



ENCLAVE REVIEW

Art, Politics and the Public Realm: Towards an Arendtian Perspective

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I want to speak about something which I'll refer to as 'The Public Realm'; this means that I'm going to draw on the thought of Hannah Arendt, the political theorist who did most of her writing and teaching in the United States between the late forties and early seventies.

This 'public realm' is closely related to our current usages of the word 'public', and also of the word 'political', but is not the same as them. In many ways, I would argue following Arendt, the 'public realm' I want to speak about hardly exists at present: it is at most a bare residue of something that once existed, or the flash of some possibility in the future. Sometimes, quite spectacularly, it makes its absence felt, as when political revolt

suddenly finds itself not only under attack from a state that equates radical opposition *per se* with criminal activity, but without that fundamental condition of protest and revolt, a space in which to gather.¹ Spaces assumed to be public are found to have quietly, at some stage in the recent past, changed their status.

Generally this turns out to be a simple matter of public space becoming occupied by something from an entirely different realm of human affairs, but without the space being redesignated as anything other than 'public'. For Arendt in the late fifties this 'something from another realm' which had taken over the space of the public and the political, was administration, and what she called 'the social' or, more confusingly, 'society' *tout court*, a conclusion which echoes Eric Hobsbawm's description of the reconstructed post-war world – "industrialization backed, supervised, steered, and sometimes planned and managed by governments" – especially when it is recalled that such industrial processes underwent a remarkable expansion into human and social life in this period.² It would be a mistake, however, to identify Arendt's position with an anti-Keynesian, liberal capitalist opposition to government intervention in economic affairs, *à la* Hayek: for Arendt the socialist rationalisation of society, of which Marx was the founding thinker, was simply a more sophisticated extension of the basic premises of Adam Smith and the original political economists. The dominance of economics *per se* was the problem, because it involved the colonisation of the public and political realm with the values of the *oikos*, the private household, for which bodily maintenance, biological function, labour and the necessities of life were essential.³ Creation of a surplus, and even the amassment of wealth, came in the same necessity-ruled category, a fact which explained, for Arendt, the willingness of the ancient Athenians, an exemplary political people, to leave their investments and mercantile affairs in the hands of slaves.⁴

That Arendt's concept of the colonisation of the political by economic values and administrative processes still applies, and in an Irish context, was brought home to me recently by a speech made by Taoiseach Enda Kenny on the 90th anniversary of the death of Michael Collins at *Béal na Bláth*.⁵ Kenny praised Collins, a political revolutionary, primarily for his role as 'outstanding organiser', one who would have

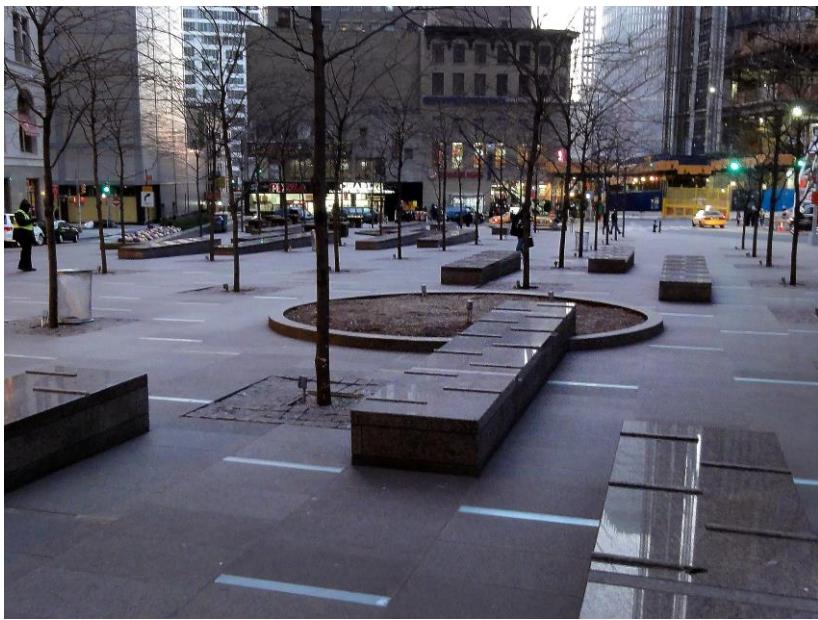
approved of the current government's work of restoration of 'economic sovereignty'. The only truly political word in this appraisal, 'sovereignty', referred to something that was not only lost, but that had somehow become tightly bound to a term from the non-political realm, 'economic'. In Kenny's speech politics had somehow become absorbed by a post-political managerial practice, and Collins' foundational role had disappeared into his post-foundational organisational ability – which ability doubtless was possessed, perhaps even to a greater extent, by numerous anonymous civil servants in Ireland's past.

But what is it that has been colonised by administration? Whatever it is it is not *apparent* – so how am I to present it? I am particularly aware of the fact that I am giving this talk in the National Sculpture Factory, a place dedicated to art, and in the context of a series of discussions on art's relation to its audiences: for art and artists the *apparent* is all-important. So essential is it that in the recent exhibition *Invisible* at the Hayward in London (a show which echoed very similar exhibitions in Paris in 2009 and San Francisco in 2005) the apparent is pursued to the extreme point of no longer needing a sensible object for its occurrence.⁶ Through a conceptual device, delivered by the slightest piece of sensory datum, something becomes apparent in an empty room, something that cannot be seen, touched, heard, tasted or smelt. It isn't that a work like Roman Ondar's *More Silent than Ever* (2006) makes us believe that there is actually anything real there in the room – it seems important, in fact, that belief is beside the point – but that our perception of the room has nevertheless changed. Something has become apparent, in a way absolutely denuded of aesthetic (sensory) quality: a limit-point defining of art.⁷

Well, one way of presenting this 'public realm' might be to recount how Arendt's concept, if not the thing itself, has made an appearance in contemporary thinking and practice. For instance, Jeremiah Day is an artist chiefly known for performance around political themes, who was in Cork for the Cork Caucus in 2005 and contributed to the growing interest in Arendt among the artists of the city. In interview with me this summer he discussed how reading theorists like Foucault, Baudrillard and Deleuze while a student 'fed the process of making work', and even had a kind of stimulating alienation

effect on Day's experience of the built and institutional environment, but didn't seem able to contribute anything when it came to the 'brick wall of where the art could actually go in the world'.⁸ The public fora for art seemed deeply compromised, or at best irrelevant, in the face of the greater political reality, to which Day was attuned as a politically active individual. What Arendt seemed to offer was an understanding of this greater political reality (including the fora to which art was directed) that was oriented towards forms of action and organisation. But, perhaps more importantly, Arendt offered an understanding of political struggle itself, separate from the kinds of means-end thinking that had become a habit of thought since at least Utilitarianism in the 19th century (which demands that the political actor justify their activity in terms of quantifiable results, leaving them with the choice, in politically barren times, of compromise with an established 'system' or acceptance of a position of frustrated alienation). Politics, as currently conceived and practiced, might inherently involve the sidelining and making impotent of real political activity, to which a wholly different set of values attached. Arendt vindicated the political instinct, offering it more than theoretical detachment and reflection, reinserting it in overlooked revolutionary traditions, while providing a hard, but not hopeless, understanding of its historic failure.

But what of art? Shortly before this interview was conducted Day had organised a seminar in Amsterdam, issuing from a series of reading-groups there and in Berlin, to 'take a good look at [Arendt's] 1961 text 'The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance'.⁹ The hope was that a connection between artistic practice and Arendtian politics might be found there; after all, 'if this person's work was so important to [Day], and [he] was mostly busy with art', it made sense to 'figure out exactly what her take was.' It was not a straightforward affair – one of the principle moves in Arendt's political thinking is her establishment of separate, fundamental domains of human experience, all of which come into play in human existence, but which individually tend to predominate in particular cases. *The Human Condition* (1958) divides its sections between three of them: labour (according to whose values man is an *animal laborans*, part of 'the metabolism of man and nature'); active life (which depends upon the existence of a public realm); and work, the



Zucotti Park. Image courtesy of Craig Dietrich (<http://craigdietrich.com>).

realm of *homo faber*, the man who makes things.¹⁰ (The fourth, philosophy and *The Life of the Mind*, was the subject of her last major work.) Art, Arendt obstinately insists, belongs to the realm of making: the artist makes beautiful objects and their thinking is that of a fabricator, submitting material to an idea so that an object may be made – the means-end conceptuality that in modern governance precedes the full dissolution of ‘effectiveness’ into the ‘efficiency’ and logical consistency of quasi-natural processes (administration). This proved to be a constant stumbling-block in Amsterdam, a kind of scandal continually half-acknowledged as the text was read and discussed. How, in a post-conceptual art environment, could art be limited to its concern with objects? Or how could art that thought of itself in terms of political intervention, like Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974–1979), be understood primarily as fabrication? What did this offer the artist with political instincts? When it came to art was the artist simply to return to their studio and concentrate on the work? Whatever avenues were opened by Arendtian political thinking abruptly ended, for the artists gathered, at a barrier marking the border with art practice. Would it not be more sensible to dissolve such borders, to regard Arendt’s experience of art as anachronistic? Transdisciplinary theories were on the tips of the attending artists’ tongues. And yet, the tension introduced by the discrete Arendtian domains somehow sharpened the problems, and maintained a conceptual space for active politics that

otherwise shrank and disappeared. And the urgent need for active politics was palpable in Amsterdam in 2012, the movement of Dutch governance to the populist right, with concomitant attacks on the autonomy of artistic institutions and the conditions of artistic livelihood, coinciding with the crisis in the EU. On what was such active politics to be based? And again: what was its relation to art?

The suggestions in Arendt were hard-won and cryptic, undeveloped. *Culture*, at least, artistic reception and education, had some kind of relationship to real political life. Drawing on Pericles’ ‘Funeral Oration’ on the occasion of the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War, Arendt suggests that certain forms of culture maintain a readiness for political action, work in a kind of vitalising tension with politics, whereas others, perfectly fine in artistic terms, undermined that readiness, dissipated the instincts involved in real politics. ‘We love beauty within the limits of political judgement,’ said Pericles.¹¹ Culture, in these terms, seemed almost like an activity itself. Second, the figure of the artist seemed to be a last repository of individual freedom in twentieth century society. This was initially unhelpful: it seemed to return us to a naive popular image of the artist, to Kirk Douglas’ Van Gogh, or to the Late Romantic figure that attached itself to the ‘heroes’ of American Abstract Expressionism or the lyrical ‘bards’ of the sixties, a figure that Minimalism and the rediscovery of Duchamp, non-authorial art and the artist as game-player, had overcome.



St. Paul's Cathedral. Image © Elliott Brown 2012

But it did possibly point to a source of the connection between the artist and the survival of political instincts, that in the artist's education at least, perhaps especially in their unofficial and pre-institutional education, the promise of art had been bound up with a promise of active freedom. And, finally, there was the matter of judgement.

It was the question of judgement that led me into reading Arendt. My being asked with Dobz O'Brien in 2004 to be involved in the curation of the aforementioned Cork Caucus, sparked off a process of thought. It was an event premised (by Charles Esche, primarily) on the joint between art and politics, a connection that was again *au courant* after about twenty years in the margins. There had been a lot of internationally recognised political art since the late nineties, much of it issuing from the practice of 'institutional critique', more of it attaching itself to Bourriaud's concept of 'relational aesthetics' – the Documentas of 1997 and 2002 had set their imprimatur on the scene. And this had seemed to revitalise interest in the avant-garde artistic tradition and its relationship with political revolutionary activity. But could we assume, I asked myself, that the political current within the avant-

garde still fed into contemporary art, especially after the events of 1989? If more than a mere passing trend was involved – and the artworld has a voracious appetite for passing trends, enshrining them as historical just as it looks elsewhere for its next source of 'importance' – there must be some lasting connection between art and politics that warranted their continued association in a time of the *Revolutio Abscondita*. The concept of judgement provided just such a durable hinge. As Arendt frequently remarks, judgement is the political faculty *par excellence* – in active human affairs (i.e. affairs not part of a mechanistic system, managed according to behavioural laws or subjugated to industrial processes) it is impossible to calculate outcomes – the improbable is continually occurring. Judgement, and the kind of knowledge associated with it (called *phronesis* by the Greeks, the word 'prudence' as used in the 18th century still captured some of its meaning) is the responsible thinking and understanding towards decision in the face of this half-unknown and incalculable reality. There are two kinds of judgement, as Kant had analysed the concept, writing, as Arendt noted, in the French revolutionary period:

determinative and reflective. Determinative judgement subsumed the individual case under the universal and understood it, fully, in those more general terms. Reflective judgement moved from the individual to a new or changed universal, even leaving an insoluble residue of the individual behind, and it was to this latter category of judgement that both political and aesthetic judgement belonged. In Kant, in fact, aesthetic judgement was the exemplary form of this faculty that governed truly political activity.

So here was a direct theoretical connection between art and the political, and in my own pursuit of an understanding of the topic I was soon led to the strand within Arendt's work concerned with judgement that eventually issued in her final work – those lectures in which she attempted to derive a political philosophy from Kant, from the *Critique of Judgement* in particular.¹² But in Arendt there also ran alongside these comments on the role and nature of judgement a less theoretical account of the conditions and environment needed for the life of political activity, one still under the sway of reflective judgement and thus saturated with aesthetic and artistic qualities. Action and speech – political activity in particular – were concerned with the *making apparent* of the individual *among others*, and for this to occur in any enduring or reliable way a space of public display was required, often referred to by Arendt as 'the world' (in contrast to the unworldliness advocated by the Christian tradition, in the Middle Ages at least), but in a more concrete way in terms of the Greek *polis*. This was a physical, legal and customary social establishment, a particular form of city-state intended as a kind of 'theatre where freedom could appear', freedom and human agency being bound together.¹³ At the heart of the *polis*, metaphorically and actually, was the *agora*, an open public area (shared, incidentally, with a market) in which citizens gathered daily. The physical shape of the *agora*, the architecture and statuary associated with it, the traditions, law, history and literature of the *polis* – all these things guaranteed a *political* life, which happened continually and spontaneously as a free overflowing of the existence of the citizenry (apart from their private, physiological and fabricatory lives). The chief source for Arendt in this regard is what she refers to as the *experience* of the Ancient Greeks, as apart from the experience

of Greek philosophy – in which concept can be seen the influence of Nietzsche and her early mentor Heidegger, as well as post-Husserlian thinking on the *phenomenon* (literally, 'that which appears'). And the values associated with the world and politics, in Arendt's account, bear their marks, and also the marks of a thinking according to the terms of reflective judgement: deeds and speech 'shine', are 'glorious', 'great', 'immortal', 'beautiful', 'splendid'.¹⁴ The terms are aesthetic, but without the self-referentiality of an aesthetics seeking to detach itself from all other experience. Neither, however, do they serve any end outside of themselves – there is a delicate balancing act here between a seduction into self-enclosed formalism, and a collapse back into given content.

Does this bring us to a contemporary sense of what real politics and the public realm are? Yes, to a degree – but it is surprising what happens if we apply these terms *directly* to the present world. The association of politics with 'appearance' rapidly loses its Hellenic meaning of a clear, transparent, *exterior* existence, of citizens living and dying by what they say and do in public, and takes on a post-Machiavellian tone: 'appearances' as semblances, occlusion of real motives becoming essential to political conduct, power being established and maintained through secrecy and the manipulation of public perception, the stage of freedom becoming the 'theatre' of the media. As Richard Sennett's extraction of a performative ethic from Arendt in *The Fall of Public Man* (1976), and the twin meanings of words like 'appearance', 'stage', 'drama' and 'gesture' show, the two forms of 'acting' are very closely related – in post-monarchical government at least since the strange confusion of revolution and theatricality in 1848, when revolutionaries invaded parliament dressed as popular stage characters.¹⁵ The quasi-aesthetic values of the life of action, on the other hand, call to mind, if anything, the world of sport, of international football in particular. What state, unless ruled by a tyrant or drawing upon the jingoism of the national imperialist period, would refer to itself in terms of 'glory'? Yet 'glory, glory Man Utd.' is sung by thousands. What piece of improvisation in parliament would attract the epithet 'immortal'? Yet an overhead kick by a football player at a crucial point in a major match will be talked of in such terms. Again, there is a close relation between the two:

Arendt's Kant lectures, after all, take as one of their central topoi the description, attributed to Pythagoras, of life as a festival, that is, as an occasion for competitions.¹⁶ Associations, organised protests, criticism, judgement – all gather around football teams. Seen from this perspective sport is the most effective mode of containment of political spirit that there is. Dialectically, that is, in an inverted form, it might also be seen to maintain one of the last images of true political life.

It is not easy to apply Arendt's concepts of true political existence to the present. There are examples from the past – the Greeks, of course, to a lesser extent the Romans, the late medieval and renaissance Italian republics, the 18th century American townhall movements ... As modernity advances, to a greater and greater extent the examples are furnished by revolutionary activity or the experience of resistance fighters (apart from the interesting case of the historical self-organisation of scientists and the foundation of the Royal Society).¹⁷ Concrete, modern examples of the *opposite* of political existence, however, of subsistence in a state of 'worldlessness', are provided by many twentieth century societies, and form the heart of Arendt's extensive treatment of life under totalitarianism. Arendt mentions that Kant disagreed passionately with the belief that, no matter how the state restricted public exchange of ideas and opinions, one was always free to think. Publication was a basic right and the removal of publication grounds for rebellion.¹⁸ The loss of public space, the modern confinement in private spaces of personal taste and importance, so that the individual cannot *appear* in any objective sense to others, is, for Arendt, the root of the phenomenon of 'mass loneliness', which was to form the basis – along with the concept of the 'movement' and the vulnerable position of the stateless 'human' – of the states established by Hitler and Stalin. Without the great richness of private life, and relative absence of material pressure, of a period like the *Belle Époque*, or the consolation of a flourishing religious 'worldlessness' like that of Christianity, the privated person becomes prey to 'social epidemics' – xenophobia, unfocused rage, belief in global conspiracies, unreal, hyperlogical private philosophies – which are grasped as the elements of a new social order by particular revolutionary movements. To a certain extent Arendt would argue that this

should not matter to artists, who work in isolation, their eye upon the *eidos*, the inner shape according to which their work is fabricated. This clearly corresponds to what we would call the 'studio artist', a lifestyle which often seems enviably pure – an art practice undertaken away from collaborations, form-filling and negotiations, a simple, concentrated making in a dedicated environment as only the research scientist seems able to achieve in recent years. But even in the Arendtian conception of the artist the question of worldlessness, the lack of a shared, open space of display maintained between individuals, arises. Where does one bring the work when it is finished? How can it be shown so that others will, not only see it, but engage with it? Where is that place of display where appearance matters? A social realist painting produced in a worldless state, according to party diktats, in many respects needs no such display: if it has already put in place the requirements for a work of art as specified by the relevant office of the state, it is beyond judgement, it has fulfilled its function in the overall process of the moving social organism. It is consciously meaningless. The same danger arises with a heavily administrated national artistic culture: to get funding certain forms must be filled out, the fulfillment of certain criteria must be promised. To get continued funding the finished works must be seen to correspond to that promise: noone need judge along the way (certainly it would not make sense to put arts administrators in the position of judges). Truly successful works in this vein hardly need to be displayed – unless displayed as consumer goods are displayed, in a market; or for the artist's vanity; or because, as is usually the case, 'display' is an administrative criterion; or in the hope that the artist might achieve some level of celebrity that places them above the administrative apparatus. But for the tradition of art part of the artwork's working is cut off, amputated, if it cannot extend into a space where, through the judgement of others, it may come into full appearance.

In my experience the absence of this space has been generally accepted and internalised by art students. I had the good fortune to be part of a project based around this predicament of the artist, the graduating artist in particular, by the Liverpool art-group Static. The *Exit Review* I was involved in in 2005 staged a confrontation between



Tahrir Square. Image courtesy of Kashif Ali (<http://kashif-ali.com/>).

students who had just produced their graduate show (at Cork's Crawford College), that is, at the threshold of post-College life, and the custodians of the institutions their fledgling career would depend on: gallerists, curators, critics, administrators. Each of the latter had to review randomly picked samples of the graduate show in a very small textual space. A group meeting between the reviewers and reviewees was then arranged at which, once the initial, understandable nervousness of the students was overcome, negative reviews led to confrontations. These took on interesting shapes: a particularly outraged student questioned the very right of any individual to set themselves up in authority by judging. This struck most of the other students as naive: of course, once the work goes into the outside world, it will be judged. But what interested me about their understanding of this process was that they considered this judgement to be inconsequential as far as the artwork was concerned – this outside judgement was a matter of private meaning, and it was the artist's private assessment that truly mattered, although, of course, if the outside assessor happened to be someone with clout in the artworld, *their* public assessment could have important consequences for the artist's career. Publicity, display and criticism were hard facts of life of an artist's existence, but they were separate from what actually mattered.

This struck me as being a defensive position, adopted in the face of what was felt to be a hostile environment. Wholly understandable: the chances in Ireland of having the general public notice an artist's work, to the point where they might establish a livelihood from their practice, are quite slim. And as far as a successful career is concerned a 'troika' of factors faces the young artist: the market, the scene and administrated funding. This troika, in fact, is what occupies the 'space of display' towards which the artist's work is aimed, and it ensures that the public outlet of the artwork is anything but a free space – it must, in fact, appear to the uninitiated as a wholly determined and determining arena. Either your work must be eminently sellable; or you must get to know the right people and learn how to speak their language and promote yourself; or you must become an expert at filling out forms and producing the kind of work that conforms to the criteria of accountability anticipated by those forms.¹⁹ Yet what simultaneously came home to me was the falseness of the notion that artistic meaning was essentially private – not only was it bound up with public appearance, but that this public character was part of the work itself – the public dimension of the artwork. Furthermore, the graduate artists knew it: while they told themselves and others that everything other than the work's private meaning was a matter of indifference, they were busy with intervening in that public

dimension: organising DIY gallery-spaces, reading groups, collaborative projects, alternative funding methods, critical projects. *All art is public*, was the maxim I came away with – the problem was how to achieve a properly public space for this dimension of the artwork to be liberated. Looking at the outcomes of the public spatial projects undertaken by young artists it was clear that mere placement in what went by the name of public spaces was not enough – the openness of the public realm, as Arendt attested, was something achieved and maintained, it was made open by a constant practice of judgement. Projection onto the biggest billboard in the centre of the biggest city meant nothing if not within a culture of judgement, which would lead to the work, if it was judged to be worthy of it, being remembered, discussed and preserved. If by sheer force of spectacle such a work did enter art history, as anything other than an indictment of the times, then the loss of judgement, the closure of art history too would be in play.

This was a lynch-pin holding contemporary art and politics together: how to reoccupy that space of appearance currently occupied by the ‘troika’. Meanwhile this concern with making apparent, and the occupation of designated public spaces, suddenly became physical reality on a grand scale in the wake of the collapse of the credit-fuelled finance system in 2008, which pitched the old capitalist West into severe recession and occasioned the representation on the streets of the ‘99%', the envoicing and making visible – that is, making politically apparent – of the financially disempowered that was the Occupy movement. However, what actually became apparent with these revolts against what was, even after efforts at reform, the same establishment that had brought about the economic collapse, was not the ‘people power’ or the ‘alternative social organisation’ hoped for by the protesters, but the bizarre absence of the basic conditions for their activity: public space, open space in which they might gather and make apparent what they represented. In New York the ‘public park’ chosen for the occupation, Zucotti Park, turned out legally to be a strange chimera, a ‘privately owned public space’, part of a deal made by the city (ironically, in 1968) with developers in return for permission to build the neighbouring U.S. Steel building over the legal height. Private

property concerns, such as matters of health and safety, could be used to legalise the eviction of the protesters. In London the protesters found themselves, under duress from the police, having to fall back anachronistically on the role and customs of the medieval Church: a truly free space, one on which one could gather publicly, could be found only on the grounds of St. Paul’s Cathedral. The relatively recent (since the late nineties?) police technique of ‘kettling’, used again in the control of student protests in 2010, ensured that even when large crowds attempted to lay claim to the streets, the participants were shut off from ordinary civil society, in terms of visibility and rights to ordinary self-maintenance, until such time as they lost their status as protesters. Meanwhile, popular revolution in the Middle East, especially in Egypt, seemed to constitute an unadulterated model of political action. Presenting themselves, at the risk of extreme violence, in Tahrir Square, a sufficiently large open area at the centre of Cairo, a cross-section of the citizenry had (successfully) made their demand for the end of tyrannical government. Yet the reception by the West’s media managed to depoliticise this most simply political of actions. According to the majority of reports and editorials, the revolution had not occurred on Tahrir Square, but on Facebook, the social media website. It had not been ‘the people’ who had revolted, but the new young, technologically savvy professionals that had made the cultural leap to online interaction. Ignoring the fact that only 20 of the 300,000 or so protesters operated the relevant Facebook page, mainly as a means of counteracting distorted accounts emanating from the official media organs, and that the square’s occupants had been drawn from a great variety of social backgrounds, and that the numbers gathering had actually increased during the blackout of social media, it remains that a tool for organisation and publicity (as such little different to the network of men on bicycles, railway workers and representatives in the US used by Irish revolutionaries in the revolutionary years) was replacing human action in official Western accounts.²⁰ The subtext was clear: the revolution had actually been brought about by techno-economic development, the appearance of individuals in public was no more than a symptom of such ‘real’ unapparent processes, leading inexorably towards liberal capitalist

'democracies'. If these political agents were of any interest, in fact, it was as a new market for the goods supporting western lifestyles: they were a category of marketing, a demographic profile. The Arendtian resonances are obvious.²¹

If contemporary politics and contemporary art, then, are both concerned with *appearance* of this kind (or rather with *non-appearance*) – politics with the appearance to each other through speech and deed of individuals and groups, which appearance requires an open space constituted by constant acts of judgement (and preserved and dissolved by interactions of law, governance, tradition and cultural works) – art with the dimension of appearance intrinsic to the artwork itself, its need for a space of display made meaningful, again, by a culture of judgement – and if we call this space, after Arendt, the public realm, then it is clear that among the web of connections between the artist and political activity there is one lasting strand. Both are fundamentally concerned with the public realm and with its survival or reestablishment. And though it is imperative, as Arendt states, that the 'conflict' between the artist, as *homo faber*, and *homo politicus*, not be solved, that one figure not be collapsed into the other, the two are nevertheless allied when it comes to the question of the continuing existence of the public realm: artists (and, by the same logic, the politically inclined)²² naturally find themselves playing dual roles.²³

If we wish to get a palpable sense of what the public realm is, therefore, if we wish to experience it in its own appearance, we could do worse than to go to those places where artists have reached the stage of successfully organising themselves and public spaces for artistic ends. If the individuals drawn to these spaces show a desire to teach, exhibit, perform, discuss, publish – that is, reach gatherings of attentive, judging others – then chances are something truly public is under way. The likelihood is considerably higher if there is a wide range of backgrounds and beliefs among the individuals concerned, that is, if they are not all the same sort, or necessarily agree with one another. This is not easy to achieve, though it may be easy enough to produce something that passes, is adequate to the notion of public space, something whose real concern is with instincts and interests that have greater currency. Real public spaces have nothing to do with

personal expression, for instance, despite the centrality of individuals reaching others. Nor can they be organised as temporary affairs – they are not festivals, events or 'biennials' – at best conceived in such a way as to be repeated. As Arendt constantly asserts, public spaces are implicitly concerned with endurance – if they *can* be made to last, they *will* be made to last, despite the dangers of institutionalisation. Permanence may be all but impossible in prevailing conditions, but it remains imperative that the possibility of endurance not be discounted in advance. Finally, there is that rock upon which innumerable revolutions, that is, real appearances of the public, have founded: property. An unavoidable question, so that its dissolution into various socialist or communist abstractions simply engrains and intensifies the matter in actuality, ownership, nevertheless, has nothing to do with public space. Stewardship, yes, and it may be that a single individual, undemocratically, might perform this role, but the space must remain in no way the property of the steward or stewards. And with the manifold forms of appropriation today in existence this necessity becomes near impossible to achieve: it cannot be 'the people's' or common property; it cannot be an intellectual property, boosting the investment folio that is a CV (not even if it boost the CVs of all of the participants); it cannot be the means to office of its founders and participants; its activities cannot be included in the returns of any associated artistic institution or funding body; it cannot be the generator of coolness or authenticity for a social scene; it cannot exist for the sake of the social legitimisation of a private patron; it cannot be there to make money – it will, of course, need to be financed, but this must be conducted in such a way as not to impinge upon the space itself; it cannot be there to eventually serve other interests – economic regeneration, for instance. It is not that public space is noone's property, nor even that it is anyone's property, rather it has, remarkably, nothing to do with property at all. If there is any question of ownership involved it occurs in an inverted form: the actors in the space somehow belong to that which grants them their appearance and its endurance. Public space opens in such a way as to make its own anyone who can appear there.

NOTES

1. In the UK, for instance, under The Public Order Act (1994, amended 1996), police may refer to violent precedents when dealing with non-violent protests, and legitimately use cordoning tactics ('kettling') to effectively remove the possibility of publically visible protest, depriving the protesters of their liberty in the process. Essentially 'kettling' is undertaken as a preemptive measure for the protection of property (public and private) and maintenance of public peace. In practice, therefore, a gathering of non-violent protesters and a crowd of looters are no different in the eyes of the law. See the UK Government's (successful) defence in *Austin and Others v. The United Kingdom* at the European Court of Human Rights (15 March 2012).
2. See, for instance, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958) pp.38-49 and *On Revolution* (Viking, 1963) pp.59-114. Arendt uses the word 'society' in three quite different ways: neutrally, according to common usage, to designate the general organised collection of people; but also to refer to a fully administrated modern form of society – the subject of 'sociology' and the behavioural sciences – a technically manageable system of human life processes; and lastly, interchangeably with 'good society', a cultural elite that absorbs political action, refocusing it on a self-regarding theatrical round of salons and intrigues, and sets the tone, as it were, for greater 'society'. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (Abacus, 1994) p.269.
3. The word 'economics' is derived from the Greek for 'household', *oikos*, and *nomos*, i.e. 'law' or 'custom'.
4. *The Human Condition* p.59, n. 54.
5. The full text is available at <http://www.merrionstreet.ie/index.php/2012/08/speech-by-an-taoiseach-to-commemorate-the-90th-anniversary-of-the-death-of-michael-collins-at-beal-na-mblath/> [accessed Nov. 3rd 2012].
6. *Invisible: Art about the Unseen 1957-2012* ran at the Hayward from 12 June – 5 August 2102; *Voids: a Retrospective* at the Pompidou Centre from 25 February – 23 March 2009; *A Brief History of Invisible Art* at the Carl Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art 30 November 2005 – 21 February 2006.
7. *More Silent than Ever* involves the placement of a small text on the wall of an empty room 'informing' the viewer that an eavesdropping device has been planted nearby.
8. Email of 24.06.2012.
9. 'Hannah Arendt's Crisis in Culture 50th Anniversary: Reflections, Implications, Speculations.' Presented by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and co-hosted by Goleb, 16th-19th May 2012.
10. 'Metabolism of man and nature': a Marxian phrase often quoted by Arendt, denoting human productivity as a physiological process, albeit one capable, unlike related bestial processes, of producing a surplus. See *The Human Condition* pp. 98-99, referring to *Capital*.
11. The 'Funeral Oration' is reported by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. See 'The Crisis in Culture' (In *Between Past and Future* [Viking, 1961]), pp. 213-217.
12. The lectures were given at the New School for Social Research in the Fall semester of 1970. The texts are collected, along with other material relating to Arendt's thought on judgement, in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), which includes a fulsome interpretative essay by Ronald Beiner.
13. Arendt, 'What is Freedom', *Between Past and Future* p. 154.
14. For instance:
*Unlike human behavior ... action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*.*
(The Human Condition 205, emphasis mine)
15. See Philip Mansell, *Paris between Empires: 1814 – 1852* (Phoenix, 2001). De Tocqueville noted that:
The men of the first Revolution were living in all minds, their acts and words were present to all memories. All that I saw on that day bore the visible imprint of those souvenirs; it always seemed to me that they were imitating the French Revolution rather than continuing it.
*(quoted in De Sant Amand, *The Revolution of 1848* [Hutchinson, 1895]. p. 243)*
16. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* p.55. Even Heidegger was not immune to the power of football, talking about an international match he had just watched at a meeting with the director of the Freiburg Theatre when the latter would have preferred to discuss literature and the stage, and enthusing about Franz Beckenbauer the 'invulnerable' (Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil* [Harvard UP, 1998]).
17. See *The Human Condition* pp. 271, 324.
18. '... we may safely state that the external power which deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thoughts *publicly* also takes away his freedom to *think*.' ('Was heisst: Sich im Denken orientieren?', quoted in Arendt, *Lectures* 41)
19. I am equating the 'art social scene', with its openings, parties, patrons, celebrities, gossip and self-promoters, in terms of Arendt's understanding of the 19th salon and 'society':
Good society, as we know it from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, probably had its origin in the European courts of the age of absolutism, especially the court society of Louis XIV, who knew so well how to reduce French nobility to political insignificance by the simple means of gathering them at Versailles, transforming them into courtiers, and making them entertain one another through the intrigues, cabals, and endless gossip which this perpetual party inevitably engendered.
My own suspicion is that Louis XIV's strategems were a continuation of Catherine De Medici's attempts at defusing the conflicts between French Protestant and Catholic nobles that accompanied the reigns of her children in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

20. See, for instance, the report of visiting design doctoral student Mohamed Elshahed:
<http://places.designobserver.com/feature/tahrir-square-social-media-public-space/25108/> (accessed 30.11.12), and Miriyam Aouragh & Anne Alexander, 'The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution'. *University of Cambridge International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011), pp.1344-1358.

22. Though it could be argued that Arendt's critique of Marx, in terms of the victory of the *animal laborans*, underestimates the power and influence of the market. On the other hand, the destructive power of capital is more than clear enough in her account of imperialism in *Origins of Totalitarianism*.

23. 'The Crisis in Culture', p. 218.