people assembled, he stopped being a despot who reigns over a miniature monarchy and became a citizen, equal in his rights to others. He could no longer command, all that remained was the persuasion of equals.

The removal of coercion from the political sphere into the social sphere allowed Arendt to not only build a suggestive – the question remains how authentic – ideal model of the Greek city-state, but this also allowed her to criticize modernity, which according to her has confused these two spheres. By using society as the source of politics modernity made a mistake, because it let violence creep into politics.

¹⁵ H. Arendt, *Kondycja ludzka* [The Human Condition], trans. Anna Lagodzka, Warszawa 2000, p. 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

However, there appears a very considerable difficulty: by construing her ideal model of a Greek *polis* she not only passes over in silence the true character of Greek politics during the classical period, which was full of violence, but she also passes over those elements of a Greek citizen's upbringing which were saturated by the continuous presence of violence in Greek communities. We should turn our attention to the references to violence in the models of a citizen's upbringing and civic virtues contained in the works of Aristotle and Thucydides. This is especially significant, because Arendt has her own specific way of choosing quotes from these authors. Let's take, for example, the funerary speech of Pericles so frequently cited by Arendt. Pericles says that before praising the fallen he will first explain, "what kind of order and what character traits have made our country great."¹⁷ Pericles simply calls this political order democracy, and marks out freedom as its leading principle. He suggestively describes the greatness and fame of Athens, which flow directly from the spirit of its citizens. The glory of the country, above all, comes from military victories. From Pericles' perspective the main advantage flowing from these victories is not prosperity, but glory itself:

Our country evokes wonder, because with our courage we have forced all seas and lands to open themselves up to us and we have put up lasting monuments to the defeats we have inflicted and to our good deeds. In the defense of the city these men bravely perished, not wanting to lose it; all those that remain should also be ready to suffer for the defense of this city.¹⁸

Within all of this reasoning death has a key significance as a proof of virtue – the one who does not fear to lay down his life for his native city does not only act on behalf of its material might, but also, at the same time, is a witness of the power of its *polis*, of the power of the ties binding the political community.

Thus, the virtue of courage does not have a purely military character – it constitutes the highest realization of political virtue. Death on the field of glory in defense of a victorious fatherland constitutes the most perfect deed, the most perfect form of action for a citizen, and it deserves particular praise and memory. As Thucydides' Pericles says, the living should look upon the might of the country and fire themselves up with love for it, "and since they will become aware of its greatness, they should remember that it was created by daring people, responsible and enlivened by a sense of honor, who during times of hardship did not hold back their services and courage, instead they gave it the most valuable sacrifice as a gift."

Pericles concludes this part of his speech with the following words to the living, "Imitate

¹⁷ Thucydides, *Wojna peloponeska* [the Peloponnesian War], trans. K. Komaniński, Warszawa, 1988, pp.37-38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

these heroes! By understanding that happiness depends upon freedom, and freedom upon courage, do not avoid the dangers of war.”

Pericles in his speech echoes Aristotle who placed death on the field of glory at the beginning of the catalog of virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Virtue of courage is related to danger, according to Aristotle, because the man who is valiant is the one who does not fear the greatest of all dangers. The deciding factor in the question about the essence of courage is the answer to the question about the things toward which man shows himself to be courageous:

What then are the fearful things in respect of which courage is displayed? I suppose those which are the greatest, since there is no one more brave in enduring danger than the courageous man. Now the most terrible thing of all is death.¹⁹

But not every type of death is intended here:

But even death, we should hold, does not in all circumstances give an opportunity for courage, for instance, we do not call a man courageous for facing death by drowning or disease. What form of death then is a test of courage? Presumably that which is the noblest. Now the noblest form of death is death in battle, for it is encountered in the midst of the greatest and most noble of dangers.²⁰

Arendt, in her convincing reconstruction of the nature of politics and in her building up of a suggestive model of the ideal Greek community passes over in silence the aims of these actions. Politics, in the narrow meaning of the word presented by Arendt in her ideal model, is concerned with the process of making decisions and designating the aims of common action. But one would be hard pressed to find in Arendt's description what this whole process is concerned with if not matters pertaining to maintaining and expanding the might of the state (since this is obviously tied to violence). But when one remembers the words of Pericles one cannot help but hold back the impression that for real Greeks the establishment of ties and new realities was inextricably connected with conquest and destruction, with the imposition of their will upon others. And not even for material gains, but for glory, which confirmed their civic excellence. The readiness to risk one's own life was the best proof of having crossed the cramped confines of the biological nature of man, which he shares with the animals. The most beautiful deed is heroism in war, and the most beautiful form of “speech” is advising the city in matters pertaining to war and peace.

¹⁹Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115a.

²⁰*Ibid.*

If in the picture of the Greeks presented to us by Arendt we notice considerable oversights, then there is a glaring contradiction in her picture of the modern epoch and the place of violence in modern politics. In her accounts of councils during the Bolshevik revolution, or also councils during the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, violence implicitly becomes a positive element.²¹ Or to put it another way, it is hard to understand why criticism of the Jacobins and the negative appraisal of the violence used during the French revolution can go in hand in hand with a fascination with Russian workers' and military delegates councils. Arendt did not live to see 1980, but one cannot shake the impression that among all the 20th century political movements enlivened by civic cooperation, "Solidarity" was the closest to the ideal described in *The Human Condition*. This is because it was the only immense social movement totally devoid of violence. August, and later "Solidarity" between 1980 and 1981, was a political community whose main tool for achieving change was the element of speech, rather than physical force. And yet it seems to me that it is not possible to explain the republican political pathos which appeared in the Gdańsk Shipyard without acknowledging an element of violence.

The words of a reporter who was present in the shipyard are key to understanding this matter, "If one lives a bit with people who throw caution to the wind and are willing to risk their lives, then this has an effect." In an obvious sense violence was present in during August. It's true that violence was not directly present on the stage of the historical drama, yet, it was lodged within the reality of that time as a possibility.

Just the potential for violence, happily not actualized in August, decided upon the character of the pathos felt by the participants. It was also one of the sources of the extraordinary psychosomatic reactions described earlier in this lecture. The threat of intervention, internal and external, by the USSR, was both an obvious and deciding factor within the situation.

The nature of August's pathos seen in light of the republican tradition is based on the fact that a community of citizens, consciously and in solidarity, stood up against the threat of violence from a tyranny. This community itself did not resort to violence, but it did win a war of nerves; a war, because it consciously risked life. If it was ready to risk its life in the defense of its freedom, then it fulfilled an elementary requirement of classical republicanism – it went beyond the boundaries of its own biological necessity. By defeating the tyranny it achieved the glory due to truly courageous people.

²¹ The text itself is full of references to Marx and Engels, which brings up mixed feelings today, as does *On Violence*, written under the influence of the counter-cultural student revolts of the latter part of the 60's, where one can find, for example, the author's sympathy toward the Black Panthers.

In 1972, in Toronto, during a seminar devoted to the thought of Arendt, where the author of *The Human Condition* was present, there came the question about where in the democratic and liberal world did she notice places where the spirit of ancient civic life could come back to life. For the one asking the question it seemed especially problematic, because the only thing “left to do for the political man, is what the Greeks used to do, make war!”. To this Arendt replied that there are places where the spirit of civic debate is still present:

let's take, for example, urban public meetings. Let's say that building a bridge is what's at stake. This can be decided from the top down, or through public debate. If it just so happens that the building of a bridge is truly an open matter, then it's better that it were decided upon by a discussion, rather than from the top down. I was once at such a meeting in New Hampshire and was impressed by the reasonableness of those citizens.²²

This whole example contains the core of the problem. Even though local self-rule often remains – especially in countries where civic culture is strong – a substantial element of civic activity, this form of engagement is essentially different from the classical model of political community.

Civic life on this level, even though it is necessary and extremely useful, only with difficulty provides the stimuli necessary to feel “public happiness” and also to feel the pathos which comes from enacting freedom. It would be hard to imagine people who are constantly crying or throwing up at a vote for the county budget or during a discussion about the renovation of a school.

Local self-governance, free from pathos, directed at comfort and friendly cohabitation is always in danger of falling into the sphere of the social. This is not a catastrophe or an act of God, but the normal situation which is totally understandable in modern liberal-democratic societies. On the other hand, the appearance of the republican pathos requires a context, even just a potential, of violence, or at least a sharp existential conflict, which causes such situations to be treated by modern societies not as desirable, but rather as dangerous and threatening. The totality of social mobilization which appears during limit situations such as August is hard to maintain for the long run.

Thus, the republican tradition is not so much a realistic project as it is a normative utopia, the measure for social and political reality, which serves as a tool to criticize them. Paraphrasing Arendt, who spoke of the “lost treasure” of this tradition, it is a treasure continually regained in

²² Cf. “Seminarium w Toronto” [the Seminar in Toronto] in *Przegląd Polityczny* [the Political review], no. 55/2002, p. 196 ff.

history and also continually lost until its next lightning bolt, until the next historical revelation of primordially pure politics. It is true that each such bolt will fall back into the sphere of the social, but memory of the miracle of freedom and real community will constitute – for a time, for a generation, maybe for several generations – a continually present ideal that shows the measure of perfection possible for people. And one of such ideals – still present in our history – is the phenomenon of “Solidarity”.