What Are and To What End Do We Study Spaces of Appearance?
Martin Renz/Julius Schwarzwälder

How do things and people come to matter to people and things? What makes a thing or an action seem obvious, salient or evident? What, on the other hand, makes them seem obsolete, obscure or out of the question altogether? How are such relations of importance and insignificance produced and institutionalized, how do they get overturned and occluded? Or, in short: in what ways has the semblance of relevance and effectiveness been organized and disorganized?

To address these far-reaching and general questions, we have assembled a variety of essays that, for the most part, take a concrete object as exemplary for the manner in which the perceptive standards of a given political situation may subtly change or consolidate. All essays share an approach in the spirit of a key concept in the work of Hannah Arendt: 'space of appearance.' We believe that this concept, along with the vocabulary that surrounds it and the kinds of arguments it implies, can make a diverse range of objects speak to these questions. Inspecting them in terms of the spaces in and through which they appear allows the framing of the political situations in which they occur to be perceived.

'Space of appearance' figures as the common point of reference that allows for a theorization of the subtle changes in how a given object of interest may differently appear in diverse situations. The differences we are interested in are aesthetic, but their relevance and appeal, we suspect, concerns the specific political stakes to which they are attached. We reject a conception of aesthetics as an 'autonomous sphere' that stands apart from or is even hostile towards politics.[01] As has often been remarked in recent discussions, an 'aestheticization'

01 For an outline of recent approaches, see
Nikolas Kompridis, ed., *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*
(Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

of politics need not always be inherently a- or anti-political.[02] With this in mind, we attempt to resist the conception of aesthetics as a mere structurally analogous model or mirror image of politics.[03] Instead, we look for "concrete transactions" between aesthetics and politics: how aesthetics constitutes the effectiveness of politics, how politics influences the way in which the world appears.[04]

Taken by themselves, there is a tendency for each of the two terms that Arendt combined—'space' and 'appearance'—to foster and even provoke misunderstandings

02   In this fundamental assumption, we follow Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics," *October* 62 (1992).

03   Curiously enough, in spite of their newfound co-presence, aesthetics and politics can seem as disconnected as ever. Think of some of the words most frequently used to mark the relation between aesthetic categories and political reality. They will most likely include verbs like 'indexes,' 'reminds us of,' 'exemplifies,' 'speaks to,' 'shows,' 'seems to be about,' 'is a model of/for'—notions that indicate relations of representation and analogy between two autonomous or autotelic 'spheres,' 'realms,' 'regimes,' 'domains,' or 'territories' that might be treated as similar, but ultimately separate. For the Kantian origins of this conception, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 182: "As I have indicated, the essential component of this corrupting tendency that is implicit in the meaning of Kantian philosophy from the outset appears to me to arise from the circumstance that the disaggregated elements constitute separate realms, like countries on a map, lying contiguously, but independently of one another—an image that Kant constantly uses by way of illustration. These separate realms have no authority over one another." For some remarks on how this separation between theory, practice and aesthetics has been constructed and upheld in recent Germanophone philosophy, see Julius Schwarzwälder, "Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger ART (Artistic Research Theory)," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 7*2, vol. 1 (2024).

04   To our knowledge, this challenge was first posed in T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Thames and Hudson, 1973), 12: "Even if one distrusts the notions of reflection, of historical background, of analogy between artistic form and social ideology, one cannot avoid the problems they suggest … I want to discover what concrete transactions are hidden behind the mechanical image of 'reflection,' to know how 'background' becomes 'foreground'; instead of analogy between form and content, to discover the network of real, complex relations between the two."

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in this regard. If aesthetics is understood to concern 'mere' appearances, a space of appearance would precisely be the superficial kind of illusion that must be disregarded to get to what is of the 'essence' in matters political: rational debate, making and implementing decisions, writing constitutions, the conduct of war. In such a view, appearances would be arbitrary and suspicious, an 'objective' focus on instrumental analyses of the required means to an end would suffice completely; enquiries into how something 'appears' to someone or a group could and indeed should then be supplanted by examining how things 'really are.' But this begs the question of how a relationship between means and ends is constituted and generally accepted in the first place. What counts as instrumentally effective itself changes over time. Any account of instrumental effectiveness must account for the spaces in which this impression comes about. The appearances we are interested in are therefore always 'spatial' in that they pertain to common impressions from which those who share a given space cannot withdraw by their own volition.[05]

If the meaning of 'space' were reduced to material or physical surroundings, then it could more easily be discussed in terms of architecture and public design. Unlike 'mere' material space, spaces of appearance are constituted by human interaction, they are always performed, at times even staged, and depend upon their continued and iterative enactment to persist. Material objects, by contrast, once produced, are independent of the process by which they were produced. This difference is captured by Arendt in her distinction between 'work,' which produces tangible, enduring objects, and 'action,' which concerns performed interaction whose duration ends with its performance.[06] Spaces of appearance, it could be said, are effects, not 'products,' of action. They are usually connected with, but not reducible to, the built environment in which they occur. In each case, their appearance is of the essence, they dissipate when the action stops.

05   See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 199: "To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; 'for what appears to all, this we call Being,' and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality."

06   Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7–8.

The concept 'spaces of appearance' designates a virtual aspect of the in-between, the interstices of the human world, which is different from, though always interwoven with, the physical or tangible aspects of the world. One needs to be sensitive towards the difference between changes in perception and changes in material in order to identify the structures of relevance through which certain historical modes of articulation, conduct, and interpretation establish themselves as appealing or appalling within a specific political situation. As an analytical concept, 'space of appearance' is fine-tuned for such an endeavor. It refers to real and concretely instantiated configurations of action and behavior that concern the way in which people explicitly and implicitly organize their interaction in and perception of the world. Analyzing spaces of appearance allows concretely modulated forms of agency to be explained as always-already embedded. They are irreducible to the intentions of actors but nonetheless provide space for a revelation of "who" someone is.[07]

       Arendt's use of the term 'space of appearance' is less than systematic. The same goes for adjacent terms she employs, such as "space of display"[08] or "spaces of freedom,"[09]

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07   See Arendt, *Human Condition,* 178. Here, we follow Patchen Markell, "The Moment has Passed: Power after Arendt," in *Radical Futures Past: Untimely Political Theory,* ed. Romand Coles (University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 128: "One way to mark this feature of Arendt's use of 'power' might be to ascribe power in this sense to situations rather than to agents… But that way of talking about the power of a situation … is still quite forward looking and anticipatory, whereas Arendt helps us see that such situations are also powerful in a different sense: their very existence *as* situations is an expression of the power of the past—or, more exactly, of a past that is not quite finished, that has a kind of momentum through the people who find themselves engaged with it. We might underscore this point by ascribing power in this sense not just to a situation as a 'context within which something *consequential* seems bound to happen,' but also to whatever it is that is the focus of people's attention in that situation—to an event, for instance, that we might describe as 'powerful' in something like the same way that we talk about a work of art as being 'powerful': we mean that it holds us in its presence [emphasis added]."

08   Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture," in Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (Viking Press, [1961] 1969), 218.

09   Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Books, [1963] 1990), 264, 275, 277.

which are also used in diverse and sometimes conflicting ways. In a much-quoted passage towards the end of § 27, Arendt writes that

> [i]t is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.[10]

At least since Jürgen Habermas's influential essay on Arendt's notion of power, passages such as this have been taken to imply that the space of appearance is an ideal of "undistorted communication," which, if at all, could only be reached under extraordinary conditions.[11] 'Space of appearance' here describes the conditions under which human beings experience their equality and common humanity while also coming to an enhanced self-awareness of their own life and personality. This passage lends itself especially to readings that contrast unpolitical, private spaces—the *oikos,* the private place of reproduction—from the public 'space of appearance' proper.[12]

10   Arendt, *Human Condition,* 198–99.

11   See Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles: Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (MIT Press, 1995), 177: "She wants to read off the general structures of an unimpaired intersubjectivity in the formal properties of communicative action or praxis." It should be noted that the translations of Haberma's text that we consulted are imprecise in this section. In the original, the quoted passage refers not to Arendt but to what Habermas describes as the phenomenological method underlying her 'philosophy of praxis' in general. A valuable criticism of Habermas's essay can be found in Margaret Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt," *Political Theory* 11, no. 1 (1983).

12   In *Human Condition,* Arendt introduces the notion of thepublic in two senses. The first proclaims that public is whatever is not hidden, a matter of degree, and thus everything is potentially public and political, see Arendt, *Human Condition,* 50: "[Public] means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity… Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life … lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence *unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance* [emphasis added]."

But not only does Arendt have more to say about the space of appearance, the passage quoted above is in tension with others, such as the following:

> The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore pre-dates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. 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—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves.

The second sense relates to the ordinary usage of the term in distinction from the private, see Arendt, *Human Condition,* 52: "Second, the term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it." Just like in the case of her use of 'space of appearance,' where the use of the term differs depending on whether it is contrasted from the private space or from the non-physical, intangible aspects of the 'world,' Arendt's use of 'public' differs depending on whether she speaks, as in the second sense above, of 'the public' in opposition to 'the private' or, as in the first, of 'public' as a matter of degree on a spectrum between 'fully public and seen by everyone' and 'almost completely hidden and not in sight.' Many interpretations "think with Arendt against Arendt" (see Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), xi, xx, 198; see also Juliane Rebentisch, *Der Streit um Pluralität: Auseinandersetzungen mit Hannah Arendt* (Suhrkamp, 2022), 11) to favor the second sense that pitches 'the public' against 'the private' as two irreconcilable spheres, but nonetheless argue that her conceptual vocabulary is open to interpretations in the first sense, too. For instance, multiple contributions in Bonnie Honig, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (Penn State University Press, 1995), such as those by Bonnie Honig and Morris Kaplan, have opened up the notion to also include spaces that are not obviously part of 'the public,' see 126, 130, and 146. Not only do we follow these interpretations; we in fact believe that the formalized public/private-distinction is secondary to the informal processes which situationally produce and reproduce the public/private-distinction in the first place and that Arendt does account for this. This becomes especially clear when connecting Arendt's ideas about the public to a mundane notion of 'spaces of appearance.'

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> Wherever people gather together, it is potentially
> there, but only potentially, not necessarily and
> not forever.[13]

Clearly, Arendt here argues that the space of appearance really does exist on specific occasions—namely, whenever people act. What is more, it is prior to and pre-dates "all formal constitutions of the public realm." It is thus not subsumable under any specific public realm. And even though it does "not [exist] necessarily and not forever," it seems like the simplest, most mundane thing in the "world"—a stark contrast to Habermas's idealizing theoretical abstraction.[14]

This passage speaks to a more worldly aspect of the notion, which connects well with the phenomenological underpinnings of Arendt's theory and more specifically her notion of the 'world.' Accordingly, Sophie Loidolt argues that the reception of "Arendt's notion of 'world' [has] often [been] reduced to the public world and then directly identified with the political space of appearance." Loidolt distinguishes the actually existing political space of appearance from 'space of appearance' in a more "fundamental," phenomenological, and technical sense, in which it is synonymous with the "appearing world."[15] In this latter sense, it captures not an idealized mode of interaction and speech but a general condition of human existence: humans always-already appear in front of others, usually in a world of objects and practices that were there before them and may very well outlast them.

We agree with Loidolt's use of the 'space of appearance' to also describe the appearing world as actors always-already encounter it. Yet the philosophical dimension of this notion as it relates to Arendt's debts to the phenomenological tradition is not the foremost concern of most contributions to this volume. What interests us are the concept's historically realized forms, which ought not be hastily identified with 'the public.'

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13   Arendt, *Human Condition,* 199.

14   Arendt, *Human Condition,* 182–83.

15   Sophie Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* (Routledge, 2018), 98 and 103.

The Concept in Use:
Mundane Spaces of Appearance

The task at hand is to resist the automatic identification of the technical notion of 'the space of appearance' with 'the public' as it occurs in many interpretations of Arendt and, it is worth noting, also in some passages of Arendt's work itself. This is because 'the public sphere' is never wholly or clearly demarcated. It is but a frayed assemblage of overlapping and contradictory, more or less relevant and more or less hidden zones—there is no *single* public sphere.[16] In its more tangible dimensions, the concept 'space of appearance' might be used to designate the concrete zones in which these publics are actualized. And this is precisely how we propose to use the term, which is why we pluralize it as *spaces* of appearance.

Pluralizing the concept calls for an interplay between the general and the particular, allowing the concept to be critiqued and enriched through its engagement with concrete case studies.[17] The pluralized perspective on spaces of appearance is more open to case studies that reveal the

16 On this point, we broadly agree with Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xlviii: "The bourgeois public sphere is anchored in the formal characteristics of communication: it can be represented in terms of a schema of continuous historical progression, insofar as one focuses on the ideas that are realized within it. But if, by contrast, one takes its real substance as one's point of departure, it is not unified at all, but rather the aggregate of individual spheres that are only abstractly related." See also Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25–26 (1990), and Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Zone Books, 2002).

17 Our approach is partially inspired by Johannes Völz, who employs the notion of 'space of appearance' similarly to many of the contributions to this volume, even though his essay accepts standard normativist readings of the space of appearance. See Johannes Völz, "Toward an Aesthetics of Populism, Part I: The Populist Space of Appearance," *Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 34 (2018), 224. Another approach that employs Arendt to ends similar to our own in this volume is found in an ethnographic study of street parliaments in Kenya, see Stephanie Diepeveen, "Politics in Everyday Kenyan Street-Life: The People's Parliament in Mombasa, Kenya," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 2 (2016), 266–83.

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specifics and the particular inherent logics of spaces of appearance in their concretely actualized form. The contributions to this volume critically reassess, specify, and re-evaluate the sometimes rather unclear usage of 'space of appearance' in Arendt's writings, providing a new and useful way of understanding the notion which critically complements the readings mentioned above. This volume should thus be seen as an extensive proof of concept, an invitation to further enquiry along similar lines.

Thus, we suggest foregrounding a more particularist reading of Arendt's usage of 'space of appearance' to designate really existent spaces in the world. This allows the concept to be approached, examined, and applied more rigorously. For instance, one is less prone to fall into the trap of considering only those spaces widely perceived to be the most general and most hegemonic. Mundane, trivial, and vernacular spaces may also come into view, especially in their competition with different spaces of various degrees of size and formalization.[18]

Since spaces of appearance "preced[e] all formal constitution of the public realm," they may also include informal practices that prevalent preconceptions of a situation would deem to be private:

> [W]herever human beings come together—be it in private or socially, be it in public or politically— a space is generated that simultaneously gathers them into it and separates them from one another.[19]

Privacy not only denotes a state of seclusion from an assumed and unified public realm; it can also refer to a relative hiddenness from view, a general space of public irrelevance in which individuality and intimacy may be safely fostered according to the implicit customs of a community.

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18   While the notion of the 'vernacular' has recently received renewed attention thanks to Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 16–18, it should be noted that it was more formally introduced in Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999).

19   Hannah Arendt, "Introduction Into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics,* ed. Jerome Kohn (Schocken, 2005), 106.

Yet what is generally assumed or supposed to be private may turn into a public and political issue. This can happen to entire spaces. Think, for instance, of the 1960s "kitchen culture" in the Soviet Union, when the "communal apartment" was reappropriated for "citizen resistance" and as a space of display for dissident art.[20] It can also happen to activities that migrate into political spaces of appearance. Activities such as cleaning and cooking, which are all too often considered inherently a-political and an entirely private matter, may take on an explicitly political character when, say, you are cooking or cleaning at a protest camp. In such cases, the public quality of an activity changes depending on the space of appearance in which it is performed.[21] Assigning different degrees of publicity to a given space is nothing that can be done at whim. 'Private' and 'public' are contestable and contested categories, and these struggles are reflected in perceptions of what 'private/public' means and where it occurs. The unofficial slogan of second-wave feminism, 'the private/personal is political,' comes to mind.[22]

But the extent to which such efforts may take root is always conditioned by the political situations that these efforts prefigure and attempt to reconfigure.[23] 'Situation' refers to the implicit background conditions that always-already

20   Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (MIT Press, 2000), 199.

21   For discussions of activities like cooking or cleaning being practiced in protest camps, see: Markell, "The Moment has Passed," 130–31, and Nazlı Konya, "Making a People: Turkey's 'Democracy Watches' and Gezi-Envy," *Political Theory* 49, no. 5 (2021): 841. In any case, here we are talking about the very exercise of these activities, and not their social organization, which Honig, *Toward an Agonistic Feminism,* 146 calls "the (sedimented) products of ... actions, behaviors, and institutional structures." While seemingly private matters such as the question of who is typically tasked with wageless reproductive work need to be problematized, practicing these activities itself is usually not political.

22   See Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991), and Joan W. Scott, "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity," *October* 61 (1992).

23   For the notion of 'prefiguration,' see Hans Blumenberg, *Präfiguration: Arbeit am politischen Mythos* (Suhrkamp, 2014), 11: "the significant antecedent, the prototype [Prägnat], is not born for prefiguration but is made in order that that which is

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pervade our perception, which Arendt captures more technically in terms such as "second ... in-between" or the "'web' of human relationships."[24] While these kinds of implicit background conditions frame the way in which action unfolds and appears, they do not predetermine it. Quite to the contrary, the actualization of a situation in iterating spaces of appearance influences how these general, non-universal rules are typically lived and enacted.

Such situational change becomes apparent when looking at history, in which one is often confronted with spaces of appearance and practices whose criteria change drastically while nominally staying the same. Consider, for instance, the peculiar relation between chanting and street protests in the German-speaking world that emerged in the late 19th century. Within only a couple of decades, street protests changed from an activity that was done in stern silence to one characterized primarily by a spectrum of more or less articulate noises and movements, from cheers and jeers to chants and dance.[25] Crucially, what a street protest 'really is' can never be determined by private opinions alone, it depends upon the situationally specific assumptions about what is considered normal and abnormal behavior. Again, we are talking about appearances that are 'spatial' in scope. You might not particularly enjoy, in the early 21st century, the clamor that comes with a protest. But chants and singing are obviously a normal part of protests today. What may indeed change are the criteria "by means of which we regulate our application of concepts, means by which [...] we set up the shifting conditions for conversations."[26] Yet this common ground of our language and perception is never at any one person's disposal alone. It is the situation that supplies the backdrop against which the concrete modulations and

written might be accomplished—as soon as the accomplishment allows that which was to be accomplished to be recognized in it [translation by Joe Paul Kroll]."

24 Arendt, *Human Condition,* 183.

25 Sabine Müller, "Political and Aesthetic Representation: A Problem Solved, or Still a Challenge?," (paper presented at *The Aesthetics of Democratic Life-Forms,* Goethe University Frankfurt, September 23, 2023).

26 Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 5.

configurations of these spaces appear, such as whether street protests are generally accepted to be silent or loud events, which in turn is conditioned by what street protests have been taken and are remembered to be.

At the heart of these criteria is the degree of reality implicitly assigned to a specific space of appearance. Think for instance of a play in a theater. Its narrative exists in its own 'universe'—what narration theorists would call its intra-diegetic dimension—and, typically, cannot be influenced by the audience.[27] However, a stage performance also has extra-diegetic consequences in that it affects the audience directly, thereby producing effects in the 'real' world. Thus, even when a completely fictional play is performed, it is necessarily performed in a space of appearance since it will have extra-diegetic effects. While this does not make all theater political, it marks the point where, according to Arendt, the performing arts and politics overlap:

> The performing arts … have indeed a strong affinity with politics. Performing artists—dancers, play-actors, musicians, and the like—need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their 'work,' and both depend upon others for the performance itself. Such a space of appearance is not to be taken for granted wherever men live together in a community. The Greek polis once was precisely that 'form of government' which provided men with *a* space of appearances where they could act, with *a kind of theater where freedom could appear* [emphasis added].[28]

Both the performing arts and politics are similar in that they need an audience that they can affect extra-diegetically. They depend upon concretely enacted spaces of appearance, which is a technical way to say that an actor—theatrical or political— needs an audience to act. Without an audience, all acting is mere rehearsal.

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27 See Anton Fuxjäger, "Diegese, Diegesis, diegetisch: Versuch einer Begriffsentwirrung," *montage AV: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation* 16, no. 2 (2007).

28 Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?," in Arendt, *Between Past and Future,* 154.

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Political spaces of appearance, however, are those spaces that, at least to politicized people, proclaim to immediately concern the non-fictional reality shared with all others. They do this both in terms similar to the extra-diegetic effects of performance art, which attempts to make onlookers perceive the world differently, but also—importantly and curiously—in terms of proclaiming its own reality to be the world immediately shared with all others. Actions considered political are those that affect the real, tangible world—the "reality-diegesis," so to speak—by being perceptibly and causally effective within it.[29] Accordingly, only those spaces of appearance that are generally deemed to be immediately relevant and effective are political.[30]

29   Fuxjäger, "Diegese," 24 [our translation].

30   The question of whether Arendt's account of politics excluded instrumental concerns has haunted Arendt scholarship at least since a question posed in Hanna Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (1981), 336–37: "What keeps these citizens together as a body? And what is it that they talk about together, in that endless palaver in the agora?" This has been quoted widely and usually affirmatively, for instance by Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 36; George Kateb, "Aestheticism and Morality: Their Cooperation and Hostility," *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (2000): 133; Peter Euben, *Platonic Noise* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 41; Shmuel Lederman, "Agonism and Deliberation in Arendt," *Constellations* 21, no. 3 (September 2014): 327; Maria Robaszkiewicz and Michael D. Weinman, *Hannah Arendt and Politics* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 144.
It concerns the issue whether Arendt's account of political action allows for any kind of instrumental 'content' or whether she wanted, as indicated in Sheldon Wolin, "Hannah Arendt, Democracy and The Political," *Salmagundi* 60 (1983): 15, "[a] pure form of politics" for its own sake. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger,* 12–25 argues that Arendtian action is "self-contained" and motivated by an "inexplicable need to *aestheticize* action." Villa later revised his view, see Dana Villa, *Hannah Arendt: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 70. In our reading, Arendt (or anyone else, for that matter) cannot determine the concrete 'content' of politics irrespective of a given political situation, because what counts as the immediately effective, real, and relevant content of politics is always also dependent upon the situationally predominant ways of perception that designate it as such in the first place. Take two exemplary quotes that favor this reading. (1) Arendt, *Human Condition,* 182: "Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that

By contrast, a political space of appearance may lose its political quality when it is widely questioned whether it exerts an immediate effect upon the shared world. People are then prone to denounce such spaces as 'mere theater.' This is typically the case when established politics is unable to produce significant immediate results and thus its influence upon reality is questioned. Arendt describes as much in her account of the Dreyfus affair, when "the whole of France's political life ... was carried on outside Parliament,"[31] in the streets and in the press. In spite of parliaments typically being a particularly political space, the French parliament was severely depoliticized in this situation, as it was widely perceived to be ineffective in tackling the most pressing and relevant political issue of the day. This demonstrates that whether a specific space is considered political or not is itself primarily a question of the general plausibility of its claim to relevance and immediate effectiveness.

most words and deeds are about some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent [original emphasis]." So action is primarily about the in-between or world, which consists of the material environment as well as the "intangible" persistent background conditions of practices that are always-already there before you enter the world, see Arendt, *Human Condition,* 183. The point is repeated in relation to power and the perceptual organization of what actions count as means to an end and which ones do not, see (2) Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 51: "But the power structure itself precedes and outlasts all aims, so that power, far from being the means to an end, *is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category* [emphasis added]." This is to say that power determines what is recognized as instrumentally effective in a given situation and what is not. Or, to be more precise, power is what allows people to organize for joint political action, which ultimately implies the ability to identify aims and act in their pursuit, see Arendt, *Human Condition,* 199–202. Arendt does not exclude instrumental concerns from political action, she only downplays their relevance in light of the performative elements that always also play a role in political action. For a longer account of this argument, see Martin Renz, "The Prejudice Against Politics: Arendtian Explorations of the Populist Situation," (PhD diss., Goethe University Frankfurt).

31   Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Penguin Classics, 2017), 150.

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Our case for 'spaces of appearance' as a useful concept in aesthetico-political research rests on one main advantage: it makes it possible to disclose and analyze not only *whether or not* persons and things appear at all, in a binary sense, but *how* concretely they come to appear in a specific instance. The question of 'how' something appears implies a threefold motion of inquiry. Intertwined with the descriptive gesture that provides details about the tone and shape of something, it may also supply, in the same stroke, an explanation as to why something comes about the way it does, and an assessment of how 'real,' politically speaking, it is taken to be.

The Uses of the Concept

The opening contribution by **Sophie Loidolt** critically expands upon our conceptual differentiation between 'space' and 'spaces of appearance.' Reading the very first pages of Robert Musil's *Man Without Qualities* with support from Alfred Schütz and Hannah Arendt, she tries to clarify the characteristics and pathologies of spaces of appearance. What Musil introduces with offhand irony is a modern world in which neither relevance (Schütz) nor power (Arendt) are self-evident features of spaces of appearance. While the novelist stages this by using a technique of 'zooming in and out' of different zones of relevance, Loidolt's philosophical concern revolves around a particular set of questions: What holds the world together and makes it something in which orientation is possible for people who appear in it and act before one another? What is it in the development of modernity that so unsettlingly questions this orientedness? The paper first develops a notion of spaces of appearance in the plural with the help of Schütz's notion of relevance, before turning to Arendt and the 'space of appearance' (in the singular) as a space where freedom can appear and which needs power to remain in existence.

Problems of political disorientation are also a central theme in the contribution by **Martha Crowe.** She employs the 'space of appearance' to critically examine a cultural intervention aimed at de-escalating political tensions and addressing far-right radicalization in contemporary Germany. Between 2017 and 2019, the Albertinum museum in Dresden hosted a series of public events entitled "We Need to Talk: *'Bilderstreit'* Face-to-Face" (*Wir müssen reden. 'Bilderstreit' mit*

Blickkontakt). These events were organized in response to claims that the museum had been disproportionately sequestering GDR-era art away in storage, an outcry fueled by enduring East-West divisions in Germany. Based in part on an interview with museum director Hilke Wagner—who initiated the event series—the contribution investigates the motivations behind the museum's approach and its resonance with a broader public. Through a close reading of the first event in the series, Crowe proposes that contemporary political threats are not to be addressed through retreat or moral distancing, but through public conversation and discussion. By drawing on the concept of the space of appearance, Crowe's analysis shows that such interventions can enable subtle shifts in how political identities and divisions are perceived and negotiated, offering an alternative to both silence and polarization.

One very specific form of a subtle shift in perception is at the heart of the contribution by **Martin Renz** and **Julius Schwarzwälder.** Through a close reading of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution,* they argue that what they call 'un-unseeability' can explain how, from images to political situations, the same things may subtly change and no longer look the same. The relevance of un-unseeability surged once it invaded and changed the meaning of politics in the course of the revolutions of the 18th century. Significantly, these revolutions changed what could potentially be perceived as political. This had consequences for both the spatial and temporal aspects of politics. Politics ceased to be a sphere, instead becoming a potential medium of reality that designates a particular space and the actions that constitute it as immediately effective and generally relevant. At the same time, experiences of irrevocability signaled the advent of a distinctively modern kind of novelty to the political stage. In light of this un-unseeable novelty, issues such as the much-cited 'social question' appear less like a 'cause' than an effect of the type of freedom found in the un-unseeable experiences of the French Revolution.

Spurious claims pertaining to a revolution's 'cause' are also investigated in the contribution by **Raha Golestani.** She examines the unsettled discursive space of the Shiraz Festival of Arts, an annual performing arts event unfolding

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at a decisive moment in Iranian history: the decade leading up to the Iranian Revolution (1967–1977). Interrupted and overshadowed by the revolution, the festival has become an equally understudied and burdened site, clouded by an aura of nostalgia, grievance, and speculation. Speaking to other voices in the contemporary discussion of the festival, Golestani contextualizes these debates within gendered assumptions about the public roles assigned to aesthetics and politics in pre-revolutionary Iran, and how their 'irreconcilable differences' manifest in the singular circumstances of the festival. The essay's themes, in equal proportions, are paradise (the festival's subversive portrayal as an Arendtian oasis in a desert), art (its artistic strategies for navigating cultural hierarchies), and caviar (accusations of decadence and aestheticization of politics). Almost fifty years after its final act, the essay looks into the festival's prismatic nature and the diverse responses it generates and sustains to this day.

Merve Yıldırım's contribution deals with another attempt to come to terms with cultural differences by considering a building that was never built and a friendship whose historical roots are all too often overlooked. She examines the House of Friendship (*Haus der Freundschaft/Dostluk Yurdu*), commissioned in Constantinople in 1916, as a lens through which to explore the long and layered history of German-Turkish relations. Tracing this diplomatic history from early modern treaties to its wartime culmination, she focuses on the moment when an abstract ideal of 'friendship' was to be spatialized through architecture. Organized by the *Deutscher Werkbund* and framed as a cultural initiative, the project shows how architecture could operate as soft power— designed not only to symbolize but to generate perceptions of proximity, familiarity, and shared purpose. The House of Friendship, according to Yıldırım, must be understood both as a material intersection of the two empires' trajectories and as an effort to shift friendship from the sphere of statecraft into public experience. Conceived during the Great War, it embodied the paradox of seeking to provide stability to something often lacking permanence, physicality to something inherently relational, and appearance to something not necessarily visible. That the building never advanced beyond its foundation stone does not diminish its significance; rather,

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it reflects the complexities of rendering political friendship into architectural form, thereby offering a reminder defined less by completion than by its unresolved style.

Further discussion of architectural attempts to give concrete shape to a space of appearance is found in **Dorothea Douglas**'s examination of the unusual central distribution node of Germany's largest courthouse at the turn of the century, the main stairway pavilion of the *Landes- und Amtsgericht Mitte, Berlin*. As part of the wave of courthouse construction following the opening of civil proceedings to the public in the wake of Imperial legal codification, a novel topos of interaction between the citizen—understood as liberal and economically rational in the context of the reforms—and the machinery of the administrative state emerged from centralized planning within the Prussian Ministry of Public Works. Unlike conventional readings of main stairways as merely oppressive ante-juridical spaces, Douglas explores how law's novel order was communicated through the tactile experience of movement. Drawing on discourses surrounding the epistemic potential of psychophysical perception in turn-of-the-century Germany, she engages with August Schmarsow's work, which re-centered architectural form around the sensing body. In this framework, the experience of architectural form is linked to the newly codified legal subject as embodied in the stairway's design. Aesthetic experience, used to transform the fragmented urban dweller into an autonomous legal subject, initiates the viewer into the order of law. Drawing on the notion of space of appearance, the paper questions how the stairway modulates agency and self-experience in relation to power.

Noah Grossmann's contribution takes up the issue of agency modulation and relates it to the work of Arendt and Fred Moten. He traces how Arendt (in "Reflections on Little Rock") and Fred Moten (in *Refuge, Refuse, Refrain*) look at the same photos of Black teenagers facing hostile white crowds. Arendt's essay is interpreted as opening up a simultaneity of futures that shape American society: despite the existence of liberal rights, procedures, and narratives of progress, Black individuals continue to navigate a landscape marked by racism. Moten instead focuses on Elizabeth Eckford's shaded eyes and draws on further material to describe two ongoing

histories and futures into which, in his account, the teenager is to be inserted. By comparing two theorists looking at the same photographs, Grossmann uncovers a range of different, conflicting registers of the future—from progress to stalemate, from rupture to rollback—that are employed to think about racism and how it appears.

A different register of the future—promising—is taken up in the contribution by **Reinhold Görling,** who emphasizes Arendt's use of 'medium' to describe the network of human affairs that promises constitute, as well as her shift from 'space' to 'medium of appearance' in *The Life of the Mind.* While Arendt's use of 'medium' varies, she tends to employ the notion to circumscribe modes of communication in which the singular comes to appear without being overwritten by a general concept. This becomes conceivable by understanding the singular as an event that communicates itself to other events. Arendt's theory of the mind further develops this relationship by understanding appearance as an inner dialogue as well as a social relationality reaffirmed in judgment. Imagination and *sensus communis* are the central elements of this capacity for judgment. Yet, Görling argues, a problem arises in that Arendt does not pursue the dynamics of the inner dialogue any further. She highlights that appearance always simultaneously means concealment, but with regard to her dictum on the 'banality of evil' in particular, it would be important to consider the dimensions of denial and splitting, as demonstrated for instance in psychoanalysis. They interrupt the inner dialogue and conceal the self from itself.

Helena W. Crusius's essay asks what kind of political efficacy belongs not to selves but to objects, and what those things that appear between us can do. For Arendt, objects share in two paradigms of appearance: the sheer appearance of the *phainesthai* in philosophical wonder and the mediated appearance of the *dokei moi* in secular politics. But even as objects comprise the most quintessential appearances insofar as they can only be judged according to the criterion of beauty, their appearances are categorically passive—that is, the only appearances with any power are those made by the only actors capable of making their appearance, namely living creatures and sentient beings. By contrast, the object is endlessly active for Ernst Bloch, for whom what is

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aesthetically portrayed dialectically drives forward the uto-
pian itself. Crusius suggests that these conflictual approaches
dramatize the problem of the possibility of an effective object
in terms of the declension of appearance: the dative which in-
heres to Arendt's object and the accusative of Bloch's show us
how the active object acts, perhaps, only by tyrannical means.

Finally, **Susan Buck-Morss**'s visual-textual essay
provides some meditative after-thoughts and after-images as
well as a call to action. Her wager is to begin thinking in im-
ages, seriously, in a way that is sensitive to how perceptions
may shift, sometimes confusingly and without an accompa-
nying change in thought. This would allow a shift in politi-
cal vision, she argues, away from the global and towards the
planetary dimension.

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