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Phenomenal Existence and World-Building: Revisiting the Ambivalences of Hannah Arendt's Public/Private Distinction and Its Relation to the Body

ABSTRACT: Hannah Arendt argues for a primacy of appearance in which human existence is embedded. Specific forms of appearing relate to specific activities. In the first part of my paper, I turn to Arendt's late work *The Life of the Mind* in order to reconstruct how human activities can come into view. This allows to get a clearer grasp of what world-building in a phenomenal world amounts to and how certain activities like building, acting, speaking, thinking, and judging open up dimensions that go beyond the immediately appearing world. They disclose historical, generative, and political horizons and thereby create new worlds within the appearing world. While in the first section I focus on the careful distinctions Arendt makes between the phenomenal world, the space of appearance, and the public realm, I turn to a problematization of her public/private distinction in the second section. Instead of accusing her of a "phenomenological essentialism" which locates every type of activity in a proper place, I take a look at the correlation between embodiment and architecture. Based on the horrors of a boundless mega-body, the need for bodies to be sheltered and located, and the possibility to relate bodies to a common history, Arendt develops specific claims about how bodies should be arranged, housed, and located.

KEYWORDS: Hannah Arendt, public–private differentiation, space of appearance, body, worldlessness

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Hannah Arendt argues for a primacy of appearance in which human existence is embedded. Specific forms of appearing relate to specific activities. In the first part of my paper, I turn to Arendt's late work "On thinking" (the first part of *The Life of the Mind [LM]*) in order to reconstruct how human activities can come into view. Taking her departure from the difference between thinking the world and acting in it, Arendt embeds her earlier considerations from *The Human Condition (HC)* in a new comprehensive regime: that of appearance and in/visibility. This allows to appreciate that we share a phenomenal world with all living creatures who make their appearance in it and even have an "urge" to appear. It also allows, however, to get a clearer grasp of what world-building in a phenomenal world amounts to and how certain activities like building, acting, speaking, thinking, and judging open up dimensions that go beyond the immediately appearing world. They disclose historical, generative, and political horizons and thereby create new worlds within the appearing world. While in the first section I focus on the careful distinctions Arendt makes between the phenomenal world, the space of appearance, and the public realm, I turn to a problematization of her public/private distinction in the second section. Instead of accusing her of a "phenomenological essentialism" which locates every type of activity in a proper place, I take a look at the correlation between embodiment and architecture. Based on the horrors of a boundless mega-body, the need for bodies to be sheltered and located, and the possibility to relate bodies to a common history, Arendt develops specific claims about how bodies should be arranged, housed, and located.

The World's Phenomenal Nature, the Space of Appearance, and the Public Realm

On the very first pages of *The Life of the Mind,* Arendt's main claim is that the world's nature is phenomenal. All things that are appear, "natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal."[1] But the concept of appearance would not make any sense if "recipients of appearance did not exist."[2] Appearances thus conceptually imply existing spectators, somebody to whom they appear. These spectators are not unworldly eyes of the mind, just watching a spectacle from another sphere. They are "living creatures" and as such, they are embedded in a world of appearance. They enter this world by appearing in it and leave it by

[1] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1977, p. 19.
[2] *Ibid*.

disappearing from it. So, essentially, they are themselves appearances, with their (normally) invisible bodily functions producing surfaces that present themselves to other sentient creatures. Living beings are thus not only in the world but are *of* the world in the sense that "nobody so far has succeeded in *living* in a world that does not manifest itself of its own accord."[3] In the phenomenal world which is our lifeworld, "Being and Appearing coincides."[4] This means that everything "depends in its being, that is, in its appearingness, on the presence of living creatures,"[5] including those creatures themselves. Living creatures possess consciousness qua intentionality, i.e., that they are aware of something: appearances and a whole appearing world. Vice versa, this world implies a plurality of spectators: "Plurality is the law of the earth."[6]

In just a few sentences, Arendt spans a whole phenomenological ontology with far reaching philosophical consequences. By starting from a primacy of appearance, she arrives at a co-implication and co-dependency of subjects and objects that commonly actualize the world's phenomenality, while being a part of it. Appearance equals Being, implies plurality, constitutes world, and embeds life. One could call this a co-constitutive philosophy of manifestation, combined with a primacy of the lifeworld which is a phenomenal world: "the world of appearances is *prior* to whatever region,"[7] and this "primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life which neither the scientist nor the philosopher can ever escape."[8]

As I have argued elsewhere, Arendt's notion of appearance is clearly a phenomenological one.[9] Even if the Kantian approach to judging appearances in the Third Critique is of crucial importance to her, she goes far beyond Kant by equating appearance with Being. Her pluralization of appearances transcends Nietzsche as well because she views appearances as constitutive of reality and not as "illusions created for the sake of life."[10] Arendt's notion, just as Heidegger's, roots in the Greek concept of *phainesthai*: shining forth, showing oneself. What she emphasizes a lot more than Heidegger is that this implies a plurality of "spectators," or of

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[3] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[5] *Ibid*.
[6] *Ibid*.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 23.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[9] *Cf.* S. Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality,* Routledge, New York, 2018, pp. 53–76.
[10] D. R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, Princeton University Press, Princeton/New Jersey, 1996, p. 103.

conscious beings who experience the appearing world and appear in it like on a "stage."[11] Without relapsing into a Cartesian philosophy of the subject, Arendt thereby confirms the Husserlian theories of intentionality, the intersubjective constitution of reality, as well as the double nature of the body as lived body and objectively appearing body. She does this mostly by drawing on Merleau-Ponty, and his later work on *The Visible and the Invisible.*

Thinking, as Arendt explains, is an activity that allows to partly withdraw from the world of appearances—into "the life of the mind." The thinker is "absent minded," she is not involved in the events of the world, even if her body is still there and visible to all. In this way, thinking "makes sense" of the appearing world, it creates meaning and context, it elucidates the appearances in a specific mode: that of speaking with oneself. But it also brings transcendental (i.e., necessary) illusions with it. Through the experience of thinking, which is a reflexive activity of the mind in the medium of language, professional thinkers are drawn to a metaphysis of two worlds where the visible world is taken to be a "mere appearance" grounding in the reality of the invisible world.

Arendt explains how these metaphysical conclusions occur in thinking while she insists that the realm of appearances is the only realm where life is really lived, and reality is experienced and shared. From the thinker's perspective, she reminds us, the whole of life goes on "in public."[12] But this is a philosophical way to frame the situation. It leads to a philosophical use of the public/private distinction, indicating a dichotomy of a "private mind" and a "public world." This not only covers up that private and public spaces are actually and originally innerworldly, built spaces; it also declares everything worldly to be "public" in the same way. It is thus important to note that Arendt herself avoids using the public/private vocabulary in this philosophical sense (in the quote above she only cites Hugh of Saint Victor, a medieval author). She tries to be more nuanced in order to develop different regimes and ways of appearing. If we look at her terminology, she very consistently discerns between (1) the "phenomenal world"—including its appearances and its visibility—and (2) the "*space of appearance*" which, in *HC* she again clearly distinguishes from (3) the "public realm" as an institutionalized and organized form. What are the differences and how do the three concepts relate to one another?

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[11] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 21.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

Ad (1) In the *phenomenal world*, all kinds of activities take place, they are "public" in the sense of being "visible." Even appearing itself is an activity for living beings who show themselves on a "stage":

> The urge toward self-display—to respond by showing to the overwhelming effect of being shown—seems to be common to men and animals. And just as the actor depends upon stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, to make his entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the location for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence.[13]

The "worldly stage shared with all sentient beings"[14] is thus something like a proto-public realm, one where life thrives as appearing, visible, shared life. Conceiving life as *appearing* life in *LM* gives it new a surplus beyond the only necessary functions Arendt attributed to life in *HC*: animal life in all its colors, varieties, and forms surpasses what would be needed for mere survival. It is an excess of abundance and beauty. This connects the dimension of life with what transcends it and appears for its own sake. Arendt thereby allows for life what she ascribed to utensils and functional objects already in *HC*, using the same argument:

> Everything that is, must appear, and nothing can appear without a shape of its own; hence there is in fact no thing that does not in some way transcend its functional use, and its transcendence, its beauty or

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[13] *Ibid*., p. 21f.

[14] A. Gündoğdu, "Animal Trouble: Arendt and the Question of Anthropocentrism," *The Review of Politics,* 86, 4, 2024, pp. 505–528, here 515. It has been argued that Arendt gives up what she defended in *HC* (176), that only human plurality expresses itself as uniqueness. Instead, "plurality arises out of the intersubjective practices of appearing and being perceived in distinct forms on a worldly stage shared with all sentient beings who are all beginners in the sense that their (inter)actions set something into motion that cannot be predicted by necessity or utility" (*ibid*., p. 10). I agree that embedding life in the primacy of appearance opens it up to more than a logic of necessity or utility, but I would be hesitant calling (higher? or all?) animals "beginners" in the historistic sense as Arendt uses the term. It is one thing to say that all sentient animals have their range of reaction and play beyond necessity alone; it is another thing to say that a group of squirrels in 1789 set something in motion that changed the whole course of squirrel history. This difference is important, and I do not regard it as discriminatory to not apply this kind of talk to non-human animals; to the contrary, I would rather see it as problematic if the only way of getting into a theoretically and ethically accurate relation with non-human animals would be to anthropomorphize them.

> ugliness, is identical with appearing publicly and being seen. By the same token, namely, in its sheer worldly existence, everything also transcends the sphere of pure instrumentality once it is completed.[15]

The lifeworld, a plurality of spectators, and appearance hence intrinsically belong together and allow for the possibility to transcend invisible processes and functions. The human public realm does not fall from the sky, it is rooted in plural, appearing life.

Ad (2) In *HC* as well as *LM*, Arendt throws a spotlight on types of activities: On the one hand, she investigates their intentionalities, temporalities, products, rhythms, and establishment of relations to others and the world. On the other hand, she explores their relation to appearance. It is no exaggeration to say that *HC* is methodologically based on this heuristic, which is reflected in the chapter structure, and I would argue that it is also at work in *LM*. From the viewpoint of thinking (Arendt always takes a specific viewpoint and never suggests she could stand above all viewpoints), action and speech as well as acting and speaking subjects appear just like anything else in the phenomenal world. Form the viewpoint of action and speech themselves, however, something additionally happens which is decisive for our topic: acting and speaking generate an additional *"space of appearance."* Whenever people are "together in speech and action," Arendt says in *HC*, the "space of appearance comes into being."[16] What kind of illumination is this, adding to the phenomenal world? And what kind of quality characterizes these activities in order to be able to produce this additional sort of "light"?

Let us look at speech first: clearly, Arendt sets a different focus than Heidegger when she claims that "being together in speech" brings something to light. Heidegger argues that the *logos* "lets something be seen *(phainestai)*"[17] in principle, but regarding political relevance, then reduces it to rare accomplishments of thinkers, poets, and leaders.[18] This is democratized in Arendt: "whenever people are/gather together" such a "light" emerges.[19] What does the discourse bring to light that is otherwise not visible in the phenomenal world? Once again Heidegger gives the initial answer: that "what the discourse is about; and it does so either

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15 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998, p. 173.
16 *Ibid*., p. 199.
17 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1962, p. 56.
18 D. R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, pp. 155, 218.
19 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 199f.

for the one who is doing the talking (the medium) or for persons who are talking with one another."[20] Speech—or *logos* as a way of being in the world together—reveals the world and the speakers in a specific way. The simple fact that the logos lets something be seen *as* something[21] adds something to the self-givenness of appearance and self-display: a perspective that makes something a theme and thereby expresses itself. The other simple fact that one can contradict this articulated perspective, opens up a whole realm of self- and world-articulation that goes beyond our immediate appearance and expressivity as living beings.

Acting, the second activity that "shows something," has obviously been added by Arendt to Heidegger's scheme of disclosive existentialia of *Being and Time*. Yet, it is central that acting and speaking are inextricably linked. Action without speech remains sheer violence which is mute.[22] Speech, on the other hand, can be action, since it conveys not only information or generates communication, but sets something in motion. Hence, there is a particularly revealing quality of deeds that are accompanied by words, and words that are deeds. An action can reveal an actor, show who she is, which goes beyond her visible appearance. She appears as a person who, in a conscious decision or not, has come to take this or that position, who has reacted this or that way. Of course, this implies a context of common affairs, a historicity of events, and a shared intelligibility of possibilities, all of which is provided by Heidegger's description of Dasein. At the same time, the actor appears as someone who could act differently or begin something new: the "who" gains shape in her actions but, as long as alive, remains inscrutable and intangible.[23] By emphasizing this point, Arendt introduces what she calls "natality," a force that precisely has the power to rupture the conformities of "the anyone".[24] Arendt also highlights how important plurality is for action, again by examining its relation to appearance. Her very specific notion of action primarily looks at action *as it appears, not as it is intended*. This does not mean that the intention does not matter, but rather that what unfolds in the world depends on how the action is taken up. If an action is not taken up at all, it is as if it had not happened. By contrast, an action can be impactful to the highest degree, even if its intention is misunderstood.

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[20] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 34.
[22] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 26.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 181.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 246.

This indicates how much Arendt ties the revealing qualities of action and speech to worldly appearance and actualized plurality, but also to factors that transcend plain exposedness and visibility. What expresses itself in speech and action is a standpoint of an individuality that articulates something *as* something and that shows herself *as* some*one* in a web of relationships. Plurality is "the law of the earth" and rooted in the phenomenal world; but articulated plurality lets something appear that transcends the visible.

The "space of appearance" created by acting and speaking thus enhances the phenomenal world but has to be differentiated from it. One important difference is that it is a dimension that is actualized by specific activities, which implies that it disappears again when the correlating activities cease. Unlike the phenomenal world which "manifest[s] itself of its own accord"[25] and which we can neither leave behind nor destroy, the space of appearance is not a necessary feature of existence, not even an enduring one, but rather a fleeting phenomenon:

> Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men [...] but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.[26]

Another important feature is that the activities generating a space of appearance are themselves dependent on it "in order to be actualized at all."[27] This indicates a co-dependency in actualization, which also underlines the fragile status of the activities themselves. They do not just produce a space of appearance from a distant, independent sphere, but need the environment they continue to produce. In Arendt's words, they depend on a certain "degree of manifestation"[28] which discerns them from other activities, like laboring, working, thinking, or willing. This is a position Arendt holds onto also in *LM*:

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[25] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 26.
[26] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 199.
[27] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 72.
[28] *Ibid.,* p. 72.

> If we consider the whole scale of human activities from the viewpoint of appearance, we find many degrees of manifestation. Neither laboring nor fabrication requires display of the activity itself; only action and speaking need a space of appearance—as well as people who see and hear—in order to be actualized at all. But none of these activities is invisible.[29]

When Arendt argued earlier in the book that every appearing being needs uptake from fellow creatures, it seems like a contradiction now to reduce this again only to acting and speaking. I think we can only understand Arendt adequately if we take her talk of "degrees of manifestation" seriously. First, even if worldly appearance implies a plurality of spectators, this does not mean that certain activities would depend on their visibility: the activity of working is visible because it occurs in the phenomenal world, our lifeworld; but it does not *have to* be perceived by anyone in order to accomplish its aim: to produce a thing and bring it into appearance. Hence, its basic visibility in the world can be modulated without changing its productivity: it can be hidden or displayed, its aim can be achieved one way or the other. The opposite is the case with speech and action. If they are hidden away, their effect is seriously diminished, up to not making any sense anymore. A speech no one hears and an action no one takes notice of simply cannot achieve what they are meant to—it questions not only their success but their being as a whole. Speech and action thus need to appear and be taken up in order to be what they are. This sets the course for Arendt's differentiation between "the public" and "the private." Secondly, it remains true that "everything that is must appear,"[30] a conviction Arendt had already in *HC*, and that this implies a plurality of spectators, of fellow creatures recognizing one's existence. But in order to recognize more than existence, namely, thematizations, statements, positionings, new beginnings, opinions, standpoints—everything speech and action have to offer—a different degree of manifestation is necessary: that of appearing in a dimension where others not only take notice of it, but speak and act themselves and are ready to continue doing so. This is what Arendt calls a "web of relationships" and a "second in-between." In contrast to the first in-between, which is the appearing world, and which must include reciprocal and continuous interaction

[29] *Ibid.,* p. 72.
[30] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 173.

between those who live in it, the second in-between establishes a different kind of "light" and dimension of co-existence: it lets things be seen from different perspectives, it lets characters and personalities appear, it opens up a temporal, generative, and historistic dimension of a past and a future—and indeed, all of this ceases and can wither away if the space of appearance is not held in actualization.

Arendt calls a continuing actualization of an in-between *power*: "Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence."[31] In the simplest form, it can be actualized by "gathering together:" this creates common attention, readiness to act or respond, continuing communication and interaction. But in order to last, this coming together needs to be bound by something that allows to transcend the present and project itself into the future: Arendt thinks of promises and political forms that arise from acts of commitment to be a functioning community. Power is thus something that only a plurality of beings can actualize together. Importantly, power is "a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity."[32] This means on the one hand that it cannot be stored like a thing. On the other, it indicates the specific actuality of a potential: the greatest power does not have to be exercised, it has its effect just by being a real potential. This is how it can be a force that holds together the space of appearance which contains pure actualities. But it also has normative requirements:

> Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.[33]

For the "light" of action and speech to ignite, they must actuate their disclosive and creative characters: words must disclose realities; deeds must establish relations and create new realities. As we know from Heidegger's existentiell modifications, this is by far not the whole range of these existentialia: action can be disruptive violence, speech can be idle talk or lie. Speaking and acting thus could in fact go on but would not

[31] *Ibid*., p. 200.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] *Ibid*.

have the power to illuminate anything—the space of appearances can darken or fade away. On the other end of the spectrum, word and deed can reach a powerful combination if a community chooses to regulate its affairs among equals and only with words and not violence. This sets the course for Arendt's democratic approach to the public realm. But here the fleeting space of appearance is already cast into a form. We have to take a look at the next basic activity, world-building, and its relation to appearance to understand how the actuality of the space of appearance can be institutionalized and transformed into a lasting "space." This is where and how architecture—in a concrete as well as in more metaphorical sense—becomes crucially relevant for mediating, realizing, and stabilizing humans' phenomenal existence.

Ad 3) World-building allows to arrange spaces and places in the appearing world: a home, a stage, a place for memory; it can conserve, create, protect, or hide appearance. It can do a similar thing for the product of action and speech, the space of appearance: while not being able to produce it (nor to produce power), it can give it a framework, a built and/or designed stage, a medium, an interface, an organization—and thereby institute it, make it become a *"public realm."* This transforms the mere actualization-phenomenon of the space of appearance which "predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm" into an organized dimension of relative stability: be it a "reading public" or "various forms of government [...] in which the public realm can be organized."[34] In its political form, it secures a space and builds a structure "where all subsequent actions [can] take place, the space being the public realm of the *polis* and its structure the law."[35] For Arendt, it is of immense importance that human affairs are "housed" by the human artifice, as otherwise they "will fade away as rapidly as the living deed and the living word;"[36] but just as much does the human artifice need the "lifeblood" of power and actualized action and speech, or else it "lacks its ultimate *raison d'etre*"[37]—it becomes meaningless. The public realm, terminologically, designates this hybrid dimension, partly erected and stable, partly enlivened by the activities which the "architecture," in a metaphorical and non-metaphorical sense, enhances and supports. This has the following two implications.

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[34] *Ibid*., p. 199.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 194.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 204.
[37] *Ibid*.

First, the public realm is less fragile than the space of appearance, but certainly also of a different nature than the phenomenal world. While it necessarily roots in the basic ontological regime of appearance, it amplifies and stabilizes a very specific kind of disclosing activity. Second, the public realm is not only a historical and political phenomenon, it also founds history and politics. As Heidegger argues, Dasein is historistic, which means that it (co-)exists temporally. Therefore, it will necessarily exist in traditions, in a language, and in the everydayness of the "anyone." However, in order to enlighten this dimension, to manifest and grasp it, it is necessary to tell stories and to give appearing individuals and their words and deeds a stage which transports their accomplishments (and failures) over time and lets them sediment as the "history" of this group: this is how our community was founded, this is how and why we started or stopped doing this, this is our story, etc. For Arendt, this necessary shift from a simply *lived* tradition to stories, deeds, and individuals—"heroes" as well as everyday people—that are put in the spotlight is crucial, although it does not yet satisfy the condition for the public realm as she envisions it. A public realm additionally organizes these activities and inspires their continuation by promising "glory" or, to use a more contemporary expression, recognition for great deeds and words—a place in history, where the passion to distinguish oneself and appear by one's own initiative, is rewarded with attention and rememberance. Furthermore, it has a tendency, exceptionally realized in the Greek case, to fully free the word-deed-complex as an own, self-standing dimension of existence. Words, publicly spoken, can resist an otherwise only endured fate and allow for an experience of dignity, even if they are futile; likewise, publicly spoken words can motivate people to do something together which they would not do, had they been left enclosed in their own worlds: it makes them feel, and, ideally, realize their common agency and freedom.

Finally, I would like to shortly address the activities of thinking and judging in their relation to appearance in order to complete the picture. In terms of being activities of the life of the mind, they do not appear in the world, except if they manifest themselves in spoken or written words. Hence, the experience of thinking as well as judging suspends the constant exposedness of appearance and involvement in the world. While thinking steps back to make sense of it all, judging distances one's immediate reaction to get a "view" on things also from different perspectives. Both activities thus enable to relate to the appearing world *as* an appearing one; they allow to thematize it, articulate one's standpoint

and thereby provide an additional illumination beyond the immediacy of appearance. Their withdrawal provides a resource that enhances and deepens appearance in different ways. In the case of thinking, it can lead to metaphysical illusions that eventually degrade the original appearing lifeworld. Judging, by contrast, escapes this bias which is why Arendt is so fond of it: as Kant explained, it deals with single appearances which are not just subsumed under concepts or moral ideas but are reflected in their forms and shapes in relation to our pleasure or displeasure; and it has to appeal to others and their judgments of taste to test its own validity. Therefore, it has to return to the phenomenal world. Judging thus closes the circle and completes the architecture of the public realm:

> The public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators and not by the actors or the makers. And this critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator; without this critical, judging faculty the doer or maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived.[38]

Judging provides a context, it aims at a holistic picture, but not in form of the "one truth" of the singular spectator (the thinker), but in the plural assessments of a judging public. The spectators, not the actors, hold "the clue to the meaning of human affairs"[39] and "Kant, more aware than any other philosopher of human plurality"[40] was the one who recognized this in his *Critique of Judgment*. The phenomenal world thus provides the basic positions, actor, spectator, and stage, which are then elevated to another level and different degrees of manifestation by distinct activities: action and speech weaving a second, however fleeting in-between, which is fastened, formed, and institutionalized by the capacity of world-building; thinking and judging enriching this realm with a depth-dimension that is achieved by moving back and forth between the visible and the invisible, between the dialogue with oneself, the appearances themselves, and the judgment of others.

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[38] H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 63.
[39] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 96.
[40] *Ibid*.

The Public and the Private and the Ambivalences of Embodiment

In the second part of my paper, I would like to take a closer look of how the phenomenal existence of human beings in all its complexity relates to the public/private distinction and how this shapes the political significance of world-building. Arendt largely seems to argue for a rigid and pretty traditional defense of the public/private divide which has earned her pronounced criticism, especially from feminists.[41] For example, Seyla Benhabib charged her with being committed to a "phenomenological essentialism," defined by "her contention that each human activity has a proper place in the world, in which it must be carried out and within which it unfolds."[42] As I have argued previously,[43] I neither think that Arendt's argumentation is essentialist nor that, in this case, it rests on phenomenological grounds. What really motivates Arendt's judgment is "political significance,"[44] i.e., the impact it has on the political when a certain type of activity becomes dominant in the public sphere (which means it can very well unfold there). This measure mainly determines her views about what should be hidden away and what should be displayed in public. The reason to ban a logic of production and consumption (which she calls "life") from taking hold over the public realm is to protect locations where other domains and activities can unfold: first and foremost, acting and speaking, which indeed cannot come into their own existence without being heard and seen. Instead of a "phenomenological essentialism" we thus find a normative argument for protection of those elusive activities that actualize plurality. Furthermore, we find an argument for a multiplicity of spaces and activities, public and private, supporting each other.

Arendt is aware that the public realm does not emerge out of nowhere; that it rests on conditions of life and worldliness, labor and work; that it is interrelated with these conditions and that already life is embedded in appearance. I started my reconstruction of her phenomenology of the public with *The Life of the Mind* in order to emphasize this crucial embeddedness in lifeworldly appearance. It corresponds to the two

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41 B. Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1995.

42 S. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt,* Rowman and Littlefield, New York, 2003, p. xliv, cf. also pp. 123–126, 157, 172.

43 S. Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality,* pp. 133–143.

44 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 78.

most fundamental conditions one could also call appearance-conditions of the individual: natality and mortality. The condition of natality means that we enter this world of appearances by being born into it; the condition of mortality addresses the fact that when we die, we leave a world of appearances that has been there before us and will continue after us. As this short explanation already indicates, there is a specifically human way of being born and dying since it grants us not only the dis/appearance in a phenomenal world, but, on top of that, relates an individual to the historical world and to a generative chain. Natality and mortality thus contain the promise of embedded individuality to make sense in a realization of plurality. Plurality, again, is in need of the other two activity-conditions to be actualized: the needs of life have to be fulfilled and there has to be a stable world in order for speaking and acting to be sustained and have a location. In contrast to this, to simply live and appear in the phenomenal world is not in need of worldliness and plurality. This comes at the price of not being able to grant the individuals their space of appearance. Life needs individual reproduction, but it can do without the individuals' articulation *as* individuals in a space of appearance. When life occurs primarily in this mode, the balance between individuality and its conditions is out of joint, the promise of natality is broken. That life can have this deindividualizing aspect and can, quite literally, become a general term of existence which is "instantiated" by different specimens counting all as the same, is a horror that constantly haunts Arendt's considerations.

I find Linda Zerilli's psychoanalytic interpretation helpful in this regard, since it brings out the ambivalences in Arendt's account. By drawing on Kristeva's distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic, she argues that Arendt "offers a powerful if problematic account of the subject's terror of embodiment" namely, the "terror of having a body, an anxiety about mortality and loss of symbolic mastery that, on her account, haunts every speaking subject in Western culture."[45] Being reluctantly gender-blind, Arendt does not grant women an escape from this terror by means of an alleged special relation to their embodiment. Instead, she stages the terror for all sexes and "in doing so she both confirms *and* contests, secures *and* attenuates, the symbolic order."[46] In the

[45] L. M.-G. Zerilli, "The Arendtian Body," in Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1995, pp. 167–193, here p. 174.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 175.

deindividualizing form of life Arendt invokes, "we witness a recalcitrant, desiring and polymorphous body that ruptures the very boundaries (private/public) and identities (woman/man) that Western culture and Hannah Arendt herself frantically secure in an effort to keep the body in its place."[47] *Animal laborans*, the monstrous and amorphous accomplice of an "unnatural growth" of life (in the form of consumerist capitalism), conquers the public light of differences and makes everything diffuse into one formless, anonymous process. Zerilli has a point that, put in Kristeva's psychoanalytic terms, this restages "the symbolic law of the father against the unnamable, jouissant body of the mother"[48]—and it is no coincidence that Arendt sees a large part of her philosophical method in making clear distinctions *(krinein)* and drawing borders like Zeus, the father of gods. In fact, Arendt "does more than describe the wall that secures the border between public and private, nameable and unnamable, symbolic and semiotic; she rebuilds it."[49] Arendt, thus, can be read as something like a haunted architect. I think that this is what we can see in many of Arendt's problematic accounts, be it her disinterest in subsistence labor or her dismissal of "nomadic tribes" and other indigenous peoples as "worldless" and not having a "history."[50]

Being lost in the amorphous, unhistorical, unnamable is a horror that Arendt unfortunately—but maybe not so surprisingly—combines with Eurocentric, culturally elitist, and in the case of the description of (South-)African peoples, even culturally racist biases.[51] But she also relates it to the totalitarian horror: totalitarian politics systematically deprives individualized, housed life of all its legal, moral, personal forms with the goal to reduce it to unprotected superfluous life that does not count and can be annihilated. "The danger is that a global, universally interrelated civilization may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages."[52] Arendt's fear of this "possible regression

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47 *Ibid*., p. 175.
48 *Ibid*., p. 178.
49 *Ibid*., p. 179.
50 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 204 & cf. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1973, pp. 190–192.
51 Regarding several difficult passages in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, I would like to point to Shmuel Lederman's helpful analysis in S. Lederman, "Making the Desert Bloom. Hannah Arendt and Zionist Discourse," *The European Legacy*, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/10848770.2016.1158559 (accessed May 5th, 2025).
52 H. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism,* p. 302.

from civilization,"[53] of masses of "rightless people" who "live and die without leaving any trace"[54] results in a nearly desperate desire for *form qua protection*: a right to have rights, a guaranteed place in a community which she calls "property,"[55] and a world that is solidly built so that it can outlast us.

All of these issues hang together closely with her conception of the public and the private. If we go to the *locus classicus* in HC, chapters 7 and 8, "The Public Realm: The Common" and "The Private Realm: Property" we can see how she reimagines a balance between the two realms, partly by drawing on Greek and Roman Antiquity, partly by contrasting it with the modern developments. It is important to note that Arendt speaks from a position where she regards the ancient public/private distinction as having long been superseded by the difference between the "social" and the "intimate" sphere—the latter being the very small rest that is defended against a complete socialization and commercialization in modernity. From this viewpoint, Arendt's characterization of the public and private realm has an ideal rather than a descriptive character; it has a heuristic function in our current situation, one that again introduces differences. Generally speaking, the private realm should anchor and harbor individuals and their (generative) life process, in order to have a place from which they can rise into the public sphere and gain a voice, sounding through the "mask" of *persona*. While the public stands for the real, the shared, and the common, the private stands for a place one owns and occupies in the world, a place that guarantees belonging to a common world.[56] Arendt's architectonic project emphasizes, in a metaphorical as well as in a quite material way, that only marked distinctions and owned, protected spaces can serve as the foundation for real, plural communality.

Let me highlight three main arguments Arendt makes with regard to the political significance of the public/private distinction and explicate how this relates to the body and architecture: The first one concerns the arrangement of bodies in a way to prevent them becoming one mega-body and thereby losing the reality *between* them. This is mainly directed against a privatization of the public realm. The second one addresses the need to shelter bodies and give them "a room of one's own"

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[53] *Ibid*., p. 300.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 58.
[56] *Ibid*., p. 62.

(Woolf) in order to be able to withdraw as well as rise into the public from a solid ground. This defends the private realm in the sense of property, having a place. The third argument insists on housing bodies in a tangible generative world—a place that outlasts my existence and that allows us to care for future generations.

1. Arrangement: A Shared Reality vs. the Darkness of a Mega-Body

One of Arendt's main arguments is that only the public realm, i.e., intersubjective attention and recognition can constitute reality. I consider this to be an existential version of Husserl's theory of transcendental intersubjectivity, which claims that the difference between reality and illusion presupposes others to whom the world appears as well. Inner life can be intense, but it only gains reality, in terms of coming into view from different perspectives and being taken up, when it appears in a shared world. Arendt even enforces this contrast by going to a drastic example, that of extreme pain. It is not by chance that the vulnerable body exemplifies how the initial opening to the world can close down. Arendt calls extreme pain a "borderline experience" which "deprives us of our feeling of reality" and which is "so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all."[57] Furthermore, a state of extreme pain is "privative" in the sense of depriving us not only from the world, but also from being able to share a world with others. Note that this whole argument builds only on the category of subjectively lived bodies and yet does not say or claim anything about the political sphere or the sphere of the household. As a phenomenological argument, it could hold without thematizing built public or private spaces at all. But Arendt takes this subjective paradigm of privacy and its correlative intersubjective paradigm of reality and extrapolates it to a political situation:

> The subjectivity of privacy can be prolonged and multiplied in a family, it can even become so strong that its weight is felt in the public realm; but this family 'world' can never replace the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators.[58]

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

What Arendt wants to underline in this section, is that there can be different "wes:" a we that is constructed from the one perspective of a de-individualizing mega-body, knowing neither birth nor death; and a we that is constituted by a plurality of embodied, finite perspectives. It is crucial to understand that these are very different social formations which involve specific forms of arrangements of plural first person perspectives. Arendt uses two terms for these different arrangements: "world" for the multiperspectival arrangement attaining publicness; and "body" for the one-perspectival arrangement remaining in the paradigm of subjective privacy, now taken in a metaphorical sense. While the "world" gathers people together, relates and separates them,[59] the "family," and on a larger scale, the "social body" arranges people according to the logic of an organism: in an interdependent interplay, but united by one teleology: to keep being alive. For Arendt, this is *the* paradigm of privacy on a social scale. It is "private" like the inner darkness of a body whose organs do not need to appear before each other in order to function together. Instead of the paradigms of appearance and in-between, it is the paradigms of function, productivity and efficiency that arranges people in different (social) architectures.

A public realm does not come into being between people who regard themselves mainly as "members of a family," simply because the one family interest coordinates and, in case of conflict, overrules the perspectives of its members. They are not equal first person perspectives, but arranged in a hierarchical order and eventually channeled into one perspective. This is why Arendt argues that such social formations lack "reality"—their "world" never comes into view from another perspective. Arendt further extends this argument to mass society whose arrangement is that of one big macroeconomic body and whose "objective" common denominator has become money. "As distinguished from this 'objectivity' [through money] the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised."[60] Hence, the difference between private "need/intensity" and public "reality" also implies two forms of objectivity: one that is achieved by reducing everything to one measurement; and the other which is constituted intersubjectively by articulating different

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

perspectives of the same thing. A common denominator, neither that of mass society's "conformism," nor even that of a "common nature,"[61] will never create an experientially common world. For this, experiential plurality is needed, and this means to experience equals which see the world from a different perspective. If this is not possible anymore, people

> have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.[62]

Let me illustrate this famous point Arendt makes in HC by returning to the question of arrangement—which, not by chance, reminds us of our digital worlds of clicks and likes: if everyone is held in front of a screen where a common denominator makes all manifestations measurable and thus reduces them to it, it is very likely that everything that appears will converge to one mode, namely the one that achieves the most clicks. Arendt regards such captive state "worldless." It is deprived of the reality that only "truly and reliably" comes to pass "where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity."[63]

To sum up: Arendt uses an argument to distinguish between "private" and "public" by drawing on the difference between the "subjective" and "intersubjective" sphere. The former is connected to the logic of the body, including its urges and needs, and to the fleeting phenomena of the stream of consciousness, which do not gain worldly shapes; the latter is conceived along the lines of a shared world, where everything that is in-between subjects comes into view from different, articulated perspectives. By extrapolating the subjective paradigm of the public/private distinction (i.e., the philosophical public/private divide) to social formations, i.e., a "mega body," Arendt arrives at the claim that specific intersubjective arrangements come with a loss of experiential reality.

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61 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
63 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

2. Location: Privacy Is Needed for Public Life to Unfold

This brings me to Arendt's second, central argument with regard to the relation between public and private spheres: in order to achieve this specific intersubjective arrangement of being gathered around things that are in-between, subjects need to be *located*. Again, Arendt draws conclusions from basic phenomenological insights and transposes them into political constellations. But now, without her making it explicit, the body attains a much more positive role. It serves as a model for what privacy should provide subjects with: a location in the world, a basic "zero-point of orientation."[64] It is bodies which allow that "those who are present [in the world] have different locations in it, and [that] the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects."[65] What embodiment does for consciousness in a basic phenomenological sense, i.e., to locate it in a world, and thereby to enable it to constitute identical, three-dimensional objects and subjects in the world, is what "property" allows for in a political sense. This is the "profound connection between private and public, manifest on its most elementary level in the question of private property."[66] Arendt reminds us that property does not equal wealth. In fact, what she really means by it is a stable place and position in the world which is owned without question: a place to live. In more abstract political sense, it means citizenship, an unconditioned right to belong to a community (Arendt speaks about the "location in the world and the citizenship resulting from it"[67]). Arendt takes her extrapolating intuition from the fact that bodies do not simply exist in an appearing world but need to be clothed, housed, and sheltered. Every body needs a home, its very own protected place, in order to fulfill its world-opening function well. It needs to be fed and cared for to be able to be the transparent projection onto the world that bodies usually are (certainly also if they are regarded as abled bodies). Arendt's argument, without explicitly mentioning bodies, bears a certain resemblance to Simone de Beauvoir's[68] treatment of the body, embodied existence, and its (gendered) relationship to the public and the private:

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[64] E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book,* Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1989, pp. 61, 135, 166.

[65] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 57.

[66] *Ibid*., p. 61.

[67] *Ibid*.

[68] Cf. S. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* Vintage, New York, 2011.

embodied existence, of whatever gender, is essentially meant to transcend itself. When it is held back in immanence (i.e., the private), it suffers and is cut off from its ownmost possibilities. While Arendt would probably agree with Beauvoir's analysis—and would likely be hit by the same criticisms—what she emphasizes here are the conditions for the body's political integrity: and this is to have a place in the world. Otherwise, the capacities for political orientation, so she argues, become confused. Arendt does not think so much about "straight" or the "right" orientation (as the reflections of Sara Ahmed[69] on this topic have taught us), but primarily about the constitution of multiple located perspectives in a common world: me being here and the other being over there, so *us* being positioned with regard to an object in this and that location/distance/view/light etc. In a second move, she would probably agree with Ahmed that the position of a "pariah" with regard to "society" results in queer/ing orientations. But the crucial thing is to be able to remain orientated at all, and for this, property is necessary.

Now, there are two ways to read Arendt's claim: One is revisionist and would take her comments on the world of antiquity as a direct advice for today: "To own property meant here to be master over one's own necessities of life and therefore potentially to be a free person, free to transcend his own life and enter the world all have in common."[70] This would not only legitimize the exploitation of others in order to become "master" over one's life and venture freely and carelessly into the public sphere; it would also bypass the body and regard all the labor and the place sustaining it as inferior. I find this an unproductive interpretation. Therefore, I favor another reading which highlights Arendt's emphasis on the lost "sacredness of private property"[71] and transforms it into a "right to have rights" and a much stronger conception of social rights that Arendt explicitly advocates for (although she does, of course, insist that "[t]here should not be a discussion about the fact that everybody deserves a decent place to live."[72] For Arendt, it is more about finding a modern form that grants the privilege of rising into the public sphere from a protected home *for all* than just returning to Antiquity. Arendt is not only well aware that the modern age "began with the expropriation

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[69] Cf. S. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* Duke University Press, Durham / London, 2006.
[70] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 65.
[71] *Ibid*., p. 61.
[72] H. Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in M. A. Hill (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. The Recovery of the Public World,* St. Martin's, New York, 1979, pp. 301–339, here 332.

of the poor and then proceeded to emancipate the new propertyless classes"[73] to unleash "the enormous and still proceeding accumulation of wealth in modern society."[74] She also notes that

> mass society not only destroys the public realm but the private as well, deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world and where, at any rate, even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth of the hearth and the limited reality of family life.[75]

If we think of the massive number of displaced persons, refugees, migrant workers, homeless people, and other forms of contemporary uprootedness and homelessness, it is hard to deny that this development of modernity continues, no matter how much wealth capitalism produces. Although the "limited reality" of family life is certainly not Arendt's ideal (as we have seen before), it is more than an uprooted modern existence has to offer. Arendt could make a strong political argument for social justice given her claim about private property as a condition for public life, but, unfortunately, she fails to do so because she regards the private as pre-political. It is hard not to view this as a mistake: if the conditions for the political can themselves not become a political issue, how are they to be realized? Arendt hopes for technological solutions, at best some that are uncontroversial. But so far, technology has rather supported the forces of the dynamized capital instead of housing and locating people.

To summarize: Arendt strongly argues for a privacy in the form of a sheltered owned home, in order to make the arrangement of public life possible. Interestingly, she implicitly bases her argument on the orientating functions of the body which gives individuals a form, and a place (even when they move). In this case, the body does not stand for an anonymous and amorphous inner urge, but precisely for boundaries, orientation, and location. There is no common world without embodied perspectives, and *a forteriori*, without located and sheltered bodies. To combine the first and second argument in a very concrete sense of political emancipation relating to architecture, we can think of Virginia

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Woolf demanding a "room of one's own."[76] Woolf famously preferred this and a regular revenue to the right to vote, thereby indicating that material conditions need to be at the basis of legal emancipation. The female individual body needs to be given its own space and place to withdraw, without being constantly exposed in the kitchen and appropriated by the mega-body of the family and its constant needs. Only then will the female body also be able to leave the house and enter the public realm.

3. Continuity: A Lasting World vs. Worldlessness

The third argument takes the spatial form of the intersubjective, public arrangement to a temporal stage. Arendt argues that "[i]f the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men;" because: "the common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die."[77] What Arendt has in mind here is the creation of a historical world which can only be a public world. It is a world where people and deeds are remembered through a collective endeavor that has to do with telling stories, recording, judging, canonizing, building something that lasts, etc. In Arendt's view, this illuminates the past as well as the future in a specific way: it creates care for something that outlasts us. This enables a different kind of attitude than believing that everything we do is futile or doomed. "Worldlessness as a political phenomenon is possible only on the assumption that the world will not last; on this assumption, however, it is almost inevitable that worldlessness, in one form or another, will begin to dominate the political scene."[78] For Arendt, this creates a "darkness" which I would characterize as an intersubjective and temporal phenomenon. It is a peculiar form of "privacy" in the sense of being deprived of something: the generational possibility of existence. What people are deprived of when they must consider the world doomed is a lasting place in which they can project a generative future. In times of climate change this feeling is probably more widespread than Arendt would have thought when writing *The Human Condition*. During her own times, the nuclear threat was perceived as the more imminent danger. Both create a comparable fear of an uninhabitable earth and thus a vanishing world. Arendt's prime example, however,

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[76] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, 1995, p. 28.
[77] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 55.
[78] *Ibid.,* p. 54.

which goes back to her early work on Augustine, is the worldlessness of the Christian community in the end-time atmosphere of late antiquity. It was built on the assumption "that the world itself is doomed and that every activity in it is undertaken with the *proviso quamdiu mundus durat* ('as long as the world lasts')."[79] Again, we encounter the idea of the *corpus*, the body, as an answer to worldlessness: in this case, as the principle to unite the Christian community, "whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family."[80] It is, again, a mega-body, one that is orientated towards a worldless transcendence. Consequently, Arendt regards it as "non-political and even antipolitical."[81]

So, on the one hand, a specific form of collective temporal apperception is at stake, one in which action matters and can make a difference. On the other hand, Arendt displays a problematic Eurocentrism by regarding herself fit to judge who has a history and who does not. Her cultural elitism, paired with the idea that human affairs must be given a stage by being housed in the human artifice, held together by power, and preserved through time, leads her to regard everything else as "floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes."[82] Who is outside of this "light," can at best be condemned to the melancholy wisdom that everything is nothing in the eternal recurrence of things: without believing in action, there is "nothing new under the sun;" without speech and the human artifice, there is "no remembrance;" and without power, the space of appearances fades away "as rapidly as the living deed and living word."[83] By repeating the distinction between "Greeks" and "barbarians," Arendt seems to conjure up a specific kind of darkness which is rather one ascribed to others than a genuine phenomenon of the addressed peoples themselves. The privative dimension of being lost and unremembered in time, seen only from the vantage point of the ones considering themselves superior, might, eventually, be the latter's very own privation in the bright light of cultural dominance.

Building, thus, for Arendt not only has a protective but a communicative and narrative function across time. It houses bodies in the history of generations before them. This creates a generative in-between and a world that outlasts the current living generation. To build always means

[79] *Ibid*., p. 53.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 54.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 204.
[83] *Ibid*.

to build for the future—not for eternity, but for a sustainable, livable place where a community creates its own world, a world it can believe in as the objectively tangible and enduring manifestations of its existence and spirit. Arendt's reflex against nature again seems to have its source in the fear of the big eternal cycle in which our tiny individual life-circles turn, age, reproduce, and wear out, without leaving a trace. But the real horror, eventually, is not the eternal presence of nature. It is the "holes of oblivion" built by humans for humans.

What Architecture Can Do

Let me close by pointing to these two extremes in the range of the human activity of building: On the one hand, there is the possibility to make spaces of appearance thrive by providing the right arrangements and surroundings. On the other hand, people can violently hold others in a darkness that not only equals an absence of recognition but will most likely also express itself in built structures. This can be the enclosed household, as a place of labor; it can be the modern factory; and it can be, much worse, the plantation or totalitarian death camps, "holes of oblivion," "into which people stumble by accident and without leaving behind them such ordinary traces of former existence as a body and a grave."[84] As these heterogeneous places indicate, being condemned to being invisible and "leaving no trace,"[85] can have different degrees. It can concern a life that might consider itself fulfilled but that just does not enter public life; but it can also indicate a violence of the highest degree, targeting the most basic forms of social visibility and generative remembrance. On the one hand, Arendt brings home that a life limited to these non-public places is a privative life, and that to be held in darkness equals violence, even "social death."[86] On the other hand, she again reinforces the perspective of those who are "in the light," thereby overlooking that those "in the dark" (and in different kinds of "darknesses") might see things differently. This is why a look at refugee camps[87] as well as at the

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[84] H. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism,* pp. 434, 459.

[85] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 55.

[86] O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1982.

[87] I cite two exemplary and recent works which engage in such analyses, partly with a phenomenological and even Arendtian background. Cf. A. Singh, *Negotiating Homelessness. Rethinking the Human Condition in the Refugee Camp*, https://kuleuven.limo.libis.be/discovery/search?query=any,contains,LIRIAS3429785&tab=LIRIAS&search_scope=lirias_profile&vid=32KUL_KUL:Lirias&offset=0 (accessed 3 May 2025)

"generativity of landscapes"[88] might tell us more about how people deal with their historistic and generative existence, precisely in absence of a "proper architecture." Such a differentiated look can also make us understand how people under these conditions are still worldly and not "ghostlike" creatures.

The idea of a "proper architecture" (including private property, the public realm of common affairs, and a built world that is sustainable and lasts) indeed makes a claim about what is right for humans. But interestingly, it draws lines and builds spaces only to open up to a transgressive event eventually: the actualization of plurality. Arendt's rigid reinstalment of the borders between the public and the private finds its aim in the non-sovereign and unpredictable interaction of equals showing themselves as a "who:" "Whereas the 'what' not only *can* be symbolized by the subject but also is fixed or (over)determined by symbolic categories [...], the *jouissant* 'who' exceeds those categories and is even 'hidden from the person himself'."[89] A final key to Arendt's ambiguous conception of the public and the private hence is that both realms actually deal with *non-sovereignty*: "man," even if master of his household, is neither the creator of the phenomenal world and his appearance in it, nor of plurality and generativity; to relate to facticity as if we could create ourselves and others is equally wrong as to relate to plurality as if it could be tamed and controlled. This is where the body and the dimension of political self-expression converge and, as Zerilli rightly observes, "are not in fact so much opposed as interdependent:" "As the locus of radical heterogeneity and vitality, the body is not the limit point but rather the condition for the nonsovereign subject of Arendt's action."[90] Architectural arrangements of an in-between, location and continuity hence should free a potential that is very much an embodied one.

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[88] Cf. T. DuFour, *Husserl and Spatiality: A Phenomenological Ethnography of Space*, Routledge, New York, 2022.

[89] L. M.-G. Zerilli, "The Arendtian Body," p. 181.

[90] *Ibid*., p. 180.

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