A Thesis

Entitled

The World in Common: Hannah Arendt, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Re-housing of the Political Self

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Philosophy

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An Abstract of

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Working primarily with Hannah Arendt and Jean-Luc Nancy, I critique aspects of contemporary political thought with regard to the public, the private and the nature of the individual. I challenge the vision of the public and private spheres as being necessarily divided, as well as the assumption of the family into the private realm. Using Nancy, I develop a way of thinking about plurality, the self and our interactions with the political from a more holistic stance.
Acknowledgments

For my committee and their patience;
For my parents and their support;
For Jacob and his laughter;
My world-in-common is richer for having all of you to sense it with me.

“Strangeness” refers to the fact that each singularity is another access to the world. At the point where we would expect “something,” a substance or a procedure, a principle or an end, a signification, there is nothing but the manner, the turn of the other access, which conceals itself in the very gesture wherein it offers itself to us – and whose concealing is the turning itself. In the singularity that he exposes, each child that is born has already concealed the access that he is “for himself” and in which he will conceal himself “within himself,” just as he will one day hide under the final expression of a dead face.

Jean-Luc Nancy – “Of Being Singular Plural”

Into the clockwork universe the quantum child. Why doesn’t every mother believe her child can change the world? The child can. This is the joke. Here we are still looking for a savoir and hundreds are being born every second. Look at it, this tiny capsule of new life, indifferent to your prejudices, your miseries, unmindful of the world already made. Make it again? They could if we let them, but we make sure they grow up just like us, fearful like us. Don’t let them know the potential that they are. Don’t let them hear the grass singing. Let them live and die in Newton, tick-tock, the last breath.

Jeanette Winterson – “Newton”

We are taught we are an absence, and mistake this for a longing to be found.

Claire Chaffee – Why We Have a Body
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Chapter 1

Unknotting the Public and the Private

In this thesis I will engage with the history of thought surrounding the divide between the public and the private. I argue that our thinking about the public and the private influences how we are able to think about the self, and that with a rethinking of what it means to be public or private we will come to a different understanding of the self. This new understanding of the self will be one that allows us to engage with difference and plurality in a more robust manner. With respect to the public and the private I will work with the thought of Hannah Arendt, and argue that a revised idea of the public and the private will give a space for the play of the self. In the final chapter of the thesis I will work with Jean-Luc Nancy to connect more firmly the self, difference and the world that is held in common by those who make it up.

In this first chapter I will begin the critique of the historical thought surrounding the public and the private. Using Carole Pateman as a reference point, I will develop the argument that the relegation of the family into the private, and therefore hidden, sphere complicate our thinking of plurality. From this point I will begin to lay the groundwork for a different understanding of the self, that understanding and its relationship to difference will be further developed in the second chapter.
To begin, I would like to tell a story. In the winter of 2007 there was an apartment fire. Such tragedies are common overall, but rarely affect our personal lives. Occasionally, however, one does touch someone close to us. Once the safety of loved ones is confirmed our thoughts then generally turn to the loss of physical objects, the flotsam and jetsam of the everyday that surrounds us and makes up part of the daily rhythms we think of as ourselves. This particular fire, in addition to destroying those everyday objects, consumed the identity papers of a good friend.

We, his friends, gathered soon after the fire to commiserate in companionship and beer, to mourn the loss of books and clothes, and revel that those were the only losses to be mourned. When the server came to our table to take drink orders and confirm that we were old enough to drink, she accepted most of our identification cards without a second thought, checking briefly to ensure that each person’s date of birth was at least twenty-one years prior to the current date and that the photograph on the card bore some resemblance to the face of the person presenting the card. However, my friend posed a problem, he had not yet received a replacement driver’s license, and had only the temporary slip of paper. There was no photograph. We were fortunate in that we were not unknown at that particular bar, and so had not only his testimony but the testimony of one of the managers that he was as he claimed to be.

For him to obtain that minimally acceptable temporary slip of paper, with the promise of more definitive papers to come, took more than testimony, of course. His story of how he had come to possess even that scrap of formally recognized identity, a parent swearing he was her child, the presentation of that formal affidavit to other appropriate authority figures, and so on, impressed upon me how fragile our own legal identities are. That political power
recognizes me for myself is not a given, and can be taken away, with little recourse. This has as well implications for our personal sense of identity.

Once secure in his ability to identify himself as himself, my friend found that there was a political space in which his personal testimony was not enough to secure recognition from those in power. While he was able to restore his right to claim to be who he was, through public records and the testimony of relatives who were still in possession of their own recognized identities, there was a time he spent outside of the traditional structures that house and identify us as members under political protection.

The story he told of this brief interlude of being at once outside of the reach of political surveillance and perfectly at its mercy, was not particularly harrowing or noteworthy; a story to be told in part as explanation to the bartender as to why he lacked photographic evidence that he was who he claimed to be. Nonetheless, his tale pulled back a corner of the curtain that normally divides the day to day from our theorizing about the meaning of the political. After the fire he was, for a period of days, without a public identity. While he himself was never in doubt as to his own identity, his identity was held in doubt.

The following thesis is born from this second-hand brush against the contingency of our appearance in the public realm in a recognized political sense. I seek to rehabilitate what it means to be an individual; to re-house the concept of individual within those systems of relationships and world in a way that can more fully confront what brings us together yet acknowledges that no one of us is capable of being interchanged with any other. The image of the individual articulated most clearly in the writing of the early modern political philosophers engaged in the development of social contract theory as a concept that is extricable from the community as a sort of empty abstraction does not capture the
interconnected, multivalent relationships of plurality that can enrich the experience of the public realm.¹

A problem that confronts political thinking in the twenty-first century can be thought of as the problem of belonging. This is not, assuredly, a novel problem, questions surrounding so-called “identity politics” have haunted political philosophy and theory for some years now.² This idea of including specific, situated identities into our political thought and public consciousness is an interesting response to the question of belonging, insofar as it is an inclusion which is predicated on an initial separation. Groups are first defined and then brought forth as alternative ways of thinking, being, knowing, etc. However this can serve to gloss over the uniqueness of human lives, contributing to further confusions over how to achieve the inclusion the original groupings sought.³ Looking at the state of our nation and of our world there is a sense that the urgency with which we ought to address this questions grows ever stronger. The conventional response has been to address questions of difference through attempts to craft legal parity and equity, where the others could be taken into the

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¹ I would like to mention that none of this critique of the social contractarians’ thinking of the individual is to disparage relatively revolutionary claims to equality and plurality that they represent in the history of philosophy. The removal of inborn, differentiable values in the natural realm that we see in the writing of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (to name a few) represents a step towards greater plurality in the public realm. To trace that development is, unfortunately, largely outside of the scope of this project.


³ This concern with difference and identity will be further explicated in my discussion of Iris Marion Young below.
society as a whole, to be made the same.\textsuperscript{4} What passes how for belonging (e.g. national, ethnic, religious identities) is paradoxically used to define exceptions, outsiders with whom we have nothing to connect us. We have identities, in place of the community. The question becomes how we will go about to include difference in community.

We can look to feminist thought for an example of this critique of the historical thinking about individuals and the question of the divide between the public and private. Carole Pateman’s \textit{The Sexual Contract}\textsuperscript{5} addresses the patriarchal assumptions that make up the social contract theories that underpin contemporary political philosophy. \textit{As The Sexual Contract} is a critique, it is historical and diagnostic. Her arguments about the patriarchal bases underlying social contract theory primarily focus on the construction of the public, political realms.

I would argue that in Pateman’s work we might be able to construct an argument that under the sexual contract women are not members of the private sphere, properly constructed. This is not to say that women are exposed to the realm of the public as men are. Instead, the sexual/social contract \textit{removes} women as individuals. While under coverture a woman “was civilly dead,”\textsuperscript{6} a more explicit rejection of woman as human, the space afforded women outside of coverture, even in what is ostensibly the private sphere, is not a space which permits her to exist as an individual.\textsuperscript{7} Indeed, in some cases, as in that of John Locke, women were not counted as individuals even within the purported state of nature. “Locke assumes that marriage and the family exist in the natural state and he also argues that the

\textsuperscript{4} This is the approach of what has come to be called liberal feminism, for example. It is the use of legislative and judicial power to shape social norms and behaviors, such as the creation of hate crimes legislation such as the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (2009).


\textsuperscript{6} Pateman: 119.

\textsuperscript{7} Pateman: 130-1.
attributes of individuals are sexually differentiated; only men naturally have the characteristics of free and equal beings.”

Hannah Arendt, while writing in favor of maintaining the separation between public and private spheres, does shed some light on the death of the individual within the private sphere of the household and the family. As she traces the historical development of the concepts of public and private she notes the importance of owning private property as a means by which one might enter the public realm; “to have no private place of one’s own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human.” If women were without property or other civil rights, but rather were granted accommodation and courtesy out of the beneficence of the men who owned their property, one wonders whether women were human.

Pateman’s argument about the meaning of the social contract, that it is founded upon the sexual contract (that is men’s sex-right over women) can be read as a critique not just of the traditional forms that the social contract has taken over the centuries, but as a critique of the traditional division of the public from the private. The social contract was a means to explain how civil society, that is a society that is in some sense public, came to be. The social contract operated between free individuals, beings who met one another as equals.

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8 Pateman: 52.
10 I approach the use of Arendt with caution in this case, and urge the reader to remember that she never counted herself as a feminist. The text upon which I will rely most heavily in this thesis, The Human Condition, refers to women in but two passages and in an additional two footnotes. Including the following passage: “The fact that the modern age emancipated the working classes and the women at nearly the same historical moment must certainly be counted among the characteristics of an age which no long believes that bodily functions and material concerns should be hidden” (Arendt, HC: 73). We feminists read her in spite of herself.
11 Pateman: 3.
12 In case the reader might think this is an outdated concern, Pateman reminds us that, at the time she wrote The Sexual Contract the concept of rape within marriage had not yet been settled as a legal concept. See Pateman: 7.
That one could agree to submit oneself to another, such as in a work contract, or even in a slave contract\(^\text{13}\), would not deny that in the original state, or state of nature, the individuals were equal.

What differentiates the sexual contract from the social contract is that the majority of the sexual contract is an agreement that takes place not in the public sphere of work and political contracts, but rather is an agreement that is traditionally viewed as that which takes place in the bastion of the private, the family. The marriage contract is a contract that is formed such that the daily maintenance of life might be assured, basic physical necessities met and reproduction carried out. This is then denied access to the scrutiny of the public sphere. “Patriarchal civil society is divided into two spheres, but attention is directed to one sphere only. The story of the social contract is treated as an account of the creation of the public sphere of civil freedom. The other, private, sphere is not seen as politically relevant. Marriage and the marriage contract are, therefore, also deemed politically irrelevant.”\(^\text{14}\) That these were the concerns in the state of nature might allow the private realm to be read as analogous to, if not concomitant with, nature.

Women have been incorporated into the public sphere, and are ostensibly now individuals in the same way that men are, individuals understood as beings who have rights to property and are separable from their bodies. Forgotten in this incorporation is the corporeal nature of identity. Women are incorporated only so far; the disembodied individual is an individual who is unconstrained by the private, by the rhythms and

\(^{13}\) Pateman’s critique of the marriage contract in history is illustrative of the ability of the conventional social contract to include the slave contract, and the marriage contract as strikingly similar to the slave contract. See Pateman: 118-25.

\(^{14}\) Pateman: 3.
necessities of natural life. Contracts between explicitly embodied individuals are contracts about the body, as a property that can be owned. However the free individual who is capable of entering into contracts is not embodied. Here we find the fact that, under the traditional contractual structure, women are not individuals.

Much of Pateman’s critique can be framed as a critique of the idea of individual as owner, specifically that the individual is someone who owns a body as property, not as a being that is embodied. That the distinction between men and women is a distinction that first centers on the body calls into question the ability to talk about sexed individuals, thus erasing the visibility of plurality in the public sphere (this anti-embodiment extends as well to racial difference, differences of ability, etc.).

The traditional “private” denotes a deviant reading of “family.” Concurrent with this reading of the private are the vestiges of the practice of coverture, rather than the married partners being unnaturally melded into one legal person, they are unnaturally melded into one social or familial person. Assigned to the private, we are to assume, then, that rather than reading “family” as a coalition of private individuals, it is instead to be seen as an obscene amalgamation of all of those entities previously considered individuals and is, in general, referred to as a singular organism in its own right. The family is spoken of as though it were a singular (with the husband as the head and wife and children mere dangling appendages), as though the private could be located in this multiplicity of personalities. With such an understanding of the family and the private, Woman is more easily associated and identified solely with the body. This identification with the natural and with the body, removes women as individuals under classical and contemporary contract theory.

15 My initial use of “incorporated” was an accident of speech; however, I cannot but be struck by the dissonance in thinking of the incorporation (from corpus) of the disembodied (incorporeal) individual.
We can see this thinking again in the philosophy of Arendt. The strange amalgamation of the family into a singular perspective that erases human plurality can be found in her writing. We see on the one hand the value placed on hiding the bodily and the natural, so that “... it is striking that ... it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy, all things connected with the necessity of the life process itself ... Women and slaves ... were hidden away not only because they were somebody else’s property but because their life was ... devoted to bodily functions.”\(^{16}\) And on the other hand we see that “the richest and most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one’s own position with its attending aspects and perspectives.”\(^{17}\) Indeed, there is not even the same reality in the family life as there is in the public sphere, for Arendt, owing to this loss of plural perspectives.

If women are not properly formulated as individuals under classical and contemporary contract theory, how can they exist in either the public or the private sphere? We have seen the advance of the juridical incorporation of women into the public sphere largely through a process that simultaneously renders women fictional men through attempts at sex-blind laws and conventions as well as excises from the public those aspects of Woman that are incompatible with Man (so that the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1964) treats pregnancy as a disability). However, while there is no space in the public for women’s bodies, within the private sphere, specifically within the household, we are still living with the image of a head of household, head meant in the most literal sense; the thinking, acting and desiring locus of the household. To be a woman in the private sphere under the contract theory is still to be wife and mother. The body of the woman in contracted through the

\(^{16}\) Arendt, HC: 72.

\(^{17}\) Arendt, HC: 57.
sexual contract, however the individual as woman is lost, subsumed under the head of household.

Contract theory, whether social or sexual, then, cannot hold a space open for a plurality of individuals, but rather necessitates the sort of individual found in the thought of John Rawls, a singular individual capable of rationally thinking for all. Some of this inability to hold plurality rests on the sustaining of the state of nature in the private, and constituting the public as a pure rejection of the private.

_The Sexual Contract_ is a critique, and as such Pateman does not offer much by way of corrective, however I believe that we might be able to imagine the beginning of an answer to the problem as stated above. The answer lies, in part, in thinking of the self as an embodied self. The Cartesian separation of mind from body, echoed in the social contractarians’ belief in an individual that can be separated from all points of identity, lays the groundwork for thinking about the body as property, and for the sort of difference-elision that covers over the possibility of plurality in the public sphere.

One cannot completely discard the idea of a self that is distinct from other selves. However one conceives of the constancy or construction of the self, there is still a point of view from which an individual looks. The origin of that point of view is in the body; it is by my body that I am best able to identify what distinguishes “me” from the rest of the world.

It is the interiority of the body that houses the private, the truly private, that which is not even potentially available to others, although I might choose to share that which is within that interiority. To begin to rethink both sexual and social contract theories, we must find a way to rethink our divisions of public and private. Redefining the private as the embodied

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18 See Pateman: 41-3.
self permits us to begin thinking about both public and private in a way that can include plurality, in fact plurality becomes the ground upon which our thinking must then rest.

Pateman’s concern with traditional contract theory can begin to be answered by carving a space for the individual person that does not abstract out all of those things that make up the differences between persons. Narrowing the private does open a space that is neither properly private nor properly public, the space of the family or indeed the space of the schoolroom, where the effects of publicity are not fully realized. These awkward spaces must be thought.

Part of this rehabilitation can be found in exploring some of the ideas surrounding what it means to be in public, to participate in the political aspects of human life. Hannah Arendt and Jean-Luc Nancy have both spent time on the problem of life with others, and it is toward their thinking that this thesis will travel. Their thinking intersects with this project where both approach a thinking of the human experience that conceives of a world held in common by all human beings. This world is not identical with the earth, but is rather created by human beings, who are, in turn, shaped by the world. What that phrase means to each will undergird the following pages so that we might better, at the end of this, see how Arendt’s understanding that “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”\(^\text{19}\) might be related to Nancy’s explication of “what has been called ‘the creation of the world’ . . . is the explosion of presence in the original multiplicity of its division.”\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Arendt, HC:52.

The Human Condition is devoted to a rethinking of the political situation in which we as human beings find ourselves. It is in this book that Arendt sets forth the distinction between the different spheres of human being for which she would become well known. In explicitly drawing lines between the public realm of human action and political appearance and the private realm dominated by the repetitive deeds required for the mere maintenance of life, Arendt begins with the plurality and difference of each person on the stage of appearance. However, it is in drawing our attention to the mixing and overlapping of the public and the private realms, creating what she calls the social realm, in our current politics and the dangers that lurk therein, that we best see how Arendt might be able to contribute to the overall work to be undertaken in this thesis. The social realm is a realm where the differences between individual persons are erased; it is where the concern with the repetitive, daily maintenance of human life is thrust onto a stage where it begins to become confused with the action and appearance of the political realm.

At the core of Hannah Arendt’s The Human Condition is the distinction between the public and private realms. In that work she argues for the need to divide the public and private spheres, and to build a suitable barrier between the two. The lack of such a space affords the individual neither the escape from others that allows for privacy to truly exist (the discovery of the self), nor the space between others to allow for individuals to distinguish themselves from one another as occurs on the public stage (the presentation of the self). It is action and speech that allow for this distinction, without those, in the private as in the social, there is no means of distinguishing one person from another. In the private there is no “other,” while in the social there are other bodies, but these bodies are rendered indistinguishable, mere commodities.
Arendt’s *The Human Condition* confronts these limits between public and private explicitly, drawing firm lines between the private and the public and offering a negative, if unfulfilled, critique of the social. It is possible to read Arendt’s social as a direct response to Martin Heidegger’s understanding of the public as it is presented in *Being and Time*. Where Heidegger writes of “the They” (*das Man*) and their homogenizing influence, Arendt recognizes that as an aspect of human life that is not truly public. Publicity, the availability and visibility to all, is the coming together of plural perspectives, the peculiarly human ability to do and say new things along with the recognition of the fundamental lack of control over the effects of the acts and speeches in the public realm. In the attempt to control and regulate the effects of public acts and speeches, the social adopts the homogenizations we see in some of Heidegger’s thought.

While Arendt overtly engages the questions of the public and the private, her dismissal of the social realm as one that lacks the possibility of a positive effect leaves her project unfinished. There is the perhaps too harsh rejection of the value of the private sphere, as well as an over-valuation of the political, and yet I will argue that there is hope that we might begin to think through and find something to salvage in her social. There may be something to be said for a space in human life that permits of a sort of learning *how* to be public, yet still has restraints on the fully free effects of publicity. Such examples may be that of the family (where the child is able to explore but is protected in some ways by the elders of the family) or the space of the classroom (where the public *agora* of ideas is modeled and guided by the educator).

Where Arendt explicitly engages in the divisions between the public and private, Jean-Luc Nancy is not as explicitly addressing the divide, but rather engages with the
Heideggerian dasein as that which is the being-singular-plural, i.e. that which is connected by difference. While still addressing plurality, the plurality is located at a level that is both narrower than Arendt’s world (the singular) as well as more broadly construed. In Nancian thought there is not the same possibility of escape from relational life. We are all already in relation with one another and with the world, that we might find in Arendt’s understanding of the private. Where we find the social in this understanding is in the spaces between the singularity (the individual point of origin). The space of the touch, the reaching out, or belonging in my understanding, is the movement toward the public. How this makes up aspects of our thinking politically must be explored.

Where Arendt’s The Human Condition is a diagnostic of contemporary political thought, diagnosing the political mistakes made by a culture that has forgotten plurality, Nancy, in Being Singular Plural, draws us a new way of thinking about community, ourselves and the ways in which we are political. Developing his thought of the person as the being-singular-plural, Nancy grounds political thought, as does Arendt, in the plurality of human difference.

Nancy’s work is valuable to us in this project as, while he does not explicitly engage with the traditional divisions of public and private, his understanding of the being-singular-plural, and the idea that we are first with others through our differences from others can serve as an interesting way to think a new way to relate to public and private aspects of life.

The use of surveillance by State power, both overt forms such as video and audio recording as well as more subtle forms of surveillance such as identity papers, to the foreground the importance of interrogating thinking about the scope and possibility of the division between the public and the private realms. Surveillance, understood for our
purposes as the act of observing or the potential of that observation of daily life, brings into relief the question of privacy. There are times when surveillance is used to overtly control behavior. Commercial retailers use closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras to deter theft, the requirement that those who wish to purchase certain goods present identification to verify age controls who has access to controlled substances. The broad use of CCTV on city streets, proposed and accepted clauses of the USA PATRIOT Act, or the use of racial profiling, however, blur the line between overt control and a more subtle pressure to self-police. Of course, the controlling power of surveillance is not limited to State power such as police forces, the surveillance of the teacher in the classroom or of the head of household of the family are able to act as microcosms of the larger structure built into our political systems.

The surveyed society may not be able to house us, not as plural individuals making up the world (as we must now understand it as that which is created by we human beings, and that which creates us), but rather imprisons each one of us in the limits of our difference, while at the same time taking away the language with which we might talk of that difference. Through surveillance, the limits between the public (aspects of human action and interaction that are presented in plurality and are available to the world) and the private (those aspects of human life that are common to all and that can be, in interesting ways, aspects that hide plurality) are blurred, creating a space that presents the facticity of our existence in the place of our actions.

The surveyed space controls and limits speech and action, it disavows the anarchic reach of the effects of those. Surveyed societies are threatened by and cannot recognize differences that extend outside of the borders of surveillance. When the surveyed space is
thought to be concomitant with the public space, there is no “outside” of the borders and the
differences that are formed in human plurality become forms of threats to the society.

The so-called “counterterrorism” approach, with its attendant constant surveillance
creates a narrowing of the space of appearance, an expansion of the social realm beyond the
spaces of protection appropriate to learning how to be public but rather becoming restrictions
across all of the public. Citizens must appear as citizens, and with the constant surveillance,
every aspect of their lives is available for judgment, so that there is not space remaining for
difference. Every part of the citizen in constant surveillance is controlled. “Surveillance
instructs the development of political subjectivity by turning the subject back on itself;
knowledge of the potentially omnipresent gaze frames sense of self-regulation and the
cultivation of identity fit for inspection.”

That the reliance on surveillance goes further than mere video and audio recording,
but, in the wake of 9/11, burrows into the body of the citizen gives us reason to believe that
the individual becomes ever aware of her own inability to be the ideal citizen, becoming, as
Dean Wilson says, an ideal suspect. “Through codes of biometric identification, the spaces
of citizenship are reconfigured as spaces of suspicion occupied by the increasingly ubiquitous
identity of the ideal suspect.” Surveillance controls the bodies of citizens, such that they
are placed in the untenable position of attempting to conceal their selves.

The political subjects of surveillance must take as their task their own
nonappearance in the result sets of queries hunting for suspect activity even as
their own physicality – the facts of embodiedness – mandates their appearance
in the camera’s eye. To stand out is to be at risk; to becomes undifferentiated

22 Dean Wilson, "Biometrics, Borders and the Ideal Suspect," in Borders, Mobility and Technologies of Control,
from the mass of other lives translated into the binary language of electronic encoding becomes the goal in the age of Total Information Awareness.\textsuperscript{23}

The danger of the social is that it draws the population into complicity with it. Surveillance’s power is not limited to the observed political powers and their ability to search our bodies, tap our electronic communication and film us as we inhabit public spaces, but rather the social as it extends its demands of homogeneity outward pulls those it envelops into the role of enforcers. We are plural; each of us distinct and different from one another, this difference is what permits ingenuity. However under the social this difference becomes a liability, and so to cover over the unruliness of our inherent differences, the population turns on itself, highlighting the distinctions of others and deflecting such suspicions away from the self.

How surveillance interacts with being-singular-plural seems to be in ignoring the originary difference that permits us to even appear to one another. The control that we find in the social when it is expanded to the size of the surveyed society again gives little recognition to the difference between people, and to the making-sense-of the world that such a difference permits. The social, negatively construed, forgets that the making-sense, the meaning comes from the plurality of perspective and instead attempts to impose it from a monolithic perspective.\textsuperscript{24}

In the following chapter I look more closely at the intersection of Hannah Arendt’s thought on public and private and our thinking about difference and expand the critique of the family as private to develop a thinking of privacy that is focused on a space for rehearsal of difference, relying on Arendt, Betty Friedan and Iris Marion Young for explication.

\textsuperscript{23} Troyer: 271.
\textsuperscript{24} I will explore these themes more explicitly in the third chapter of this thesis.
Chapter Two

Hannah Arendt and Plurality

Having engaged with critiques of thinking of the public and the private spheres as necessarily divided, I will now turn to a rehabilitation of the social realm. Through this rehabilitation, I will find a place for a rediscovery of the self in that space, a space traditionally thought of as hostile to the self. The relationship of the self with the public and the private is one that can be found in the exercise of biography and narrative. This relationship is shaped in part by the ways in which the public sphere is constructed. I will address the concern with surveillance as an example of a limiting factor on the development of biography and move from there to a more robust engagement with what sort of a private sphere we might want to consider.

Surveillance turns the body into a liability. One’s physical existence can put one at risk. The urge is, therefore, to be as undistinguishable as possible. Acts and speeches, rather than being designed to add to the biography of the actor/speaker, are instead designed to cover over the actor, to hide difference. What makes the surveyed society so alarming is that it encourages not just the attempted suppression of one’s own plurality, but encourages as well wielding others’ plurality as a liability. The surveyed society brings us the closest to Arendt’s worries of the social, the single perspective bleaching out the voices of difference.
Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the “common nature” of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object. If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men, least of all the unnatural conformism of a mass society, can prevent the destruction of the common world, which is usually preceded by the destruction of the many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality. This can happen under conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else, as is usually the case in tyrannies. But it may also happen under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor. In both instances, men 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 as 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.  

A person’s experience of the world is checked and bounded by the experience of other perspectives in the world. We come to truth in the public realm through the convergence of differing perspectives. The reality of the world is one grounded in action, and a sustaining that extends beyond our own lives. “For our trust in the reality of life and in the reality of the world is not the same. The latter derives primarily from the permanence and durability of the world, which is far superior to that of mortal life.”

At the core of *The Human Condition*, the formal offering of her *vita activa*, is the distinction between the public and private realms. This is the distinction that has traditionally been such a thorn in the side of feminist thought. The framework of the public and private spheres built here are ostensibly antagonistic to much of the politics of identity, for Arendt’s account neglects gender, and under the least charitable readings seems to reinforce the discriminatory separations of woman-as-private and man-as-public. It is

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26 Arendt, HC: 120.
through the division of life into those aspects that are appropriated by the public and those that would be better kept away from prying eyes that women have found themselves identified with the private realm nearly universally. This division rests on a traditional reading of what the private contains, a reading that I will argue is questionable. It is so long as the private is read as synonymous with the family-as-single-entity, a mono-perspective organism, whose thinking, public head is literally the father, that the actions that are committed by women will continue to be recast as private moments, and thus not action at all. What is necessary is a revaluation of the private and the family that can more accurately be located with respect to the true privacy of the individual’s interior life. Moving the family out of the strictly private sphere, and reducing the private to an individual level, returns the lives of women to a status worthy of action and biography. It is in biography that the ability to build a life story of action lies as it is “the stories, the results of action and speech, [that] reveal an agent.”

It is not my intent to argue that Arendt’s work is inherently feminist. Rather her world-structure, when seen through a slightly altered perspective, allows for many interesting points of beginning.

Storytelling and biography are the individual’s links to a wider audience in both space and time. To draw out the feminist potentials in this form of publicity I will turn to The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan’s classic documentation of the lives of a limited but culturally iconic group of women. There are many respects in which The Feminine Mystique and The Human Condition are related. Friedan’s work begins the act of storytelling, an action that is necessary for entrance into the public realm. The story that is told is one that illustrates the murky sphere of the social, the realm that forms, according to Arendt, when the

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27 Arendt, HC: 184.
division between private and public become confused. Within *The Human Condition*, the social sphere both echoes the feminist catchphrase ‘the personal is the political’ and resoundingly condemns it. Society “excludes the possibility of action,” and it is only through action that a person can engage in the creation of biography, as well as in the reality of the public realm.\(^{29}\)

While Arendt’s social sphere discourages political notice of private concerns, a distinction between the private realm and the public realm is not wholly antagonistic to feminism. In fact many political goals of those who would object to systems of oppression may be framed loosely in terms of a desire for a re-separation of the public from the private. It is certainly the approach taken, currently, with respect to reproductive rights, and in general in determining what are acceptable criteria for evaluating an individual’s status or merits. What is problematic with the public/private divide is not the divide itself, but the traditional means of effecting the division. *The Feminine Mystique* is important for the critique of that traditional division. Friedan offers us a narrative of the state of Woman (admittedly upper-middle class, white woman) and the struggle against the problem that famously “had no name.”\(^{30}\) As Arendt draws a picture of the increasing emphasis on commodity in the modern world and the resulting status of objects and alienation from the world, Friedan gives us the biography of the social construct of woman-as-object.

This biography begins by acknowledging that the American women in the 1950s and ‘60s faces a common problem one that was left unspoken, and so silenced women further. The problem is not within the woman herself, but rather is found within a *lack* of self.

I think that this has been the unknown heart of woman’s problem in America for a

\(^{29}\) Arendt, HC: 40.

\(^{30}\) Friedan: 15.
long time, this lack of a private image. Public images that defy reason and have very little to do with women themselves have had the power to shape too much of their lives. These images would not have such power, if women were not suffering a crisis of identity.\textsuperscript{31}

The private creation of self had been overtaken by public images of what that private self should be. “The new image of woman as housewife-mother has been largely created by writers and editors who are men.”\textsuperscript{32} With an external image pressed onto the definition of woman as a whole, deviations from that mold were unintelligible, the words and deeds that make up individuals were then lost. This is as good an example of the implications of the social sphere as any the reader would find within \textit{The Human Condition}. As we will see with Arendt, speech and action are essential to a self, and these cannot be formed by an ostensibly private self that has been shaped by a public force.

Arendt defines the public from two angles, the first being simply that notion of \textit{publicity}. “[F]irst . . . everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and have the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance . . . constitutes reality.”\textsuperscript{33} It is through this publicity that we develop the concept of the biography. It is within the art of autobiography that the self is able to separate from others.\textsuperscript{34} One must be witnessed to be capable of performing acts or speeches. “\textit{Who} somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero –his biography . . .”\textsuperscript{35}

The second understanding of the public “signifies the world itself, in so far as it is

\begin{footnotesize}
31 Friedan: 68.
32 Friedan: 47.
33 Arendt, HC: 50.
34 Arendt, HC: 179.
35 Arendt, HC: 186 (original emphasis).
\end{footnotesize}
common to all of us.” This world is not only what individuals hold in common, but also acts as a space between individuals, relating and distinguishing distinct perspectives. Christopher Phillip Long supports a non-traditional reading of Arendt’s household through this second, worldly, approach to the public realm, a reading that I shall adopt and expand upon.

Set in opposition to this public realm is the private. For Arendt, this is the family as well. Within the private we find those activities that continue life by laboring and those that lay the groundwork for the public by creating objects that will build up the world through working. Arendt specifically locates inequality in the household, as well as a lack of freedom, “for the household head, its ruler, was considered to be free only in so far as he had the power to leave the household and enter the political realm, where all were equals.” To be able to read the family as such, one must remain faithful to this image of a singular identity within the family. Any revaluation of the true nature of the family would remove it from a solely private role.

In The Human Condition Arendt argues for the need to divide the public and private spheres, and to build a suitable barrier between the two. The social realm is that which occurs when such a suitable barrier cannot be built and the concerns of the private are allowed to bleed into the discourse of the public, while the publicity of the political sphere shines into every aspect of the private life. There becomes no arena which can separate the many from the individual. The lack of such a space affords the individual neither the escape

36 Arendt, HC: 52.
38 Arendt, HC: 7.
39 Arendt, HC: 32.
from others that allows privacy to truly exist (the discovery of the self), nor the space between others to allow for individuals to distinguish themselves from one another as occurs on the public stage (the presentation of the self). It is action and speech that allow for this distinction, without those, in the private as in the social, there is no means of distinguishing one person from another. In the private there is no ‘other’ while in the social there are other bodies, but these bodies are rendered indistinguishable, mere commodities. This commodification of human existence is a theme that connects *The Feminine Mystique* with *The Human Condition*. Both writers comment on this problem. Arendt speaks of the tendency of the social to “‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave,”40 Friedan, the inescapable “image of woman.”41

The social sphere’s power to “normalize” gives it the power to destroy action, removing individuals and replacing those with mere entities. The social sphere exists as a twilight realm that does not permit of the above freedom to leave the private behind for the true equality of the public. Instead one is trapped in a false equality. Arendt locates a form of equality in the social sphere for this reason, which is at first pass difficult for liberal ethics to appreciate. She states this explicitly: “But society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual.”42 The “equality” to which Arendt refers, however, is not to be understood as a general rejection of inherent favor bestowed upon individuals by mere fact of nature for aspects that are unrelated to acts or speech, but rather the dystopian

40 Arendt, HC: 40.
41 Friedan: 58.
42 Arendt, HC: 41.
“Harrison Bergeron”-esque “equality” that allows only conformity and mediocrity. The social realm is one that is populated by stereotypes, not persons. This equity of conformity does indeed annihilate action, and as we shall see, sheds interesting light on the situation of woman. Friedan approaches a similar form of equality in her critique of the feminine mystique, anticipating many of Arendt’s concerns with the role that the social plays in an individual’s ability to act in the world:

Did the new mystique of separate-but-equal femininity arise because the growth of women in America could no longer be repressed by the old mystique of feminine inferiority? Could women be prevented from realizing their full capabilities by making their role in the home equal to man’s role in society? . . . Housework . . . had to become the every end of life itself to conceal the obvious fact that it is barely the beginning. 43

Reading the public/private divide in the traditional light that Arendt does, we are told that it is in the private that we find just necessity, just the continuation of life. These processes take up more and more time as we have a greater division of labor and roles. We then have classes of people who, as the ancient Greek slaves labored, work to maintain the biological necessities for others who are living strictly within the polis. This division is noticed by Friedan as well. “Why, it was asked, should men with the capacities of statesmen, anthropologists, physicists, poets, have to wash dishes and diaper babies on weekday evenings or Saturday mornings when they might use those extra hours to fulfill larger commitments to their society?” 44 Apparently no one thought then to ask a similar question about the women with such capacities. Instead the culture was divided not only into public acts and private labor, but the culture was split completely in two, with separate classes of people classified ‘public’ or ‘private.’

43 Friedan: 229.
44 Friedan: 42.
This distribution of tasks stems from the traditional, problematic understanding of the nature of the private and the family that has been discussed above. With the understanding of the family as being a space of pure privacy, the singular perspective that does not afford plurality, Man is alienated from the private sphere just as Woman is alienated from the public; this at least is the ideal that we are given in the traditional social sphere. With the family conceived of as a singular organism, Man and Woman become literal halves of a whole. He is the public persona, she is the private laborer; the sole point at which they can come together is the social realm, encouraging its spread.

This obscene, many-bodied beast is not, however, an adequate description of the private nor the family. As Long states, “the notion that the family is characterized by a single position multiplied is both antiquated and phenomenologically false.” Should we remain faithful to Arendt’s concept of the public in a worldly sense, the presence of multiple perspectives and others’ eyes and ears lend some doubt to the strict delineation of private and public. In bringing in the second approach to the public, through the concept of worldliness we find that the traits that develop the world (viz., being between people, a plurality of perspective and a transcendence of the finite human life-span), can be found as well in the interactions of family members. We must look at what the private truly entails to give such a worthwhile description. The sustaining of life and performance of tasks of necessity need not completely take over the life of an individual. Nor do these tasks entail the escape from others. “The social viewpoint is identical . . . with an interpretation that takes nothing into account but the life process of mankind, and within its frame of reference all things become

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45 Long: 97.
46 Long: 92.
objects of consumption.”

Even within the family there are still individual members, separate identities who are capable of beginning new actions. These multiple perspectives, which may or may not settle on a single goal at any one time, do not cease to be human beings with the attendant quality of natality solely because the other perspectives with which they interact are beings legally recognized as family members. While the space of the private may be found within the walls of a household, a location for privacy, it is not the family that is private, and the space of appearance is potential even there. In fact, one could see where the mis-reading of the family as the private entity would lead to a greater reach of the social. The rejection of the full access to the public found in an embrace of simpler homey tasks. Just as Arendt opens the prologue to The Human Condition with a discussion of life in a world that permits dreams of escaping to the stars, so does Friedan comment on the Bomb’s impact on post-war American life, each ending in a world that is conducive to the growth of Arendt’s social.

If we follow the advice . . ., to adjust our cultural attitudes to the present status of scientific achievement, we would in all earnest adopt a way of life in which speech is no longer meaningful . . . The reason why it may be wise to distrust the political judgment of scientists is . . . precisely the fact that they move in a world where speech has lost its power . . . Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves.

There was, just before the feminine mystique took hold in America, a war, which followed a depression and ended with the explosion of an atom bomb. After the loneliness of war and the unspeakableness of the bomb, against the frightening uncertainty, the cold immensity of the changing world, women as well as men sought the comforting reality of home and children . . . And so

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47 Arendt, HC: 89.
48 Arendt, HC: 3-4.
the American woman made her mistaken choice. She ran back home to live by sex alone, trading her individuality for security. Her husband was drawn in after her, and the door was shut against the outside world.49

There is little room for action and speech in either of the visions of the world they lived in. In both visions, the world of interacting individuals has been replaced by silence and world alienation. However, neither are complete, no one can live purely in the private and so aspects of the public are pulled into the silence of the scientifically alienated world and slip underneath the closed door.

Within the scope of our earlier discussion of the problems embedded in thinking of the private as distinct from the public, we must now begin to rebuild the public and the private as something other than separable. We have recognized that we cannot find the private comfortably in the realm of the family. To find the private, one must look to a space that is beyond appearance, beyond the reach and intrusion of other people. Arendt describes what makes a life a private one, it is “to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard . . . [t]he privation of privacy lies in the absence of others.”50 The presence of other perspectives removes the possibility of privacy; even before family members we must be aware of our actions and speech. The location of the private may then be only found by oneself. This is, however, a term loaded with philosophical implications.

The self51, as it is in a world which is held in common by all, is at once the locus of uniqueness – the source of natality and plurality to use terms suitable for Arendt, but as we are as shaped by the world as the world is shaped by us, the self cannot be the sort of singular

49 Friedan: 174, 195.
50 Arendt, HC:58.
51 I am well aware that this is a contentious, inflammatory term in philosophy. I use this in only the loosest of senses here, and beg the reader’s patience until I might be able to further explicate “the self” in terms of the private.
individual as was critiqued by Patemen. There seems to be question as to whether the ultimate privation described by Arendt could be achieved. Despite our rejection of the family as being merely a multiplication of the same perspective (however the legal fictions of the past may have constructed it), we might find the privacy of being by oneself as a singular perspective. This singular perspective is unbounded. It is when one is by oneself that one can indulge in private fantasies, explore dreams and alternate endings to conversations. It is not reality, but it is not without attachment to the world. I am alternately petty and generous, when spending time in introspection. I am hopeless and grandiose. I explore philosophical arguments and implications. I am frequently wrong. But I can expect that no one will hold me account for those moments of private reverie. Any pettiness in which I indulge is not a pettiness that has been witnessed, that might be written as part of my biography. I need not ever mention, let alone feel the need to defend what I do in my own company.

Rather than seeing privacy as just what happens behind closed doors, as even that has some form of resonance, it is what happens behind closed eyes. This interiority where we rehearse our speeches and actions without committing ourselves to such performances is the only guaranteed space for the private realm, not the family that blends both the necessities of life with the activities of individuals interacting. It is within the interior of one’s own self that one is able to be and to think beyond the reach and gaze of others, however that self might be made up by the interaction with and touching upon those others. This is not, of course, a literal interior. I am not advocating something like a literal inward turning duality.

There must be some continuity of private and public so that we have to ability to go from one to another. This continuity may best be found within the social, as it is composed in the family and in the classroom, for example. This gray area between the polis and the
interiority fills the space between individuals in the social world. This gray area between the polis and the interiority fills in the space between the individuals in the household world. While this allows for familial relations, its expansion out of the household and into the public proper (as through legislation that looks to affect the interior) bloats the gray area to a point where individuality is excised in favor of conformity and mass culture. If it is through biography that we are capable of revealing, however unintentionally, who we are, there must be a means to connect the self and the action. A properly contained social world would give room for the practicing of one’s autobiography.

The idea of the interiority also removes the problem of the purported privacy of the body. This is a traditional reading of the divide to assume that the body, and the appearance of the self, are purely private. Arendt claims that “the body indeed becomes the quintessence of all property because it is the only thing one could not share even if one wanted to. Nothing . . . is less common and less communicable . . .”。52 This reasoning reinforces the privation of women, who are also traditionally read as the body as opposed to the head. In this understanding of the privacy of the body, there is no account left by which the means of action and speech are effected. The role of the body in intersubjectivity is exactly opposite Arendt’s claim. While we, as autonomous human beings have a right to the possession of and control over our own bodies as extensions of our selves, the body itself is also an essential tool of communication and connection with others. It is the space of appearances to which Arendt assigns public action, and so to appear in space one must have control over a particular body. When we force the private to expand and encompass a plurality (a situation that is inherently public) by engulfing all members of a family into a single organism, we

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52 Arendt, HC: 112.
must also conduct strange alchemy upon the bodies of the members. Understanding the family as an organism of privacy, the bodies of the family members become communal and so easier to objectify.

Many of these problems of self-definition can be found to stem from Arendt’s social realm. This blurring of the line between the public and private, between the interiority and the world, leads to the removal of the individual-as-actor. The false expansion of the private to include a former multiplicity of perspective leads to the strange, collective images that we are exposed to via our media and other social institutions. “[T]he reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects . . . Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position.”

Making the interiority a space that covers more than one individual makes those placed under the umbrella of such a space beholden to a singular position. All that can be identical among all people is the driving force of life’s necessities, and so what was the world becomes “an interpretation that takes nothing into account but the life process of mankind, and within its frame of reference all things become objects of consumption.” The end result, arrived at by both Friedan and Arendt, is the objectification of human life. Friedan remarks that “[t]he new image of woman as housewife-mother has been largely created by writers and editors who are men.”

Action and speech are essential to the development of an autobiography, as is a stage upon which to act and speak. The autobiography, the telling of the life story that allows a person to exhibit who she is, something greater than the mere what of body, is the garden

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53 Arendt, HC: 57.
54 Arendt, HC:89.
55 Friedan: 47.
gate that mediates between the interiority of private thought and decision forming and the public actions that stem from that interiority. Autobiography is the step necessary to enter the self into the public realm. It is within the art of autobiography that the self is able to separate from the artificial melding of the family into a singular entity and thus be able to locate the sense of interiority that is truly private into the self proper. The ‘who’ is an exhibition of her agency.

This rehearsal space is a space of practice. We practice being ourselves, trying on ideas and attempting different ways of being. That we are embodied strikes me as an uncontroversial statement; one aspect of the human condition, whatever else we may want to add to that definition, is extension in space. That we experience the world via our bodies, that is, that our experiences of a shared world, a world filled with other people and things, that which makes up the content of our lives is available to us because we are embodied may have its share of controversy amongst philosophers concerned with how it is that we experience that external world (external to what, one wonders), however, few (I hope) would argue against that it is through embodiment that we make sense of the world.

There is much about a person that her body can tell those who sense her; how she clothes herself, in what way she styles her hair, we infer, despite our best intentions, beliefs and facts about her only from what is available to our eyesight. I maintain a certain amount of control as to how I am sensed by the world, is my hair responsibly restrained, muted in color or is it recklessly free; do I wear jewelry that may identify particular religious beliefs, or with which gender I prefer to spend my nights? This control is not complete, and I must use the codes of dress made available to me by my culture. Nor can I prevent others from coming to their own conclusions, assigning to me other beliefs (of course, those external
judgments are discouraged from being acted upon, however, they are). Our clothing and hair styling is culturally determined, however the cultural construction of those roles does not lessen their impact on our lives.56

The body, and its appearance, is frequently where difference is located. That is to say that “deviant” appearances are marked out against the unnoticed “normal.” Dress traditionally found in other cultures marks the foreigner; skirts pick out women or gay men; the filthy hippy. Appearance that confuses, that blurs the line between dichotomous categories, is marked as dangerous or particularly deviant. So that with intersexed and transsexual bodies, the former are submitted to the surgeon’s knife quickly and repeatedly and the latter must first prove they can pass. In times before the “corrective” methods of modern surgery, we have cases of intersexed bodies being specifically marked as such, such as in the case of Thomas/ine Hall, a 17th Century intersexed person who was ordered by the Virginia Court to dress in men’s clothing, but to wear a woman’s hat and apron, so that Thomas/ine’s anomalous genitalia (and thus sex) would be known.57

Deviant bodies are subject to scrutiny and are marked as public. The sideshow of the 19th Century circuses may be less culturally acceptable, however the voyeurism has only been brought into our homes, by virtue of “informative” documentary-style television programs such as those run by The Learning Channel.58 The freak-show now comes to us,

56 Indeed our very freedom can be threatened, witness the case of the young woman sentenced to 3 days in jail for contempt of court for wearing shorts, after having been fined. The cultural coding for “appropriate dress” differed between the judge and the young woman, and his won out. (Kocher, “Woman Jailed for Wearing Shorts”)

57 Anne Fausto-Sterling, Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality (New York: Basic Books, 2000):111-2. Sexing the Body is a fantastic examination of the ways in which our experience of sex and gender are constructed, ordered and normalized by the medical and legal surveillance of our bodies.

58 A quick glance at their programming website gives us a handful of make-over shows, for both self and house, two shows chronicling life in tattoo parlors, two shows about life as a dwarf family, two shows following children’s beauty pageants, a show about motorcycle customization, three programs following large families,
although the cast of characters has little changed, the morbidly obese, the transsexual and intersexed, the extraordinarily tall or extremely short, the strong-men and –women flow along broadband cables into our living rooms, the Other’s extraordinary bodies reassuring the rest of us of our lack of deviance.

This voyeurism does more than reassure the general population of their own conformity; we are instructed in the images and ways of those deviant groups, the better to recognize and classify those whom we meet. We learn whom to desire, who we ought to pity, and importantly in a surveyed society, we learn who deserves our fear. We can identify drug dealers and terrorists and pedophiles by the color of their skin or by sexual orientation, or so racial profiling and mass media seem to be telling us.59

The reduction of difference, equating it to something merely biological and something quantifiable, or to classes of people, robs the population as a whole of plurality and steals from those classified as different their place in the public sphere. Entrance into the public consciousness is available only insofar as the difference can be suppressed or denied, carefully contained within acceptable limits. Modern thought about difference and equality, the kind that motivates much contemporary political philosophy, posits equality as sameness and difference as superfluous. The danger of this is, of course, that we are never able to completely hide from difference; our bodily extension into the world requires that we are

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separable. Hannah Arendt addresses these concerns of essentializing and equality in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. To quote her at some length:

> Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals. The dark background of mere givenness, the background formed by our unchangeable and unique nature, breaks into the political scene as the alien which in its all too obvious difference reminds us of the limitations of human activity – which are identical with the limitations of human equality. The reason why highly developed political communities, such as the ancient city-states or modern nation-states, so often insist on ethnic homogeneity is that they hope to eliminate as far as possible those natural and always present differences and differentiations which by themselves arouse dumb hatred, mistrust, and discrimination because they indicate all too clearly those spheres where men cannot act and change at will, i.e., the limitations of the human artifice. The “alien” is a frightening symbol of the fact of difference as such, of individuality as such, and indicates those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to destroy. If a Negro in a white community is considered a Negro and nothing else, he loses along with his right to equality that freedom of action which is specifically human; all his deeds are now explained as “necessary” consequences of some “Negro” qualities; he has become some specimen of an animal species, called man. Much the same thing happens to those who have lost all distinctive political qualities and have become human beings and nothing else. No doubt, wherever public life and its law of equality are completely victorious, wherever a civilization succeeds in eliminating or reducing to a minimum the dark background of difference, it will end in complete petrifaction and be punished, so to speak, for having forgotten that man is only the master, not the creator of the world.\(^{60,61}\)

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\(^{61}\) Arendt’s reference to the alien as symbol of difference is perhaps not accidental. She refers to science fiction in her prologue to *The Human Condition* as “a vehicle of mass sentiments and mass desires.” (Arendt, HC: 2) And while science fiction had not yet been theorized in Arendt’s time, there is surely something interesting happening in that genre. That Hannah Fenchinel Pitkin phrases her concerns about the amorphous nature of Arendt’s social as *The Attack of the Blob* (1998) is no accidental allusion to 1950s pulp cinema. The concern about surveillance and the surveyed society is nowhere more represented than in the science fiction of our times. The nameless (multi-named?) protagonist of Robert Zelazny’s collection of short stories *My Name Is Legion* (1976) escapes the total surveillance society he helped to create to live outside of society (and thus be in a better position to effect justice). Jean Mark Gawron explicitly engages with Arendt’s political fears as a backdrop in *Dream of Glass* (1993). And, of course, we may not forget George Orwell, William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, Phillip K. Dick, nor Margaret Atwood and their not-so-far-away dystopias. It is, perhaps, that science fiction exists as a repository of our technophobia, that our discomfort with change is played out between pulp fiction covers, marginalized and therefore neutralized. Science fiction and its dystopias may act as the scapegoat of our times; the wound opened in our cultural landscape with the splitting of the atom is repeated, rehearsed, re-visioned in the atomic age b-movies. It is within the language of science fiction that we are able
Arendt’s concern with this sort of thinking of difference is a concern with the sort of difference as identity. A difference that becomes the sole marker of the person, thinking of people as what they are, as opposed to who they are. There is no biography in a definite description of a person. The plurality of human beings is lost when mass society creates identities built around these fact of biology (race or sex) and reduces those facts to a simple short cut of difference and other. The simple equality to which Arendt is objecting is a bringing in of difference without first thinking it. Equality based on that is a mere measure of statistical probabilities, action and speech, plurality, erased.

Iris Marion Young brings to our attention in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* a new way of thinking about justice and the approach to the public sphere, one that may seem to contradict some of our traditional intuitions. Now, almost twenty years after the book was initially published, we find that our concerns seem to have little changed. Her thinking of social justice, the political and difference are just as novel and exciting as they seem to have been at the book’s release. As the title suggests, Young locates the source of the possibility of justice in recognition of human plurality, rather than the traditional approach to justice that focuses on unity and impartiality. Like we saw with Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract*, she engages in a critique of political thought. She argues that we must find a way to incorporate the plurality of human groups in to the public and the sphere of political discussion, rather than the classical Liberal focus on the unitary individual.

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The central thesis of the book, that we must reframe our discussion of social justice in such a way as to see social injustice as oppression of groups, is explored through chapters that both challenge the traditional thinking as well as offer a vision of what the system might look like, were we to adopt a political thinking more conducive to a pluralistic public. This oppression of groups as the source of injustice is a part of what Arendt was concerned with in the above quote. There are dangers inherent in a group-oriented public, and Young must walk a fine line to avoid a sort of essentialism that can and has all too easily be wielded to sustain the very same forms of oppression she hopes to undo. She distinguishes between the traditional “contract model” that begins with self-possessed individuals entering into an association and group identity that makes up part of the person’s identity. “Individuals constitute associations . . . Groups, on the other hand, constitute individuals.” She avoids the potential pitfalls of over-simplification through her understanding of how aspects of oppression can lead can structure our thinking.

We are accustomed to thinking about difference in dialectical terms, that difference denotes a deviation from the norm. Young argues that such a view is dependent on cultural imperialism, “the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm. . . Given the normality of its own cultural expressions and identity, the dominant group constructs the differences which some groups exhibit as lack and negation.” What occurs, under this form of oppression, is that “race” becomes “not-white,” “woman” becomes “not man,” each Other is defined by and defines the dominant archetype, taken to be normal, correct or whole, and utterly ignorant of the constituting effects of its own group identity. “Where as the privileged groups are neutral and exhibit

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63 Young: 44-5.
64 Young: 59.
free and malleable subjectivity, the excluded groups are marked with an essence, imprisoned in a given set of possibilities.”

The difference Young urges us to recognize is not the standard definition, one that “always implies a good/bad opposition; it is always a devaluation, the naming of an inferiority in relation to a superior standard of humanity.” This change permits us to avoid the invisible dominance of privilege (that is the assumption that the dominant group acts as a standard, and it is only outsider groups to which distinctions attach) and begin thinking about people as plural. “The privileged groups lose their particularity; in assuming the position of the scientific subject they become disembodied, transcending particularity and materiality, agents of a universal view from nowhere. The oppressed groups, on the other hand, are locked in their objectified bodies, blind, dumb, and passive.” Thinking about difference as the particularity that is lost when under cultural imperialism allow the borders of identity to become somewhat more fluid, as it is variety and not lack of perfection that distinguishes one group or individual from another.

In the final chapter of this thesis I will expand this new thinking of difference with an engagement with the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy, in particular thinking about the being-singular-plural. In his thought we will find a world that begins in difference and relation, rather than a world of difference that can come to us only later.

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65 Young: 170.
66 Young: 170.
67 Young: 127.
Chapter Three

Jean-Luc Nancy and the Between

Having spent the bulk of this work concentrating on critique of aspects of political thought, and developing the thought of Arendt as she works with the world in common, I now turn to a more positive argument through the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and his rethinking of the political and the self in terms of the being-singular-plural. Writing on Nancy is a complicated proposition: There is a constant shifting of perspective, of scale, an inexorable sense of movement. I find myself turning to a particular piece of his writing, focusing on a particular phrase, only to be drawn in, backward and forward again. Having thought about the question of the interior as a rehearsal space for new ways of being, I turn to Nancy to help expand that thought into an account of what that might mean for us.

The thread that has woven through this work is the question of belonging. How it is that we are able to belong to community, to one another and to ourselves. Nancy gives us an ontology that begins in belonging and in plurality. “Our being-with, as a being-many, is not at all accidental, and it is in no way the secondary and random dispersion of a primordial essence. It forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of originary alterity as such. *The plurality of beings is at the foundation [fondment] of Being.*”68 That we are is that we are together. The world into which we are born is a world that is created through,

68 Nancy, *BSP:* 12.
with and by others, their plurality interweaving with our own and bringing meaning into being. We belong, and we reach for others in that belonging. Belonging is a longing, it is the between us Nancy speaks of. “Everything, then, passes between us . . . [I]t is neither connected nor unconnected; it falls short of both . . .”

This everything that passes between us, that connects and in doing so reveals the difference, that we are each singular, is found in the communication of the difference. Everything that is exists because it is sensed, it is touched upon. What is touched is not the same, it must have some difference, some distance to be touched, to be sensed. My eyes do not see themselves. The world, then, has meaning because it is filled with differences all touching upon, being sensed, newly meant. Being is between. The experience of being, the experience of making sense of the world (meaningfully and sensually), is available through the touching of the world. While Arendt worried over the development of plurality in the public sphere, Nancy brings plurality into the origin of the person, and of the world.

Being in common means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear (comparaisse), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or offered to one another. This comppearance (comparation) is not something added on to their being; rather, their being comes into being in it.

Our being as being-given-to-another, being in common, is not more that an expression of the prolonged reaching, the extended offering of being that is at the same time an accepting of the relation between self and other. This is the belonging, the desire to sense and be sensed, and our desire to make that explicit. Appearance-to-others does not come

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69 Nancy, BSP: 5 (original emphasis).
70 Nancy, BSP: 5-6.
after and being is not presupposed in appearance. Rather being is the relation between one and another. It is the process of giving away. This giving cannot be presupposed, one cannot merely talk of giving oneself. Rather the giving is performed without mediation, be it through speech or action or touch. Indeed, there is no other way to be. My being is insofar as I offer it to be sensed. That I am insofar as I am offering seems to say as well that I am never fully received, that there can never be a complete taking up of my offering of myself. This is the continual engagement with the world.

This is Nancy’s rejection of the public/private divide. Nancy brings the private/singular into touch with the public/plural by drawing together the world in common. We are not individual selves who exist as units of human being, but are rather selves that are because of the plurality of other beings. That is to say, that I am unique, in this moment. I can touch upon memories of me-past, who I was when I began this project, myself as a child, I can touch upon co-temporaneous objects and beings and (as I am doing now with my fat orange cat) share a moment. However no one, not even past or future me, and nothing can occupy this part of the world. And yet, I can never remove myself from the world; the world presses into me at all times, so that even in my interiority, my rehearsal space is populated by the world, the rehearsal of possibilities and engagements crafted by what I have been touched by.

There is a certain comfort in thinking of oneself as a fixed being. That is to say, that there is an appearance of a settled identity in our language when we speak of ourselves. There is a kind of shorthand in being able to say “I am a philosopher,” “I am an American,” “I am a woman,” or any number of labels that are available to us with certain associations or assumptions built into the use of any given label. To name myself “a woman” is to draw
upon a shared understanding of concepts ranging from biology, psychology, culture and so forth. There can be a forgetting of other possibilities, a forgetting of the necessity of action to make up a given way-of-being. The verb “to be” has become a passive verb indeed. Heidegger, when he famously calls for an investigation into the question of the meaning of Being, calls to mind for us this forgetting. Heidegger, as well as Arendt and Nancy, finds that such a call to mind renders fixed and passive understandings insufficient for describing the human condition. We are not static.

Martin Heidegger should be in our thoughts as we work with this question of the world in common, as we work with Arendt and Nancy who are themselves working with Heidegger and his thought. We would not be out of touch with the project were we to spend some time thinking about Heidegger, and the ways in which Nancy responds to him.

The experience of *dasein* is fraught with anxiety. Examined directly, the lack of a fixed boundary of the self, the openness of possibility, can be mistaken for the abyss, inspiring a sense of the uncanny. The *unheimlich*, the un-homely, is experienced precisely at that moment that *dasein* comes into the world. It is, for Heidegger, the uncanny that pulls *dasein* out of the obscure leveling of the “they.” No longer limited in possible ways-of-being, *dasein* is broken open to the groundlessness of itself, the very unnatural of its natural Being.

It is in the face of this uncanny that we engage in the creation of artifacts, *techne*. This artification extends even to our notions of our selves; we engage in storytelling, narrating actions in the world and creating artifacts that are then available to us as memory. It is these memories, the past “which already goes ahead of it [dasein],”\(^{72}\) that are used to

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create the artifice of a self. This produced self cannot fully capture \textit{dasein}, and we find the vast abyss of possibility facing us again in that mismatch. However, \textit{dasein} is not alone in the world. \textit{dasein} is thrown into a world, and it is appearing in this world that we are capable of speech and action, of being sensed and making sense. It is equally the case that speech and action are what disclose \textit{dasein} to the world.

Heidegger, quoted by Agamben, tells us that \textit{dasein}'s "\textit{state of being is such that it is in 'untruth.'}"\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Dasein} is not given to us as having a state of Being that is \textit{false}, but rather un-true, a phrase that beings to place it outside of our traditional understanding of dichotomous truth values (a thing \textit{is} or \textit{is not}, true or false). The ‘untruth’ of \textit{dasein}’s state of Being is that of the inauthentic existence. ‘Inauthentic’ not as in false, but rather as in without correspondences. There is no single mode of Being to which \textit{dasein} must ascribe, rather the Being that is \textit{dasein} can only experience that Being as present-tense. Moving from past to future, \textit{dasein} is only as its actions. \textit{dasein} has an authentic existence in so far as \textit{dasein} acts and does not merely re-present itself.

It is in this way that we are able to turn ourselves into fetishes. The posture of \textit{dasein}, continuously posing the question of its Being, is an uncomfortable one. And so, we craft images of ourselves as static, as things rather than beings. The static effigies, pushed outside of the flow of past into future, stop being our selves, just as the thing-in-itself is lost in presuppositional language. In the instant I consider what I am, as opposed to what I am doing, I cease to be that which I am. Upon finding the “truth” of myself, I lose it. While \textit{dasein} is the being for whom its Being is in question, it is not the case that \textit{dasein} is the being for whom there ever might be an answer.

This is not the rehabilitation I am seeking. There is something important about the idea of the self; that there is a perspective, a coherent (mostly) meaning to my use of the first person. When I say “I am” it is not necessary that I exclude that others are as well. This is the lesson we must take from Jean-Luc Nancy. A re-housing of the “I” is a return to home that acknowledges the uncanniness (unheimlichkeit) of my existence. Nancy, as a philosopher of community sums this project up nicely:

No one, however, has radically thematizes the ‘with’ as the essential trait of Being and as its proper plural singular coessence. But they have brought us, together and individually, to the point where we can no longer avoid thinking about this in favor of that to which all of contemporary experiences testifies. In other words, what is at stake is no longer thinking

- beginning from the one, or from the other
- beginning from their togetherness, understood now as the One, now as the Other
- but thinking, absolutely and without reserve, beginning from the “with” as the proper essence of one whose Being is nothing other than with-one another [l’un-avec-l’autre].

While the previous section worked the question of the role of the social from the larger structures to smaller structures (viz., the influence of macrostructures on the lives of people) this section will take the opposite tack, thinking from the interior to the exterior.

Nancy grounds political thought, as does Arendt, in the plurality of human difference. Difference, for Nancy, engages even more powerfully with the idea of the political than in the thought of Arendt, and he rejects the legacy of modernistic understandings of the individual that can be found in Arendt. As Christopher Watkin explains in “A Different

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74 Nancy, BSB: 34, original emphasis.
75 I cannot read this quote and not be strongly reminded of Arendt’s “No human life, not even the life of the hermit in the nature’s wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings.” (Arendt, HC: 22)
Alterity: Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘Singular Plural,’” Nancy rejects the dichotomy between Self and Other, such as we might see in the philosophy of Hegel. This Hegelian Other is utterly unconnected, unrelated and unrecognizable by the Self. Nancy with his being-singular-plural would have the understanding of the self be one that is not isolated nor perfectly conceived.

“The relation that is primary for Nancy is not a relation between substances existing independently of and prior to those relations (the ‘I’ does not precede the ‘we’), but being as relation, as being-in-common where being ‘is’ the in. . . . This is less a self-in-relation, more as self-as-relation, and as such it can never be closed on itself, nor can any communal ‘we’ of such singular pluralities.”

The birth of a child is the beginning of a universe. There is a universe contained within the new body, another origin, another source of an alterity that does not set itself outside of our shared world, but rather “crosses through” the world. The singularity, an origin, a space of creation (the natality spoken of by Arendt, with no control over the creation after the initial act, the origin) touches upon the world. Each origin is singular insofar as there cannot be another origin that would come into being in the same manner, but the access is into a world that holds no proper way of being, no true archetype, but is rather that we come into being because there is a distinction to be made between one and another.

We come into being, we come to being, through difference. We are, I am insofar as I am with others, beings who are otherwise. It is the experience of this otherwise that gives the perimeter of what I call myself. I can recognize myself as belonging by recognizing similarities, but never sameness, which is unrecognizable (not available to re-thinking). To

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77 Watkin: 53-4, original emphasis.
78 Nancy, BSB: 11
claim belonging is to claim the joint as well, the limit between myself and that to which I belong. This is the beginning of the intimate exclusion, that to be is to be different. I can know that I am me and not you because I can be aware of our dis-positions. Even so, I am aware of the world as it is in touch with me; I am constituted, am originated, as difference, and yet am only insofar as I am available to the world. This touching is my being. I cannot speak of my being without holding it against the world. And here is where language becomes difficult. I am thinking of an echo, simultaneous with the originating speech, I speak of my being as speaking difference, which is available only through comparison, compearance with the world. I am insofar as I am coming to the world, arriving without end.

In his essay “Heidegger’s ‘Originary Ethics,’” Nancy identifies the ethical in Heidegger in terms of a sense: “in dasein the fact of Being is making sense [le fait d’être est: faire sens] . . . to be is to make sense.”79 This being in common and this making-sense are related (they may indeed be identical) and give us an account as to what it means for us to be public.

We make sense insofar as we are capable of being-with-others, as we are each acting properly, which in the case of dasein is itself impropriety. That is to say, we make sense insofar as we are in the act of reaching toward another (belonging). The public realm, the ability to appear and to speak and to act, is composed of making sense. This public sensing is the negativity found in dasein, and found in the Voice. Nancy finds this negativity again own presentation.”80 We meet again with this act of reaching for the vacancy made vacant

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by the reaching. This is a slightly different presentation, however, when we introduce love. No longer is the reaching done by \textit{dasein} something that is purely for itself (singular) but in love, as it takes place, the reaching is seen to be (is sensed as) toward another. Love is at least the offering of one’s self to another, and so “it needs to be made absolutely clear that Dasein, . . ., is not even an isolated and unique ‘one’ but is instead always the one, each one, with one another [l’un-avec-l’autre].”\textsuperscript{81} Our original mode of being is that longing, we are originarily in love with the world. And we are shy lovers, longing for the beloved, reaching out across the space between; we are originarily as young lovers waiting for the first kiss.

The negativity that comprises ourselves, our words and the world is that space which must be traversed, that which must be covered so that we can make the public. It is not even fair to say that we are insofar as we are \textit{with} others; rather it is simply that we \textit{are} with. There is no alternative, no outside, we are already always outside. “The heart is not an organ, and neither is it a faculty. It is: that \textit{I} is broken and traversed by the other where its presence is more intimate and its life open.”\textsuperscript{82}

The world testifies to the presence of others because the world \textit{is} that testimony. Matter and energy might build the earth, the physical fact of the matter, but the world, as it is lived in and experienced, the world as that which is sense, that which makes sense, is made up of our plurality of perspectives.

This distinction is not an opposition, nor is it a matter of belonging according to propriety. The distinction, the \textit{between us}, is what is Being, it rules out the Other, the classical Hegelian Other-before-sublation. The Other, completely alien, utterly foreign, everything a proper “Self” is not, cannot exists, that meaning and existence pass between us,

\textsuperscript{81} Nancy, \textit{BSP}: 26
\textsuperscript{82} Nancy, “Shattered Love”: 99.
are us, is what connects us, unites us in our alterity and that there is not a single mode, a proper way of being, but rather only our difference touching upon one another. The Other cannot be touched, would have to exist in the world in such a way as to be other-than in every sense, even Other-than-the-world.

I have shown in this thesis that altering our thinking about the public and the private in such a way as to acknowledge the presence of difference and multiple perspectives within spaces that are traditionally thought of as belonging to the private (such as the case of the family) can permit us an understanding of the private that is just that source of perspective and plurality found within the self. Thinking about the self in these terms brings us closer to what Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *Being Singular Plural* and allows us to further develop our relationship with others and with difference.

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